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Summary

Local media in Indonesia are seizing the opportunity of the country's democratic transition to play a watchdog role on government. Slowly, they are helping to change the mindsets of government officials and the expectations of the public that these officials are elected to serve.

This paper provides examples of some of the ways in which local media in Indonesia are playing an important part in holding local government to account. It takes various forms, from a television station in West Kalimantan exposing corruption in the government, to a radio journalist revealing misuse of public equipment in Papua. Sometimes local media are working in conjunction with local NGOs or the general public in order to bring about changes in government practices. In one impressive, though sadly rare, example, a local government official in Central Java has pro-actively used the media as a means of encouraging greater engagement of the electorate in democratic governance.

Media are also increasingly using the various tools at their disposal to facilitate two-way communication between local government and civil society. When given these opportunities, Indonesian citizens respond overwhelmingly enthusiastically, as attested to by the sustained popularity of interactive radio and television programs and the high number of readers' comments and questions regularly submitted to local print media.

But while the examples of the media's impact cited in the paper demonstrate their growing function in increasing local government accountability and transparency, these are nevertheless limited, both in number and in the long-term change achieved. Each has also been influenced by a variety of local factors - be it open-minded government officials, particularly determined journalists, or the existence of local media that are particularly public interest oriented - and are not representative of all local media across the country.

A dozen years into the transition to democracy in Indonesia, there remain numerous instances of local officials who still reject the idea of having to be accountable to the public that elects them, and who continue to refuse to bow to public demand to change their actions or policies. The media too has work to do to put its own house in order, most critically by improving standards of professionalism.

This paper analyses what needs to be done if local media and civil society are to play a more effective role in monitoring the work of government as a means of facilitating continuing progress in the country's political transition. It also addresses the steps that need to be taken to improve the capacity of the media to carry out its watchdog functions effectively.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Civil Society and the Media in New Order Indonesia.....	2
3. The Impact of the End of the New Order Government on the Indonesian Media: Numbers and Membership.....	4
4. The Early Reform Years: The Media's New Role.....	7
Case Study: KBR68H	8
5. The Media Today: The Impact of Local Media on Local Government.....	10
6. Local Media and Civil Society: A Growing Partnership.....	13
Case Study: Ruai TV.....	14
7. NGO Owned Media: A Key to Greater Scrutiny of Local Government?.....	17
Case Study: Kendari TV.....	17
8. Local Government and Local Media: Learning to Work Together.....	20
Case Study: The Former regent of Kebumen – Rustriningsih.....	21
9. Constraints to Greater Oversight of Local Governance by the Media.....	24
Envelope Journalism.....	27
Media Ownership.....	28
Physical Threats.....	28
Legal Constraints.....	28
Media Blank Spots.....	30
10. Conclusion.....	32

Keeping Local Government Honest:
Local Media's Role in Ensuring Government Accountability
Tessa Piper

1. Introduction

The Indonesian media scene today is a vibrant one. Local media across the country have seized the opportunities that the greater openness of the post-Soeharto period has offered to press for greater transparency in governance. This takes a whole variety of forms, as this paper highlights, from a television station in West Kalimantan exposing corruption in the local immigration department, to a radio journalist exposing military misuse of its aircraft in Papua. Sometimes local media are working in conjunction with local NGOs or the general public in order to bring about changes in government practices. In one impressive, though sadly rare example noted in this paper, a local government official has taken a pro-active approach to using the media as a tool for encouraging greater engagement of local populations in democratic governance.

As a result of these initiatives, when monitoring the news today - where no topics are off limits and where demands for government accountability are routine - it is easy to forget the very different reality that prevailed until 1998.

Gone are the days when newspaper readers had to read between the lines to understand what a journalist was really trying to say. Likewise, the broadcast media no longer dishes out a steady diet of pro government news or steers clear of the many topics that the previously authoritarian government of former President Soeharto deemed politically sensitive. Tales of the clandestine publication of unlicensed bulletins produced in order to provide a rare analysis of what was really happening in the country are part of what must appear to be more the stuff of legend than a snapshot of the media reality a little more than a decade ago. No longer do journalists play cat and mouse with the authorities in order to avoid jail. That this is the case is a testament to the progress that has been made in Indonesia's transition to democracy.

Today, newspaper readers in the capital have an abundance of print media to choose from, ranging from tabloids filled with often gruesome criminal reports and sensational celebrity gossip, through to serious news publications that provide a source of reliable information about developments in the political, economic and social scene. In the country's main towns, the local print media is also thriving, with multiple choices of newspapers and tabloids from which to choose.

The broadcast media is similarly impressive in terms of options. State television, TVRI, remains, though it is struggling to adapt to the changed political times and a far more competitive marketplace. The television sector now includes a dozen national

terrestrial television channels and a growing number of cable and satellite providers, with digitalization destined to further expand the choices on offer. In addition, well over a hundred local television stations, previously not permitted, are today dotted around the country.

Radio penetration is broader still, with an estimated 2,600 stations across the archipelago. A number of radio networks also exist. The state radio network, RRI, which in the past enjoyed a monopoly as the only national network, is today dwarfed in size by the country's only independent national radio news agency, KBR68H, which in just ten years has grown to over ten times the size of the state broadcaster.

The internet also offers a relatively small, but fast growing number of people with access to multiple options when it comes to accessing news about Indonesia, with online versions of traditional print and broadcast media competing with popular internet news portals and a growing number of bloggers. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, which is hugely popular among Indonesians, are also proving effective as a means of disseminating information across this vast archipelago¹.

This multiplicity enables both the traditional and new Indonesian media to play a much more effective watchdog role on government than has previously been possible, and is also providing an increasing variety of means through which the public can engage in the discourse about the country's future.

This paper provides examples of some of the ways in which media at the local level are having an impact on local government as well as on the level of local populations' engagement in the democratic process. It also highlights some of the main obstacles that are hampering the media's ability to do so and analyses what needs to be done if the Indonesian media and civil society are to play a more effective role in monitoring the work of government as a means of facilitating continuing progress in the country's transition to democracy.

2. Civil Society and the Media in New Order Indonesia

An increasingly active civil society and a lively media scene underline the progress that has been made since the end of authoritarian rule in Indonesia. Nevertheless, an understanding of the former New Order government's attitude to public engagement in politics and the restrictions imposed on the media during more than three decades of authoritarian rule is critical. Without it, an informed analysis of the public's response to the opportunities offered today for policy-level debate as well as the influence of today's media on government policy is impossible.

¹ Indonesia is the country with the highest growth in number of Facebook users in the 12 months to 2 July 2009. During that time user numbers increased a remarkable almost 3000%, from 209,760 to 6,496,960. See <http://www.nickburcher.com/2009/07/facebook-usage-statistics-top-20.html>

Prior to May 1998 and the reforms that followed, citizen participation in public life was highly circumscribed. Besides their five yearly participation in tightly controlled elections – which the then government described, apparently without a hint of irony, as ‘festivals of democracy’ – whose outcome in overwhelming favour of the incumbent government was always assured, Indonesian citizens had no means of engagement in public policy making. Authoritarian rule was the order of the day, and any attempt to question this was met with a speedy clamp down on those responsible. Although in the final years of the New Order government, the signs of dissatisfaction with the status quo were growing stronger, culminating in the fall from power of then President Soeharto, right up until the end of his rule Indonesian citizens had very limited room to manoeuvre in the public sphere. As for the media, it was largely muzzled and far from able to act as an effective watchdog on government.

The print media enjoyed a little more latitude than their broadcast media counterparts, but even so the practice of self-censorship was widespread. A wide range of topics related to the government – particularly corruption and human rights abuses, but also less contentious subjects – were totally off limits. A few print media outlets did push the boundaries of what was deemed by the authorities to be acceptable, but were unable to be openly critical of the government, and were instead limited to writing in such a way that readers had to read what was inferred rather than what was actually stated in order to understand the true meaning of articles. These efforts, while looking fairly tame in the context of the much more outspoken media of today, were regarded as bold at the time, particularly compared to the largely mute or supine broadcast media.

Radio faced tight restrictions on political content. Private stations were barred from producing their own news content and were instead obliged to broadcast the news programs produced by the strongly pro-government state radio network, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI), 14 times per day. Radio stations that broadcast programs that discussed political issues or any topic deemed by the government to be sensitive ran the risk of losing their licenses. As a result, the medium with the greatest reach had virtually no possibility of facilitating any meaningful discussion of public policy and, with a handful of exceptions that sought to get around government restrictions on current affairs reporting, the industry as a whole was almost exclusively an entertainment medium.

Television too was closely controlled in the New Order era, though in a different way. After over two decades of market monopoly, the state-owned television station, TVRI, was joined by five commercial television stations. Far from heralding an opening up of the medium, however, these stations were all owned by the then President’s family and close associates who had no interest in jeopardizing their licenses by broadcasting content that conflicted with government policy.

These restrictions were backed up by the so-called 'telephone culture' (budaya telepon), by which government or military officials would phone editors to warn them against reporting on certain issues, along with periodic meetings at which editors received what was euphemistically called "guidance" from the Ministry of Information about what stories they should or should not report.

On the fairly rare occasions in which the media refused to tow the government line, the authorities were quick to clamp down. A common means of doing so was to paint any questioning of government policy as a threat to the country's security. In March 1995, for example, an Information Ministry official issued an instruction to privately-owned radio stations not to broadcast any material with political content or which could be considered likely to create conflict. They did so on the grounds that such broadcasts could cause the public to form opinions which conflicted with government policy and, if not halted, could disturb national stability and in doing so endanger the future of radio broadcasting². A broadly defined law that criminalized public discussion of anything that could cause religious or ethnic tension or conflict was frequently invoked by the government and acted as an effective deterrent to media reporting on a wide range of topics. The government also often resorted to calling up the spectre of the mass killings of alleged communists in the mid 1960s as a means of silencing the media, by suggesting that they were in some way influenced by the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), a highly sensitive allegation in a country where any link to the PKI carried with it considerable social stigma³.

When threats and persuasion failed to keep the media sufficiently cowed, however, the government simply banned them.

3. The Impact of the End of the New Order Government on the Indonesian Media: Numbers and Ownership

It is perhaps unsurprising that, following the fall of the New Order government in 1998 and the ending of many restrictions on the media, there was a period of euphoria in the media sector. This saw a dramatic expansion throughout the country in the number of all types of local media operating. As people rushed to take advantage of the media freedom that was suddenly possible, thousands of local media outlets were created.

From a fairly stable 260-300 print media publishing during the New Order period, for example, within three years of the end of authoritarian rule, that number had skyrocketed, with licenses being granted to almost 2,000 publications. The initial

² Muted Voices: Censorship and the Broadcast Media in Indonesia, Article XIX, June 1996.

³ The Press Under Siege: Censorship in Indonesia, Article XIX, November 1994, p. 8-9. See also Surveillance and Suppression, The Legacy of the 1965 Coup in Indonesia, Article XIX, September 1995.

euphoria died down in subsequent years, as market realities resulted in many of these often poorly planned and staffed publications going out of business. Nonetheless, the enthusiasm to seize the opportunities presented by the greater political openness continued and hundreds more print media across the country started operating in the next few years.

The change in the print media scene was dramatic, both in terms of the sheer number of newspapers and magazines that were started up and the transformation in the variety of topics that quickly became the daily fare of readers around the country. However, it was the broadcast media - that had previously been most tightly controlled - which experienced the most radical changes following the end of authoritarian rule.

Radio, which has the greatest potential reach in an archipelagic nation replete with pockets of otherwise largely isolated local communities, was a sector that was always ripe for development under more conducive circumstances. The lifting of restrictions on radio meant that for the first time it had the opportunity to test that potential, an opportunity that stations were quick to seize. Radio station numbers tripled in less than a decade, increasing from 740 in 1997 to around 2,000 as of 2005, and rising still further to an estimated 2,600 today. Station formats also saw significant changes, as many seized the chance to move away from primarily entertainment programming and to develop information and education based programs, including interactive talk shows.

The nature of television in Indonesia also changed radically following the end of authoritarian rule. Prior to 1998 only six national stations existed – the state-owned TVRI and five others, all owned by relatives or close associates of the Soeharto government – and local television stations were not permitted. Within just seven years, the number of television stations had multiplied to 65, the vast majority in the form of local stations owned by local governments, private business people or even in a handful of cases by non-governmental organizations. Today local television stations alone number over 100, with national, cable and satellite channels swelling their numbers still further.

National television's focus on ratings ensures that popular formats such as soap operas and celebrity gossip shows are heavily featured, but news and current affairs programs are also standard fare. While the limited skills and experience, and often also financing, of local television means that quality is not always high, some local stations are showing serious commitment to producing public interest programming. These include programs that incorporate not only local news but also debates on the workings of local government. Viewer participation in such discussions is often encouraged, and some local television stations are also making efforts to investigate corruption, environmental degradation and other topics of public concern.

The much freer post-Soeharto era also resulted in the emergence of a vibrant on-line media, with dozens of websites springing up, although most of these start ups later folded as the dotcom boom came to an end. Others, though, continue today. In some

cases, these online media are simply internet versions of existing media, such as the Surabaya-based Jawa Pos newspaper (www.jawapos.co.id). The largest selling national daily, Kompas, went one step further and, after initially setting up a website containing content from its print publication, then set up an online division, Kompas Cyber Media, and established a dedicated news portal (www.kompas.com), which today is the second most popular online news site in the country. The number one spot is held by a media specifically designed for the internet, DeTik (www.detik.com), which pioneered real time news on the internet following its launch just weeks after Soeharto stepped down. Competition in the online news sector has increased with the entry of two new players. Okezone (www.okezone.com) was established by the MNC conglomerate at the end of 2006 and the Bakrie conglomerate set up VivaNews (www.vivanews.com) in October 2008.

At the same time that the tight reins on media held by the New Order government were released, new types of media owners entered the frame. Media franchises, already tentatively in evidence, took off, primarily in the leisure and entertainment sector. Meanwhile, existing media groups began to expand into other types of media. Conglomerates which already had strong print media credentials, such as the Kompas newspaper group, soon branched into both television and radio and, as mentioned above, into internet media. Likewise its main print media rival, the Jawa Pos Group, which had been in expansionist mode even prior to the end of authoritarian rule, was also quick to move into the local television sector as well as establishing the Jawa Pos News Network (JPPN), the largest newspaper network in Indonesia.

The post-Soeharto period also saw entry into the media market by non-media businesses, including two major Indonesian conglomerates, the Lippo Group and the Bakrie Group, as well as the Mugi Rekso Abadi (MRA) Group, which moved into the radio and magazine sector. This period also saw the development of radio networks such as the Masima Group, the Volare radio network based in Kalimantan, and the expansion of the largest and one of the oldest local radio station networks, Cipta Pariwara Prima (CPP) Radio Net, headquartered in Magelang, Central Java. Non-governmental organizations also entered the media fray, with the Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information (ISAI) starting Indonesia's first, and until now only, independent national radio news agency, KBR68H.

Today, while conglomerates and networks are strongly represented in the Indonesian media, there is still a place for individual ownership, and some of the country's most powerful local media are family owned. For example, three of the country's most prominent and older local print media, Pikiran Rakyat, a Bandung-based newspaper that is the largest selling daily in West Java, Suara Merdeka newspaper in Semarang, Central Java, and Kedaulatan Rakyat daily in Yogyakarta, are all family owned businesses. Hundreds of local radio stations throughout the country are also individually owned, as are dozens of local television stations.

A promising development for those wishing to see television take a more active role in monitoring the workings of government has come from the establishment of a handful of local television stations owned by non-governmental organizations. These stations, which have established an association – the Indonesian Association for People’s Television Stations (ASTEKI) - are committed to offering their viewers more informative and educational programming than the overwhelmingly entertainment-based programming that dominates most other television stations. Although they are a few in number, and have much to learn about the industry, these stations nevertheless represent a potentially valuable tool for holding local governments to account and ensuring that their viewers have a means of monitoring the workings of their elected representatives.

4. The Early Reform Years: The Media’s New Role

If the speed with which the New Order collapsed in May 1998 came as a surprise to Indonesians and foreign observers alike, the impact this had on the media was no less dramatic. Almost overnight, the government’s tight grip on what could or could not be reported on was loosened and the media finally had the opportunity to be able to take on their role as the Fourth Estate, by acting a guardian of the public interest and as a watchdog on the activities of government.

The end of authoritarian rule meant the chance, for the first time, to report accurately on the workings of the government, and both national and local pre-existing media seized eagerly on the chance to do so. Topics such as local government corruption and parliamentary inaction, the appropriate role of the military in politics, and a whole host of issues previously deemed by the authorities to be taboo, were suddenly daily fodder for the media throughout the country.

If this offered exciting and unexpected possibilities, this new political reality also brought with it new challenges, and even the small number of media that had been at the cutting edge of pushing the boundaries of what could be discussed took a while to come to grips with the sudden changes and the impact this would have on the media industry. If this was true of the print media, which had historically held comparatively more leeway than their broadcast counterparts to address politically sensitive topics, for radio and television the lifting of restrictions were even more significant. They, like the hundreds of local print media that sprang up around the country, embraced the ability to cover topics of all kinds, but lacked the experience, and more often than not also the expertise, to do so to professional standards.

The geographic exceptions to this sudden opening up were those parts of the country where armed separatists were operating – Aceh, Papua, and East Timor – where media reporting on the conflicts was still tightly restricted. It was only after the late 1999 referendum and the granting of independence to the former Indonesian province that

East Timor could finally be reported upon accurately. Likewise, and it was only following the devastating tsunami that hit Aceh in December 2004, that resulted in an end to a decades-long armed conflict in the province, that balanced media reporting about Aceh became possible.

Papua, though, remains a particularly sensitive area for the authorities, particularly the military, which still seeks to control the flow of information it considers detrimental to its interests. Reporting by Indonesian journalists in Papua is closely monitored and they are liable to threats from the authorities when reporting on topics regarded as off limits. Foreign journalists are more restricted still, being required to obtain a special permit from the government to travel there, a process which can take months. Any foreign journalist found in Papua without the appropriate papers is liable to deportation, as happened to Dutch journalists covering a pro-independence rally in Jayapura in March 2009.

Nevertheless, the dawn of the reform era brought with it enormous hope from the Indonesian public for a fundamental change in the way their country was run, coupled with great enthusiasm for the implementation of a transition to democracy.

The Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information (ISAI), an NGO that had been one of the groups at the forefront of the fight for freedom of expression in the latter years of the Soeharto government, was quick to see the importance of using the media to bolster the process of democratic change. The challenge was to find a relatively low-cost means of disseminating accurate and up to date information across an archipelago of 17,000 islands. Not only this, but if public participation in the democratic process was to be maximized, the channel of communication needed to be two-way.

The solution was the establishment of an innovative new media outlet that quickly grew into one of the most effective means of informing and engaging millions of people across the country in debates about Indonesia's development, radio news agency, KBR68H.

KBR68H

KBR68H, Indonesia's first and only independent national radio news agency, is a unique initiative designed specifically to assist Indonesia's transition to democracy by facilitating open and informed discussion among people living throughout the archipelago. Simply by tuning into their favourite local radio station, millions of Indonesians from across the political, economic and social spectrum have access to debates about key issues affecting their lives.

KBR68H was established in April 1999, soon after restrictions on news-based radio content were lifted. It quickly developed as a relatively low cost and effective tool for

citizen participation in public life, and today produces 8 hours a day of information and education based programming to over 720 radio stations and 22 million regular listeners nationwide, making it by far the biggest radio network in the country. (The state radio broadcaster, RRI, by comparison has just 60 stations, yet operates with a budget twenty times that of KBR68H and many times the number of staff.)

KBR68H has been designed to be a network for development. With its explicitly public service ethos, and its strong emphasis on government accountability, KBR68H actively encourages listener participation in a country where, for decades, they were discouraged from active engagement in public life.

Programs broadcast nationwide include weekly interactive talk shows on legal reform and human rights, health, decentralization, environment and economics, and others address topics such as religious tolerance and education. A toll free phone number and text messaging facility encourages participation in all of these programs by listeners regardless of their economic, social or political status and a platform from which to state their views. Thus, a fisherman on a remote island in eastern Indonesia, a small businesswoman on the island of Sumatera, or a farmer in rural Java, can equally each interact with policy-makers and leaders and offer their input in debates of local and national importance.

By providing this service, KBR68H has created a new paradigm for information dissemination and democratic development. By establishing an effective platform for interaction between citizens of the country and decision makers it is helping to redefine the role of policy makers and their accountability to, and need to obtain input from, their constituents.

KBR68H's weekly program Across the Regions (Lintas Daerah) features reports about topical issues concerning different parts of the country, ranging from local politics, to corruption and environmental destruction and a range of other local issues that need a local or national government response. This has resulted in numerous instances where local government action has been prompted. For example, a payment issue raised by displaced people from Poso, a site of a six-year inter-religious conflict in Central Sulawesi, was only addressed after KBR68H reported on the problem and attracted public attention. In South East Sulawesi, the central government had for months failed to confirm the appointment of the new local regent, creating an administrative limbo. Soon after KBR68H began to highlight the problems caused by this inaction, the central government confirmed his appointment.

KBR68H has also encouraged greater scrutiny of local government through the production of special radio programs for three regions of Indonesia where human rights violations and interfaith conflict have been prevalent. Kabar Aceh (Aceh News), Kabar Maluku (Maluku News) and Kabar Tanah Papua (Papua News) are daily news programs that focus on addressing key challenges and opportunities in these parts of

the country, with a weekly interactive program that encourages listeners to discuss them live on air. All three locations have limited information access, and the geography of the latter two areas makes exchange of information even within each province a major challenge, and local government receptiveness to public input has historically been limited. KBR68H programs allow listeners in these provinces to learn about and discuss developments in these areas and thereby, for the first time, to participate in civic life.

In doing so, KBR68H is underlining to Indonesians that it is their right to expect public accountability and that they can and should have an impact on government decision-making. By being able to demonstrate concrete examples of success, KBR68H encourages listeners all over the country to demand more from their leaders and to take action when they are found wanting. The continuing popularity of their phone-in programs – with dozens and sometimes hundreds of text messages and phone calls being received from all over the country during a single program – attests to the great enthusiasm with which listeners respond to this opportunity to have their say.

Part of the public service mission of KBR68H to facilitate greater civic participation in public life also entails initiatives to extend information access to isolated parts of the country. In Aceh, KBR68H has rebuilt dozens of radio stations destroyed in the December 2004 tsunami, and has also assisted radio stations affected by the earthquake that hit Yogyakarta in 2005. KBR68H has also pioneered a radio station building program in remote areas of Eastern Indonesia, the least developed part of the country, in order to prevent people living in these locations from being cut off from the development process and instead to enable them to play an active part in it. The impact of these stations on the lives of both the general public and in terms of increasing local government accountability has been substantial, as some of the examples in this paper demonstrate.

The work of KBR68H in promoting democracy and development has been recognized through a number of national and international awards. Most recently, the King Baudouin Foundation in Belgium awarded the 2008-2009 King Baudouin International Development Prize to KBR68H 'for its contribution to a sustainable development based on the strengthening of democracy, tolerance and citizen participation, by producing and disseminating qualitative information through a network of local radio stations and by promoting professional ethics in the media world'.

5. The Media Today: The Impact of Local Media on Local Government

The Indonesian media today, both at the national and local levels, has evolved considerably from those early reform years, and now clearly plays an important role in influencing public policy. So too have national and local government attitudes to greater public oversight from both the media and other civil society institutions. As a consequence, while the extent to which local authorities accept and accommodate

the need for government transparency and accountability varies in different parts of the country, there is no question that the situation is far improved from that prevailing just over a decade ago.

In Ambon, Maluku, a journalist with 20 years experience with local print media and who is today the Chief Editor of the Radar Ambon daily newspaper, has seen significant changes in the local media's ability to oversee local government since the reform era. Ahmad Ibrahim notes that even though the province of Maluku, in Eastern Indonesia, is far from the centre of power, in the New Order era the local media were no different from their counterparts in Jakarta and elsewhere. Wary of being banned or imprisoned for their reporting of issues deemed politically sensitive to the government, this fear informed their reporting. He describes the situation as being "like someone who needs to cross a river, but in front of him is a large rock. He has to determine how he can steer safely to the other side without crashing into the rock."

Now, he says, the situation is different. Where before senior government officials were "little kings," there is now a greater awareness of the need for accountability. Simple changes since the start of the reform era, such as the requirement that local government tenders be announced in the local newspaper, represent a modest but nevertheless important step in the right direction, and the media's slowly but steadily increasing watchdog role has, he believes, had a positive influence. He regards the media's focus on local government corruption as having played an important role in lessening corruption levels, and notes that various local government officials have lost their jobs or even been imprisoned for corruption following media reports, something that would never have happened in the Soeharto era.

Another change that Radar Ambon's Chief Editor notes is the role of local media in providing space for issues of public concern. Columns given over to readers' letters and editorials routinely cover topics such as problems related to those still displaced as a result of the 1999-2002 religious conflict in the province, as well as day-to-day matters such as sanitation, water, traffic jams, parking, road conditions, or the state of the provincial capital's chaotic Mardika Market. He believes that the improvements that have occurred following discussion of specific issues in the media can be directly attributed to the media having provided a medium for their public debate.

Until recently, Ahmad Ibrahim was the Chief Editor of an older Ambon-based newspaper, also owned by the Jawa Pos group, Ambon Ekspres. With text messaging in the province, as elsewhere in the country, extremely popular, a column in the newspaper dedicated to reproducing the content of text messages sent to the paper has become a regular feature. Although it is not clear that the media was directly responsible for it, he notes what happened in one case. After Ambon Ekspres printed a text message from a member of the mobile police brigade, which complained that one of his superiors had kept back for himself a percentage of the meal allowance allocated for him and his colleagues, the officer concerned was replaced. While on the

surface only a minor issue, raising something like this in the paper in the authoritarian era would have been totally taboo for fear of the serious consequences that would result. On this occasion, by contrast, although officers from the mobile brigade visited the Ambon Express offices to deny the allegation, the matter was taken no further and the newspaper faced no negative ramifications, as would very likely have been the case in the past⁴.

In other instances, local media and local journalists are able to point to specific examples when they have been able to have a policy level impact. The issues vary widely, and the media involved is as likely to be a local newspaper or tabloid as the radio or television station, and examples are to be found throughout the archipelago.

One part of the country where the local government has come under less scrutiny from the media than most is Papua. This is partly a result of the relatively limited capacity and reach of the local media across an unusually broad and geographically challenging swathe of the country. But it is also a direct consequence of a decades-long low level armed conflict in the region that has given the military greater than usual power and allowed it to show very little tolerance for investigations into its activities. This has often therefore caused journalists and their editors to remain cautious and to avoid stories that risk reprisals.

This makes the exposure in May 2007 by a Biak-based radio journalist of the illegal use by the military of Hercules transport planes particularly noteworthy. Despite the risks, after uncovering the use of these air force planes for commercial purposes, the journalist was determined to expose the air force's clear contravention of regulations. He was also keen to highlight the fact that this practice was not only putting in jeopardy the safety of the passengers but also causing financial losses to the state.

The journalist's investigation was featured on Indonesian national radio news agency KBR68H's radio program, Kabar Tanah Papua (Papua News), and broadcast by 11 radio stations across Papua⁵. After the news broke the air force issued a denial that the Hercules aircraft were being used as reported. Also, as had been anticipated, following the airing of the report, both the Papua-based journalist and KBR68H's editorial team in Jakarta received threatening phone calls and text messages, presumed to be from air force personnel, although fortunately the threats did not translate into physical violence.

In a part of the country where the military is used to acting to a large extent with impunity, it was surprising that the local air force commander was removed from his post and the use of Hercules aircraft in Biak for commercial purposes was halted.

⁴ Phone interview with Ahmad Ibrahim, Chief Editor, Radar Ambon, 12 April, 2009.

⁵ Kabar Tanah Papua radio program, KBR68H, 30 and 31 May, 2007.

Disappointingly, just a month later, after the issue died down in the media, the military aircraft were once again carrying civilian passengers. Nevertheless, this example clearly shows both the positive impact that the media can play in monitoring local authorities and reporting on wrongdoing, as well as the risks that can accompany this kind of action to press for accountability.

In Riau province, meanwhile, a series of articles published on the treatment of hospital waste in March and April 2008 by two local newspapers in Pekanbaru – Riau Pos and Tribun Pekanbaru – resulted in the local government taking action to enforce compliance with regulations. The newspapers revealed that the lack of waste treatment facilities was resulting in untreated waste water from six hospitals draining out into the local river, and that seven of the town's 14 hospitals which lacked incinerators were dumping medical waste directly onto public dump sites. Following publication of reports in these two local dailies, the Local Environment Impact Management Agency (BAPEDALDA) conducted inspections of the hospitals concerned. Warning letters were issued, and briefings were provided to the hospitals on how to improve their waste management, following which the practices were halted.

While yielding very positive results, with clear public interest impact, at least some of these articles might not have been published had it not been for the tenacity of one of the journalists investigating the story. On this occasion, though, it was not the responsible parties that sought to keep the story out of the public arena, but the media itself. One of the journalists later revealed that after reporting her initial findings she faced some resistance from her own editors in continuing her investigations. They feared negative repercussions either from the hospitals concerned or the local authorities.

This example illustrates the still existing tendency of some media to at times practice self-censorship rather than risk antagonizing the local government or local establishment figures. It also underlines the importance of journalism training. The journalists who broke the stories had recently participated in an environmental journalism training course during which they had received advice on how best to investigate this case. In parts of the country where newsroom ethics do not always accord with accepted norms, support of this kind can be vital in encouraging journalists to pursue stories in the public interest.

6. Local Media and Civil Society: A Growing Partnership

Another evolving reform era phenomenon with respect to local media is the growing acknowledgement that in addition to their critical roles as vehicles for information dissemination, they can also have a more interactive role and can facilitate engagement between local authorities and the local population.

Even though not all media have embraced this opportunity, there are a number of creative ways in which different types of media have responded. The generally positive results suggest that this will be an increasing role for the local media as the public becomes more aware of its rights in monitoring government and as the authorities come to increasingly recognize not only the legitimate role of the media in this regard, but also the benefits that can result from it.

Interestingly, while the Kompas media group's national paper, the country's best selling daily, Kompas, still sticks to the more traditional Letters to the Editor section to provide a platform for readers, the group's local daily in Makassar, Tribun Timur, has created a special public services section of the newspaper to publish questions from its readers along with responses from the appropriate local authorities. In a town well served by local media, and with a vibrant non-governmental organization sector, it would be understandable if public interest in such a rubric waned over time. The reality is far from the case and, whereas when the paper started publishing in 2004 the public services section took up one quarter of a page, it has remained consistently popular and today, two pages per day are devoted to providing a space for questions by the public and answers from the local authorities concerned.

Common topics focus on complaints about petty corruption in the process of obtaining basic documents, such as identity cards or drivers' licenses, as well as damaged roads, and problems with water supplies. According to Tribun Timur's Executive Editor, Syarief Amir, the public services pages of the newspaper often prove effective in resolving problems raised. It helps that the local mayor is a regular reader who often calls in local officials whose departments have had complaints to explain why the problem arose and how it will be dealt with. He points out that this forum has become so popular that people sometimes even go so far as to threaten local authorities that if they do not fix a particular problem they will be reported to the newspaper, and that this warning alone has at times been sufficient to result in greater accountability.

Ahead of the April 2009 legislative elections, Tribun Timur's national and local election news coverage also gave space to comments from local people. Selected to represent individuals from all walks of life, newspaper staff phoned these individuals to get their views on various election issues which were then published. Readers were also encouraged to send in their comments by e-mail, via the newspaper's website, as well as by text message, the latter resulting in hundreds of messages being received each day⁶. These examples clearly show both the continuing interest in and need for the local media to play this bridging role between the local government and the local population, as well as the way in which this is increasing expectations of accountability.

⁶ Interview with Syarief Amir, Executive Editor of Tribune Timur, 11 March, 2009.

In addition to the work being done by local media to bring local authorities to account and to engage the public directly, there is a growing trend for them to also cooperate with non-governmental organizations when they share a common interest in securing greater local government accountability. This partnership is sometimes embedded in the media itself, as in the case of Ruai TV, which has a very unusual ownership structure. The television station was set up by a local credit union, which has itself been highly successful in improving the economic status of its members.

Ruai TV

Ruai TV in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, was set up in July 2007 and is an example of a local television station that is strongly committed to providing the public with a service by highlighting local issues and calling local government to account.

One of the station's most popular programs is Warta Ruai (Ruai News) which is broadcast each evening, and repeated the next morning. Also highly popular is their interactive morning show, Interaktif Pagi, broadcast from 06:30 to 07:00 each morning.

These and other programs are watched not only by members of the public, but also by local government officials and, as a result, have often had a demonstrable positive impact on the monitoring of local government. In early 2008, for example, Ruai TV obtained information about attempted corruption using discriminative practices in the Pontianak immigration department. An Indonesian of ethnic Chinese origin wishing to obtain a passport had been advised by an immigration official that he needed to first obtain a letter confirming that he was indeed an Indonesian citizen, despite the fact that this requirement had been abolished several years earlier. (This letter was a requirement for many years for ethnic Chinese Indonesians who were the frequent target of ethnic discrimination during the New Order government.). In fact the immigration official was using this tactic as a means of demanding a bribe to process the man's passport. After Ruai TV reported this case on its Warta Ruai program on successive days, the Governor issued a regulation prohibiting this form of discrimination.

Warta Ruai also highlights day to day problems related to public services, such as roads in need of repair, or poor families being denied the free medical treatment to which they are entitled, which often results in the roads in question being repaired and the relevant health facilities subsequently being provided. As such, Ruai TV plays an important role in acting as an effective means of control and of increasing local government accountability in West Kalimantan.

Another example of successful collaboration between local media and local civil society organizations concerns a case in South Sulawesi. The two came together to

collaborate on a campaign against the allocation in the 2006 regional government budget of Kijang Innova cars for all 75 members of the provincial parliament. The media exposed this, and at the same time several local non-governmental organizations and academics formed the South Sulawesi Citizens' Coalition to campaign for the budget item to be scrapped. As well as the local media's consistent reporting on the issue, the coalition warned that if the purchase and distribution of the cars went ahead they would stop paying taxes. After approximately one month, the car purchase plan had been deleted from the local government budget⁷.

Although for the most part civil society looks to the media to call local government to account, occasionally it is the media that calls upon its own audience for help when the media itself comes under threat from local governments wishing to prevent exposure of wrongdoing.

This happened with a small local radio station in Tual, South East Maluku, Radio Gelora Tavlul. The station went on air in March 2004, with its formal launch by the regent taking place in August 2004, a well attended event with several senior local government officials, the head of the DPRD and the police chief all present, and the regent – the guest of honour – officially opening the station. This event was broadcast live on the station, with listeners all hearing the regent's praise of Radio Gelora Tavlul and his expectations for the positive role it would play in providing information, education and entertainment to the local community.

Since then the station has indeed played an important role in extending access to information in this otherwise isolated part of Maluku, situated in eastern Indonesia. Until the station went on air, the only local media in Tual was the state owned RRI radio station, which placed little emphasis on critical reporting of local government. Besides RRI, there was no broadcast or print media available to offer an alternative voice on matters of public interest.

The station developed a lively style and offered varied and relevant content, which proved popular with listeners. However, after Radio Gelora Tavlul broadcast allegations of corruption in the local health ministry and of corruption of aid for those displaced by the 1999-2002 conflict in the province, the station incurred the ire of the same regent who presided over the station's launch and who had previously praised its existence. Still under the impression that he had the authority -- as would have been possible in the pre-reform era - to shut the station down, the regent sought to do precisely that. He had not anticipated, however, the power of radio and the backlash that his plan would have. Strong public support for Radio Gelora Tavlul quickly came not just from listeners in Tual, but also from other parts of Maluku, where radio listeners knew of the station and its troubles through the specialist daily regional news

⁷ Interview with Khudri Arsyad, Coordinator, FIKORNOP, Makassar, 11 March 2009.

program about Maluku, Kabar Maluku (Maluku News), produced by national radio news agency KBR68H and broadcast by local radio stations throughout the provinces of Maluku and North Maluku.

As a result of public protest at the regent's plans to shut down the station, the local branch of the independent broadcasting commission became involved, and confirmed that the regent had no authority to take such action. In the face of this opposition, the regent backed down, and today the station continues to provide radio listeners in this remote part of South East Maluku with a rare source of reliable and up to date information. The regent, meanwhile, experienced a less positive fate, failing in his subsequent bid for re-election.

A similar problem occurred in June 2006 in the far west of the country, in Aceh, when the province's only community radio station dedicated to providing information about women's rights, Suara Perempuan (Women's Voices), was shut down by the Ministry of Communications and Information for not having a license. This station was founded by women's rights activists in June 2005 and had received authorization to conduct test broadcasting over a six month period while their application for a broadcasting license was processed. Unfortunately, due to the notoriously time consuming nature of the procedure of obtaining the necessary authorization in order to complete the licensing process, the license had still not come through by the time their permit to conduct test broadcasts had expired, resulting in the frequency monitoring body issuing two warnings to the station to shut down pending approval of their license.

The station did as requested, but when staff of Suara Perempuan decided to go on air a week ahead of the station's first anniversary in order to celebrate the occasion, the response from officials from the Ministry of Communications and Information was swift and dramatic. Ministry officials came to the station, accompanied by 20 military police officers, padlocked the radio transmitter, and warned the station manager that she could face arrest if she attempted to put the station back on air.

However, after interviews about the closure of the station were aired by other radio stations who joined the protest at Suara Perempuan's forced shut down, the regional branch of the broadcasting commission took action. While prior to the ban it had advised Suara Perempuan that in order to get a license they would have to take their paperwork to Jakarta themselves – a costly undertaking for a recently established community media with very limited funds – the body relented and agreed to send the papers to Jakarta on the station's behalf, meanwhile urging the ministry to rescind the ban. As a result, three months after it was forcibly shut down, Suara Perempuan was

back on air and today continues to be a unique media in Aceh, serving the information needs of radio listeners in Banda Aceh about the rights of women⁸.

7. NGO Owned Media: A Key to Greater Scrutiny of Local Government?

Media run by NGOs are not a new phenomenon in Indonesia, but their approach and impact have changed over time. In the past, NGO owned media traditionally took the form of a bulletin with a small circulation and was produced primarily for its own stakeholders. The explosion in the growth of local media over the past decade, though, has encouraged a small number of NGOs to enter the local media sector in order to further their goals by bringing their messages to a much broader audience than has previously been possible.

NGOs that set up local media for the most part do so without any having prior experience in the media field, instead spurred into the sector by awareness of the significant potential this offers for substantially increasing the reach and impact of their work. This lack of experience in media, generally combined with weak financing and little or no business background, creates major challenges to creating high quality and sustainable media, leading some NGO run media to fail as a result. But these weaknesses are countered by the specialist knowledge that these NGOs have built up over their years of working in their area of focus. With a sound grounding in and therefore also in-depth understanding of the local community, and a strong public service ethos and orientation that drives their interest in setting up media, NGO owned media are often at the forefront of local initiatives to demand greater government accountability and transparency.

Although the focus area of the NGO that sets up the media has an influence on the media's content, it seldom dominates. Thus while Kendari TV, a television station set up in Kendari, South East Sulawesi by an environmental NGO called Yascita, addresses environmental issues on a regular basis, its remit is to a broader public service agenda.

Kendari TV

Set up in 2003, Kendari TV is the only local television station operating in Kendari, the capital city of the province of South East Sulawesi, and was the first local television station in Indonesia to be set up by an NGO, the Yascita Foundation (Yayasan Yascita), an environmental NGO which had previously set up a local radio station in Kendari, Radio Suara Alam, to further expand the impact of its work.

Kendari TV is an example of a civil society led local media that is playing an important role in the democratization process at a local level. Its popularity among viewers

⁸ Interview with Ephie Elvida, Director, Suara Perempuan, 30 April, 2009.

confirms the public's thirst for local programming and a desire to see greater local government transparency and accountability. Its strong public service orientation makes it one of only a few, out of over one hundred local television stations that have sprung up in Indonesia over the past few years, to have the service of the public interest as its main mission.

The television station's content is local in focus, with strong attention paid to issues such as corruption and environmental degradation, as well as the workings of local parliament and local governance. Programs produced include news and talk shows, as well as programs covering topics such as religion, culture, and health. Kendari TV also produces local sports and entertainment programs.

One of Kendari TV's most popular programs, and one that has been produced since the station first went on air, is Indra, which has been designed as a means of facilitating exchange between the local population and the local government. Viewers phone, send text messages or visit the station to comment or raise questions about a range of local issues that concern them. Based on this input the station's journalists contact the relevant local authorities to get a response. The program has proven so popular and effective that since 2006 the mayor of Kendari, or, if he is not available, his deputy, appears on the program every Friday to respond directly to viewers' questions.

In addition to providing an effective platform for engagement between the local government and the public, this television program has also had tangible results. This includes the firing of several officials working at the municipal water facility (PDAM) in Kendari, as a result of complaints from the public aired on the program about its poor management and the charging of unauthorized tariffs.

Another innovative program produced by Kendari TV is Kampung Kita (Our Village). The aim of the program is to address problems at the village level, which is done by facilitating direct dialogue between community members and local village, parliament, and government officials. The program has already notched up a number of concrete results. For example, long-standing requests for the building of markets, schools and health clinics in various villages that had not been prioritized due to the villagers' lack of connections at the decision-making level have been responded to after the relevant authorities saw for themselves the situation on the ground and the need for the provision of such facilities.

Kendari TV also produces a regular program, Parlemen Kota (Town Parliament), from the local parliament building in Kendari, which allows viewers to learn about the legislation and policies being discussed by their local parliamentarians. As with many of the station's other programs, Parlemen Kota allows the public to convey their views directly to their representatives and, at times, to have an impact. An example of this was a local government regulation on alcohol, whose implementation was postponed as a result of criticism from the public that was conveyed via the Kendari TV program.

Kendari TV reinforces the pressure for action by also raising these issues in its news and talk show programs, as well as teaming up with its radio station counterpart and the Yascita Foundation to campaign jointly on issues of mutual concern.

Kendari TV represents a successful example of how local media can have a positive impact on local government accountability while simultaneously facilitating civic engagement in local government affairs.

Given its record of success it may come as a surprise to learn that the station operates on a very modest budget and with limited facilities, and that its management and journalists had no previous television experience prior to its establishment.

This is also the case with the weekly print media in Jayapura, Papua - Suara Perempuan Papua (Papuan Women's Voices), which was established in 2004 by a women's rights NGO, the Women and Children's Empowerment Institute (Lembaga Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Anak Papua, LP2AP). As its name suggests, the weekly is dedicated to raising issues of concern to women, but it actually covers a much broader range of topics and more closely resembles regular local print media than a traditional NGO publication.

Suara Perempuan Papua's Chief Editor from 2006-2007, Eri Sutrisno, can point to a number of examples of issues raised by the weekly which, while modest in terms of the scale of the problems addressed, nevertheless have resulted in local government action to resolve them and have led to improvements that are felt directly by people in the community. He notes that although the weekly was managed as a separate business division of the NGO, with its own management and editorial policy and therefore also with its own agenda, the paper's concerns very often mirrored those of the NGO and the two frequently worked closely together in a mutually reinforcing way in order to achieve a common objective.

One example of this relates to a story published by Suara Perempuan Papua about school children in the Jayapura area who were having to walk several kilometres to and from school each day. The minibuses that serve the route as public transport were reluctant to pick them up because the children's fare was half that of the regular adult fare and therefore less lucrative. After Suara Perempuan Papua published the article, LP2AP representatives followed up by requesting a meeting to discuss the problem with the local department of the Ministry of Transport. As a result of this joint pressure, the department arranged for the provision of special transport to take the children to and from school each day.

In another case, the paper teamed up with the NGO to highlight the plight of women vegetable sellers in the centre of Jayapura, who had been forced to move from where they had traditionally sold their produce. Thanks to a combination of articles in Suara

Perempuan Papua and initiatives by LP2AP, the local government agreed to hold a dialogue with the women concerned, which resulted in the women being offered a new location from where they could continue to sell their vegetables.

Eri Sutrisno explains that there was not always a need to collaborate with the NGO and that often the paper acted independently and was still able to have an impact. For example, after the mayor of Jayapura authorized a shopping mall and market development on the site of a children's playground, Suara Perempuan Papua campaigned for the establishment of a new playground to replace the old one. During the course of the 2007 election mayoral campaign, the candidate who subsequently won pledged to do so if elected. Following his election, Suara Perempuan Papua continued its campaign to get a new playground established, reminding readers of the new mayor's electoral promise in this regard and calling on him to deliver on it. Eri Sutrisno is confident that had the mayor not felt continued public pressure, this electoral promise would likely otherwise have quietly been forgotten. It was as a result of the paper's continued highlighting of the issue that a new playground was built.

The fact that Suara Perempuan Papua has been able to play such a positive role in raising issues of local concern and securing local government commitment to resolve problems is impressive, and all the more so given the fact that it has a regular print run of just 2,000 copies. Even allowing for the widely accepted estimate that each print media publication in Indonesia is read on average by five people, meaning that the weekly is reaching around 10,000 readers, the impact compared to reach is notable. When asked why this is the case, former Chief Editor Eri Sutrisno points out that local media in Papua are taken seriously by local government, noting that the heads of government departments and the mayor, along with members of the provincial parliament were among the first subscribers to the weekly when it started publishing in 2004 and continue with their subscriptions to date. Interestingly, he stresses that despite the fact that local government constitutes the main advertiser in the paper – a common practice in Indonesia, particularly in the east of the country - throughout his management of Suara Perempuan Papua there was no attempt by officials to influence media content⁹.

8. Local Government and Local Media: Learning to Work Together

In Indonesia, just as in other countries in transition to democracy following long periods of undemocratic rule, local government officials who have previously enjoyed little public scrutiny and accountability do not always find it easy to adjust to the new reality in which greater media and public attention is applied to their actions. Until today there are still numerous cases around the country of local government officials

⁹ Interview with Eri Sutrisno, Chief Editor of Suara Perempuan Papua from 2006-2007, 29 April, 2009.

who act arbitrarily and respond in a hostile fashion to attempts by the media to uncover their actions, or even simply to question what they are doing or call for accountability for the use of public funds. While progress has been made, there is nonetheless still a long way to go before there is widespread acceptance among local authorities of the rights of citizens to expect transparency and accountability in their public officials.

This reality makes the actions of the former regent of Kebumen in Central Java to open up local government to public monitoring all the more unusual and impressive.

The former regent of Kebumen: Rustriningsih

Rustriningsih, who became regent of Kebumen in Central Java in 2000, is a rare example of a local government official who is not only committed to transparent and accountable government, but has also used the local media to impressive effect in order to achieve this.

Not satisfied with the barriers she had already broken by becoming a woman regent at just 32 years old when she was elected in 2000, Rustriningsih then set herself the task of running Kebumen transparently and free of corruption, a Herculean task given the endemic nature of corruption in local government in Indonesia.

Unlike most government officials, far from seeing media as the enemy or at least something to distance oneself from, Rustriningsih recognized its potential as a tool for direct engagement with her constituents. Her achievement in realizing this potential offers an excellent model of good governance, worthy of replication by other local governments around the country.

Her first step was to revitalize the local government radio, Radio Siaran Pemerintah Daerah (RSPD) Kebumen, using funds that she first had to secure from the local government budget. "I convinced the local parliament that the money could be repaid in three years" she told Koran Tempo in an interview in August 2007¹⁰. In the process, the station's name was changed to INFM, a wise decision, as local government radio is best known as a mouthpiece of local government rather than a vehicle for two-way communication with the public.

Through this radio station, Rustriningsih began her campaign to engage the public. In the first ever initiative of this kind in Indonesia, she started an interactive radio program Selamat Pagi, Bupati (Good Morning, Regent). At six o'clock every morning

¹⁰ Transparensi Melalui Selamat Bupati, Koran Tempo, 31 August 2007.

the regent could be heard discussing with listeners their concerns and suggestions regarding local government, with no topic off limits. Listeners were encouraged to phone in or send text messages containing their views and their comments were broadcast live on air and their text messages read out by the program presenter. Where possible, the regent responded directly to the issues raised during the program, but if this was not possible she followed up with relevant officials after the program ended and reported back to listeners about the action taken in later editions of the program.

Not surprisingly, the program proved highly popular with her constituents, who took advantage of this line of communication to discuss all kinds of issues, from problems with local services such as power cuts or poor road conditions to issues related to health care and education. This frequently had positive results.

Not only did the Kebumen regent make herself available daily via the local radio program, she also took the highly unusual step of giving out her mobile phone number so that her constituents could contact her directly. An article in *Gatra* magazine in October 2003 describes a pedicab driver's shock when, having phoned the regent in desperation after having been unable to obtain some antibiotics for his child, he received a phone call soon afterwards from the head of the health department giving him information about where he could obtain the medicine¹¹.

In the Indonesian context, Rustriningsih's local radio initiative represents a transformation in terms of approach. Never before had a local or national government official been so pro-active in opening up their work to public scrutiny. Not only did the radio program give the regent a chance to hear and respond directly to the complaints and concerns of the local population and thereby provide improved government service, but for the vast majority of those who engaged in these programs, it was their first opportunity to play a part in democratic government.

The radio program alone was therefore already a unique example of good governance, but Rustriningsih did not stop there. So successful did the radio program prove that in 2003 Rustriningsih expanded this initiative by setting up a local government television station - *Ratih TV* – and started a daily morning talk show which, like its radio station counterpart, was called *Selamat Pagi Bupati*. As with the radio program, Rustriningsih's aim was to facilitate effective interaction between her and her 1.2 million constituents. In so doing she succeeded in raising awareness among them – and among her officials - that the role of local government is to provide services to the public and that the public has a legitimate right to complain in the event that these services are not provided or not up to standard.

¹¹ Nonton Kebumen di CNN, *GATRA*, Edition 47, 3 October 2003.

Rustriningsih's media savvy also led to her setting up a press centre in the building that housed the television station. Here, journalists could go to get information about the regency and the local government's activities, something unheard of in other regencies.

This innovative approach to utilizing the media for direct communication has had a positive impact for constituents, as their complaints were often quickly dealt with. It also had significant impact on the popularity of the regent, who not only won a second term as regent but also became the first female deputy governor of Central Java for the period 2008-2013.

Rustriningsih's impressive initiatives were recognized in 2007, when the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) presented her with the Tasrif Award for her efforts to create clean and transparent local government. As noted by the organization's Chair, Heru Hendratmoko, "She offers inspiration for other governors and regents"¹².

A less dramatic, but nevertheless instructive example of how local government can work with local media to effect positive change is offered by the Solo Pos newspaper in Central Java. Established in 1997, Solo Pos is Indonesia's largest local newspaper at the regency level, with a loyal readership and a circulation of 35,000 copies per day, several times the national average for a regency-wide newspaper.

The newspaper's local roots and strong readership base suggest a powerful rationale for the decision of Solo Pos to campaign to preserve a 5 hectare piece of land in the centre of Solo, called Sriwedari, for public use. For years, it had been used as a public space for a variety of traditional art performances as well as the town park. A court ruling in a dispute over the land's ownership meant that its future as a public space was in jeopardy.

The newspaper found an ally for their campaign in the mayor of Solo, who also did not want to see this popular public space lost to developers. Even so, when the paper's campaign began, the odds were against them, as the high court had by then agreed with a lower court ruling in favour of the royal palace of Solo, which was one of the parties in the land dispute, the other having been the local government. Having secured confirmation of its ownership of the land, the royal palace was planning to allow it to be used for commercial purposes, meaning that this rare area of greenery and centre for arts and culture in the town would be gone.

¹² Transparensi Melalui Selamat Bupati, Koran Tempo, 31 August 2007.

The campaign launched by Solo Pos involved intensive reporting on the developments in the land dispute, which in turn prompted considerable public debate, and the newspaper published many Letters to the Editor from local people, as well as articles by intellectuals and other well known figures protesting the royal palace's commercial plans for the area. This level of public support encouraged the local government to lodge an appeal with the Supreme Court against the high court decision, the decision on which is still awaited. Although the outcome is yet to be determined, at a minimum this local newspaper succeeded in giving the public an opportunity for their views to be heard and for the issue to be widely debated. This case also represents another example of how local media can play a valuable role in ensuring that decisions concerning public interest become the legitimate subject of public scrutiny.

Local media can also play a vital role in education, and as such, has enormous potential to assist local governments in their public information campaigns. Although some local governments recognize this and do work with media in this regard, there is still plenty of opportunity for more effective use of the local media by local governments working in the public interest.

When a community radio station, Radio Gogali, was established in the recently formed regency of Central Sumba in late 2008, however, the local government was in no doubt as to the positive impact that it could have on life in this impoverished regency which, although just a one hour flight from Bali, is one of the least developed parts of the country. Poverty levels are well above the national average, few homes have electricity or a water supply and almost 60% of children drop out before finishing primary school. Over 25% of the population is illiterate¹³, far above the national average of less than 10%.

The regent of Central Sumba was so pleased with the establishment of the radio station that when the Dutch Ambassador, whose government had funded the building of the station, came to its official launch in February 2009, the local government supported Radio Gogali to host a traditional ceremony that attracted 1,500 people. The regent also conferred on the Ambassador the traditional Central Sumba title of Umbu, making him the first foreigner to have this honour granted to him, in recognition of the value that the local government and the local population placed upon having, for the first time, their own local media.

Just a few weeks after the community radio station went on air for the first time, Radio Gogali had proven its potential for positive impact. As elsewhere in the country, mobile phones are enormously popular, and the low cost of text messaging makes them a valuable means of communication for people from all strata of society. This is

¹³ Bahan Presentase dalm rangka Kunjungan Duta Besar Kerajaan Belanda, 18-20 Februari 2009, Pemerintah Daerah Sumba Tengah, pp. 9-10, quoting 2007 statistics.

especially true in Central Sumba, where land phone lines are rare, and phoning from mobile phones is often difficult due to poor sound quality. In a largely rural island, programs about agriculture were regarded as likely to be popular with listeners from the outset, but no one at Radio Gogali had anticipated how quickly the station would be able to demonstrate its value to local farmers.

Animals such as horses, pigs and cows are highly prized in Sumba, and are used in a variety of traditional ceremonies, as well as for food and transport. But organized gangs of animal thieves are a source of major hardship to poor farming communities that can ill afford to lose any of their precious livestock. Therefore, when a listener sent a text message to Radio Gogali in February 2009 with news that thieves had stolen some horses from a nearby village, the presenter was quick to act. As well as announcing the details of where the animals had been taken from, the presenter urged listeners to converge on the area and block off the roads leading out of the village. Many people heeded the call and, soon afterwards, five thieves were caught red handed with the animals they were stealing and were subsequently arrested by police and sent to jail.

9. Constraints to Greater Oversight of Local Government By the Media

The examples given in this paper clearly demonstrate concrete ways in which local media are facilitating greater public engagement in civil life and increased public oversight of the workings of government. While this represents a major advance compared to the pre-1998 reality, significant constraints continue to hamper the media's ability to act as a more effective watchdog of government.

Journalists and Journalism Standards

The dramatic growth of the media industry in Indonesia over the past decade has predictably had a significant impact on the journalism profession, as demand for qualified staff far outstripped supply. As a result, thousands of people all over the country started to work as journalists without any prior experience.

Today, an estimated 30,000 journalists are working in Indonesia. Of these, a relatively small number, based primarily in the capital and the largest regional towns, are experienced and skilled journalists producing high quality content. The majority of them, however, have limited experience and have had little or no access to any kind of formal journalism training. Instead, they are obliged to hone their skills through 'learning by doing', which means that only a minority of journalists working in local media around the country have any grounding in the fundamentals of journalism. The impact of this, combined with a lack of emphasis on adhering to media ethics, can be read, seen and heard in the media throughout Indonesia, and is in large part responsible for the low regard in which the profession is held by large swathes of the population, including local governments.

Despite the sudden expansion of media outlets over the past decade, the subsequent unexpected and dramatic growth in demand for journalists only accounts to some extent for why so many of them have only very rudimentary knowledge of the fundamentals of their profession. This is not the full story; there is actually a much deeper underlying problem that significantly restricts the potential for raising professional standards in the media. Namely, the very limited education and training programs available for would-be and working journalists.

At the tertiary education level, one or two universities - such as Padjajaran University in Bandung – are gradually giving more focus to journalism. However, it remains largely left out of university curriculum, and until very recently there were no schools of journalism at any universities in Indonesia. The closest alternatives to these are communications departments, but these are generally more targeted towards public relations, and tend to focus more on communications theory rather than on professional, practical journalism training.

Within the media profession itself, the provision of in-house training to journalists is the exception rather than the rule. Only a handful of media – such as Tempo Media, which comprises the highly regarded Tempo magazine, Koran Tempo daily newspaper and Tempo Interaktif online news portal - have an institutionalized training program for new journalist recruits. In Tempo's case, the management regarded training as a high priority from the outset, and as a result, its training program is sophisticated and comprehensive, and the envy of most of its media counterparts. Tempo, though, represents very much the exception to the rule, and the reality is that, for local media in particular, financial and human resource constraints mean that considering the establishment of a systematic in-house training program is unrealistic.

The lack of journalism training opportunities, either at universities or within media themselves, combined with the undoubted need for improved skills, suggests a gap in the market that the private sector could be predicted to quickly fill. It is rather surprising, therefore, that this country of 240 million people, with so many media of all types, is remarkably poorly served by journalism training institutes.

Following the end of authoritarian rule, a flurry of interest from international donors resulted in hundreds of journalism training programs being conducted throughout Indonesia. However, although these were welcome and without question assisted in improving standards, the fact that they were, by and large, one-off training programs that allowed for little or no medium to long term follow up means that they were not as effective as they could have been. In addition, because many of these programs were conducted by international organizations, once the donor funding began to dry up, so did the knowledge gained about the needs and capacity of local journalists around the country.

Indigenous journalism training institutions, meanwhile, do exist, but are much fewer in number than could be expected to meet the industry's needs. The best known of these is the Jakarta-based Dr. Soetomo Press Institute (LPDS), set up in July 1998, which offers longer, class room based courses. Meanwhile, a younger generation of Indonesian organizations have led the way in the development of increasingly professional short, practically oriented courses targeting working journalists. These courses are often conducted in the regions and are for the most part the only chance that local journalists get to access high quality training that is tailored to their skill levels and is informed by an in-depth understanding of their working environment and their training needs.

The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) has for years conducted training of this kind for journalists around the country¹⁴. These short courses are generally for working journalists, and have historically focused primarily on print media journalists, though lately AJI has also offered some courses for broadcast journalists.

The Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information (ISAI) is another organization that provided a rare source of good quality journalism training during the final years of the Soeharto government and into the reform era¹⁵. Their training programs target both working journalists as well as those working in student media, the latter being of particular significance, given that many future journalists are drawn into the profession as a result of their experience of working in campus media. Some of this training is currently conducted by the Jakarta-based School for Broadcast Media (SBM), of which ISAI is a founding member.

A more recent entrant to the media training scene is the non-profit Indonesian Association for Media Development (PPMN), which was set up in 2006 by a group of Indonesian media practitioners and observers committed to promoting media professionalism. Unlike other domestic training organizations, PPMN focuses its programs primarily on those working in the radio sector, not only providing training for journalists but also, unusually, offering courses and workshops for media managers and marketing staff as well as radio technicians.

While these and other organizations, mainly non-profit, provide training to a few thousand media workers each year through their programs, this still leaves tens of thousands of others without the opportunity to participate due to the very limited availability of such courses. As a result, even if media or individual journalists wish to

¹⁴ AJI was set up in 1994 and was the first independent journalists' association to be established in Indonesia. It played a key role in pressing for greater media freedom in the latter years of the New Order government as a consequence of which a number of its members were imprisoned, harassed or lost their jobs.

¹⁵ ISAI is a non-governmental freedom of expression organization founded in 1995 by pro-democracy activists and was at the forefront of efforts to combat the then government's attempts at censorship.

improve their skill levels, they have very few options for doing so. This is a key factor holding the media industry back from better serving the interests of the public and raising its ability to act as an effective watchdog on government.

Envelope Journalism

The paucity of training facilities undoubtedly represents a major bar to the development of professional media capable of monitoring the workings of government, but the media itself also bears some responsibility for this. The generally poor wage levels for journalists across the country have led to a widespread practice called 'envelope journalism,' which significantly limits their ability to act in the public interest¹⁶.

Envelope journalism refers to the giving of envelopes containing money to journalists in the expectation that they will then cover a particular story, and do so favourably. These envelopes are routinely handed out at press conferences and other events by private businesses and government departments alike, with money often coming from budgets specifically allocated for this purpose. While many journalists argue that these supplements to their often meagre incomes are an economic necessity, the detrimental impact of this practice on journalistic independence is self-evident. In a more sinister manipulation of this practice, people posing as journalists use the threat of publication of negative stories to blackmail sources.

Although other factors undoubtedly also influence the level and nature of interaction between local media and local government officials, these practices also explain, to some extent, the distrust with which the profession is regarded by many government officials. It is also a rationale often provided for the latter's reluctance to explore the potential for more productive cooperation with local media in the common aim of serving the information needs of the public.

Media Ownership

Media ownership can also prohibit effective government monitoring. The increasing trend for media in Indonesia to be owned by conglomerates is an issue of on-going concern with respect to the ability of those media to act in the public interest, especially with regards to conflicts with the political or business interests of the conglomerates involved. This can also happen in the case of media owned by individuals or smaller enterprises, with the business or political interests of media

¹⁶ Although conducted almost a decade ago, a survey of journalists conducted by AJI in East Java in 2000 provides an illuminating and still relevant picture of journalists' welfare. At a time when the regional minimum wage was set at Rp. 236,000/month, 15.2% of journalists were earning between Rp. 100-250,000/month and 34.1% earned Rp. 250-500,000/month, with another 21.4% earning between Rp. 500-750,000 month (Kesejahteraan Jurnalis, Antara Mitos dan Kenyataan, Potret Sosial Ekonomi Jurnalis Jawa Timur, Rochman Budiyanto, Mabroer MS, AJI Surabaya, July 2000, pp. 7-9).

owners at times interfering in editorial issues in order to protect or further these interests. Although the more professional media have established clear policies designed to ensure editorial independence, this is far from being common practice.

Physical Threats

Compared to the situation during the three decades of authoritarian rule, physical violence perpetrated by government or military officials is less prevalent, but is far from being eliminated. At the same time, other forms of threats have emerged in the reform era, which have had a negative impact on the ability or willingness of media to expose actions or opinions that counter the interests of certain groups.

The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) has kept records of violence against journalists since 1999. AJI has found that the main 'enemies of press freedom', to quote the title of their annual announcement, began to shift soon after the beginning of the reform era, which saw a change from government officials to organized civilian groups.

According to AJI Indonesia's figures for 2008, 60 cases of violence or harassment of journalists were recorded in the year. Although government officials (11 cases), police officers (11 cases) and members of the armed forces (8 cases) were responsible for half of these attacks, more than one third of the total number for 2008 were perpetrated by civilians, most of whom were supporters of candidates in regional elections (20 cases). In 2008, AJI found that the most dangerous places in Indonesia for journalists to be reporting on were Gorontalo (11 cases of violence), Jakarta (nine cases) and Ternate (four)¹⁷.

Legal Constraints¹⁸

The legal system also constitutes a constraint to press freedom in Indonesia, with many laws on the statute books that can be used to imprison or otherwise intimidate journalists and the media, and thereby restrict the ability of media to monitor the work of government. Despite the passing of Press Law No. 40, 1999, which provided a mechanism for Right of Reply and mediation by the Press Council, these non litigious means have seldom been utilized by those who felt harmed by media reports.

¹⁷ 2008 not a bright year for Indonesian media, says journalists' group, Alliance of Independent Journalists, 12 January 2009.

¹⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the legal constraints faced by the media see *Don't Shoot the Messenger: Policy Challenges Facing the Indonesian Media*, Tessa Piper, USAID/DRSP, November 2009, also published in Indonesian as *Jangan Tembak Si Pembawa Berita: Tantangan-tantangan Kebijakan yang Dihadapi Media di Indonesia* http://www.ajiindonesia.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=44&Itemid=285

Instead, a growing trend is for local government officials and others who object to media reports about their activities to take legal action against the journalists or the media concerned and recent times have seen a number of criminal cases brought against journalists who were simply carrying out their professional work.

One such case is that of a journalist in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Jupriadi 'Upi' Asmaradana, who went on trial in early 2009 accused of defamation and facing a potential prison sentence and ruinous damages for allegedly slandering the then provincial police chief¹⁹. Upi, whose case attracted considerable national and international attention, was acquitted in September 2009, but it highlights a broader problem, namely that many local authorities still do not accept the role of the media as a legitimate watchdog of government, or the validity of the greater scrutiny that they will come under as a result. As such, cases of this kind pose a danger for the continued transition of Indonesia towards more open and accountable government. As the chairman of AJI Indonesia, Nezar Patria noted: "When one (a journalist) criticizes an official but (he) is imprisoned or sued for billions of rupiah, then public control by the people, including the press, over the government's operation is battered"²⁰.

One of the more recent pieces of legislation to raise concerns about the potentially damaging impact on media freedom is the new electronic transactions regulation, Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) regards the law as a retrograde step, not least on the grounds that it provides for imprisonment of up to six years and a fine of Rp. 1 billion for those found guilty of violating the law, but particularly given that the key element of the offence seems, according to the IFJ's legal expert, to be "purely subjective".

Following a visit to Jakarta in April 2009 Jim Nolan, Legal Consultant to the International Federation of Journalists, commented: "Although criminal defamation remains a scourge in Indonesia . . . new forms of internet regulation have also sprung up in Indonesia . . . These disturbing trends have the real potential to represent a significant diminution of press freedom in the region . . . The impression currently created is that these internet 'laws' have the potential to become even more chilling successors of the various criminal defamation regimes throughout the region. Rather than representing some amelioration of the present laws these - potentially at least, and in some cases actually - represent a further and renewed threat to press freedom in the region"²¹.

The IFJ consultant's warnings were all too graphically illustrated in an extraordinary case that demonstrated just how dangerous this new legislation is, not just for journalists but also for ordinary citizens. In May 2009, a 32-year-old mother of two was

¹⁹ At the time of the trial the plaintiff was the Chief of Police for South Sumatera.

²⁰ 2008 not a bright year for Indonesian media, says journalists' group, Alliance of Independent Journalists, 12 January 2009.

²¹ Report of Jim Nolan, Legal Consultant, to the International Federation of Journalists, 22 April, 2009.

imprisoned pending trial for criminal defamation and faced up to six years in prison for doing no more than sending an e-mail to several friends complaining that she had been misdiagnosed at a hospital in Tangerang, West Java, in August 2008. Even though she had indeed been misdiagnosed by the hospital's doctors, the hospital filed a lawsuit against the woman under both the ITE Law and the Criminal Code as well as lodging civil suits against her. It is likely that she would have remained in prison pending trial, and potentially received a much more severe sentence, had her case not been widely reported in the media and caused a storm of protests, including via the popular social networking site, Facebook, where an online petition quickly attracted over 380,000 supporters. Although released from prison after three weeks, the hospital and public prosecutors continued with both criminal and civil cases against her. Public concern for the woman culminated in a campaign to raise money to pay a Rp. 204 million (approximately \$21,600) fine she received in the civil case, which swiftly raised four times the amount. Bizarrely, given the enormous outpouring of public support for the woman, at the time of publication of this report both the hospital and the Tangerang prosecutors' office were continuing with cases against her.

Concern about growing limits to media freedom in Indonesia, with the negative implications this has for the media's ability to ensure government accountability, is reflected in Indonesia's position in the annual Press Freedom Index published by advocacy organization, Reporters Sans Frontieres, which ranks media freedom worldwide. From a relatively high position in the rankings in 2002, when Indonesia was placed in 57th position out of 139 countries, making it the freest country in South East Asia, by 2009 it had slumped in the table to 100th out of 175 countries²².

Media Blank Spots

While it is true that in many parts of the country local media is playing a valuable role in monitoring the workings of local government and highlighting misdeeds, this is not the full picture. There are currently more than 100 regencies around Indonesia that the government has classified as "least developed", almost all of which remain without any form of local media. In these places, local governments and local populations alike lack any means of effectively engaging with one another in meaningful policy dialogue. Yet in these most impoverished parts of the archipelago, the need for media to act as a channel for the aspirations of the otherwise all but unheard population is particularly vital.

Where local media are built, the positive impact on local communities can be significant, as the example of a radio station set up in Yahukimo, in the Central Highlands of Papua, attests. In this remote area in the far east of Indonesia live some of the most isolated communities in the world. Largely cut off from development, poverty is rampant, basic services such as water, electricity and telecommunications

²² The 2009 Index covers the period 1 September, 2008-31 August, 2009. See www.rsf.org for further information.

are unavailable, literacy is low, health services almost non-existent, and subsistence farming is the norm. Lack of access to information resulted in the death of 55 people from hunger in the district of Yahukimo in December 2005, and it was this fact that led the following year to a decision to build a community radio station in the sub-district of Anyelma.

The official launch of Radio Pikonane in September 2007 proved to be a major event that underlines its significance for the inhabitants of the area. A remarkable 5,000 men, women and children walked for hours or even days to witness Radio Pikonane go on air. As one local leader commented, 'We have received promise after promise from the government to provide development here. This is the first time anyone has delivered on their promise'²³.

Since being established, the station has been providing the estimated 70,000 people scattered around the surrounding hills with local and national news, as well as programs on health and agriculture, the former improving basic health conditions and the latter resulting in subsistence farmers in the area being able to secure much higher prices for their crops than had previously been the case.

But even though the station has had considerable positive impact on the lives of those living in the local community, it will not be easy to change local government practices of operating in a remote part of the country, especially given that it has been under little or no public scrutiny up to the present. Whereas elsewhere in Indonesia people can simply pick up the phone or send a text message in order to have their say, lack of phone access means that this is not an option for Radio Pikonane listeners. Following a news report the station broadcast in early 2009 about the year-long closure of the Anyelma village school due to the absence of the teachers, women from another village in the area walked for three days to inform Radio Pikonane staff that the same thing had happened to the school in their area, and requested the station to report on this too. The radio station's subsequent investigation into the state of schools in the area revealed a shocking reality: the almost total collapse of the school system in the local area.

It is common in eastern Indonesia for teachers from outside the area to be assigned to work in remote schools. It is also usual for them to travel once a month to the nearest town to get their salary. This is already a cause of considerable disruption in the education of the children, as the journey to and from the nearest town can take up to several days. But a much greater problem arises when the teachers, once they get to town, are then tempted to stay there rather than return to the isolated communities to which they have been assigned.

²³ Interview with traditional leader (name unknown), 10 September, 2007.

In the area surrounding Radio Pikonane this had happened on a massive scale, resulting in a total of eight primary schools being closed. Not only that, but one of the school's building had collapsed, rendering it completely unusable. More shocking still, it transpired that of these schools, one had been closed for over ten years, effectively denying a whole generation of children their basic right to education. Another of the schools had been closed for nearly four years. The only remaining open school was functioning only sporadically, as and when a teacher was available. But despite Radio Pikonane's repeated reporting on this issue, as of early April 2009, the local government showed no signs of taking any action²⁴.

After learning of the failure of the local government to respond, radio news agency KBR68H followed up a few weeks later, interviewing the head of the national education department for its regional current affairs radio program Kabar Tanah Papua (Papua News)²⁵. This time the media attention caused the ministry to agree to sponsor the broadcast of announcements on Radio Pikonane and the local state-owned radio station, calling on teachers who had left their posts to return to work. The impact was remarkable. By November 2009, teachers had returned to all but one of the schools and they were once again back in operation. While this is clearly a success story, the fact that this situation had been allowed to continue for so long without any action being taken by the authorities to rectify it points to a major breakdown in local governance. As such, it underlines the importance of maintaining sustained local media and civil society pressure in order to solve the problems hampering Papua's development.

10. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted a number of examples of the positive ways in which local media in Indonesia is operating. Acting as an effective trigger and conduit for the country's democratic development, gradually increasing government accountability and beginning to change the mindsets of officials to better understand the responsibilities of their roles as public servants are just some of these ways.

Most fundamentally, local media has done this by reporting on the workings of local government and bringing the actions of public officials to public notice. Increasingly, though, different forms of local media are using the varying tools available to them to encourage and facilitate two-way communication between local government and civil society. In so doing, local media are opening up important opportunities for much greater civil society participation in public life and the chance to influence government policy.

²⁴ Interview with Kathy Dimara, Director, Radio Pikonane, 2 April, 2009.

²⁵ Kabar Tanah Papua, KBR68H radio program, 30 April. 2009.

Indonesian citizens have responded overwhelmingly enthusiastically to these local media initiatives, as attested to by the continued popularity of interactive broadcast programming and the opportunity to have readers' comments and questions published in print media. This clearly demonstrates that the public is eager to embrace the country's democratic transition, to participate in civic life and to have a chance to influence their local governments' actions and policies.

There is no doubt that as a result of these media initiatives, as well as activities undertaken by other civil society groups – sometimes acting independently of each other but often also in collaboration - local governments are gradually becoming more accepting of their roles as public servants and therefore more accommodating to public calls for change.

Even so, it must be underlined that the positive examples of media's impact on local government cited in this report are individual cases, each one of which has been influenced by a variety of local factors, whether it be unusually open-minded government officials, particularly determined journalists, or the existence of local media whose mission is committed to serving the public interest.

Sadly, though, these examples should not be taken as being representative of the situation across the country, and there are numerous instances of local governments and local government officials all over the archipelago that still reject the idea of having to be accountable to the public that elected them, and who continue to refuse to bow to public pressure to change their actions or policies. There is therefore clearly much work to be done to educate local governments about their responsibilities to the public and to monitor their conduct in this regard, to educate local populations about their rights as citizens, as well as to improve the capacity of the media to carry out its watchdog functions professionally.

Consequently, it is important to keep their relative impact in perspective when considering the effectiveness of local media in acting as a watchdog on local government. For example, for the most part, the cases of local media impact on local government that are cited in this report are at a very modest level, dealing with day to day issues such as road repairs or electricity supply, rather than at a broader policy level. Also, where impact has been made, the improvements are at times no more than short-term, with old bad practices re-establishing themselves once the media spotlight has been turned off the problem.

Meanwhile, there continue to be parts of the country where even modest influence on local government remains a distant hope as a result of the total lack of local media. In general these are places where the local government is least accountable to their local communities. Even where local governments may wish to be more transparent, without any means of effectively engaging with their constituents, this is impractical.

Taken as a whole, however, there is no question that the local media has played an important role in increasing local government accountability and transparency compared to just over a decade ago. This represents a clear sign of progress in moving towards a more democratic society in which local governments are becoming increasingly accountable to society. But it is equally evident that much work still needs to be done, both by the media and the public, to ensure that local and national governments are increasingly held to account if Indonesia is to achieve full, open, transparent and accountable governance.