



MEETING REPORT

Creating an enabling environment for free and independent Indigenous Community Media

Multistakeholder event, 18 April 2023, UN Headquarters Building in New York, USA

In the margins of the 22nd session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), UNESCO, in partnership with the Canadian National Commission for UNESCO, the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) and Whakaata Māori (Māori Television), organized a multistakeholder event on Indigenous community media.

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Executive Summary

UNESCO, in partnership with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) and Whakaata Māori (Māori Television), organized a multistakeholder event “Creating an enabling environment for free and independent Indigenous community media” in the framework of the 22nd session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York on 18 April 2023¹. The event brought together Indigenous media organizations, media professionals and civil rights advocates to discuss how to create an enabling environment to strengthen free and independent Indigenous community media. The discussion provided valuable insights from media practitioners and experts and set the agenda for future actions. UN Web TV provided a livestream, and the session is available on demand². This report provides a summary of the event discussion and a set of recommendations for action for the development of Indigenous community media.

Introduction

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right which enables people to participate in socio-cultural, economic, and political life. It is a cornerstone of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - as enshrined in Article 19. Its corollary is free, independent, pluralistic media. Article 16 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) further enhances freedom of expression and acknowledges Indigenous peoples' right to establish their own media and to have access to all forms of non-Indigenous media without discrimination. UNDRIP also calls on States to ensure that State-owned media reflect Indigenous cultural diversity.

Community media are a vital enactment of citizens' freedom of expression and access to information. They are owned and run by the people they serve and give voice to communities. Further to channelling Indigenous rights, Indigenous community media enrich society with news on Indigenous issues and events. Through sharing Indigenous voices on current affairs and a variety of topics, they make Indigenous people part of national conversations.

While Indigenous and non-Indigenous community media have grown substantially in recent years, they continue to face multiple challenges. These include competition from commercial broadcasters, the rapid pace of transition from analogue to digital media and operations in the digital market and reduced financial and human resources. A variety of obstacles and restrictions on media can limit their benefit for society, affecting citizens' freedom of expression and access to information. The sustainable development of community media depends to a large extent on the existence of an enabling environment. Additional challenges exist where community media established and run by Indigenous Peoples' Organizations are linked to legislation on constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights, as well as other national laws and regulations.

Opening

The traditional welcome ceremony was offered by **Ms Star Beardy** from Canada.

Mr Francisco Calí Tzay, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, emphasized the importance of community media in democracies. Indigenous community media support democracy and help Indigenous people to implement the right to self-determination and strengthen Indigenous Peoples' Organizations. They raise awareness among communities about rights, such as Free, Prior, and Informed consent and women's rights, public services, and enhance dialogue between generations. Furthermore, media are fundamental in recovering, conserving, and transmitting Indigenous languages, cultures, and education. Free and independent Indigenous media guarantee a plurality of voices allowing Indigenous people to express their opinions and share their stories on mainstream events. The Special Rapporteur said that media is significant for youth who leave their communities, to maintain connection and identity. He also stressed that it is essential to ensure that Indigenous media are legally recognized in national legislative frameworks to protect Indigenous journalists and develop institutional capacities while still providing support and advice to those which lack a formal recognition. He welcomed the timeliness of

¹ The event's outline is available on UNESCO website: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385108_eng

² <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1f/k1f8qkdxs6>

the UNESCO-led multistakeholder event at UNPFII as Indigenous media face many obstacles and immediate actions are needed for the development of Indigenous media.

In her opening remarks, **Ms Elaine Young, Program Officer, Communication and Information, Canadian National Commission for UNESCO** stated that supporting truth and reconciliation through the implementation of UNDRIP is a cross-cutting strategic priority of Canada. It informs the Commission's work, from supporting efforts to decolonize knowledge and education, to working to further the goals of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, and to supporting Indigenous media. She cited Article 16 of UNDRIP as especially relevant to the discussion - that Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media. Supporting media development so that Indigenous people can access information and share their stories is essential to the actualization of Indigenous peoples' rights. Indigenous media is central not only to the tenets of freedom of expression and access to information on which democracies are built, but also to cultural expression and the preservation of ways of knowing that shape how we see the world.

Key outcomes of the debate

The panel discussion was moderated by **Ms Francine Compton, Associate Director at the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA)**, who welcomed attendees. She invited attendees to contribute to the discussion using Ideas Cards and for journalists to follow up in the Indigenous Media Zone set up in the margins of the forum.

Ms Aluki Kotierk, Member of UNPFII and President of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (Canada), stated that legal recognition is important for Indigenous media as it contributes to the preservation, revitalization and promotion of Indigenous peoples' rights, cultures, and identity. She emphasized that Indigenous media, particularly television, has supported self-determination in Inuit communities. Indigenous media also present Indigenous worldviews and encourage people to create their own media content which is culturally appropriate to Indigenous peoples. More support is needed from governments for the development of Indigenous media.

Mr Shane Taurima, CEO, Whakaata Māori (Māori Indigenous Television) (New Zealand), described how Whakaata Māori is publicly owned and operated by Māori people under its own Act. It was established 40 years ago to promote the Māori language which was on the brink of extinction. The Treaty of Waitangi Settlement Process means that Māori can raise historical grievances and have them addressed. Mr Taurima emphasized that the ancestors created a legacy for all Māori. He said that in addition to legal recognition, Indigenous media need more resources and support. Currently, the Māori media sector has been built up over the last 20 years. In times of crisis, such as the global pandemic and natural disasters, Māori media have been a powerful voice and means of providing accurate information to local communities. The speaker also acknowledged the act of resistance in the context of colonization and its impact. He said that media offer a unique opportunity to reclaim Indigenous narratives, to decolonize, but more specifically to "re-Indigenize" by telling their own stories in their own way. Many stories about Indigenous people are not told in mainstream media, or if they are told, they are not told well. The success of Whakaata Māori has led to more Māori content in mainstream media and a more active recognition of Māori culture as part of New Zealand's national identity. Māori content is available in prime time and Māori media professionals have more opportunities to work in mainstream media.

Mr Dev Kumar Sunuwar, Founding Chairperson and Co-founder, Indigenous Television (Nepal) echoed that the establishment of Indigenous media in Nepal has also been a struggle. However today, community media enjoys legal recognition and at least 1,000 licenses have been issued, including 400 for community media. Indigenous peoples have established 24 community radios in their own languages and formed an Indigenous community radio network. In 2016, the first Indigenous community TV station was established and currently broadcasts in 17 different languages and reaches remote areas in Nepal. Mr Sunuwar said that Indigenous media is integral to providing Indigenous voices. Further efforts are being made to replicate this success in India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and the Philippines through cable television, as well as to share content among media organizations and increase access to information about Indigenous issues in the region. In addition, the speaker stressed the importance of ensuring sustainable financial support for Indigenous media. Without financial resources and capacity building for media practitioners, content can be poor quality or, just translated from mainstream media. Many Indigenous media organizations, often those without licenses, are broadcasting through social media. Efforts should be made to build

the capacity of media organizations to prepare funding proposals and actively seek alternative financial resources.

Ms Irmgarda Kasinskaite-Buddeberg, Advisor for Communication and Information (UNESCO) introduced UNESCO as one of the UN specialized agencies mandated to promote the free flow of ideas in word and image. For several decades, UNESCO has advocated for free, independent, and pluralistic media that contribute to diversity, openness, and inclusion in society, which are indicators of democracy and good governance. Building on Article 19 of the UNDHR, Article 16 of UNDRIP states that Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and operate their own media and to have access to all forms of non-Indigenous media without discrimination. It also calls on States to ensure that state-owned media adequately reflect Indigenous cultural diversity. This could also be applied to private media.

Following the multistakeholder discussion, as a contribution to the debate on item 4 of the UNPFII, UNESCO delivered a statement with recommendations for Indigenous peoples, Indigenous media, and governments to develop Indigenous media. Among them, UNESCO proposed to conduct a study on Indigenous media in partnership with UNPFII and other UN Indigenous mechanisms, which would contribute to the elaboration of strategic steps for joint action, and to present findings at the annual session of the UNPFII to be held in 2025. This proposal was unanimously accepted.

Summary of themes and actions

Several themes and actions that emerged from the multistakeholder discussion are summarized below:

1. Promotion of human rights through the effective functioning of Indigenous media

Indigenous media facilitate civic participation and pluralistic debate. They enrich society with news on various issues and events, but most importantly, they include all voices in national conversations. Indigenous peoples' rights - freedom of expression, access to information, and Free, Prior, and Informed consent - are further promoted and guaranteed through effective functioning of media in society, especially those established and run by Indigenous peoples.

2. Legal recognition and supportive media policies

Indigenous media need legal recognition and formal accreditation. Necessary changes should be made to national legislative frameworks in favour of the sustainable development of community media. Furthermore, efforts should be taken by governments to provide support for media run by Indigenous peoples. Governments are responsible for the creation of policies and practices that will result in an overall enabling environment for free and independent community media. They must provide access and fair allocation of frequencies for broadcasters and provide advisory services and capacity building to ensure media represents all social groups, particularly Indigenous peoples.

3. Financial viability and access to resources for Indigenous media

There needs to be equality in financial resourcing as a vast majority of Indigenous media struggle to access adequate funding when in competition with mainstream media and larger communities. Governments have a responsibility to create favourable conditions for Indigenous community media to operate in society. Efforts should be taken to create mechanisms for providing financial resources and support to Indigenous media to broadcast. Decisions must be made in consultation with Indigenous peoples. Capacity building is needed to upskill media practitioners for editorial independence, professional and ethical standards, quality programming, production, and disseminating relevant content. This also includes the allocation of adequate financial and human resources to create original media content

rather than just translating mainstream news. Capacity building in fundraising skills, such as writing funding proposals and understanding legal frameworks and other important issues including climate change, gender equality and disability inclusion, is also needed to secure alternative public funding sources which are provided by governments, foundations, intergovernmental organizations, or private funding sources.

4. Utilization of digital media and content production relevant to Indigenous peoples

Indigenous people are increasingly using digital platforms to reach audiences, particularly where they face restrictions in obtaining broadcast frequencies. There is a need to promote the use of multimedia alongside traditional media channels, which could also help them monetize news content. Large technology companies should make tools and establish digital platforms which support Indigenous languages. There are many opportunities to build successful public-private partnerships for media content in Indigenous languages on social media.

5. Reclaiming the narrative and raising awareness about Indigenous issues

Indigenous media provide opportunities to reclaim the narrative and to implement self-determination and autonomy. This is vital to the expression of Indigenous identity, self-determination and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Indigenous communities need to be able to see themselves reflected in media, receive culturally relevant information, and present their worldviews and opinion to a broader audience on equal footing with other citizens. Indigenous media must be developed, designed, and implemented by Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, efforts should be made to foster multidimensional portrayals of Indigenous people. include topics of concern and perspectives on issues of Indigenous peoples in mainstream media programming and content.

6. Preparedness of Indigenous media for emergency and crisis situations

Indigenous media are critical in times of emergency and crisis, such as global health pandemics, conflict, and natural disasters as they can convey information in an efficient, relevant, and timely manner. Indigenous people must have access to reliable public information in a health emergency, in environmental and other assessments.

7. Collaboration, partnerships, and knowledge sharing among Indigenous media

Collaboration, partnerships, and networking can advance Indigenous media within countries and across borders. Success stories should be shared and adapted to other countries to empower Indigenous peoples and enhance access to public information and participation in current affairs and news. Working for and with media should be integrated into all campaigning for Indigenous issues to empower communities. Lastly, efforts should be taken to facilitate the creation of networks and cooperation among Indigenous community media organizations.

Resources

- [Weblink](#): Concept note and agenda of the multistakeholder event “Creating an enabling environment for free and independent Indigenous Community Media” organized on 18 April 2023, 22nd session of the UNPFII.
- Live and on-demand webcast coverage on the UN Web TV website: <http://webtv.un.org>
- [Weblink](#): Report of the 22nd session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 17-28 April 2023 (Ref.: E/2023/43-E/C.19/2023/7)

Annex

UNESCO's contribution to the Item 4 - Discussion of the six mandated areas of the UNPFII
(economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights)
22nd session of the UNPFII, 20 April 2023

- Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right which gives us **the right to hold our own opinions and to express ourselves freely without interference**. It enables people to participate in socio-cultural, economic, and political life. It is a cornerstone of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - as enshrined in Article 19. Its corollary is free, independent, pluralistic media.
- In 2007, Article 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples **further enhanced** the notion of freedom of expression and acknowledged **Indigenous Peoples' right to establish own media**.
- Today, we are increasingly reliant on the media to understand the world around us. The media is essential for sharing reliable information and building trust among people. The media also is instrumental in raising awareness and inspiring action to address global challenges such as poverty, health crises and climate change, and finally – contributing to dialogue for peace and stability.
- Media connects people, mobilizes action, and inspires engagement in society. So does Indigenous community media.
- Today, here at the Permanent Forum, UNESCO advocates for free, independent, and pluralistic media, that can perform fundamental functions in society. This contributes to **pluralism, diversity, openness, and inclusion in society**, which are indicators of a democracy and good governance.
- As an alternative to public, commercial, and social media, community media are non-profit media, owned and run by the people they serve. They have a greater focus on local issues and provide a public forum for debate and discussion.
- As enshrined in the Article 16 of the UNDRIP, Indigenous peoples have **the right to establish and run their own media and have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination**. The UNDRIP also calls on States to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect Indigenous cultural diversity. The Global Action of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages calls on all stakeholders to create favorable conditions for Indigenous media development.
- It is on this foundation, that UNESCO supports the development of Indigenous community media and **invites the Permanent Forum and other UN Indigenous mechanisms** to:
 - Conduct **a study** on Indigenous community media
 - Hold **a debate** dedicated to Indigenous community media in line with Article 16 of the UNDRIP at upcoming sessions of the Permanent Forum, in order to elaborate future steps for joint action
 - Strengthen the voices of Indigenous girls and boys, women and men, and elders in **media coverage, programming, and representation**, particularly in mainstream media
 - Promote **policies and practices** that result in an overall enabling environment for free and independent community media, including operation with legal recognition, access to frequencies and financial viability
 - Support **capacity building** of Indigenous community media on editorial independence and application of professional and ethical standards, content production in Indigenous languages, and advocate for the transformative changes in management practices in favour of Indigenous media professionals particularly indigenous women working in media
 - Promote **international cooperation, knowledge sharing and partnerships** among Indigenous community media and other partners including mainstream media