




# Towards Equity in Global Communication?

Second  
Edition



Edited by  
Richard C. Vincent  
Kaarle Nordenstreng



This is a book about global communication and equity. It comes as the world of media and communication has drastically changed. The fundamental issues and structures behind digital media remain basically the same as they have been over the past 50 years. Also the communication problems and policy questions raised since the 1970s at the United Nations have not lost their overall relevance, while new perspectives emerged in moving from the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

The main issue of the media world is to which extent the resources for communication – both material and mental – are distributed in a fair and equal way between nations and people. New technologies have brought along many new possibilities, but their potential has far from materialized due to social and economic structures. While “imbalance” as the overall theme since the 1970s has been replaced by “digital divide” in the 2010s, the fundamental question is still equity.

The book begins by offering a broad overview of communication by two eminent scholars. Johan Galtung’s presentation of the triangle State-Capital-Civil Society is a classic in the study of media and society. Majid Tehranian’s examination of communication and democracy suggests an exceptionally powerful historical and visionary perspective.

The rest of the chapters are either updated from the first edition or new chapters that provide up-to-the-moment appraisals of some of the most important socioeconomic and political issues that affect the world of communication currently.

The Appendix provides a complete record of the eleven MacBride Round Tables that were held between 1989 and 1999, a strategic move to carry on the idea of the NWICO in the ecumenical spirit of democratization of communication as advocated by the MacBride Report *Many Voices, One World* (1980).

This book is meant for the students and scholars of international communication and development, political economy and international relations. It is also a resource for members of governments and NGOs, as well as advocates of human rights and grassroots communication.

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# Towards Equity in Global Communities



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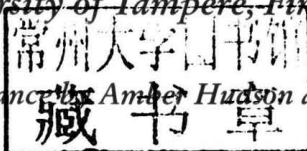
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# **TOWARDS EQUITY IN GLOBAL COMMUNICATION?**

**Second Edition**



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This book is dedicated to Michael Traber (1929-2006)





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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Historians on every continent are now busily writing the history of the 20th century. Three themes are likely to dominate their efforts. The first is war. The 20th century has created and developed the notion of "total war," with its disregard for civilians and its weapons of large-scale human annihilation. In addition World War II was followed by the decades of the Cold War, which have affected the whole of humankind and from which the world still has not recovered.

The second historical theme is decolonization and how this has changed the map of the world. There are now many more diverse international players than in 1947. Close to a hundred sovereign new states have emerged since then.

And a third theme of 20th century history may well be science and technology, the creation and application of knowledge, and the powers that technologies have unleashed. The technological infrastructure of communication has undergone particularly drastic change, with more in the offing.

This collection of essays on global communication has to do with all these themes. This is particularly true if they are seen from the perspective of a movement that is associated with the name of Sean MacBride: Irish statesman and champion of world peace, international lawyer and human rights activist, advocate of developing nations and international justice.

In 1977 Sean MacBride was chosen to chair UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. Most of the 15 commissioners were eminent scholars from five countries. They completed their work in 1980 with the publication of a report entitled *Many Voices, One World*. The MacBride Report, as it is commonly referred to, constitutes a landmark study of the problems of global communication.

International communication, particularly in the form of radio broadcasting, owes its rapid expansion to the promotion and the pursuit of wars, hot and cold. Propaganda became an unfortunate part of international broadcasting, and in some ways still is. One of the lessons learned from World War II was that radio should never again be used and abused by war-mongering governments as had been the case. UNESCO's *Mass Media Declaration* of 1978 is a bench-mark in this respect, and must be seen as an important precursor to the *MacBride Report*.<sup>1</sup>

Of equal if not great significance for the MacBride Commission was its concern for the so-called developing countries, or the South. After all, more than half of the commissioners came from the South. Although these countries had achieved political independence, in terms of their economies and cultures they were still treated as colonies.

Another United Nations project, the creation of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), pursued in the early 1970s, was supposed to lead to a more even-handed international trading system and thus to economic decolonization. The decolonization of information and communication was the next logical step. However, the struggle for a New International Information Order (NIIO) was clearly a program of the South and of its Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).<sup>2</sup> It was, in the first instance, the countries of the South that would benefit from "a new, more just and more efficient world information and communication order" (the subtitle of *Many Voices, One World*).

What started as a clear South-North issue soon turned into a quagmire of Cold War politics. In some respect the NWICO was hijacked by the two Cold War superpowers and used to settle their scores, old and new. Thus, the NWICO fell victim to imperial power. The colonial system prevailed in new guises. It did not permit a further emancipation of the South, least of all in the field of communication and culture.

The NWICO is also about science and technology. In the second half of the 20th century technology utterly transformed everyday life in the rich world and, to some extent, even in the poor. Perhaps the most spectacular achievement is the fact that, since the 1960s, radio can reach the remotest villages, thanks to the transistor and the miniaturized long-life battery. Technology allowed the capturing of sound and sight and their distribution in unprecedented ways. The spread of telephony and of computer networks through satellites has given rise to a new lifestyle for the affluent in the North and a small elite in some parts of the South. In general, however, technological resources are now so unevenly distributed that the gap between North and South seems almost unbridgeable, a problem that the MacBride Report already addressed—at a time when the world Internet had not even been invented.

Time will tell whether 20th-century historians will devote to the struggle for the NWICO a chapter, a paragraph, or a footnote. Yet, there are people all over the world who consider the work of the MacBride Commission one of the great landmarks of cultural politics of the 20th century. The NWICO could have been one of the jewels in the crown of UNESCO and the UN system as a whole. Alas, they lost this jewel for the sake of political expediency.

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The MacBride Round Table was conceived and held its first meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1989. Its expressed purpose was to evaluate world communication at this 10-year mark following the publication of the *MacBride Report*. The inaugural meeting was cosponsored in the Federation of Southern African Journalists, the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), and the Media Foundation of the Non-Aligned (NAMEDIA). The Round Table urged investments that would help improve the delicate communication infrastructures in the developing world, urged media professionals to set guidelines for operation, and reiterated the belief in a free and responsible press, with a public-interest orientation and without extreme government or commercial control.

Ten Round Tables have been held. Following the Harare meeting in 1989, there was Prague (1990), Istanbul (1991), Sao Paulo (1992), Dublin (1993), Honolulu (1994), Tunis (1995), Seoul (1996), Boulder (1997), and Amman (1998). The Round Table has become an international communication rights advocate with an agenda to accommodate scholars, activists, journalists, and other communication experts devoted to the monitoring of world communication, legal ramifications, and information imbalances, and reporting findings to community groups, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the news media. Further information on the Round Table may be found as the organization's website at: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~vincent/macbride/htm>.

The current volume grew out of these Round Table meetings, particularly the one in Honolulu. The chapters that follow offer a look at issues highlighted by the MacBride Commission and thereafter elaborated by the Round Table, on the eve of the 21st century.

The term *MacBride Movement* is no euphemism. What started, historically, with the proposed restructuring of the international information and communication order has grown into an alliance of grassroots organizations, women's groups, ecology networks, social activists, and committed academics. Some now call it a media reform movement, other emphasize media education, and still other focus on the entire cultural environment, of which the mass media are an important part. There is a new NWICO in the making which sees itself as a network of networks based in civil society.

In other words, although many epitaphs have been written on the death of the NWICO, the movement “towards a new, more just and more efficient world information and communication order” is very much alive, although no longer under the same slogans. It has taken on new issues and concerns—the 1995 MacBride Round Table was on Africa and the Internet—yet it is still stepped in the old NWICO principles.

One of these principles is equity or equality. The concept pertains both to justice and communication. To justice, because communication is an essential precondition to social empowerment. If individuals and groups of people are deprived of communication, or prevented from developing it, they are essentially rendered unequal. Furthermore, genuine communication cannot take place between superiors and inferiors. Masters can shout commands at their servants but they cannot really communicate with them. Communication can only take place if all partners acknowledge, in principle, the equality of all men and women.

This collection of essays treats the issues of equity and equality in communication not merely on the interpersonal but, in the tradition of the *MacBride Report*, on the international or global level. The book thus starts with two chapters proposing a new global vision.

Few international documents on communication have been so unambiguous on freedom and democracy as the *MacBride Report*. In spite of allegations to the contrary, anyone who has actually read *Many Voices, One World* can attest to that. Freedom is the hallmark of all genuine communications and the basis for every democracy. That freedom, however, can only be achieved if communication is truly democratized. The MacBride legacy on freedom and democracy has guided this book. It is also implicit in the call to renew the NWICO debate on new and realistic terms, meeting the requirements of the next century.

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## NOTES

1. Its full title is “Declaration of Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening of Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War.” For further background and details see Kaarle Nordenstreng, *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984).
2. NIIO later became known as the New World Information and Communication Order, also known by the acronym NWICO.



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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The first edition of this book appeared at the end of the 20th century—at a time when international communication was still mainly based on traditional mass media and telecommunication. Internet and World Wide Web were only at the initial stage and few could foresee how the media world would look just a decade and a half later—with China as the leading country of Internet users and social media everywhere occupying space that used to be devoted to mass media alone.

Today, in the mid-2010s, the world of media and communication is drastically different from what it was in the late 1990s. However, the fundamental issues and structures behind digital media remain basically the same. If anything, big issues of media ecology have only become more prominent. Also the communication problems and policy questions raised since the 1970s at the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations have not lost their overall relevance.

The main issue of the media world is to which extent the resources for communication—both material and mental—are distributed in a fair and equal way between nations and people. New technologies have brought along a lot of new possibilities, but their potential has far from materialized due to social and economic structures. While “imbalance” as the overall theme since the 1970s has been replaced by “digital divide” in the 2010s, the fundamental question is still equity.

Accordingly, there was no reason to change the main keyword of this book—equity still hits the core problem of global communication. But the old title was misleading as it suggested that we are moving towards greater equity. Therefore the title is now posed as a question—with a discrete suggestion that the world is moving away from rather than towards equity in global communication.

The subtitle of the first edition was *MacBride Update*. This is deleted from the present edition because the new collection no longer stands as a follow-up of the original MacBride Report *Many Voices, One World* (Unesco, 1980). Only half of the chapters originate from the first edition, whereas the other half is new.

The book retains its first two chapters, offering a broad global overview of communication by two eminent scholars in the field. Johan Galtung's presentation of the triangle State-Capital-Civil Society has become a classic in the study of media and society. Also Majid Tehranian's examination of communication and democracy suggests an exceptionally powerful historical and visionary perspective.

The rest of the chapter are either updated from the first edition (chapters 3, 5, and 6) or written for this new edition (chapters 7-10). Chapter 4 is an exception: written by Mustapha Masmoudi of Tunisia—a member of the MacBride Commission and one of the most prominent spokesmen of the Non-Aligned Movement in matters of media and communication. His text was first published in 2005 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the MacBride Report, yet he still considered it valid enough to be included in this reader before his unexpected death in 2014.

The Appendix of the book provides a complete record of the 11 MacBride Round Tables that were held between 1989 and 1999. This collection allows for detailed study of this civil society movement as it evolved in the late 1980s with a strategic move to carry on the idea of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the ecumenical spirit of the MacBride Commission's Report. The Round Table was a coalition of professional and academic supporters of the idea without political pressures from governments or intergovernmental organizations—an expression of the grassroots voice and a mobilizer of the professional and citizen associations in support of democratization of communication in general and NWICO in particular.

The statements and reports reproduced in the Appendix provide a panorama of topics raised by the worldwide media reform movement in the 1990s—including issues of gender, right to communicate, and information society—accompanied by a host of proposals extending from political problems in Southern Africa to the People's Communication Charter. This rich roadmap is impressive as such, but it tells also an instructive story of the fragility of social movements. Despite great visions of an attractive global movement with a number of voluntary activists, the Round Table ran out of steam after a decade and simply discontinued on the eve of the new millennium.

The lesson is to see the paradox of civil society: while the citizens and grassroots need to be supported in emancipating and empowering themselves, it is naïve to believe that spontaneous movements will automatically

endure. To be sustainable they need permanent structures and organization. The MacBride Round Table was flourishing as long as there were parties to host its meetings, but without a NGO status and financial backing it had no way to continue, although the issues involved remain for attention and action.

The lesson does not suggest, however, that we should be cynical about civil society and the social movements. We should only avoid mystifying them and undermining the importance of institutional structures. What is needed in any case is critical and reflective study of international communication, and it is for this purpose that the second edition is compiled.

Finally, we dedicate this volume to Dr. Michael Traber, the third editor of our original volume who passed away in 2006. This Swiss priest and media scholar served as director of research of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and editor of its journal *Media Development*. Mike was an exemplary advocate for peace, justice, and social progress—a role model for innumerable students and colleagues aiming at equity in global communication.

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