When it comes to establishing good governance, the media has a vital role to play, in promoting accountability and transparency, and keeping the public informed during elections and other key events. But how are we best placed to engage with this fast-developing and sometimes resistant sector?

Many partners within the global GTF family reported that community organisations were failing to engage effectively with the media. In response to this, the Department for International Development ran a Media and Governance workshop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August, working with GTF partners to see how we can form effective partnerships with media bodies.

Moses Nsubuga from GTF partner Refugee Law Project in Uganda represented Christian Aid at this. Other GTF partners also attended, and participants from organisations, including BBC World Service Trust and ACT, gave presentations about improving communities’ ability to engage with and use media to promote good governance.

Some key observations and recommendations from the presentations were:

- the media should be viewed as part of a wider accountability system
- development organisations’ capacity for and expertise in working with media should be strengthened
- media should be incorporated into political and economic analysis of countries and other planning systems by programme staff
- currently, there is a greater need for the GTF to focus on empowering citizens rather than attempting to improve media institutions, which are often owned or run by the state
- the GTF and its partners need to stay as cutting edge as possible, to attract continued funding but also to create real interest in change.

There are numerous challenges to working with the media, the most significant of which is the perceived threat from governments – partners fear they could be prevented from operating freely if they are seen as being too political. This is an issue that Christian Aid’s GTF Global Workshop in London, in September 2011, identified as being of relevance and importance to projects’ impact. At this meeting, participants also established that the media is key to all GTF work, and each partner committed to researching the best methods of working with media.

Our GTF partners in Brazil and the Dominican Republic – INESC, CESE and JRSM – are collaborating on a learning initiative on how to strategise more effectively in a climate where the media is largely controlled by powerful elites. They can perhaps learn lessons from other GTF organisations. Our Iraqi partner’s newsletter, for example, has been a powerful tool in raising issues and gaining government support for its work. In Sierra Leone, meanwhile, an ongoing relationship with local radio and links with the BBC World Service Trust have helped our partner there achieve strong results in promoting its work, while gaining unexpected benefits, such as staff training and a chance to collaborate with other organisations.
For three years, Christian Aid’s GTF programme has been working to support some of the most marginalised groups in the world. Through the efforts of 15 GTF partners, across 10 countries and 3 continents, we have brought about new legislation, improved infrastructure in poor areas and empowered hundreds of communities to access vital rights and services.

By working with community-based organisations in Brazil, in 2010, GTF partner INESC obtained the 2 million signatures required by the government to propose the Fincha Limpa (clean sheet) law, which prevents any candidate with a criminal record from standing for election. This legislation was enacted for the first time during the 2010 elections and has given Brazilians renewed hope for their political system.

In Ghana, our partner SEND has been working to support communities to put pressure on local government to sustain the Schools Feeding Programme, which for many children provides the only meal they will have all day and has been proven to improve attendance.

In rural Iraq, where sustained conflict has caused slow rates of development, communities, with the help of our partner REACH, are successfully lobbying regional councils to connect them to clean water, which, in turn, is opening up dialogue on a range of issues.

Getting women involved in and engaging with government bodies is vital to improving governance and representation. The Kailahun Women in Governance project, run by GTF partner SEND in Sierra Leone, has supported women to run for political office. It has also helped political organisations to reflect on how they approach gender, using the Gender Audit tool, which allows them to measure where they currently are in terms of being fully inclusive.

Several GTF partners work with refugees and migrants – often in countries where governments and large sections of the population are hostile towards them – helping them to access their rights. The Refugee Law Project in Uganda works with a range of refugees and internally displaced people for three years, Christian Aid’s GTF programme has been working to support some of the most marginalised groups in the world. Through the efforts of 15 GTF partners, across 10 countries and 3 continents, we have brought about new legislation, improved infrastructure in poor areas and empowered hundreds of communities to access vital rights and services.

By working with community-based organisations in Brazil, in 2010, GTF partner INESC obtained the 2 million signatures required by the government to propose the Fincha Limpa (clean sheet) law, which prevents any candidate with a criminal record from standing for election. This legislation was enacted for the first time during the 2010 elections and has given Brazilians renewed hope for their political system.

In Ghana, our partner SEND has been working to support communities to put pressure on local government to sustain the Schools Feeding Programme, which for many children provides the only meal they will have all day and has been proven to improve attendance.

In rural Iraq, where sustained conflict has caused slow rates of development, communities, with the help of our partner REACH, are successfully lobbying regional councils to connect them to clean water, which, in turn, is opening up dialogue on a range of issues.

Getting women involved in and engaging with government bodies is vital to improving governance and representation. The Kailahun Women in Governance project, run by GTF partner SEND in Sierra Leone, has supported women to run for political office. It has also helped political organisations to reflect on how they approach gender, using the Gender Audit tool, which allows them to measure where they currently are in terms of being fully inclusive.

Several GTF partners work with refugees and migrants – often in countries where governments and large sections of the population are hostile towards them – helping them to access their rights. The Refugee Law Project in Uganda works with a range of refugees and internally displaced people.

**Public Chambers: gateways to hope**

**Davlatbi Hakbidieva** suffered extreme domestic abuse for a decade during her marriage. Many times, she thought of committing suicide. Now divorced, she has been able to secure a court decision, with the support of the Public Chamber – a body set up by Christian Aid partner Rights and Prosperity, in Rudaki district, Tajikistan – to order her husband to pay maintenance for her and their two children.

‘I didn’t know who to turn to before I heard about the Public Chamber,’ says Davlatbi, who was also given help by the partner to secure some land for a new home.

The Public Chamber was established in 2010 to give advice on legal rights and entitlements to communities, with a particular focus on marginalised groups such as women. Since then, Rights and Prosperity reports that the rate of female suicides in Rudaki has gone down. ‘The Public Chamber is very good,’ Davlatbi explains. ‘Each time I come, I get support to solve my problems. When I went to the court, I met other women. Everyone said how the Public Chamber has helped them, because it gives such good advice.’

‘Before I divorced, I was too shy and too afraid to go out to get help, so I didn’t know if there were others out there like me. Now I always tell other people about the Public Chamber and how helpful it is.’
Land rights: a victory for the Quilombola people

On 29 September 2011, 512 families living in the Quilombo Brejo dos Crioulos community, in southeast Brazil, achieved a prominent victory in their struggle to have their rights recognised and upheld. After 12 years of ongoing claims, President Dilma Rousseff signed a decree that will allow the removal of illegal rural settlements in the Quilombo area, allowing the indigenous community to reclaim their land.

The presidential decree was signed in response to a two-day event, organised by Quilombolas in the capital, Brasília, with the support of Christian Aid partner CESE and the GTF programme, at which pressure was put on the government to pay attention to the specific case of Brejo dos Crioulos.

Quilombo communities were formed through resistance to slavery in Brazil, which lasted more than 300 years. The communities remained following the abolition of slavery in 1888, but have traditionally been ignored by the government and the rest of society. Quilombolas were recognised in the constitution of 1988, which guaranteed their existence as a social group and the right to land tenure. However, 22 years later, only 185 Quilombola communities – about six per cent of an estimated 3,000 in Brazil – had received the title to their land.

The victory of Brejo dos Crioulos is not only the first step for the full recognition of that community, but also sets an important precedent for gaining land rights for Quilombolas. Despite being guaranteed in law, land titling is becoming increasingly difficult due to representatives protecting landowners’ interests in the Brazilian Congress, including by questioning a 2003 law that regulates the procedures for land recognition and titling for Quilombolas. This community will keep working to preserve this legislation and to guarantee that others can benefit from its struggle.

people. They have created training programmes on refugee rights, which have now been incorporated into the national curriculum for police training. As a result, refugees have reported better treatment by authorities and increased understanding of and access to their rights.

Our partner JRSM, meanwhile, has been helping migrants in the Dominican Republic, where many people are denied access to their legal documents, leaving them unable to work or access education and health services. JRSM helped a young woman of Haitian descent to secure the right to her legal documents, which set an important precedent for all cases and has highlighted the stateless predicament of those living without citizenship in the country.

Since 2009, when the GTF programme started, several partners have also worked on projects relating to elections in their countries. In Nigeria, Justice Development and Peace Commission ran awareness campaigns and created platforms for candidates to open a dialogue with the communities they represent. It also supported communities to register to vote, especially women and young people, and, ahead of the election, trained election observers for all polling stations in Anambra State, ensuring the polls were both free and fair.
Although an insurance scheme exists to help people access the health system in Ghana, many are still excluded from getting the medical care they need because they are unable to pay the necessary premiums.

Recognising this, the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) provides exemptions to the very poor, pregnant women and children under 18 years. Yet the limited capacity of the scheme’s authorities to reach and assess these groups, coupled with a lack of public awareness of available support, has led to situations where people are excluded from accessing health services, often for long periods of time.

To tackle this problem, GTF partner SEND-Ghana is assisting the NHIS, and helping the most vulnerable and marginalised people to use it. SEND’s approach is to educate communities on who is entitled to help with paying the premiums, along with conducting research on those accessing health services and engaging in dialogue with authorities.

With SEND’s help, the Citizens’ Monitoring Committee in Wa district undertook research by consulting scheme managers, community members and other key stakeholders. The findings were that most people who are considered poor – even those who qualify for support under the Government’s Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme – are not benefitting from the exemptions in the scheme.

These results were used to engage NHIS authorities, officials from the District Assembly and District Health Directorate, and other key stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the scheme. This platform created by SEND and its grassroot networks, based on the research findings, provides opportunities for marginalised groups to speak to the authorities about their experience. This has improved public understanding of the policy, and as a result more people are accessing services and are able to give feedback to the authorities.

Following this engagement, 39 people with disabilities have been able to access free health services. One group to benefit was the Physically Challenged Association, of which Hile Beeleng is a member. ‘I have used this card to assess healthcare at the Wa Regional Hospital three times, thanks to God, Wa Municipal and SEND Ghana,’ says Hile.

GTF partner SEND-Ghana is helping the most vulnerable and marginalised people to use the country’s National Health Insurance Scheme. As a result, 39 people with disabilities have been able to access free health services.

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

christianaid.org.uk