

# How media can be an instrument of peace in conflict-prone settings

This is a background paper for the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre media and conflict prevention research and policy roundtable, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017. It is based on the paper *Media in Conflict Prevention* authored by Michelle Betz.<sup>1</sup> Additional inputs to this paper by Katy Williams.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents evidence on how media development policies and programmes can help prevent insecurity and violent conflict, and contribute towards peace and justice. It aims to help practitioners and researchers in the field of conflict prevention and communication explore ways to work better in this area.

While there is increasing recognition given to the importance of media and its positive and negative potential in relation to conflict, there is relatively little accessible evidence on what works, guidance for practitioners, or attention from donors.

The paper will examine the available literature on this subject specifically focusing on the challenges that conflict prevention and media specialists face in working in this area as well as what we know works, drawing on best practices and lessons learned. It will highlight the knowledge gaps around media for conflict prevention and form a basis for the discussion of what steps conflict resolution specialists could take next to engage in this area.

## BACKGROUND

In recent years, the importance of a free, professional and plural media in contributing to good governance has gained traction in the international development community. A vibrant media gives people free flowing access to information, enables dialogue, encourages people to express their views, prompts greater political participation and encourages accountability.

Development programmes that strengthened the capacities of local media organisations to be independent gained prominence during the late 1980s and 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. To some extent, civil society and development workers attributed communism's end to the introduction of dissident voices on radio stations such as Radio Free Europe and the underground production and distribution of restricted publications.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Background paper for United Nations/World Bank (forthcoming) "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict"

<sup>2</sup> Amelia Arsenault and Shawn Powers, "The Media Map Project: Review of Literature," <http://mediamapresource.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/literature-review-the-media-map-project.pdf> Accessed 17 January 2011.

At that time, the focus was not on conflict-stressed states. In fact, there is significant research looking at the power of the media as a *driver* of violence and conflict rather than of peace.<sup>3</sup> Development practitioners did not seriously begin to consider or even address the role of media in conflict or immediate post-conflict situations until the mid and late 1990s in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and the war in the Balkans.<sup>4</sup>

With the credibility of ‘media for development’ established in post-Soviet bloc countries, it was hoped the promotion of a competent and free media could serve as a critical component in creating and building civil society, and stability, in post-conflict countries in other parts of the world. Since that time, media assistance activities have expanded both in area and scope. Many international, regional and local organisations and UN agencies are now working with media in conflict or conflict-stressed countries using a variety of tools and approaches. These include supporting free and independent media to facilitate discussions across divides and ensure all sections of society, including those who feel most marginalised, are part of effective democratic discourse that is the cornerstone of democracy.

### The changing nature of conflict

Each conflict must be understood in the context of its own political, social and cultural context in addition to its specific media system if we are to understand the best media practices to pursue.

Conflicts today are, in many cases, more complex and multidimensional than ever before. Most conflict deaths occur during internal wars rather than between states and regular armies. Over the past decade there has been an increase in the conflict relapse rate. Conflicts are less likely to be resolved through traditional political settlements due mainly to the emergence of organised crime that tends to exacerbate state fragility and undermine state legitimacy, the internationalisation of civil wars (e.g. Syria) and, increasing violent extremism.<sup>5</sup>

The conflict cycle is a circular, dynamic process with several phases including various levels of diplomatic efforts to maintain peace in the run-up to war. The peace process that follows a ceasefire is also its own cycle including peace negotiations, signing of treaties and agreements, monitoring, prevention of lapsing into renewed conflict, and reconciliation. Elections also mark crucial phases in the cycle, including the campaign, the poll, results and what often, of late, have become a violent post-electoral period and one that can readily fall into conflict as seen in Cote d’Ivoire in 2010-11 and Kenya in 2007-08. Media interventions must be tailored according to this cycle.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Cees Jan Hamlink, (2010), *Media and Conflict: Escalating evil*.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Vladimir Bratic, “Twenty Years of Peacebuilding: Media in Conflict Strategic Framework”, UPEACE Open Knowledge Network Occasional Working Paper Series No. 2 (Oct. 2013), University for Peace, <https://www.upeace.org/OKN/working%20papers/UniversityForPeaceOKN-TwentyYearsOfPeacebuildingMediaInConflictOctober2013.pdf> See also Ylva Isabelle Blondel, “Violent Conflict and Roles of the Media”, Uppsala University, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See the UN-commissioned paper *Examining Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict, 2015*. <http://cpr.unu.edu/examining-major-recent-trends-in-violent-conflict.html>

## WHAT IS MEDIA?

For the purposes of this paper, the term media refers to both 'traditional' mass media (newspapers, TV, radio) and social media (online blogs, Facebook, Twitter etc). The two have become 'intimately intertwined,'<sup>6</sup> with both used as sources of news and information and tweets used as soundbites. "Media and journalism should be understood as part of a wider 'communication ecology' that includes a wide range of stakeholders and practices."<sup>7</sup>

## MEDIA: DRIVER OF PEACE OR DRIVER OF CONFLICT?

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) developed a holistic framework consisting of eight "pillars of peace" that are "both inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing, such that improvements in one factor would tend to strengthen others and vice versa."<sup>8</sup>

One of these pillars is the free flow of information, which covers "how easily citizens can gain access to information, whether the media is free and independent, as well as the extent to which citizens are informed and engaged in the political process."<sup>9</sup>

A recent rapid evidence assessment commissioned by DFID suggests that radio, TV programming and digital media can positively affect people's attitudes towards 'others' thereby improving social cohesion. However, the report notes, the transition from attitudinal change to behaviour change is left unexplored in the body of evidence and it is unclear whether such changes are durable, or can be readily reversed if conflict returns.<sup>10</sup>

Some research assessments conclude there is not yet sufficient empirical evidence to confirm or reject claims that media promotes or prevents conflict and there is a reliance on anecdotal evidence to illustrate the media's positive impact on democracy, governance and accountability.<sup>11</sup>

### Challenges of researching impact of media interventions on conflict prevention

Conducting research in conflict poses practical challenges. For e.g. it can be dangerous for researchers; they have limited access to beneficiaries and they face resource constraints.

Mass communication can reach many people including the most isolated - that's a benefit and a curse because it makes it difficult to evaluate impact.

The intended outcomes of communications interventions are not so clearly defined as, for example, health and sanitation programmes, and the direct benefits cannot be measured to the same degree.

There are no universally agreed quality standards or specifications for what makes 'good communication'.

It's difficult to attribute change solely to the media intervention when other factors are likely at play.

<sup>6</sup> See for example José van Djick's discussion of this issue in her book: *The Culture of Connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, K & Schaer, C., eds, FoME Symposium 2016: Observer, Agitator, Target: Media and Media Assistance in Fragile Contexts. Berlin, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, (2013), *Pillars of Peace: Understanding the key attitudes and institutions that underpin peaceful societies*, pp.1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, (2011), *Structures of Peace: Identifying what leads to peaceful societies*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Cramer, C., Goodhand, J. and Morris, R, (2016), *Evidence Synthesis: What interventions have been effective in preventing or mitigating armed violence in developing and middle-income countries?* London: Department for International Development, p.iii.

<sup>11</sup> Schoemaker E. & Strelau, N., (2014), *The Media and Conflict: An assessment of the evidence*. Progress in Development Studies 14(2).

There is also a lack of data showing how many conflicts have been averted and what methods work best because “metrics of success for conflict prevention are notoriously hard to come by given that the optimal outcome – the absence of conflict – could hypothetically have been achieved without any intervention at all.”<sup>12</sup>

James Deane of BBC Media Action argues that media and communication increasingly matter in fragile states, in different ways according to the country. But he acknowledges that while media and communication sectors sometimes create the conditions for sustainable political settlements, at other times they undermine the chances of them.<sup>13</sup>

## THE SHIFTING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The nature of the media is changing rapidly, arguably more rapidly than any other sector. “Media is exploding and flourishing in some countries, and is in economic or political crisis in others, with changes happening often very rapidly; new technologies, and particularly mobile telephony, are rapidly transforming information and communication opportunities, including for the poorest with poorly understood consequences.”<sup>14</sup> This shifting landscape has implications for the role of media in conflict and conflict prevention.

### Does greater media plurality foster social cohesion or division?

Social media puts the audience as both content creators and consumers: “ordinary” people as opposed to professional journalists create user-generated “news.”<sup>15</sup> In this way it can be emancipatory, giving voice to those who otherwise may not be heard, and thus has the potential to become a significant factor in conflict management.

But this open information landscape also opens the door to abusive, intolerant and often malicious discourse. According to media ethicist Aidan White: “Learning to live with free expression in the digital age requires a new movement to help people understand that free speech is not without some responsibility.”<sup>16</sup>

Mass media is often perceived as less inclusive by virtue of being controlled by gatekeepers such as editors who decide whose voices and opinions will be heard.<sup>17</sup> But social media can create “filter bubbles,” exposing people only to content that supports their preexisting beliefs, thereby polarizing public opinion.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Zyck & Muggah.

<sup>13</sup> Deane, J., (2013), *Fragile States: the role of media and communication*. London: BBC Media Action, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Institute of Development Studies and BBC WST, *The Role of Media in Fragile Situations: A Research Dialogue Across Disciplines*, 2009, p. 7.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b4640f0b64974000a86/media\\_fragile\\_states.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b4640f0b64974000a86/media_fragile_states.pdf)  
Accessed 29 March 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Murthy, D. 2012. “Towards a Sociological Understanding of Social Media: Theorizing Twitter,” *Sociology* (46:6), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> White, A., (2016), *Media Ethics in a Context of War or Conflict: A discussion paper for International Media Support*, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1964), *Personal influence; the part played by people in the flow of mass communications*, New York, Free Press.

<sup>18</sup> Miranda, S., Young, A., & Yetgine, E., (2016), “Are Social Media Emancipatory or Jeggemonic? Societal effects of mass media digitization in the case of the SOPA discourse”, *MIS Quarterly*, vol. 40 (2), p. 304.

In his new book, Cass Sunstein discusses how today's internet is driving political fragmentation and polarization and explains why online fragmentation endangers the shared conversations, experiences, and understandings that are the lifeblood of democracy.<sup>19</sup>

In his report on fragile states and media, James Deane emphasizes the importance of the politics of identity in conflict and conflict prevention. "Problems emerge in fragile states if the principal role of the media is to reinforce the separation of identities without also having the capacity, means or will to enable the kind of dialogue that can create shared identities".<sup>20</sup>

### Media is simultaneously local and global

The diffusion of internet, mobile and social media have moved us to "horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time".<sup>21</sup>

Today local information can move rapidly across borders to reach audiences around the globe (referred to as 'glocalisation'). This has the potential to fan conflict because different nations have different notions of what may and may not be said. At the same time, global media networks have significant influence on local audiences, resulting in a blend of global, local and 'glocal' information systems.

### The immediacy of communication

The velocity of today's communications often means a journalist's ability to assess critically what is happening is reduced as is the possibility of maintaining a balanced distance from events, leading to a horrible (and potentially dangerous) cycle of misinformation.<sup>22</sup> Expressing observations and opinions in soundbites and tweets and avoiding rational discourse and analysis can fan conflict.

It is increasingly difficult for organisations to hold back sensitive information from the public until an appropriate time. The speed of communications and competition for audience share makes the media less likely to play a gatekeeper role by withholding certain information that could derail negotiations during sensitive peace negotiations.

The accelerating speed of communications can have positive as well as negative consequences for conflict management. One positive example was the online mapping of violence and human rights abuses during the Kenya post-election violence in late 2007 and early 2008. Kenya's digital community responded with SMS and web technology creating *Ushahidi*, a

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<sup>19</sup> For a fuller discussion of these issues see Cass Sunstein's book *#Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media*, Princeton University Press. 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Deane, (2013), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Castells, M. (2007). "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society". *International Journal of Communication* 1:238-266. Castells continues: "The communication foundation of the network society is the global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many both synchronous and asynchronous."

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of this issue see <http://gijn.org/2014/09/16/journalism-and-digital-times-wider-reach-and-sloppy-reporting/> and Bivens, R., "Affording Immediacy in Television News Production: Comparing adoption trajectories of social media and satellite technologies", *International Journal of Communication* 9(2015), 191-209.

website that collected and mapped reports of violence.<sup>23</sup> These tools have the potential to play a key role in conflict prevention and early warning “to the extent that small-scale violence might presage larger-scale political violence.”<sup>24</sup>

Again during the 2017 elections *Ushahidi* helped keep people safe, by informing them about the places to avoid – where there were riots or unrest. Another widely used platform was @Ma3Route (On Twitter), which shared information from citizens on which roads to avoid.

*Ushahidi*'s mapping in the 2017 elections was not well publicised and went almost unnoticed, perhaps also because of the availability of information on social media platforms in general. It is likely that such tools have not yet lived up to their potential in part because there is a lack of focus regarding what to actually do with the data. Such data collection and mapping exercises may be too simplistic for the realities of the complex situations often found in fragile and conflict-prone states.<sup>25</sup>

## CHALLENGES FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

Many conflict or transitional environments constitute a disabling, rather than enabling, environment for independent media to flourish -- corruption is rampant, pay is low, sources (official and unofficial) often refuse or are afraid to talk to journalists, unions and associations, if existent, are usually weak and the regulatory and legislative environments are more punitive than supportive of freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

This section examines the interrelated factors that may influence freedom of expression and how the media functions in conflict-affected states.<sup>26</sup>

### Media ownership

Media ownership and the diversity of ownership models (private, state/public, community) as well as alignment with political parties and/or ideologies, are likely to have implications for the roles media are able to play. State media that serves as a mouthpiece for a regime cannot hold leaders to account.

Private media, while technically independent, may become highly factionalised when influenced or co-opted by political or business figures with an interest in manipulating editorial coverage. When editorial coverage is politically aligned it can be used as “proxies in the battle between rival political groups, in the process sowing divisiveness rather than

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<sup>23</sup> See: Goldstein, J. & Rotich, J., (2008), Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis, Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

<sup>24</sup> Wanis-St. John, A. & Ghais, S. (2014). “International Conflict Resolution: From practice to knowledge and back again”. *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, p.15.

<sup>25</sup> See for example P. Currión, (2010), “If all you Have is a Hammer...” – How Useful is Humanitarian Crowdsourcing? <https://medium.com/@paulcurrión/if-all-you-have-is-a-hammer-how-useful-is-humanitarian-crowdsourcing-fed4ef33f8c8and> <http://www.ictworks.org/2012/07/09/dead-ushahidi-stark-reminder-sustainability-planning-ict4d/> for further discussion of these issues.

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO, in its framework for assessing media development, identifies a number of key characteristics of a “media environment in which freedom of expression, independence and pluralism of media can flourish”.<sup>26</sup> The five categories of indicators are: plurality and diversity of media and a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership; regulation; media as a platform for democratic discourse; professional capacity building and supporting institutions; infrastructural capacity. For a complete outline of the framework see UNESCO

consensus, hate speech instead of sober debate, and suspicion rather than social trust. In these cases, the media can be anti-democratic, contributing to cynicism about government and democratic decay. The public loses confidence in the media and in democratic institutions in general. The result is public apathy and democratic breakdown.”<sup>27</sup>

Proponents of transforming state broadcasters into public service broadcasters (PSBs) in conflict-prone states believe that PSBs can play a special role in finding common ground between people in divided societies, contributing to social cohesion and political stability and “enabling them to transcend the politics of identity to rebuild their often fractured nations”.<sup>28</sup> However, “reforming old, bloated, and government-controlled media systems” involves serious downsizing, modernisations to bring them in line with industry standards, and the introduction of media law and policy that would enable free and independent journalism ethics that conform with international practices.<sup>29</sup> All of this requires both substantial political will as well as capacity – both usually absent in conflict-prone environments.

### What is a public service broadcaster?

There are many definitions. There has even been an attempt at establishing a formal International Standard for a PSB. One of the simplest definitions comes from UNESCO: “Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned and is free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through PSB, citizens are informed, educated and also entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.”<sup>30</sup>

PSB and state broadcasters are not synonymous. A state broadcaster is accountable to the government while a PSB is accountable to the public and parliament. A state broadcaster is directly controlled by the Minister of Information, while a PSB is controlled by a board of independent Trustees. The employees of a state broadcaster are civil servants or government employees while PSB employees are employees of the broadcaster. A state broadcaster mostly features the government and only gives its viewpoint. The PSB features politicians from all parties and civil society and carries a wide range of viewpoints.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Coronel, S., (2001), *The Role of the Media in Deepening Democracy*.

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN010194.pdf>, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Harding, P., (2015), *Public Service Media in Divided Societies: Relic or renaissance?*, London: BBC Media Action. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/policy/briefings/public-service-broadcasting-21C.p.1>. See also: <http://www.dw.com/en/the-failed-reform-of-public-broadcasters-in-africa/a-19223613> and DW Akademie, (2014), *In the Service of the Public: Functions and transformations of media in developing countries*.

<sup>29</sup> Abbott, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO (n.d.) Public Service Broadcasting [online]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/public-service-broadcasting>

<sup>31</sup> Harding, P., *Public service media in divided societies: Relic or renaissance?* London: BBC Media Action. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/policy/briefings/public-service-broadcasting-21C.p.1>

### Economic constraints

As audiences fragment so does the funding (advertising and subscriptions) for media organisations. There are limited resources available to fund quality programmes that tell accurate, compelling stories, or to follow up on investigations and hold leaders fully accountable. Media houses cannot invest in the training required to ensure their editorial staff produce ethical, technically high quality programmes that people trust. And they cannot pay their staff decent salaries, making journalists vulnerable to corruption.

In addition, conflict – rather than peace - sells, and inflammatory coverage tends to be click bait<sup>32</sup>. But how to ensure the economic viability of the media if there is a narrative shift from conflict to peace?

As advocates for peace, journalists would have a much more subjective rather than impartial role, which does not sit well with a wide circle of both practitioners and academics.

### Regulation, censorship and declining freedom of information

Ideally, legal and regulatory frameworks should support a system conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media, but regulatory bodies are often aligned or connected in some way with the state<sup>33</sup>. These regulators can have undue influence on the work of journalists, they can restrict what is broadcast or published or even shut down media outlets.

Social media is increasingly being subjected to government regulation, especially as government agencies monitor online sites in their effort to identify would-be extremist attackers. Governments have called for internet platforms to remove accounts and/or content that promotes or supports extremism. They have also expanded surveillance efforts and called for restrictions on encryption – whether in the name of the war on terrorism, extremism or simply xenophobia.

According to Freedom House “more governments than ever before [are] targeting social media and communication apps as a means of halting the rapid dissemination of information, particularly during anti-government protests. Public-facing social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been subject to growing censorship for several years, but in a new trend, governments increasingly target voice communication and messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Click bait is online content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular website.

<sup>33</sup> Monroe Price has written extensively on this issue. See for example: “A Module for Media Intervention: Content Regulation in Post-Conflict Zones” (with Peter Krug), in M. Price and M. Thompson (eds.), *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights and the Management of Media Space*. Edinburgh University Press: 2002 and “Polarization and Media: The problem of the governance agenda in post-conflict societies” (with Nicole Stremlau and Iginio Gagliardone.) For World Bank CommGap conference report on “The Role of the News Media in the Governance Agenda,” Pippa Norris, ed. See also UNESCO Media Development Indicators.

<sup>34</sup> See: Freedom House. (2016). Freedom on the Net 2016: Silencing the messenger: Communication apps under pressure. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2016>

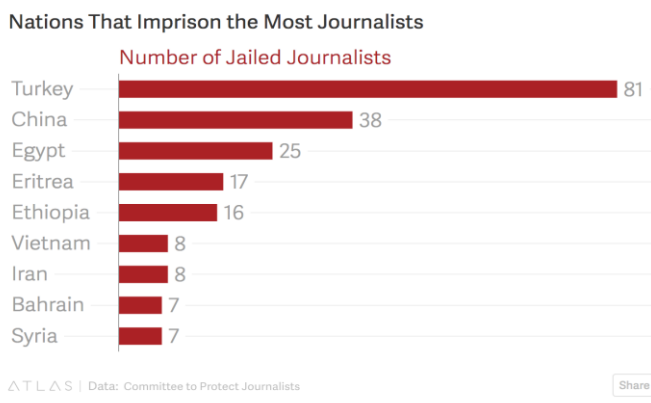
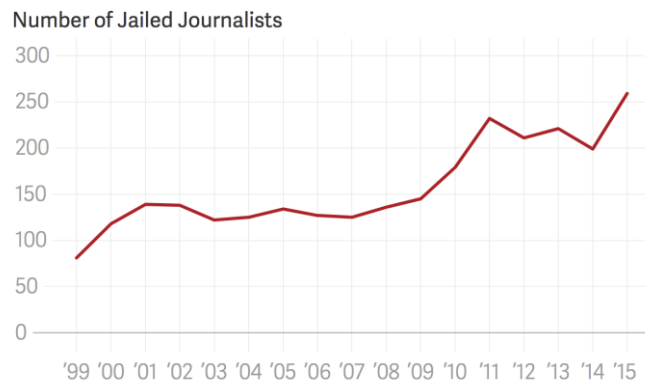


In its latest report, Freedom House examines the global decline in internet freedom; at least 65 countries have exhibited a decline in internet freedom for the sixth consecutive year.

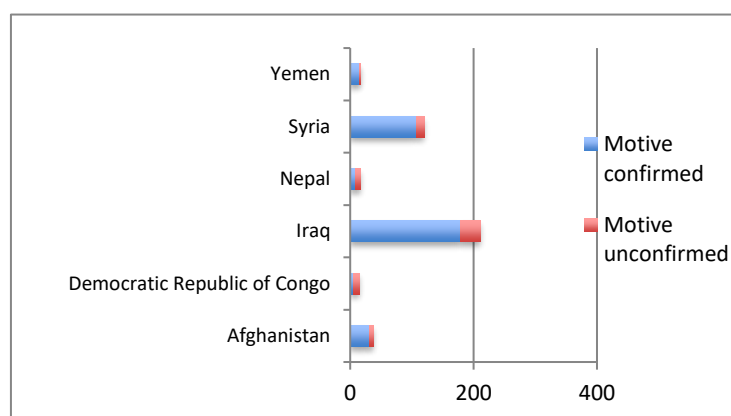
The report found two-thirds of all internet users (67%), live in countries where criticism of the government, military, or ruling family is subject to censorship.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, states are cracking down on journalists and human rights defenders in the name of national security, throwing journalists in jail and limiting access to information.

In 2016, governments imprisoned 259 journalists, the highest number since the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) began an annual



survey in 1990. Of those in jail at least 81 were in Turkish prisons followed by China and Egypt.



Over the past several years, the issue of safety of media workers has been recognized as a serious issue and an impediment to the free flow of information.

The [UN Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) recognises this important element in conflict prevention and more

Figure x: Number of journalists killed since 1992 (<https://cpj.org/killed/>)

must be done to address the root causes of violence against journalists. Figure x shows the

<sup>35</sup> Freedom House. Freedom on the Net 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2016>

number of journalists killed since 1992 according to the Committee to Protect Journalists data. (Note that these figures do not include those who were killed while working in support roles such as drivers, guards and fixers.)

### **Lack of trust in the 'post truth era'**

People's trust in news organisations is eroding. This is hardly surprising if the media is partisan – or indeed the quality of journalism is poor. But it can also be attributed to the increasing use of social media as alternatives to mainstream media for sourcing news, and to the way politicians use those sites to wage war against the establishment. "Social media, a technology designed to bring people together, seems to be doing the opposite by spreading false rumors and hateful speech," writes consultant Susan Abbott.<sup>36</sup>

There are numerous theories – none of them universally agreed upon. It is perhaps in line with declining trust in all institutions (which ironically the media played a part in), increasing political polarization, or related to information overload in the digital age leading to decision paralysis about what or who to trust.

In a recent lecture, Nick Robinson of the BBC quoted Google News's Richard Gingras: "We come from an era of dominant news organisations, often perceived as oracles of fact. We've moved to a marketplace where quality journalism competes on an equal footing with raucous opinion, passionate advocacy and the masquerading expression of variously motivated bad actors."<sup>37</sup>

Robinson added that President Donald Trump's attacks – often via Twitter – on the 'failing' press as purveyors of fake news (attacks that have been mimicked by defensive and aspiring leaders elsewhere), form part of a guerilla war on 'mainstream' media.

He added that the BBC (and by extension all public service broadcasters) should be "staffed by people who...are committed to getting as close to the truth as they can, and to offering their audiences free, open and broad debate about the issues confronting their country."

### **Internet access is still low in conflict-prone countries**

For all the talk about the rapidly shifting sands of the media landscape 'traditional' media, often remains the best way to reach people in conflict- affected countries in the least developed world because it is widely accessed and tends to be more trusted than other media. For instance according to BBC Media Action research radio is the most accessed media platform for information and the most trusted in Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania.<sup>38</sup> In Afghanistan radio was still the most popular source of information in 2016, with 70.5% of respondents receiving news and information from the radio, followed by TV at 66.4%.<sup>39</sup> In 2016 90% of Nepalis listened to the radio and 83% watched the TV, while in the Palestine Territories TV was the dominant medium (98%) with radio trailing (43%).<sup>40</sup> Syria is also a TV

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2657-Annual-report\\_2016-17.final-singlepage.web\\_pdf](https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2657-Annual-report_2016-17.final-singlepage.web_pdf)

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41412758>

<sup>38</sup> <http://dataportal.bbcmmediaaction.org/site/themes/media/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://asiafoundation.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/survey/>

<sup>40</sup> BBC Media Action country reports 2017

oriented country, with access to satellite television being almost ubiquitous, even in refugee camps.<sup>41</sup>

As figure x shows, there has been an extraordinary growth in mobile phone penetration in conflict-prone countries between 2005 and 2015 and while internet penetration has also increased markedly it lags way behind that of mobile.

There are many communities where significant portions of the population do not have access to internet-based content or social media. According to the ITU, nearly 4 billion people remain cut off from the internet and while developing countries account for the vast majority of internet users (2.5 billion compared with one billion in developed countries), internet penetration share tells a different story: 81% in developed countries compared with 40% in developing countries and 15% in the least developed countries with at least half of the latter being conflict-affected.<sup>42</sup>

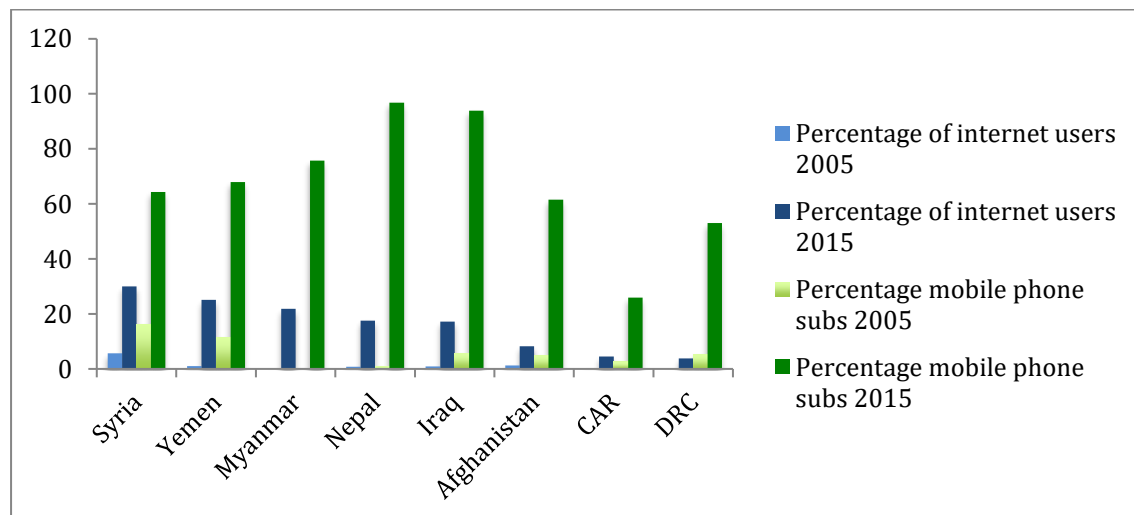


Figure x: Mobile phone penetration (# of mobile phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants<sup>43</sup>) and percentage of individuals using the internet in select conflict-affected countries 2005 versus 2015<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.mict-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/syrienstudie\\_20140814.pdf](http://www.mict-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/syrienstudie_20140814.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> ITU Facts and Figures 2016 and [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/ldc/ldc\\_list.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/ldc/ldc_list.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> ITU Mobile cellular data 2000-2015 <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

<sup>44</sup> ITU Internet penetration data 2000-2015 <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

## WHAT ROLES CAN THE MEDIA PLAY IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACE PROMOTION?

Role	Explanation	Example
<b>Brings together different groups to discuss issues</b>	<p>The media can be an effective tool to build relationships. It can support greater understanding and cohesion between people who consider themselves different from one another. It can give voice to the most marginalized in society.</p> <p>It can serve as a mediator between political parties especially in situations where there is no other means of communication particularly during conflict and post-conflict reconciliation.</p>	<p>There are many FM stations and hundreds of smaller community stations across Nepal networked to exchange programmes and news. They are a “true alternative source of information to official channels, and they focus on local issues and reflect Nepal's ethnic and linguistic diversity.”<sup>45</sup></p> <p>The South African “Peace Café” programme brought parties together who had been unwilling to meet by interviewing them separately and then editing the video and showing it to the other side. This process eventually led to direct negotiations between the parties.<sup>46</sup></p>
<b>Helps improve governance</b>	<p>Fact-based, independent, transparent, accountable and impartial reporting can serve to hold officials accountable and make public administrations more transparent. It enables citizens to be active stakeholders, to understand policies and use the impartial information provided to exercise their human rights. All of these are critical for conflict prevention.</p>	<p>Investigative reporting on the complicity of Latin American presidents was in large part responsible for the downfall of four presidents – Fernando Collor de Mello of Brazil in 1992, Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela in 1993, Abdala Bucaram of Ecuador in 1997 and Alberto Fujimori in 2000.<sup>47</sup></p>
<b>Increases knowledge of complex issues</b>	<p>These include issues such as corruption, political injustice, marginalization, lack of economic opportunity and struggles with identity that may drive violent extremism. It can help people critically think about and discuss these issues.</p>	<p>Research has shown that people who were exposed to BBC Media Action’s political discussion/debate shows knew more, discussed more and participated in politics more, even when controlling for other factors that may influence these outcomes (such as age, income, education and interest in politics).<sup>48</sup></p>

<sup>45</sup> Coronel, p.14.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/mano7476.htm>

<sup>47</sup> Coronel, S. (2001). *The Role of the Media in Deepening Democracy*, p.9. Accessed 20 January 2016 at <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN010194.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/research/reports/media-and-political-participation>

<b>Provides early warning</b>	Media can provide early warning of potential conflicts and possibly create pressure to address the conflict.	In Sri Lanka, the Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE) implemented a citizen-based system that involved media monitoring (including newspapers, websites, other public media, handbills, hate speech) followed by appropriate response mechanisms for each early warning signal. <sup>49</sup>
<b>Outlet to express emotions</b>	Media can allow people to express their fears and frustrations and share experiences and advice with others. It can also link people with power holders, enabling open communication and dialogue.	#BringBackOurGirls mobilized emotional responses to the kidnapping of nearly 300 girls in Nigeria by a militant Islamist movement. Celebrities, politicians, and citizens were brought together by their online demands for the girls to be returned while airing their dismay at the radical group's actions.
<b>Motivator for peace</b>	The media can motivate people to take action and to participate in community events. But the media's impact on behaviour change is complex. It is more likely to work on attitudes and opinions that shape behaviours rather than directly affecting people's actions. <sup>50</sup>	Through social media monitoring technology, developed by iHub in 2013, the Kenyan government was able to foster civic participation, transparency and accountability during the elections. Non-governmental initiatives bolstered the reporting process, while citizens were involved in proactively disseminating information and messages of peace using SMS, Twitter and the internet. <sup>51</sup> In Nigeria, one media support project involved both traditional and social media to influence public awareness and educated voters, encouraged participation in the electoral process and served as an advocate for peaceful acceptance of the results. On the eve of the presidential elections, in an unprecedented Media Peace Day, every radio station in the country contributed air time for peace messaging.

<sup>49</sup> See for example : <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2013/09/early-warning-early-response-lessons-from-sri-lanka/> or Rohwerder.

<sup>50</sup> Bratic & Schirch, 2007, p. 14. Behavior change communication (BCC) is especially common in communication for development (C4D) work using communication techniques to address development issues including health, education and human rights. BCC theories could be useful when developing media assistance support in conflict or fragile settings.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.insightonconflict.org/blog/2013/07/social-media-conflict-prevention/>

## Case study – governance radio programmes in Nigeria

Between 2012 and 2016, four weekly radio programmes were broadcast on over 190 radio stations in Nigeria in English, Pidgin and Hausa. The two debate programmes and two dramas collectively aimed to contribute to enabling more accountable state-society relations, to make societies more resilient to conflict and to empower people to participate in public dialogue and hold their leaders to account. TV Public Service Announcements (PSAs) were broadcast in the run up to the 2015 elections, encouraging Nigerians to go out and vote without engaging in violence.

The work was informed by three representative quantitative surveys and nine qualitative studies with audiences, governance and media experts, as well as with partner radio stations to evaluate the impact of the project. In total, it spoke to over 12,000 Nigerians.

Cumulatively the programmes reached an estimated 64.6 million people. The research found the debate and discussion programmes were successful at enabling people to question officials directly and audiences appreciated hearing a diverse range of views and opinions. The dramas were effective at role modelling how people could resolve conflicts, question officials and participate in civic life. Their storylines helped ordinary people and leaders understand their rights and responsibilities and how the democratic processes work by showcasing scenarios people could relate to.

People who were exposed to these factual and drama outputs knew more, discussed more and participated in politics more, even when controlling for other factors that may influence these outcomes (such as age, income, education and interest in politics).

However, the expert panel mentioned a number of factors that prevented citizens from holding leaders to account including fear, low expectations of response, lack of structures that enabled people do so, lack of trust in the law and corruption.

The project's training, mentoring and capacity-building activities provided valuable production and editorial skills to broadcast partners that had little or none, enabling them to produce and broadcast trustworthy and engaging governance programming.

This work was funded by the UK Department for International Development and implemented by BBC Media Action

## GOING FORWARD: KEY ISSUES FOR DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS WORKING WITH MEDIA INTERVENTIONS

### **Include the role of media in context and conflict analysis**

It is not only the conflict or conflict phase that is important but the context in which we seek to work. There must be solid analysis of the context within which the media operates. Has there been a solid analysis of the media sector? The [UNESCO Media Development Indicators](#) provide a fairly comprehensive framework for assessing media sectors.

<p><b>All content producers must know and understand their audience</b></p>	<p>What content do people consider relevant and why? What do they produce and with whom do they share or engage? Understand them and engage responsibly with them to gain their trust. You must be prepared to invest in audience research.</p>
<p><b>Give voice to all people – including the marginalised and excluded - from the outset</b></p>	<p>Consider how the media can include excluded voices through citizen reporting, radio or video diaries, town hall broadcasts and call-ins. Women and young people are especially important to involve and are often excluded. Programming that addresses migration, violent extremism and other aspects that may be related to conflict should seek out those unheard voices.<sup>52</sup></p>
<p><b>Promote regulatory reform as part of peace settlements and their implementation.</b></p>	<p>Media regulation has to be part of the political settlement in any fragile state. The regulatory framework needs to include rules for proportionate political coverage of parties and mechanisms for including minority political and cultural interests. It must also include transparent guidelines for setting licences for stations under terms that allow all media actors – even small ones – to participate.</p>
<p><b>Follow (and understand) changes in technology</b></p>	<p>Information and communication technologies are providing real-time information during crises and violence. Yet it is not fully understood how new technologies will affect media users and producers or conflict management in the future. People interact with other users, with the information providers and with newsmakers in an ever-widening circle. The result is a complex interface between conflict, media and technology with all feeding each other. Development practitioners must follow and understand these rapid changes as well as make sense of their interplay and how they can be leveraged for conflict prevention. It is likely this will mean many instances of trial and error as well as innovations and collaborations with other sectors.</p>

**Additional best practices that should be ensured in any media and conflict prevention activity, project or programme include:**

<p><b>Ensure safety of media workers</b></p>	<p>None of this work can be pursued if media workers are unable to work in safety without being threatened, harassed or killed. Practitioners should be proactive with regards to safety and should address this early in the conflict process and not at the height of a conflict. Press freedom groups and international news</p>
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<sup>52</sup> Ed Garcia, "Addressing Social Change in Situations of Violent Conflict: A Practitioner's Perspective," [http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue5\\_garcia\\_comm.pdf](http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue5_garcia_comm.pdf) Accessed 17 January 2011.

	organisations have worked together and identified the necessary standards for media safety. <sup>53</sup> These include training in first aid and hostile environments, securing medical insurance for conflict zones or areas of infectious disease, and obtaining protective gear such as bulletproof vests and helmets.
<b>Do no harm</b>	As discussed, the media have the potential to foment violence and spread hatred so all interventions should be implemented with this in mind and with attention to the context, the media sub-system and the interplay between the two. Interventions must be very carefully monitored and adjusted as necessary.
<b>Build linkages with other institutions</b>	Much of the work with media in conflict management to date has focused on the media sector itself rather than examining its interplay with other sub-systems and the greater system overall. It is crucial to build key linkages between peacebuilding and state-building institutions and media institutions, thereby supporting more effective media development in post-conflict environments. For example, media-military dialogues can be useful for building trust and understanding between those two sectors and beyond to the communities they serve.
<b>Pursue integrated research and monitoring, evaluation and learning</b>	There is a significant lack of evidence that shows causal impact of media interventions. Despite their importance, conducting rigorous impact evaluations continues to be a challenge for many development and peacebuilding programmes. In some cases this is due to resources, in others a lack of foresight while others accept the difficulties of conducting such evaluations in fragile contexts. <sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

### What are the challenges conflict prevention specialists face working with media?

With so much choice of news sources this should be a golden age for media. But in the shifting landscape where so many opposing voices are clamouring for attention, many people do not know who to trust.

In many fragile countries fact-based, independent, transparent, accountable and impartial reporting does not exist because of the business and political interests of media owners and the lack of pay and training for journalists. In others it is often subject to increased censorship, regulation and attack from parties that want to undermine its influence.

Media can be an instrument of conflict, used to incubate hatred and fan violence. It can reinforce the politics of division and identity rather than fostering social cohesion. It can

<sup>53</sup> See <https://dartcenter.org/content/global-safety-principles-and-practices>

<sup>54</sup> Aladysheva, A., Asylbekyzy, G., & Leung, W., (2016), *Impact Evaluations in Fragile States*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2016/impact-evaluations-fragile-states>



bolster currently held belief systems rather than enlighten, inform and emancipate. Anyone, anywhere has the potential to play a role on a global scale with a local tweet or Facebook post or a blog. With that comes the obvious danger that irresponsible, ill-informed, inflammatory comment can ignite violence.

### What works in the area of media for conflict prevention?

Impartial media that gives voice to people from all sections of societies, including the most marginalized, can be an instrument of peace. It can arm them with knowledge that helps them make sense of events and take informed decisions rather than reacting to rumours.

It can uphold good governance by holding leaders to account, even eroding the power base of corrupt politicians. It can motivate people to take part in community events, peaceful demonstration and to vote responsibly. It can allow them to express and share pent up emotions and fears. It can connect them with others who perhaps hold different, opposing viewpoints to foster mutual understanding and greater social cohesion. It can also give them an opportunity to question power holders. It can provide early warnings of violence so people can avoid it. It can serve as a bridge between parties in peace negotiations.

The media is best placed to address the narratives and grievances of people involved in conflict and ensure that the voices heard are not only those of the elite or those that yell the loudest, but represent diversity.<sup>55</sup>

### What we do not know

It is hardly surprising that donors are so cautious about encouraging a free and plural media in fragile states.

And while there is evidence that the media can shift people's attitudes there is a paucity of evidence regarding its ability to shift the way people behave. So while it may improve social cohesion and accountability, we still know relatively little about its ability to bring about lasting peace or avert conflict.

### And what doesn't work?

Media that reflects divisions rather than commonalities

Programmes that are inaccurate, one-sided, inflammatory and untrustworthy

Ill-timed interventions that don't take account of the political, social and media context

Interventions that are platform or technology-centric rather than tailored specifically to the needs of the audience

Interventions that put development goals over audience engagement

Top-down interventions that fail to allow a diversity of voices – including the most marginalized - to be heard from the outset

Local interventions that don't take account of their global reach

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<sup>55</sup> Zyck & Muggah, 2012.

## Recommendations for media and conflict prevention specialists

- Ensure that all media for peace interventions reinforce shared identities between opposing groups rather than differences
- Establish ways to understand local audiences better. Do they value “objective” and “quality” news? What sort of communication do they trust?
- Examine in greater detail the drivers of violent extremism and how media can work over the long term to influence these drivers
- Keep fully abreast of changes to ensure interventions take advantage of and don't fall foul of ‘new’ ways to communicate. This may include setting up an information exchange on new developments and producing regular country and sector updates
- Collaborate to build a stronger evidence base regarding what works in this field
- Commit to prevention, before the outbreak of armed conflict, because that's when information is often compromised, rumours are rampant and emotions become heated.
- Provide media practitioners with capacity strengthening activities to improve their technical, editorial and management skills to produce trustworthy and engaging programming that help reduce all forms of violence and encourage government based on the rule of law that upholds justice and human rights.
- Support programmes that reach out to make citizens – including opinion leaders such as politicians, religious leaders and others in public life – more aware of the need for responsible and fact-based communications.<sup>56</sup>
- Do not ignore the power that mass media (radio and TV) still has to reach people at scale, particularly the poorest, or the diversity of ways of communicating with people. This may include face-to face communications, workshops or genres such as radio and TV drama and entertainment.

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<sup>56</sup> White, A., (2016), *Media Ethics in a Context of War or Conflict: A discussion paper for International Media Support*, p. 12.