

WORKING WITH MEDIA TO PREVENT CONFLICT: CLUSTER SYNTHESIS REPORT

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The Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning Analysis to Action (IfP-EW) is a consortium led by International Alert and funded by the European Commission. It draws on the expertise of 10 members with offices across the EU and in conflict-affected countries. It aims to develop and harness international knowledge and expertise in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding to ensure that all stakeholders, including EU institutions, can access strong, independent, locally derived analysis in order to facilitate better informed and more evidence-based policy and programming decisions.

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International Alert is a 26-year-old independent peacebuilding organisation. We work with people who are directly affected by violent conflict to improve their prospects of peace. We also seek to influence the policies and ways of working of governments, international organisations like the UN and multinational companies, to reduce conflict risk and increase the prospects of peace.

We work in Africa, several parts of Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Latin America and have recently started work in the UK. Our policy work focuses on several key themes that influence prospects for peace and security – the economy, climate change, gender, the role of international institutions, the impact of development aid, and the effect of good and bad governance.

We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding NGOs with more than 148 staff based in London and 14 field offices. To learn more about how and where we work, visit www.international-alert.org.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Media, Information Flows and Conflict cluster of the Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning project has aimed to understand how information flows can contribute to or undermine peace in post-conflict countries and what challenges media face in reporting accurately and responsibly. Drawing on engagement and research in Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and southeastern Europe, this synthesis addresses three broad questions: how people access information in conflict-affected countries; how this information influences the peace they experience; what challenges media face in providing reliable information.

Reliable information is often particularly difficult to access in post-conflict contexts, where information, social networks and trust may have been badly damaged by war or abuse. How people access information is heavily conditioned by language, literacy, infrastructure and regulation, and is thus highly variable between contexts, including urban-rural and male-female. In most low-income countries, radio is the most accessible “traditional” medium. While “new” media and internet connectivity remain largely unaffordable or inaccessible beyond cities, mobile telephone networks have transformed modes of communication, even in quite remote areas of very poor countries.

Media may play critical roles in the prevention and management of conflict, as well as deliberately or inadvertently driving conflict. Positive roles in promoting peace and security may include: linking citizens to state; changing attitudes and behaviours; providing early warning of divisive issues or instability; mitigating conflict through balanced reporting; promoting reconciliation. Negative or destabilising roles of media may include: “hate speech” and incitement to violence; inaccurate reporting and incendiary rumour; deliberate underreporting and misreporting; over-reporting and sensationalisation of crime, violence and insecurity; the sudden collapse of media coverage.

Challenges to good media practice in conflict-affected countries include: distribution and access costs, particularly where roads and electricity are lacking; financial sustainability and dependence on foreign aid; technical sustainability, including hardware costs and maintenance; maintaining professional journalistic standards; representation of women and their interests; intimidation of journalists and sources through threats, violence or litigation; political patronage and interference.

This synthesis concludes with seven suggested principles for engagement by the EU and other donors with media in conflict-affected countries:

- 1. Understand the national and local context** of media and information flows, who is included and excluded, how and why.
- 2. Prioritise sustainability**, including business planning and appropriate technology.
- 3. Embrace new information technologies**, especially those which facilitate information sharing, not just information provision.
- 4. Prioritise professional standards**, including conflict-sensitive reporting, through sustained training and mentoring.
- 5. Work for equal access to information** for all groups, genders and regions.
- 6. Strengthen media-state communication and grievance mechanisms** to improve the security of journalists.
- 7. Support regulatory environments** to ensure independent, responsible and ethical journalism.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding information flows in fragile or conflict-affected states is vital to conflict prevention and early warning. How people receive and transmit information about their countries, their communities and their place within them is central to their perception of peace and security, as well as their relationship to their state, nation, neighbours and community. It may drive a vicious circle of fear and prejudice and, in its most extreme forms, may propel people to violence. It can also shape public understanding of the dynamics of violence, harness or encourage peaceful ways of addressing them and build communication, accountability and trust between the state and society.

Open and professional media are thus a necessary, though insufficient, component of a peaceful society. Trained, resourced and motivated to act professionally and responsibly, media can serve as a platform or echo chamber to air, acknowledge and respond to tensions within society. The “Fourth Estate” also plays a crucial role in holding government at all levels to account. Authoritarian societies typically lack such pressure valves and are less adept at recognising and rectifying drivers of conflict.

Since 2010, the Media, Information Flows and Conflict cluster of the Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning project has conducted research, capacity-building training and exchanges of media professionals in five post-conflict contexts: Kosovo/Serbia, Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste. The aim has been to understand how information flows can contribute to or undermine peace in post-conflict countries and what challenges media face in reporting accurately and responsibly. This synthesis of findings draws on research and training workshops held in Athens (for journalists from Kosovo and Serbia), Timor-Leste (Dili), Liberia (Gbarnga and Monrovia), Nepal (Nagarkot) and Sierra Leone (Bo and Freetown), as well as interviews and focus groups conducted in various parts of the latter three countries and larger surveys conducted in Nepal and Sierra Leone.

As with the separately published case studies on Liberia, Nepal and Sierra Leone, the cluster aimed to answer three primary research questions:

- How do people access information about their communities and states?
- How does the type of information they are able to access contribute to or undermine peace?
- What are the challenges to the media in providing reliable information within the post-conflict context?

Illustrating with examples of good and bad practice from the five contexts, this synthesis presents some generalised and specific findings from post-conflict countries on challenges to conflict-sensitive media practice and highlights some of the issues that donors, including the EU, need to consider when working with media in fragile and post-conflict countries.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Reliable information is often particularly difficult to access in post-conflict contexts, where the existing information infrastructure may have been damaged or destroyed, social networks disrupted, and trust in the state or opposing groups undermined. In many post-conflict contexts, the problem of access to information will be a more radical extension of problems of prolonged lack of development and access to basic services, or of suppression of information by authoritarian regimes. How people access information essentially boils down to questions of language, literacy, infrastructure and regulation. The information context of middle-income southeastern Europe is very different from, say, that of West Africa, although there are also common features.

Print media may be constrained by their dependence on access to expensive and sometimes unreliable printing presses, supplies of newsprint (sometimes monopolised by government), expensive distribution networks that struggle to get beyond urban areas or tarred road networks, and low literacy of target populations. For readers, even where supplies of publications are reliable, print media consumption is expensive relative to radio or TV. For publishers, limited circulation and limited advertising revenues mean that it is rarely economic to produce newspapers without either subsidies (often from government or political parties) or heavy reliance on government advertising.

Radio is the most accessed form of media in most low-income countries, especially outside of capital cities and larger towns. Compared to TV, internet and print media, access to radio requires neither the ownership of expensive hardware, mains electricity nor literacy. Thus, it is both the most suitable medium to have truly national coverage and the most suitable for localised broadcasting in vernacular languages. Nevertheless, broadcasting does require expensive and hard-to-maintain equipment, as well as reliable access to electricity. The proliferation of FM stations can also make it more difficult to ensure professional standards and to monitor the content of broadcasts against hate speech or incitement to violence.

Television is very widely accessed in regions or countries which have access to mains or regular electricity supplies, and where geography and lack of infrastructure do not present obstacles to receiving transmissions. For example, it is a dominant medium in Kosovo and Serbia, whereas in Liberia and Sierra Leone it is barely receivable outside of a few large towns. Nepal has a major division between hill and lowland (*terai*) regions. Even where there is local reception of national TV stations, many people prefer to access international networks via satellite or cable to receive news and entertainment.

ICT and “New Media” Internet is reliant on both electricity and a reasonable quality cable or Wi-Fi transmission infrastructure. It is thus more vulnerable to disruption during conflicts and their aftermath. For example, in Liberia the entire landline telephone network was destroyed or looted in the 1990s and never relaid. Cable internet is only being connected in 2012; Liberians remain reliant on very expensive satellite connections. Elsewhere, and even for a wealthy few in Monrovia, internet-enabled mobile telephones are increasingly widespread and transforming information realities, at least for urban populations. Blogging has long been widespread in the Balkans and is spreading quickly in Nepal, offering a virtually unregulated environment for “citizen journalists”.

Mobile telephones have transformed the world’s access to information over the past decade. Even in the poorest, most disrupted countries like Liberia, the majority of the population now has access to a handset to call or text/SMS friends and family to share information. Internet-enabled networks and handsets are rapidly

extending this capacity from text to multimedia connectivity. Meanwhile, radio station phone-in programmes are extending conversations from the personal to the communal or national level.

Thus, for many in post-conflict countries, accessing news and information about their communities and nations does not mean accessing formal media at all but, rather, the informal exchange of information with friends, family and neighbours in person or by telephone. Often there are huge discrepancies in the reliance on such mechanisms between urban and rural areas, as well as between men and women. The most marginalised groups typically have the least access to media and the highest dependence on hearsay and rumour, not least when crisis undermines the ability of formal media to report.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING PEACE AND SECURITY

PREVENTING CONFLICT THROUGH LINKING CITIZENS TO STATE

The “Fourth Estate” plays a crucial role in building an accountable state and society, whether at the national or local level. It should be a critical part of the triangular relationship between state, citizens and information, which helps to ensure responsiveness of government to people. Free media can act as an echo chamber for discontent within society as citizens express their priorities and concerns. Without this pressure valve, discontents are more likely to be expressed through explosive public protests or acts of violence. Media also contribute by disseminating information on laws, policy, service delivery programmes and priorities from government and politicians to people. It reports on the opinions and reactions of the people to policies and issues, mediated through journalists or directly through letters to the editor, vox-pops and phone-in shows. In Nepal, for example, FM radio stations are used by community police to inform citizens of their work and to gain popular input into setting policing priorities. For many isolated communities in war-dislocated contexts, hearing national radio stations may be the only contact they have with their larger nation and state.

BUILDING PEACE BY CHANGING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

In many fragile and conflict-affected countries, media have been harnessed by peacebuilding actors to disseminate messages and programming which promote peaceful coexistence and development, or raise awareness of solutions to divisive issues. These may be in the form of newspaper advertisements or radio jingles on specific themes such as reducing domestic violence, or constitute entire production and broadcasting networks devoted to peace-positive broadcasting, such as Search for Common Ground’s Talking Drum Studios in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Often this programming can be syndicated, translated or reproduced to provide cost-effective, attitude- and behaviour-changing programming for local media, as with Equal Access Nepal’s radio programming on security issues. Listeners’ groups can be useful to discuss, reinforce and provide feedback on the impact of messages.

PROVIDING CONFLICT EARLY WARNING

The echo chamber function of media can be an important and efficient source of early warning on sources of conflict within society to which the state and civil society can respond, provided that the biases or incentives of media coverage are well understood. In situations of violent conflict or high tensions it can also provide warning to people likely to be directly affected by these manifestations. For example, in post-conflict Nepal, community radio stations provide an important service by warning listeners of riots, roadblocks or strikes which may impede movement or threaten violence. Broadcast media have a similar role in disaster risk reduction, providing early warning of natural disasters such as flooding or pest infestation, as witnessed in northern Liberia in late 2008.

CONTRIBUTING TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION

In the event that violent conflict does break out, media can play a role in containing it by facilitating rapid response and appeals for calm by elected, traditional, community or religious leaders. Publishing or broadcasting balanced, well-informed and responsible stories about the nature and sources of conflict, as well as activities supporting peace, can help to counter the incendiary influence of rumour or sensationalism.

PROMOTING POST-CONFLICT RECONCILIATION

In the longer term, media can help to promote reconciliation between conflict parties by investigating and reporting on the causes of conflict and misunderstanding if they represent the opposing views of the various conflicting parties or permit excluding or dissenting voices to be heard. In countries undergoing a transitional justice process, such as Liberia or Sierra Leone, media can contribute to at least the “Truth” aspect of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, although such information needs to be very sensitively presented if it is to promote reconciliation rather than division. In Nepal, Local Peace Committees have worked with FM radio stations to raise awareness of the plight of the victims of conflict and to lobby for sources of conflict to be addressed.

KOSOVO AND SERBIA

Thirteen years after NATO intervention against Serbia, the relationship between Belgrade and Kosovo has yet to be settled comprehensively. Although the government of Serbia is not prepared to recognise Kosovo as an independent state, there are prospects for sincere dialogue – even on technical issues – which increase possibilities for bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, the media in both Serbia and Kosovo seem unable to move beyond traumatic memories and endorse future-orientated approaches in their coverage. Over-politicisation and self-censorship are significant elements in day-to-day practices while cases of threats against journalists and media organisations are not rare.

Under the IfP-EW project, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) has contributed to a better understanding between young journalists from Serbia and Kosovo. In March 2011 it organised a workshop with participation of eight representatives from each side. This provided an opportunity to start a fruitful dialogue, as well as to establish a network for future co-operation. ELIAMEP organised a dissemination conference on “Conflict Prevention, Media and South East Europe: Progress or Regression?” on the island of Halki in June 2012. This event drew practitioners and academics from across southeastern Europe to develop lessons for policy-makers, journalists and scholars.

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LIBERIA

Liberia suffered a catastrophic civil conflict and regional proxy war between 1989 and 2003 which saw up to one tenth of its population killed, over one third displaced, and a large proportion of its youth recruited into government and rebel armed groups. Recovery since 2003 has been slow but steady under the protection of a large UN peacekeeping mission (UNMIL). Liberia’s information infrastructure has, meanwhile, opened very rapidly, with the rapid expansion of mobile telephone coverage, dozens of community-owned FM radio stations, massive donor investment in public information and a liberalising political environment.

International Alert has worked in Liberia since 1993; between 2004 and 2010 it managed the Liberia Media Project of eight community radio stations. Under the IfP-EW project, Alert organised a two-day training workshop for community radio journalists and producers in conflict-sensitive journalism in Gbarnga in May 2011, as well as research workshops with media professionals and youth in Gbarnga and Monrovia in June 2011. Interviews with media professionals were conducted in Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Montserrado counties in 2010 and 2011. The findings and recommendations of the resultant case study were discussed at an expert roundtable in Monrovia in March 2012, also attended by two Nepali journalists, who shared their country’s experiences.

See: R. Reeve (2011). *Sustaining the Conversation: Media, Information Flows and Conflict in Liberia*. IfP-EW: Brussels. Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201112IfPEWMediaInfoConflictLiberia.pdf>

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NEPAL

Nepal endured a civil or “People’s” war from 1996 to 2006 between the Royal government and the Maoist People’s Liberation Army. Some 15,000 people were killed, over 100,000 displaced and rural life massively disrupted by insurgency and counter-insurgency. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement which ended the insurgency in November 2006 has not yet been fully implemented and the new republic persists under transitional institutions. Political violence has meanwhile become increasingly criminalised and shifted from hilly rural to lowland industrial areas. Post-conflict media are heavily politicised and subject to physical and economic insecurity.

International Alert has worked in Nepal since 1999. Search for Common Ground has worked in Nepal since 2006. Under the IfP-EW project, SFCG and Alert organised a four-day training workshop in conflict-sensitive journalism at Nagarkot. During 2010 and 2011, Alert conducted direct research in Bara, Kathmandu and Rolpa districts, as well as a nationwide SMS survey to inform its country case study. The findings and recommendations of this study were discussed at an expert roundtable in Kathmandu in May 2012. Alert Nepal hosted two Liberian journalists in April/May 2012 as part of an exchange.

See: R. Gurung (2011). *Journalism in Transition: Media, Information Flows and Conflict in Nepal*. IfP-EW: Brussels. Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201110IfPEWJournTransMediaInfoConflict.Nepal.pdf>

SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone’s past is marked by political violence, an overly centralised government and a ten-year civil war which devastated the country. The state of the media landscape in Sierra Leone is diverse and growing and has been improving in recent years; however, it is still characterised by poor journalistic practices, challenges of sustainability for community radio stations and challenges to reporting free of political bias and interference. The media sector is highly concentrated around élites in Freetown. Marginalised groups such as women, youth and rural dwellers still have limited access to accurate, independent information.

Search for Common Ground has operated in Sierra Leone since 2000. Under the IfP-EW project it conducted research on the connection between media, youth and violent conflict during July-August 2010 in Western (Freetown), Southern (Bo) and Eastern (Kenema) regions. This work informed a three-day training of journalists in Bo district in late August 2010 on the positive and negative roles which media can have on conflict and improved reporting skills. The journalists covered different media genres (television, radio and print). In April 2012, SFCG-SL also held three community meetings with youth, women and journalists in Koinadugu and Pujehun districts to discuss issues related to non-violence, early warning and the electioneering process.

See: N. Oatley and R. Thapa (2012). *Media, Youth and Conflict Prevention in Sierra Leone*. IfP-EW: Brussels. Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201204IfPEWMediaYouthConflictPreventionSalone.pdf>

TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste has experienced a fragile and fitful peace since its independence was formalised in 2002. Search for Common Ground began work in Timor-Leste in 2010. Under the IfP-EW project, it responded to the rudimentary state of the country’s media landscape (poor access to news outside of Dili, challenges of sustainability for community radio stations and low levels of professionalism among journalists) by providing training to 35 radio journalists in basic reporting skills. This included technical issues such as editing and the use of different radio formats, the role of journalists in promoting dialogue between conflict stakeholders, and conflict transformation. The four-day training course was held in Dili in March 2011.



THE DESTABILISING ROLE OF MEDIA

INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE

So-called “hate-speech” – using media to mobilise audiences to condone and/or commit violence – has been the focus of international monitoring and sanctioning of media in conflict-prone countries since the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. Prominent recent examples of media inciting violence against groups have included Kenya during its 2007-08 election crisis and Côte d’Ivoire during its 1999-2011 crisis. On a more localised and less deadly scale, there have also been allegations of hate speech directed at politically-affiliated radio stations or newspapers in Sierra Leone and Liberia during their most recent elections.

INACCURATE REPORTING AND INCENDIARY RUMOUR

More frequently undermining peace and security in fragile contexts is inaccurate reporting of events, typically caused by unprofessional or untrained journalists failing to check facts of stories, reporting rumour or speculation as fact. In some contexts such as Kosovo and Serbia, this may be caused by physical/bureaucratic or linguistic barriers to reporting. The spread of incendiary rumour via new media, particularly text/SMS, has become a growing feature of violence in Africa, as mobile phone access has outpaced the spread of radio and more traditional media. Rumour thrives in contexts of low trust in official or established media or the absence of reliable sources, and can have very unpredictable consequences in manifestations of violence as the relaying of ill-informed messages frequently distorts them.

UNDERREPORTING AND MISREPORTING

Self-censorship significantly undermines trust in journalism, as well as the role of the media in holding the powerful to account. It may be a consequence of corruption – journalists being bought off by the powerful – as well as of fear of the consequences of reporting negatively on the powerful. For the same reasons, journalists may choose to misreport facts to promote political patrons in a positive light. In Sierra Leone, where young journalists are paid little or finance themselves, the practice of “coasting” for payment by politicians in return for coverage is common. In Nepal, where many journalists work for media affiliated to political parties (often armed), intimidation and threats against journalists reporting negatively on politicians are common. An imbalance in the male/female journalist ratio tends to lead to underreporting of issues of concern to women or reporting on issues solely from a male perspective. Lack of content which resonates with women can reduce the likelihood of women accessing media, thus exacerbating the access-to-information divide between men and women.

OVER-REPORTING CRIME, VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY

Sensationalism of stories relating to crime, drugs and violence is common worldwide, tends to heighten feelings of insecurity among ordinary people, and can promote a siege mentality. In Kosovo and Serbia hostility and confrontation continue to characterise the way journalists from both sides depict the relationship between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs and their two governments.

COLLAPSE OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Rumour and misinformation thrive in contexts of inadequate or partial access to reliable alternative sources of information. Fragile states tend to mean fragile media provision and occasional collapses in formal media coverage, for example due to power cuts, machinery breakdowns, lightning strikes, flooding, labour stoppages or government intervention. The sudden disappearance of trusted sources of information can thus significantly exacerbate crisis contexts.

CHALLENGES TO GOOD MEDIA PRACTICE

DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS COSTS

Who can access what kind of information and where depends on information distribution and reception infrastructure: electricity, radio and television receivers, roads and vehicles are all potentially degraded in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Very few people in rural Liberia and Sierra Leone, for example, have access to the internet due to the high cost of computers and the destruction of landline telephone links during the conflicts, and a lack of satellite connections. This all means that the likely pool of consumers of formal media is restricted, often with big gaps between urban and rural areas.

SUSTAINABILITY AND AID DEPENDENCE

In countries with frail or damaged economies, national or local media houses often struggle to find viable funding through advertising or subscriptions, leaving them reliant on foreign assistance or government advertising to cover operating costs. This may compromise their ability to hold government and donors alike to account. It also impacts upon their ability to pay and train their journalists, and thus their overall professionalism. The much larger costs and technical capacity to (re)establish a nationwide broadcasting network may be only possible under the leadership of an international partner, as with UN Radio in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The greater challenge is managing the transition from a period of intense donor engagement post conflict to low donor interest. In Liberia, still within its first post-conflict decade, the waning of donor engagement with radio stations has already seen one national network go off air and has severely impacted several community radio stations.

HARDWARE PROCUREMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Printing and broadcasting are capital-intensive endeavours; where the number of paying consumers or advertisers is small, there are significant diseconomies of scale in trying to operate a television transmitter or printing press. In Liberia, repairing a radio transmitter may require ordering parts and a technician from China, necessitating a wait of several months, even if dirt roads are dry enough to permit access to a delivery vehicle. Cellular telecommunication and increasingly mobile internet technology is expanding and is important for its wide reach and relatively low access costs.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Lack of training and oversight, as well as poor economic incentives, are primary determinants of low levels of professional capacity for media in conflict-affected countries. Professional training opportunities for journalists are very limited, especially outside of capital cities, with international NGOs often providing the only training available. Career and financial incentives for professional journalists to work outside of capitals are also very limited. For press unions it can be difficult even to disseminate codes of conduct and awareness on critical issues like Liberia's new Freedom of Information Act in rural areas. Lack of professional capacity can be felt through low levels of objectivity in reporting and inadequate investigation of facts, often resulting in conflict-insensitive reporting and a lack of public trust in media.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND THEIR INTERESTS

Gender imbalance among reporters can affect the reporting of women's issues. Alert's listener survey in Nepal indicated that women felt that women's issues were trivialised or presented from male perspectives. This can be linked to the low numbers of female reporters and the limited access male journalists have to women's spheres. Gender biases also affect reporting in Sierra Leone, where reporting relating to youth violence mainly targets young men, overlooking women's experience of or role in violence.

INTIMIDATION: VIOLENCE, THREATS AND LITIGATION

Journalism is an insecure profession for many in fragile states for more reasons than just poor pay. In Nepal's lowland *terai* region journalists are often threatened by the armed wings of political parties if they report negatively against them or fail to cover developments which portray their parties positively. The Committee to Protect Journalists' 2012 Impunity Index for the killing of journalists ranks Nepal sixth worldwide. Serb journalists have also suffered physical attacks when travelling to Kosovo. The physical security of journalists has improved markedly in Liberia and Sierra Leone since their civil wars, but the fear of litigation from wealthier political actors through partial courts is pervasive in Liberia and leads to a high degree of self-censorship.

POLITICAL PATRONAGE AND INTERFERENCE

Poorly financed and inadequately trained media find it particularly difficult to maintain their independence from political or criminal factions. In some highly polarised contexts like Kosovo, Serbia, Nepal or Côte d'Ivoire, media may be strongly and overtly linked to political parties. In other countries, the political patronage of a media house may be more covert. In Liberia, community radio journalists may find pressure from elders, chiefs, officials and legislators from within their clan and community hard to resist. In Kosovo and Serbia journalists' experience, the agenda is set by the government and not by an independent media.

PRINCIPLES FOR EU ENGAGEMENT

The following recommendations are provided to the EU and other donors which can play an important role in strengthening the capacity of media and information providers to promote peace, security, development and prosperity, and help to strengthen democratic norms and values:

1. START WITH THE CONTEXT

Planning for work on information strategies in conflict-affected countries means not just understanding the dynamics of conflict, but understanding the dynamics of information flows: who has access to information, where, how, when and why? Or, more importantly: who is marginalised or excluded from reliable or necessary information and how might they most readily gain access? This means understanding the role of new, traditional and informal media as much as formal media like print, radio and television. It also means thinking about information flows as a two-way process, linking individuals, the local and national context, and the state.

2. PRIORITISE SUSTAINABILITY

Planning exit strategies is as important as identifying entry points. Reliance on donor support for the revival of national and community information networks is common in post-conflict environments, but it builds on the premise that economic recovery will permit media institutions to be sustained through state support or private advertising in the medium term. This will only be true if attention is paid to developing appropriate business models and financial planning, partnerships with communities, government and the private sector, the recognition of appropriate and standardised technological solutions and the provision of continuous maintenance capacity.

3. EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

New and emerging media are increasingly influencing how people in all countries access information, often at lower cost and with far wider reach than conventional media. Mobile phones are already ubiquitous and mobile internet is spreading rapidly. These are intrinsically two-way technologies which allow people to contribute information as readily as they consume it. They can be utilised alone or in conjunction with other media, as with radio phone-in shows. Harnessing these networks to disseminate peace-reinforcing messages, to rebut destabilising rumours, and to connect citizens to the state and security service providers – including as a means for early warning and response – is a major opportunity for the peacebuilding sector.

4. PRIORITISE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The “Fourth Estate” can only play its allotted role in linking citizens and state and holding the authorities accountable if its personnel understand their role and have a sense of collective responsibility. It is important not to overestimate professional standards in conflict-affected or (post-)authoritarian societies, where critical, independent journalism may have been repressed for decades. Rebuilding free and professional media is not a quick-impact project. Supporting training opportunities for journalists, editors and producers is vital, with an emphasis on building capacity in local institutions and trainers. Training should include principles of conflict-sensitive reporting and pay attention to reaching media personnel well outside capitals and major towns. Support to professional bodies to monitor their members and the dissemination of legal frameworks such as Freedom of Information or Codes of Conduct is also important.

5. WORK FOR EQUAL ACCESS

Some marginalised groups may require additional support to gain inclusion as providers and consumers of information. These may include women, as well as young people, linguistic minorities, rural populations and

particular regions. It means making media content relevant to all, as well as improving training and employment opportunities for excluded groups. Moving away from elite, metropolitan information provision to a more comprehensive access environment should be the principal vision, as with the delivery of all other basic services.

6. STRENGTHEN MEDIA-STATE COMMUNICATION AND GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS

Improving the security of journalists is likely to mean improving the mechanisms by which media bodies and professionals engage with the state and its security forces, and the means by which the latter may be held responsible for actions against journalists. This could mean the establishment of regular dialogue or briefings between administrations, the police and media. These can help media to hold the state to account, as well as help the police to understand the role of independent media in communicating priorities and providing early warning on security issues. Developing grievance mechanisms and ombudsmen roles are important to preserve the independence and safety of the profession.

7. SUPPORT A REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

The constitutional and legal frameworks which regulate media, such as press laws or Freedom of Information acts, are imperative to ensure independent, responsible and ethical journalism. In addition to assistance in drafting or revising suitable laws and frameworks, support may be useful in raising awareness of laws and redress mechanisms. This could include the translation into and dissemination of documents in local vernacular, training sessions for local media outlets and local authorities, which should be expected to either enforce or obey them.

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