

The media's role in peace-building: asset or liability?

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Abstract

How can the power of the mass-media be used to help resolve rather than inflame conflicts? In this age of instant digital communication, is there a role for pro-active deployment of radio, television and the Internet to help the complex process of conflict management and transformation to peaceful, liberal democracies? This paper will examine the increasing debate on the ethics of reporting conflict, and will outline a series of principles to guide media practitioners, conflict resolution professionals and NGOs on how the media can best play a constructive role in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. The presenters will refer to a number of field projects that demonstrated good practice, as well as analysing several that failed. They will conclude by posing some issues for further research and action to facilitate the media being used more widely in a peace-building role.

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Introduction

Several years ago, I was involved in organising a conference in South Africa called *Strengthening Lifeline Media in Regions of Conflict*. It was one of these conferences which brought a unique group of people together - media practitioners, conflict resolvers and researchers - all people who had used the media to try and prevent or resolve conflicts. Lina was one of the delegates - she was working at the Canadian Pearson Peacekeeping Centre at the time. We all shared experiences and tried to come up with a series of guidelines that would benefit others. Today, Lina and I would like to revisit some of these guidelines and illustrate them with a number of case studies. We think that they still represent some of the "best practice" for working in what is a very controversial and difficult area.

So how exactly can the media contribute to peacebuilding? After all, most peace settlements - for instance the Oslo Peace Accords in the Middle East, the Dayton Accords which ended the Bosnian War - take place as far away from the media as possible. For conflict resolvers, the media is usually seen as a threat - keen to pounce on any indiscreet or conciliatory remarks by the negotiators and publish them without any thought of the consequences. All too often - and we have seen this time and again in Northern Ireland - the hardliners of one or other of the parties have been outraged, and the negotiations are derailed. For peace-builders, the media is not generally seen as being helpful.

However, the media can have an impact on peace-building. Here is an example of what can be achieved: Radio Douentza, in Mali, not far from Timbuktu: small community station with a handful of staff broadcasting to about 125,000 people in the Sahara Desert, some of them nomad pastoralists, others settled farmers. Traditionally both groups had got on well, but drought and population increases had put the relationship between the two groups under great strain. Every year there were outbreaks of violence as the nomads drove their hungry cattle and goats across the fields of the farmers before they had time to harvest them. People were being killed in the resulting clashes. This was all the more regrettable as traditionally the two groups had exchanged land for grazing in return for the manure of the animals which had contributed to good crops the following year. So how did the staff of Radio Douentza react to this? They took three main initiatives:

1. They developed a series of public service announcements reminding the farmers and herders about their traditional collaboration and advising restraint. The spots started using a local proverb: 'If the yolk and the white of an egg do not agree, the eggshell breaks! Farmers and herders are both worried.....' In other words, everyone is a loser if there is fighting.

2. They reported any incidents very promptly so that the local administration could intervene before the conflict got out of hand.

3. This was the simplest, and most effective ploy: they encouraged farmers to post messages on the radio as to when they would be finished harvesting. The herders were listening to Radio Douentza, and they knew when they could safely move across these particular fields.

What emerges is a participative process; the listeners using the radio station's power to communicate as a means of tackling a social problem.

Also the local knowledge of the radio station staff was key: these were solutions very much geared to a specific local problem.

And the conflict which they tackled was manageable - the radio station avoided another larger conflict involving the government and the Tuaregs - it was simply beyond their scope.

In the words of Dudley Weeks, the veteran American conflict resolver, Radio Douentza was "doing the do-able". As we will see, these characteristics are typical of other successful uses of the media in conflict situations.

Use of new media

In recent years the explosion of digital technology combined with optic fibre and satellite links has given unprecedented access to information. The power of global communications largely benefits human rights, although not all people benefit to the same extent and there is a strong argument that the poorest are further marginalised as information "have-nots". An early example of e-mail use was by an alliance between human rights organisations, the church and activists in the US and Europe supporting the cause of the Zapatistas in Mexico. In 1994, a human rights worker in the UK received a fax from a group of human rights workers in a hotel in Mexico, surrounded by the army who had cut the phone and were taunting them from the outside, saying things like "we know where you live, we will come and get your children". The e-mail (via satellite link) allowed the UK based activist to call Amnesty's Mexico representative, as well as the press in Mexico City, to let them know that she knew what was going on.

The situation continued for a few hours more and then the army just drove away. Next day a formal complaint was lodged with the government, which was backed up by faxes, phone calls to both Mexican and US and UK representatives over the following week by people on the mail list. Result? The army knew that these people in the hotel were not alone, and that harassment was not acceptable.

Just the fact there is digital communications is itself helpful to peace-building. The war I know best, the Afghan war against the Soviet occupiers and their Afghan allies in the 1980s - was fought in secret. It was very hard to find out what was really going on, and there were very few graphic pictures to bring to the attention of the world the human rights abuses that were being perpetrated by the occupying forces. That would not happen today, with satellite video phones, portable satellite uplink equipment and so on - the Soviets would have been closely scrutinised by the international media, the people at home would have received images through satellite TV - dish bans are very difficult to enforce - and there would have been great pressure on them to withdraw from the country.

So what are the lessons from this?

- The digital revolution and advances in satellite technology has given people unprecedented access to global events, with immediate and detailed reporting of war now possible (Iraq) -
- This is good - no longer so easy to fight a war in secret (Afghanistan in the 1980s)
- But it also presents new challenges: war reporting becomes voyeuristic, a kind of real life computer game
- And information management has become a major part in war strategy - manipulating the media to get a tactical advantage over the enemy

How does this impact on peace-building?

- Journalists and media workers have more direct access to more people than at any time in the past - they need to be aware of how they are being manipulated, and on the impact their reporting can have on exacerbating or calming the conflict.

Unfortunately this is increasingly being exploited by policy-makers for "spin" reasons: in some cases journalists rather than aid workers have access to the most vulnerable and affected people in war (women, children, displaced). In the recent Iraq war, after the Anglo-American forces took control, NGO workers that were in Jordan were initially not allowed to enter Iraq, only the journalists were given visas. A Canadian journalist reported how some NGO workers (including some doctors) were blocked from going to Baghdad and how others passed pretending to be media people.

War Reporting

In recent years there has been a major debate amongst journalists on how war is reported. Jake Lynch, a freelance British TV reporter who works for the organisation *Reporting the World* is one of the chief proponents of what is called the Peace Journalism Option. He believes that war journalism is largely about highlighting events at the expense of analysing the complexities which make war far more than a simple "them versus us" struggle, goodies versus baddies in which one side wins and the other loses. Lynch is critical of the traditional defence of journalists - "we are here to report the truth objectively, we don't get involved". His arguments countering this view are:

1. The journalist can't be wholly objective - they only see a fraction of the action especially in battle, they don't know the whole picture.

2. For the same reason how can the reporter claim to be reporting the truth? A small slice of the truth maybe, but not the whole picture. And a partial reporting of the truth often distorts the overall picture. An example from the Iraq war was a dramatic firefight in Um Kasr which was captured on TV and made gripping viewing, but gave a quite false impression of the scale of opposition which the coalition troops were facing. As a BBC reporter in Kuwait later admitted, this needed to be put into context.

3. And the journalist is involved in the conflict, whether he or she likes it or not. Events are routinely created just so they can be reported - this is known as spin. By reporting a mass killing, a journalist is usually implying that this or that side is responsible, and this news will be reported on the BBC or CNN or the Internet and find its way back to the corner of the world where the report originated. It could influence the conflict or peace moves.

This is not to suggest that mass killings should be ignored - far from it. *Reporting the World* calls for journalists to be more professional: they should be aware they are involved in the dynamics of conflict, and they should understand the subtleties of the situation and report accordingly. This is not easy in this age of personality led, entertainment skewed, real-time TV news reporting.

Having said that, there are occasions where editors have taken the decision not to report violence in the interests of peace building. Bush Radio in Cape Town, the first community station in South Africa, has been heavily involved in mediation during the past fifteen years. One major challenge was when the vigilante gangs known as PAGAD (people against gangsterism and drugs) were rampaging around areas of the city, killing suspected offenders and terrorising residents. The Bush editors took the decision not to report what became routine killings. Their justification was partly that the killings were no longer news, partly because they knew through their contacts that the gangs got a kick out of hearing their exploits reported on the radio. Bush radio also played a part in mediation efforts. This was an attempt to transform Africa's 'warrior culture' paradigm to another indigenous concept - that of *ubuntu*, roughly meaning humanity. Folklore and human courage stories can be re-framed within the *ubuntu* concept. It is a rough African equivalent of the *Peace Journalism Option*.

Another initiative is taking place in Canada: The Conflict Resolution Network Canada aims to make conflict resolution strategies available to more Canadians. They are helping journalists inform and educate the public about conflicts in the news through effective conflict analysis, examining the ways that conflict is portrayed in entertainment media, and exploring alternatives that retain "entertainment value." They have created the **Award for Journalistic Excellence in Conflict Analysis**, an annual award to encourage constructive conflict coverage in the Canadian news media. One of the winners Mike Hornbrook from CBC News, for their piece entitled, *Divided by History*. This story offers an excellent example of going beyond both sides of an ongoing and difficult-to-understand conflict and exploring the possibility for change in the future. The story explains how institutions, such as schools teach children to hate, thereby perpetuating conflict. Through the perspectives of Israeli and Palestinian children, teachers and curriculum developers, the story analyzes how children, based on their history lessons, become involved in the continuing conflict. There is hope, though, if participants acknowledge the validity of the other point of view and reconsider the content of textbooks, to emphasize tolerance and to remove negative references.

One of the tools the network offers is the Alternative 5 Ws

5Ws for Conflict Reporting

Who : Who is affected by this conflict; who has a distinct stake in its outcome? What is their relationship to one another, including relative power, influence, affluence?

What : What triggered the dispute; what drew it to your attention at this time? What issues do the parties need resolve?

When : When did this conflict begin; how often have the circumstances existed that gave rise to this dispute?

Where : What geographical or political jurisdictions are affected by the dispute? How has this kind of thing been handled in other places?

Why : Why do the parties hold the positions they do; what needs, interests, fears and concerns are the positions intended to address?

How : How are they going to resolve this e.g. negotiation, mediation, arbitration, administrative hearing, court, armed warfare; what are the costs/benefits of the chosen method?

Options : What options have the parties explored, how do the various options relate to the interests identified?

Common Ground : What common ground is there between the parties; what have they agreed to so far? The Network does not advocate that reporters attempt to mediate or resolve the conflicts they are reporting on, but journalists should develop a thorough understanding of the conflict and convey that understanding to their audiences in a way that reflects the truth of the conflict in all its complexity. They point to stories that examine the context in which the dispute evolved and explain what caused any violence that might have occurred. They also suggest that reporters identify common ground, examine and evaluate any efforts made to resolve the conflict as well as the power dynamics at play. By critically examining parties' efforts to resolve the dispute, journalists provide their readers and audiences with a foundation upon which to make an informed judgment about the parties and perhaps their government representatives' actions.

And here in Colombia there is another approach: imagine a gathering of journalists, members of the guerrilla opposition and government officials to discuss the role of the media in the Colombian peace process. It seems improbable, knowing the distrust that exists between these groups, and the complexity of the Colombian conflict. Nonetheless, this meeting took place in El Caguan, the demilitarised zone, where peace dialogues are conducted. It was organized by *Medios para la Paz* (Media for Peace), a non-profit organisation that has brought together more than 500 Colombian journalists, and which aims to contribute to a culture of peace in the country.

Medios Para la Paz was created in 1997 by a group of journalists who wanted to find a way to contribute to peacebuilding. Since then, *Medios para la Paz* has delivered workshops, round-tables, publications and created a network of journalists. They promote the disarmament of the language used by journalists, so that words may become instruments of understanding and reconciliation. A dictionary entitled *Para Desarmar la Palabra* (Disarming Words) was published in 1999, followed by *Traps of the War - Journalism and Conflict*, published in July 2001. *Traps of War* presents the peace process negotiations in Colombia since the 19th century. It analyses the current peace efforts and recommends actions for a responsible approach to journalism, one which can serve the current peace process. So far, *Medios para la Paz* has offered thirty-seven workshops to 990 journalists from around Colombia. Topics covered include conflict resolution, Colombian and international law, humanitarian law and journalistic efforts to contribute to peace.

The complexity of the Colombian conflict, together with the pressures inherent to reporting in a war situation, poses great challenges for journalists. *Medios para la Paz* understands those challenges and help journalists face them by providing support for their work, and by offering tools and training with an aim to improve analysis and coverage of the country's state of affairs. By doing this, *Medios para la Paz* are responding to the needs of the journalists and the population in general. As one journalist stated: "We need a journalism that allow us to understand our tragedy and our dreams."

The issue of ignorance about International Humanitarian Law - IHL is the shorthand - is also being tackled by The Crimes of War Project. This was set up following the publication in 1999 of *The Crimes of War - What the Public Should Know* by Roy Gutman, the Pulitzer winning journalist who exposed the Serbian concentration camps in the Bosnian war. The Project is a collaboration of journalists, lawyers and scholars dedicated to raising public awareness of the laws of war and their application to situations of conflict among journalists, policymakers, and the general public. The hope is that a wider knowledge of the legal framework governing armed conflict will lead to greater pressure to prevent breaches of the law, and to punish those who commit them.

Through the book *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know*, and through the website www.crimesofwar.org, educational programs and seminars, the project also hopes to promote consultation among journalists, legal experts and humanitarian agencies about how to increase compliance with international humanitarian law.

Pro-Active Media Peace-Building Interventions

Reporting war is one thing, but using the media pro-actively in order to promote peace is another: Radio Douentza was one instance of this. But using the media to build peace is controversial - the usual objections are that this is beyond the scope of radio or television, and that journalists do not have the

necessary skills and that this risks the media taking sides and losing credibility with its listeners or viewers.

Lack of expertise is a fair point, but if you accept the view discussed a few minutes ago - that journalists are involved whether they like it or not - a strong case can be made that there is a moral responsibility for journalists not just to observe - but to try and use the unprecedented power of the media to help build peace.

The *Strengthening Lifeline Media in Regions of Conflict* conference concluded that the media could make a peacebuilding impact, provided it adhered to these guidelines:

- obtain detailed understanding of the conflict
- build partnerships with conflict resolution organisations/experts and other NGOs working in the field
- be trained in Conflict Resolution
- interventions should be long term and sustainable
- don't be too ambitious - "do the do-able"
- a participatory approach should lead local people to "own" the media intervention
- choose credible media outlets
- if possible use a multi-media approach
- encourage the search for positive outcomes
- avoid simplistic representations of goodies and baddies
- level the playing field by giving the powerless a voice
- encourage the development of a wider range of solutions
- in covering negotiations, do not focus only on losses and gains made by the parties as this will result in additional difficulties in selling the proposed solution to hard-liners on each side.

We would like to illustrate some of these guidelines with some examples from recent years. The success of media approaches to dealing with conflict in a positive way may depend on the partnerships which can be developed between members of the media and conflict resolution specialists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), funding organizations and the community. Such partnerships can facilitate the ability of various media to meet the needs of their audience. Furthermore, when thinking about the role of the media in peace building, the responsibility for promoting positive outcomes rests not only with journalists but with other members of the media as well.

New Home New Life

Nearly 10 years ago, while I (Gordon) was responsible for BBC broadcasting to Afghanistan, I was involved in starting up a radio soap opera which we called *New Home New Life*. It has broadcast three times a week in two languages ever since, and I am glad to say it is still thriving and is required listening for millions of Afghan men, women and children. It is educational in purpose but entertaining in format - the story of a community surviving at a time of conflict. And if I were to analyse why this programme is still popular it is mostly because the listeners have assumed ownership of it - it deals with issues close to their hearts, in a way they understand and can make sense of. For many, many listeners this is their own story, and that's why they continue to listen and, we believe, learn. It is an unusual example of an international broadcaster having the kind of impact normally associated with the participatory programming of community radio.

One storyline which created a huge popular reaction was the death of Faiz Mohammed. Like many others, this was aimed at providing a practical lesson in peacebuilding: during a quarrel between two families, one of the respected elders Faiz Mohammed is killed in cross-fire. The outcry from listeners was immediate; the BBC office received dozens of phone calls and letters of protest. In the Pakistani frontier town of Chaman, a memorial service was held for Faiz Mohammed in the local mosque! This is an extreme example of listeners taking over ownership of the programme!

But in terms of peace-building, the results were longer lasting: we had anecdotal evidence that for some months afterwards at a number of jirgahs - meetings of elders in which Afghan try and solve disputes peacefully - there were warnings that "we don't want any Faiz Mohammeds here! It seems that Faiz Mohammed epitomised the awful consequences of trying to solve disputes with weapons more than the many actual deaths that did occur in such disputes. This is the power of radio drama - through a fictional tragedy it can touch the hearts of millions of people.

Another issue that *New Home New Life* tackled was the practice of "bad" - when a woman is given by the guilty party - usually a killer - in order to make peace with his enemy. This solves the dispute, but the woman leads a miserable life in her new household, and is always seen as the relative of the murderer. A storyline brought out the misery of this situation when one of the principle characters was given in this way.

Evaluation showed that the "bad" storyline in the soap opera had an interesting result: it allowed close relatives, particularly men and women to discuss the practice for the first time. Before that, it was not a topic that was questioned, but people felt free to discuss its morality in the fictional context of the radio

soap opera. *New Home New Life* had given listeners a "safe space" to discuss what was a very sensitive topic. This was the first stage in people re-evaluating "bad", and it had been prompted by the intense emotions acted out in a radio social drama.

What we can learn from *New Home New Life* is fourfold:

1. Radio drama is a very effective vehicle for prompting people to think about the consequences of their actions
2. It is a long term involvement - these storylines went on for months, and the key messages were reinforced in related storylines over a period of years
3. They tackled the "do-able" - focusing not on major conflicts which were complex, but on community based conflicts where listeners could exercise influence by doing things differently
4. "Ownership" of the drama by the listeners is important - the audience really saw this as a true reflection of their own lives, and this is why they liked to listen and learn from it.

Los Nuevos Vecinos - The New Neighbors

Los Nuevos Vecinos was a radio soap opera developed in Colombia after the earthquake that affected el Quindío, Caldas y Risaralda in 1999. The objective: to help people make sense of the chaos resulting from a natural disaster, and to give people the tools to reconstruct their communities in a peaceful manner.

The radio soap opera *Los Nuevos Vecinos* was part of the communication project for the reconstruction, carried out by the ONG, Viva la ciudadanía. I (Lina) was involved in the development of it and coordinated the group that created the story. *Los Nuevos Vecinos* was a story about the living conditions faced by the victims of the earthquake in the camps and temporary housing. The plot recounted day-to-day life and how inhabitants were transformed by their experiences.

One hundred and twenty episodes of *Los Nuevos Vecinos* were broadcast over eight months on three commercial radio stations and fourteen community radios. The radio soap opera reached audiences from the twenty-eight villages affected and was the second highest rated radio program between 5 and 7A.M. The success of the project can be attributed to several factors:

1. The relevance of the issues the soap dealt with - In the camps, people said that they had come to understand the importance of dialogue for resolving their differences. "Like in *Los Nuevos Vecinos* we have to work together, to rebuild our homes and our lives." Others stated that the radio soap opera gave them tools to organize the community and to improve their living conditions.
2. The participatory process in which it was created and produced - The actors, the researchers, the technical personnel were victims of the earthquake. Most of them lived in the camps. The team who created the plot were supported by conflict resolution experts, sociologists, psychologists and other professionals.
3. The sound quality - the atmosphere created was realistic, the voices were not those of professional actors, but of community members.

Los Nuevos Vecinos is an example of a creative media project that contributed to social reconstruction, peacebuilding and bringing communities together. It also demonstrated that positive results depend on the partnership between commercial and community media, the community and other organizations.

Radio Galkayo - Somalia Radio

Galkayo is the only community-based electronic media outlet in the northeast of Somalia. Based in Puntland, it was set up in 1993 to provide an alternative to the radio stations controlled by the warlords. Run by young people on a voluntary basis and supported by Oxfam-Québec, its programmes focus on socio-economic issues, development strategies, education, de-mining, sports and culture, the concerns of women, peace and reconciliation.

In the city of Galkayo there are different opposing clans and the prime objective of Radio Galkayo has been to serve as tool for clan reconciliation, awareness and development. Since the Somali society is still mainly an oral society, the radio is considered the most appropriate medium.

Radio Galkayo invited conflicting factions leaders to discuss their peace plans. This campaign was successful and Radio Galkayo reckoned that their contribution in bringing peace and more stability in Galkayo and Mudug regions was significant. Their influence goes beyond these immediate regions. The information they disseminate is shared and discussed in other parts of the country.

"With the never to be forgotten help of Oxfam Canada, Radio Galkayo has undertaken peaceful community programs heard all over the country. We reconciled communities when no one else dared talk about peace and reconciliation. We brought communities together and broadcast peace and reconciliation messages. Together with other locals and businesses, we have undertaken post conflict programs to continue on our peace mission." (Aden Nur Mohamed, public relations person of Radio Galkayo)

Since January 1999, Radio Galkayo has been organizing sports events between the communities of different regions, for example a football "Peace Cup" with teams from Hiran (Belet Wuen) and Mudug (Galkayo). The expenses of the events have been covered by local contributions (communities and

authorities - the Governors and/or Mayors - have provided the space, food, shelter and communication facilities, etc.)

In 2001 they launched a web site, which is based in Toronto: www.radiogalkayo.com

Media Misjudgements

Another media initiative in Somalia, however, failed as a result of rather minor editorial misjudgements. The BBC Somali Service - widely listened to and trusted - broadcast an imaginative drama series emphasising international humanitarian law and exploring ways out of the conflict. There was a mixed audience reaction, with some listeners positive but others saw the drama as a plot by one clan of Somalis to criticise their rivals. The problem was the choice of actors - their accent gave away their clan. Another was the name of the imaginary village, which turned out to be a real village, which added to the suspicion that the series had been a veiled attack by one clan on another. What was lost in all of this were the humanitarian messages which had been the purpose of the whole exercise!

The problems were just the name of the fictional village, and the accents of the actors. But these were enough to compromise the entire project.

In Bosnia, following the Dayton Peace Accords, the problem was "hate media" and it took the international community a long time to come to grips with it. The peacekeeping powers saw that the media could have a significant influence on healing the ethnic divisions, so they pumped money into providing studio and transmission equipment for local radio and TV and gave control to community groups. The hope was that these broadcasting stations would attract listeners away from the ethnically based broadcasters of the Bosnian, Serb and Croatian parties. It failed because little money was put into training, and programming was generally low quality and boring. People continued to depend on the ethnic broadcasters. What was worse, the Serbian TV station in Pale continued hate broadcasting, and the peacekeepers realised there was nothing they could do about it - minimum standards in broadcasting had not been covered in the Dayton Accords. It was not until the Dayton signatories had instituted a special review meeting that they were authorised to put TV in Pale off the air - by force. It is remarkable that the power of the media was overlooked, bearing in mind that this was just two years after Radio Mille Collines and the role it played in promoting the genocide in Rwanda.

Media Peace-Building in Africa

At the same time, in the decade since the Rwanda genocide, Africa has seen some of the most successful uses of the media in peace-building. In October 1995, Search for Common Ground set up a radio production facility, Studio Ijambo, (Kirundi for 'wise words') in Bujumbura and began producing regular programmes. With funding from USAID, they produced approximately fifteen hours per week of common ground radio programming, using mixed teams of Hutu and Tutsi journalists. The programmes aimed to reduce ethnic violence and counter hate radio by stressing themes of peace and reconciliation. Studio Ijambo produce programmes dedicated to transforming conflict into cooperative action. The aim is to show that even contentious problems can be examined in ways that inform and entertain while still promoting the search for peaceful solutions. Entitled *Umubanyi Niwe Muryango (Our Neighbors, Ourselves)*, their radio drama describes the trials and tribulations of these neighbors and how, together, they overcome the problems common to both families; drought, lack of food, a pregnant daughter, division in the village, rumour-mongering neighbours etc.

Studio Ijambo reaches an estimated 12 million people throughout the Great Lakes region. It has earned a reputation for unbiased and responsible reporting, with its broadcasts used regularly by other news organizations such as Reuters, the BBC, and Voice of America. Studio Ijambo is also credited with playing a key role in decentralizing the media in Burundi and building local capacity for news coverage.

Achievements:

- In a recent survey, an estimated 87% of Burundians listen to the radio, and 82% of those surveyed believe that Common Ground's programs in Burundi greatly help reconciliation.
- Coverage of conflicts in different levels: family, community, national, regional.
- Able to highlight positive stories of conflict handling - where people have found a degree of common ground.
- Production of programmes that will draw people into the process of dealing with conflict. Programmes that will facilitate dialogue and joint problem solving and help disperse rumour, misperception and fear.
- Brought conflicting parties together in the studio. In the studio parties built relationships and exchanged views and information.

Angola - *Song of Peace*

In April 1997, the Centre for Common Ground in Angola (CCG) brought together Angolan musicians from both MPLA (Movimento Popular da Libertacao de Angola) and UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) to record a Peace Song entitled *People Are Calling for Peace*. Angolans have a deep affinity for music; it reaches beyond dialogue, beyond music, beyond words, to their hearts and souls.

"I think that Africans, particularly Angolans, have music in their blood. It is something that's within us and it has helped a lot for the Angolans to be able to resist and survive", according to Rei Webba, an Angolan musician.

In Angola musicians and their songs are effective tools for cutting through communication barriers. When a musician speaks out on an issue, Angolans listen. Musicians are therefore effective tools for peace. Given Angola's twenty-year long civil war, and bitter memories of deception and betrayal for both sides, the song is a remarkable achievement. It took CCG a year of negotiations and mediated discussions to overcome the divisions between the misgivings and make a joint stand for reconciliation. Thirty-five popular Angolan musicians with varying political allegiances put aside their differences to create an anthem to peace.

On August 30, 1997, CCG launched the song in Luanda with a concert attended by 1600 people and consisted of over 40 different musical acts. With UNESCO funding, CCG distributed 10,000 cassettes of the song through schools, churches and community centers. Both the audio and visual forms of the song are aired on state-run television, as fillers during broadcasts of the National Assembly. In February of last year, a female parliamentarian ended her speech on the floor of the assembly with the closing words of the song, "People are calling for peace."

Simunye dialogue translates as *We are One* and this is a project that has drawn political adversaries together through the use of video. Thokoza, near Johannesburg, has a very violent political history and between 1990-94 more than 2,000 people died there, chiefly because of political violence between the ANC and Inkatha. The two main peace builders within the process are two commanders who were former rivals, Thabo Kwaza of the ANC and Wiseman Ndebele of Inkatha. After consulting with the community The Media Peace Centre of Cape Town decided to use video as a tool to open a space for dialogue between those in conflict. Thabo and Wiseman each took a video camera and made a film of their interpretation of the conflict, its causes, and the suffering that both sides had endured. Though the reconciliation process was initially fraught, the Thokoza community came to the conclusion after watching the video and discussing it, that it was only political rhetoric that was dividing their community and that everyone longed for peace. The video served as an emotional catharsis for a highly traumatised community. After this process cross community groups were set up to mediate on some of the key problems that had divided them, including housing provision. A community newspaper *Simunye News* was set up.

Lesson learned from the success of Simunye dialogues:

- it was local, and jointly mounted by trusted representatives of both communities
- there was a partnership with an outside organisation (Wilgespruit Fellowship Center), which worked very hard at gaining trust and help the mediation process
- the video promoted dialogue, and helped "humanise" the opposing sides and thereby aided the reconciliation process
- it was a long term project
- it was linked to social action in areas such as housing, education and security which were identified by the community

... and in the USA

A similar approach of linking the media with community organisations was taken ten years ago in the United States as a way of handling the aftermath of the Rodney King race riots. The editor of the *Acron Beacon Journal* in Ohio realised that the calming influence of conciliatory editorials would not be enough. He realised that what was needed was direct communication between the African American and white communities, and that there were no channels for this. So he hired experienced facilitators who sat down with representatives from a broad cross section of the two communities. Eventually 165 organisations became involved, and the action was endorsed by some 22,000 readers of the newspaper - about 10% of its circulation. The Journal won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for public service reporting.

The significance of this initiative - and there have been many other examples of so-called civic journalism in the United States - is that the editor went far beyond his reporting role in the interests of peace. And he gave these initiatives the full backing of his newspaper. Again - like in Thokosa - it was a long term commitment which was highly participatory. But it should be stressed that this kind of action remains very controversial amongst American journalists, many of whom feel that by getting involved they are losing their objectivity.

Conclusions

This conference is about **Communication for Social Change**. It is difficult to imagine a more dramatic example of social change than the transition from war to peace. In our view, it is important that experiences like those we have mentioned are researched in depth so that a body of knowledge can be accumulated in this important area of media and peace-building. Bearing in mind the proliferation of local and regional conflicts since the end of the cold war, along with the emergence of new communications technologies, the interaction of media and is likely to be a growth activity. What is needed is an academic

institution to monitor this field and publish action research. There also needs to be much more research into an evaluation methodology which can help determine the media's impact in the peace-building process. This would need to be an innovative, participatory methodology that could be used by production teams as well as specialist evaluators.

This research would provide a valuable impetus to those organisations working in media and conflict to learn from each other's activities, and for the aid and conflict resolution communities to make media an integral part of conflict resolution activities rather than ignore the media as a potentially dangerous nuisance which is often the case at present. It would also lend respectability to this role for the media amongst the journalistic community, and support those journalists who are urging a rethink on how war is reported.

The initiation of debate on war reporting, and the growth of "civic journalism" are welcome signs of progress. So is the remarkable rebirth of radio - particularly radio soap opera - as a means of stimulating debate on a range of social issues - including peace-building. The past ten years have seen major, long running radio soap-operas set up with aid funding in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Kenya, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Colombia, Albania, Rumania, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to mention just a few. All of these used participative research methods - traditionally the tools of development workers rather than broadcasters - to understand the point of view of their audiences and track the impact of storylines. Radio actors and drama directors are again in demand. In some respects this is a throwback to the 1950s so vividly portrayed by Mario Vargas Llosa in his novel *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*.

But it is more than radio's success in story-telling. As Alfonso Gumucio has observed "radio is.... the most often utilised and successful medium for social change" (*Making Waves*, Rockefeller). It is still the medium accessed by the target of most aid programmes, the rural poor. Television will become increasingly important as costs reduce and electricity reaches rural areas, but in conflict areas radio retains its primacy as a purveyor of news and information. This underlines the importance of further research which will determine beyond reasonable doubt whether the media is an asset or liability in helping build peace.

Appendix One: Good Practice

From the case studies presented above of journalism and pro-active radio and video programming for peace-building, some good practices can be discerned:

The media can help:

- Ensure that the public have realistic expectations about what can be achieved, and about the length of time necessary to achieve long term, positive results.
- Give all the parties the opportunity to speak and to see each other's position clearly and without bias. Help understanding by facilitating communication and helping to avoid misunderstandings.
- Inform the populations of conflict areas about the possibilities for action, even on a very small scale, towards community level conflict resolution. Communities need the confidence of knowing that measures have been tried, with success in other places, and that their efforts will be supported and publicized, by the media.
- Help to prevent the circulation and broadcasting of propaganda, inflammatory material, hate-media, or damaging rumours which destroy communities and prevent the building of trust.
- Give accurate representation of the causes of a conflict, and of the situation in a conflict area will also help ensure that the right, and most useful, type of humanitarian aid is provided by the international community. Sensitivity to religious and cultural requirements, even in a time of crisis, is important, and helps counteract the image of those in conflict areas as passive victims.
- Establish networks of information and facilitate the maintenance of a 'collective memory' - measures which worked in one area or situation may work again elsewhere.
- Avoid stereo-typing of groups, populations , leaders etc.
- Participate in the process of social reconstruction and democratization in the aftermath of conflicts by providing a positive and participatory forum for the exchange of ideas, democracy, and nation building.

Appendix 2: References and further reading

Working with the Media in Conflicts and Other Emergencies, Department for International Development (DFID), UK Government (2000), available from the DFID website (www.dfid.gov.uk) under Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Dept, (CHAD), Publications.

The Peace Journalism Option: see www.reportingtheworld.org

Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know, available through www.crimesofwar.org

Making Waves: stories of participatory communication for social change: Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, (2001) The Rockefeller Foundation

Local Media Support: Eknes and Andresen, FAFO Institute for Social Science, Oslo, (1999) www.faf.no

The Communications Initiative: www.comminit.com

The Network for Conflict Resolution: www.nicr.ca

Oxfam-Quebec: www.oxfam.qc.ca

The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society: www.impacs.org