

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

Communication for Peacebuilding Priority Grant Program Learning Group Report

SEPTEMBER 2011-SEPTEMBER 2012

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Radio La Benevolencija in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Internews Network in the Central African Republic; and The World Policy Institute in Kenya

FACILITATED BY INTERNEWS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings of the learning group that was formed by the three grantees of USIP's 2011 Communication for Peacebuilding priority grant program. The purpose of the learning group was to facilitate knowledge-sharing, mutual learning, joint dissemination, and collaboration. The group met from September 20-21, 2012, at Internews headquarters in Washington DC to debrief and discuss their projects.

KEY FINDINGS

On communication for peacebuilding projects:

- ❖ Equipping communities with the tools to make informed decisions in times of crisis and to distinguish for themselves hateful or violent messages is an essential component of peacebuilding programs.
- ❖ ICTs are an exciting development for media program implementers. They are potentially very useful for peacebuilding efforts, as they can aid in supporting positive information flows and centralizing disparate streams of information through crowd-sourcing, among other opportunities. But ICTs are not a panacea. They present challenges that need to be more closely addressed, and in some cases present hurdles for peacebuilding.
- ❖ The importance of working with the local community, both in project design and implementation, cannot be overstated. In conflict-affected regions in particular, local actors are often more familiar with local context, and well aware of the immediate information and communication needs of the community. Finding strong and reliable local partners has been difficult for some of the groups, but all agreed that finding such a partner adds immeasurably to a project's success.
- ❖ There is a need for new and innovative ways to approach monitoring and evaluation that focus more on 'big picture' impacts rather

than individual project outputs. Knowledge about the role of media and communication in peacebuilding is incipient, making M&E that contributes to a more holistic understanding of the potential for media and communication particularly crucial for this field of work.

- ❖ Program implementers are aware that pre-implementation assessment periods are vital to projects, but the grantees all struggled to fit proper assessments into the short time frame. Pre-implementation assessment periods not only help ensure that the project's framework and goals are appropriate and realistic, but also allow for better baseline data collection. Impact evaluations that usefully contribute to the knowledge and evidence base are strongest when they can be compared to thorough and appropriate baseline data.

On the learning group:

- ❖ The learning group was an innovative and useful way to harness the unique knowledge of the group members. Given the importance of continued shared learning regarding the use of media and communication in peacebuilding, learning groups like this one are a good step toward more coordinated learning practices.
- ❖ The group agreed that meeting before projects began, rather than at the end of the projects, would have been more useful, because they would have better understood what the three projects had in common, which would have better fostered collaboration.
- ❖ The collaborative website set up by Internews did not work as hoped. A better interface and more virtual meetings would have improved the experiences of the groups on the website.

Recommendations for USIP:

- ❖ Encourage more learning groups as a way to systematize project learning and widen

the knowledge base on the role of media and communication in peacebuilding efforts. USIP's efforts to promote such learning groups should continue, but should seek ways to create more robust collaborations than those achieved for this project.

- ❖ Future learning groups should 1) encourage groups to meet at the beginning of the project, not only at the end, so that they can understand from the beginning what the projects have in common and where opportunities for collaboration lie; 2) have an improved virtual interface for more dynamic and effective communication between groups throughout the duration of the projects.
- ❖ Place priority on recognizing the importance of pre-implementation assessment periods and build them into the funding structure of grants.
- ❖ Identify better ways to promote evaluations that go beyond measuring project outputs and foster growth of the knowledge base surrounding the role of media and communication in peacebuilding.

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the United States Institute for Peace launched the Communication for Peacebuilding priority grant program (CfP). The program was intended to support innovative practice and research designed to increase understanding of how communication flows and communication technology can best be leveraged to improve the practice of peacebuilding. The CfP initiative is based on the premise that because communication is fundamental to peacebuilding, the nature of communication flows within and around conflict has a significant impact on the practice of peacebuilding.

The focus of the grant program, entitled Violence, Information, and Peacebuilding, was to improve our ability to impact the communication ecosystem resulting from violent incidents in

ways that:

1. Help support and leverage information flows that create more positive peacebuilding outcomes;
2. Help undermine information flows that create escalatory dynamics.

After a full and open competition, USIP awarded three grants to: Internews Network in the Central African Republic; Radio La Benevolencija in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and The World Policy Institute in Kenya.

Both the Internews and Radio la Benevolencija projects ran from September 2011 through September 2012. The World Policy Institute (WPI) project, which began in September 2011, is still implementing pending the upcoming Kenyan Presidential elections in March 2013.

According to the USIP initial call for proposals, “a wide range of human rights and peacebuilding approaches rely on the information flows stemming from violent incidents, including conflict monitoring and early warning, civilian protection, community security initiatives, genocide and mass atrocity prevention, human rights monitoring and fact finding, and evidence gathering for international tribunals. On the other hand, the same information flows can contribute to mobilization, intimidation, retaliatory attacks, radicalization, and other escalatory dynamics.”

To provide a sharper focus, this particular award was specifically concerned with leveraging information flows as part of three peacebuilding approaches that are used as violence is occurring or in the immediate aftermath of violence. These approaches are conflict monitoring and early warning, civilian protection, and community security. Together, these three related approaches have the common goal of responding to incidents in ways that stop the violence, prevent immediate escalation, and/or get individuals out of harm's way. A range of information flows is at the heart of each of these approaches.

As stated in the CfP call, “regardless of how conflict-prone a community or society is, violence matters. It creates immediate impact for individuals and communities. As a result, violent incidents always create a communication ecosystem that disseminates information about the violence ... This ecosystem includes information flows ranging from word-of-mouth rumor mills to remote sensing satellites. In conflict-affected areas, new communication technologies are rapidly making these ecosystems more complex.”

In light of USIP’s strategic aims, each of the project proposals was designed to:

- ❖ Articulate not only how the project would support a tool or medium (e.g., community radio), but how the project would analyze, work with, and/or create support for information flows that contribute to peacebuilding outcomes.
- ❖ Understand and work with the dynamic relationship between sender, message, medium, receiver, and context.
- ❖ Address not just information flows, but the response to those flows.
- ❖ Articulate projects that begin with an analysis of existing communication flows and not simply propose new strategies.
- ❖ Address how results of the project will reach communities impacted by conflict and violence.
- ❖ Include a field-based component.

THE LEARNING GROUP

As the goal of this program was to create practical knowledge that can be put to use by other practitioners, USIP sought projects that included:

- ❖ Pilot and proof-of-concept programming.
- ❖ Evaluation and assessment of current and past programming.

- ❖ Action research and other forms of reflective practice.
- ❖ Field-based research.
- ❖ Initiatives designed to support communities of practice and other learning networks.

The group of grantees supported by USIP also committed to forming a learning group. The learning group was designed to facilitate knowledge-sharing, mutual learning, joint dissemination, and even collaboration on implementation where feasible. The premise behind the learning group is that having several organizations working together, while using different approaches, creates synergies that ultimately produce a more solid and robust understanding of the problems being confronted.

Internews was tasked with leading the learning group among the three grantees, with the goal of creating a forum for discussion throughout the course of the project through which the three grantees could share lessons learned and best practices, and could generally debrief. Such a learning group was seen as particularly useful since research on, and understanding about, the role of media in peacebuilding is still in its infancy, despite much recent work in the field. The model for the forum included an interactive online portal through which groups could exchange ideas and experiences throughout the duration of the projects, and a face-to-face meeting in Washington DC to debrief and discuss the major lessons learned from each of the three projects as well as any potential takeaways or key findings that could be applicable to future projects in the communications for peacebuilding space.

The projects run by Radio la Benevolencija (in DRC) and Susan Benesch at WPI (in Kenya) respectively dealt with addressing inflammatory rhetoric and the escalation of violent information flows at the grassroots and policy levels. Internews’ project in the Central African Republic was designed to create a reliable, predictable and sustainable two-way information flow between community media outlets and humanitarian actors, helping humanitarians to improve their response to conflict and increasing communities’

abilities to raise awareness of conflict at the outset. While each of the three projects had very distinctive approaches and goals, which will be explained in greater detail in the following section, there were clear common experiences that emerged as issues to keep in mind for future similar projects. Broadly speaking, participants all felt that equipping communities with the tools to make informed decisions in times of crisis and to distinguish for themselves hateful or violent messages was an essential component of any peacebuilding work. In the case of both Benesch's and La Benevolencija's work this correlated to teaching audiences how to recognize dangerous speech so that they are better equipped to react against it; for Internews, this was evidenced by providing communities with accurate, unbiased information which allowed them to protect themselves from outbreaks of violence.

During the course of the learning group workshop, the participants also discussed the usefulness of the learning group and ways in which collaborations between implementing partners could be sustained and improved. All of the participants agreed that creating a learning environment in which implementers could debrief and discuss both the successes and shortcomings of their projects was very helpful, but also felt that the learning group could be improved in several ways. Insights, observations, and critiques of the learning group format are also addressed in the report.

PROJECT SUMMARIES

Below is a brief summary of each of the three Communications for Peacebuilding grantees, and their project directors. These summaries provide context for the learning group discussion, but the activities and outcomes of each of the three projects are discussed in greater detail throughout the rest of the report.

RADIO LA BENEVOLENCIJA

Amsterdam, Netherlands –
www.labenevolencija.org

Project title: *Early Warning and Response System in North Kivu for the Congolese Presidential Elections 2011/2012*

Project duration: September 2011 – September 2012

Project budget: \$103,555

Representative at Learning Group:
Ricard Sylvain, project director

The primary objective of this project, based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, was to help counteract information flows that can lead to incitement, escalation of violence, scapegoating, and other manipulation in the run up to, during, and in the aftermath of the Presidential Elections. Specifically, the project aimed to create and train a network of “civil society election observers” in North Kivu to monitor not only procedures, but also incitement to violence in their community. Additionally, the project worked to connect these civil society election observers with the media to redistribute their information to a wider audience in order to prevent election related violence.

Sylvain Ricard, the project director for Radio La Benevolencija, is a seasoned project manager and media producer, with over nine years of experience on the ground in West and Central Africa. In addition to his work with Radio la Benevolencija, Ricard has worked with Handicap International and Action Contre la Faim in Cote d'Ivoire and has strong technical skills in audio-visual production, media training and radio station management.

Through the USIP grant, Radio la Benevolencija produced two radio programs – *Wenye Kiu* and *Nia Moja*. *Wenye Kiu*, which translates to “those who are thirsty,” is a radio program structured around five-minute sketches on basic civil education and sensitization for a general audience, in order to improve the public's ability to recognize and combat forms of incitement during the election process. Sketches were produced and broadcast on a network of 21 community radio stations twice a day in four provinces of Eastern DRC. *Nia Moja*, which means “common vision” is a 30-minute informative program that covers

a variety of election related themes, such as how to react when facing incitement to engage in violence against certain political parties or candidates, and the legal and non-violent acceptance or opposition of election results. Radio la Benevolencija also organized a series of roundtable discussions with key political and international stakeholders as well as civil society organizations to educate them on the electoral laws and to provide a forum for discussion that would continue beyond the round table talks. Lastly, Radio la Benevolencija created an early warning system to enable the population to recognize and report, through SMS, incidents of violence or tension in their communities.

WORLD POLICY INSTITUTE

New York, NY – www.worldpolicy.org

Project title: *Dangerous Speech on the Road to Mass Violence*

Project duration: February 2012 – current (project was ongoing as of September 2012)

Project budget: \$75,000

Representative at Learning Group:
Susan Benesch, project director

The Dangerous Speech Project, based in Kenya and run by Susan Benesch, a fellow at World Policy Institute (WPI), has worked to provide tools which re-conceptualize speech categories in a way that pinpoints which speech is dangerous - and why - in conflict prone situations. Additionally, the project focuses on recommending best practices for limiting dangerous speech without curbing freedom of expression. The project has supported and strengthened the efforts of Kenyan media and civil society to use communication for peace. The primary activities have included using the “Dangerous Speech Methodology”¹ under development at WPI to work with selected Kenyan NGOs, media, and government agencies to define narrower categories of inflammatory speech and to find the least speech-restrictive ways of discouraging it.

1 Benesch’s methodology can be found at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/95867806/Proposed-Guidelines-on-Dangerous-Speech>

Through the scope of this project, Benesch has helped key stakeholders in Kenya create and internalize a clearer definition of hate speech and has designed a system for monitoring and classifying such speech. Additionally, Benesch has advised relevant stakeholders on the most effective and least restrictive means to limit hate speech. Another key element of this project, which is ongoing pending the upcoming Kenyan presidential elections, is to help inoculate audiences against dangerous and hate speech. The goal is to help make audiences more aware of what dangerous speech is and how entrepreneurs of violent speech manipulate audiences through such speech. Lastly, this project worked to train monitors of the Media Council of Kenya and Ushahidi on dangerous speech frameworks for classifying dangerous speech.

Benesch, project director for the World Policy Institute project in Kenya and a senior fellow at the World Policy Institute, is one of a handful of legal scholars worldwide who specialize in analyzing speech that catalyzes atrocities. Benesch previously served as senior legal advisor to the Center for Justice and Accountability in San Francisco, based at Patton Boggs, LLP in Washington, D.C., and as a program director at Amnesty International USA. She also teaches as an adjunct professor at American University’s School of International Service.

INTERNEWS

Washington, DC – www.internews.org

Project title: *Mobile2Radio: Connecting Local Media, Humanitarian Actors and Communities through Innovative Communication Flows*

Project duration: September 2011 – August 2012

Project budget: \$136,249

Representative at Learning Group:
Jeroen Corduwener, project director

Internews has worked in the Central African Republic to create what seeks to be a reliable, sustainable system allowing local media to gather information from affected populations in

real time and channel it to the humanitarian community using new technologies. At the same time, the system establishes a two-way communication flow whereby humanitarian groups can send information out to affected communities via local radio.

During this award, Internews continued support for an established network of 15 community radios in CAR and also led more intensive pilots with two specific stations in Obo and Zereda. The pilots involved using Frontline SMS and crowdsourcing technologies to engage local communities and to strengthen two-way information flows between community radios and their audiences. Internews also conducted baseline research on the types of stories produced through the established network of community radio stations as well as some informal research on both the needs of the humanitarian community and local communities. Internews consistently monitored the participation and activities of the partner community radio stations, added four additional radios during the course of the project, and added 20 local correspondents in so-called “information dark” areas, “giving a voice to voiceless people.” By relying on both new technologies and established communications infrastructure, Internews was able to leverage information flows to improve the activities of humanitarian actors and increase access to information for local communities. Additionally, Internews worked to build the technical and managerial capacity of the Association of Journalists for Human Rights (AJHR) to strengthen the overall sustainability of the network.

Jeroen Corduwener, project director for Internews, has a strong record in developing, implementing and managing projects on media and conflict prevention in Africa, especially in post-conflict zones including Central African Republic. In the past 15 years, he has built on experience as an international trainer, program and country director on media programs, good governance and election projects, including in post-genocide Rwanda and Cote d’Ivoire. Corduwener, who has a PhD in history from University of Groningen in the Netherlands, also created and piloted the current network on which the project was based.

SCOPE OF THE LEARNING GROUP WORKSHOP

The premise of the workshop was that each project had distinct methodologies and ambitions, but that each was rooted in a strong philosophical approach to conflict avoidance, and that a learning group could augment the work of each by exposing key personnel to intense programmatic efforts in like-oriented environments. The learning group was therefore designed to allow the participants to openly and robustly describe how the field of communication, media, and peacebuilding evolved in their own performances and to interact as a community of experts to consider benefits from learning about each other’s work (while at the same time reflecting on their own project). An additional goal of the workshop was that, through intense and concentrated discussion, the participants would be able to use their experiences on the ground to help build *new* knowledge on understandings of, and strategies toward, effective communication for peacebuilding interventions.

The parameters of the workshop were established in the context of “peacebuilding,” envisioned broadly by USIP as the “long-term process of addressing the root causes and effects [of conflict], reconciling differences, normalizing relations, and building institutions that can manage conflict without resort to violence.”² Within the larger framework of peacebuilding, USIP highlighted the fundamental role that communication flows can play in both promoting and undermining the process of peacebuilding in the Communication for Peacebuilding priority grant program. In common, the three projects were deeply engaged with the process of understanding, analyzing, and strengthening positive communication flows and the participants were chosen because of their ability to bring individual, deep experience with the field. The base principle of the discussion (its operative lever for interchange) was that the three projects took place in three

2 <http://glossary.usip.org/resource/peacebuilding>

very different countries, with three very different communication infrastructures, and three distinct sets of goals. A learning group environment was useful precisely because each could contribute something unique to building knowledge about this process. What emerged was the possibility of relying on strong theoretical formulations (the approach of the WPI project and the La Benevolencija project) together with the three very different implementation strategies. These three projects pointed to ways the encouragement of professional, independent media (both through funding and through policy) could serve as a deterrent to conflict.

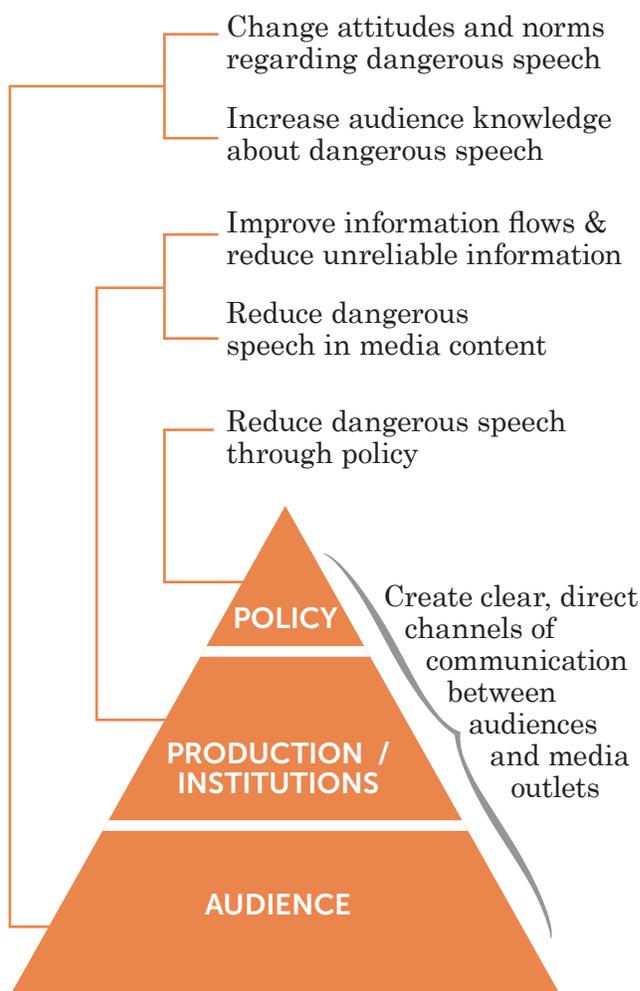
The learning group approach provided opportunities for researchers in cognate fields to gain a more intimate understanding of the theoretical approaches used by each other to instigate change, and the viability and applicability of those approaches in other conflict regions in Africa (and in particular, the projects at the table). The participants, working with the conveners, sought to develop models for intervention approaches that emerged from their discussions.

As one example, by the end of the two-day session, Benesch had convinced the other groups in the room to make more thoughtful distinctions between ‘hate speech’ and truly ‘dangerous speech.’ Benesch’s research has shown that hate speech only becomes potentially dangerous when other factors come into play, and so understanding the *context* in which hate speech is delivered (the speaker, the medium, the size of the audience, and other facts) is vital to determining what speech is most dangerous, and in understanding the different outcomes to which hate speech can lead. At the same time, Benesch was sufficiently intrigued by discussions with Ricard about La Benevolencija’s theories regarding attitude and behavior change (based in large part on the theories of Dr. Ervin Staub) that she thought it would be useful to collaborate more with La Benevolencija in future projects, combining Benesch’s theories of dangerous speech with La Benevolencija’s set of ‘key messages’ in order to create a more powerful tool to inoculate audiences against dangerous speech.

The figure below offers a visualization of the way the different projects contribute to the overarching framework of media in peacebuilding, from the small number of policies and policymakers that affect media content, to the media sector itself which requires strengthening and institutional development, to the very large number of audience members that make up the public that receives this media and is the ultimate beneficiary of most peacebuilding interventions.

MODEL OF THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PEACEBUILDING AND THE OBJECTIVES OF THE THREE PROJECTS

Some parameters relating to these three levels grew out of the discussions, echoing, of course, previously articulated goals:



Policy level

At the level of **policy**, regulations and practices that discourage dangerous speech and harmful information flows without reducing freedom of expression should be promoted. Policy efforts should aim at developing principles and frameworks that support a media environment that provides reliable and timely information to publics, and that supports conflict reduction and peacebuilding efforts.

On one hand this can occur at the country-level, by supporting efforts by governments to strengthen the local media system. Susan Benesch, for example, was able to consult with policymakers in the Kenyan government about best practices for curbing dangerous hate speech while maintaining freedom of expression. On the other hand, we can also think about policy at the funder level. The discussion during the learning group indicates that donor policies that support media sector strengthening are crucial. Importantly, this does not only mean training producers, journalists, and others in the media field, but also enhancing capacity of the institutions themselves to carry out such work, and paying more attention to what local media institutions believe their own needs are in terms of communication interventions.

Production level

Institutional development of the media sector and of individual producers within the media sector should be one of the major goals of communication for peacebuilding projects overall. The projects carried out by the learning group also suggest some particular strategies for communication for peacebuilding interventions at the production level. For one, showing journalists the value of teaching their own audiences the effects of dangerous speech is a method of counteracting dangerous speech that is at once effective and sustainable. This refers not only to hate speech, but also to inaccurate information and rumors about violence and danger. Second, entertainment-oriented media makers, including celebrities, can be shown the powerful and positive influence their work can have on the public. Credible, neutral production and broadcast can also attract a broader audience and engage diverse actors

within the same information flow. Finally, connecting communities (such as humanitarian actors, audiences and journalists) can help to triangulate information and ensure sharing of critical content for more immediate response and action.

Benesch, building off her work with policymakers, teamed up with the producers and actors of a popular Kenyan television series, *Vioja Mahakamani*, to show them the power their positive messages could have on their fans. The cast of this popular series, who have significant influence over a broad sector of Kenyan society, were actively engaged in the two day workshop led by Benesch on hate and dangerous speech and voiced their commitment to promoting positive speech.

Ricard, leading the Radio la Benevolencija project, trained radio journalists to produce programs that educate audiences about hate speech. Capitalizing on Radio la Benevolencija's past experience in this field, they produced short, easy to understand broadcasts that were aired frequently to reinforce important messages about the upcoming elections. The productions drew heavily from daily life and local realities, which helped the programming to resonate more deeply with local communities.

Corduwener, leading the Internews project, as well as Ricard with Radio la Benevolencija, focused on improving the efficiency and professionalism of community media outlets through journalism training. The Internews project in particular focused on working with community radio staff to improve their reporting capacity and helped to establish their credibility both with local and international actors. Additionally, Internews provided management and financial training to local partner, the Association of Journalists for Human rights (AJHR), to help them sustain some level of financial independence, which Internews believed would increase their credibility and reduce their dependence on political actors.

Audience level

The **audience** is the ultimate beneficiary of many communication interventions. The

three learning group projects revealed that hate speech that does reach the airwaves can be rendered less powerful if the audience is ‘inoculated,’ either because they are *informed* about the truth and motivations behind hate speech, or because their *attitudes and norms* toward hate speech lead them to dismiss it as wrong.

Additionally, creating direct channels of communications between audiences and their community radio stations helps build the trust of communities and reduces the spread of rumors or inaccurate information. This type of reliable, accurate, and timely information accomplishes more than simply preparing audiences or warning them of potential threats. Training journalists to verify information before broadcasting it to populations also served to reduce alarm caused by unreliable information and rumors.

Two of the learning group projects focused on some version of inoculation. Radio la Benevolencija produced two unique radio programs (one entertainment sketch show and one factual program) designed to sensitize audiences to the dangers of hate speech, and teach them how to react when confronted with hate speech. The WPI project, similarly, was designed to ‘inoculate’ audiences against dangerous speech by showing them the consequences associated with dangerous speech.³

The Internews project focused on providing more accurate and reliable information to audiences through local community radio stations by creating linkages between the humanitarian community and the radio stations. This was accomplished through circulation of a daily news bulletin produced by AJHR. As such, Internews was able to help humanitarian actors respond more quickly and effectively to crises in real time, and at the same time reduce the amount of misinformation and subsequent panic within local communities. A clear example of this is the work of the project’s local partner,

³ Benesch, of the World Policy Institute, distinguishes “dangerous speech” from “hate speech”, arguing that not all hate speech is necessarily dangerous, and that practitioners need to be more aware of what types of speech are more likely to lead to violence.

AJHR, in communicating information about a cholera outbreak in September 2011. AJHR was able to draw attention to the outbreak, enabling humanitarian and government actors to respond quickly in affected communities. AJHR helped produce sensitization campaigns in affected areas, minimizing the spread of the outbreak and widespread panic within the community.

OBSERVATIONS & INSIGHTS

THE POSSIBILITIES (AND LIMITATIONS) OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

All three groups have utilized ICTs in their projects (or in their research, in the case of Benesch), which allowed for a productive discussion of the possibilities (and limitations) of these new tools. Because ICTs present so many new opportunities with regard to interventions, and have become the focus of much donor attention, the group’s discussion about ICTs took up a significant portion of the workshop. The participants were eager to discuss their own experiences and bounce their insights off of each other, comparing notes and seeing how their own challenges paralleled and differed from the experiences of others. While the three groups were all optimistic about the potential for ICTs, the conclusion that arose from the discussion was that there are challenges that need to be more closely addressed. ICTs are not a panacea, and in some cases in fact presented unexpected hurdles for peacebuilding.

First, in the realm of dangerous speech, new technologies are *allowing* much of this speech to travel at unprecedented rates, and reach groups that would not normally have received it. Benesch noted that the recent events surrounding the film *The Innocence of Muslims* on YouTube is a powerful example of what can happen when words and expressions “travel more easily across the boundaries between normative groups.” Whereas certain speeches and rhetoric used to stay within a particular group, they are now being translated and sent

to others who would not have heard it before these digital technologies existed. Projects involving media and peacebuilding therefore have to, according to Benesch, counteract “what happens when you take the lid off and allow people to talk, and fight, when they weren’t before.”

Corduwener shared his own challenges with ICTs. His team was able to set up a system to get information from isolated areas to central locations, to be distributed to humanitarian groups, but an evaluation partway through implementation revealed that much of the public was not using the SMS messaging system. This was partly because of illiteracy, partly because of the cost of sending an SMS message, and partly because the population was distrustful of the device itself. This required Corduwener to consider both ways to increase SMS use, and alternative methods for getting information to and from isolated populations. The lack of trust in ICTs is one area in particular where stronger pre-intervention research could play a pivotal role. Addressing trust issues upfront could significantly strengthen community uptake of ICTs to communicate their needs.

For both Corduwener and Ricard, the crowd-sourcing platform they used, Frontline SMS, also had several bugs, which were eventually resolved, but that prevented the system from functioning as it was supposed to from the beginning of the project.

Potential of ICTs

At the same time though, the projects, particularly those of Radio la Benevolencija and Internews, found that ICTs had great potential for increasing positive information flows. SMS messaging worked well for Radio la Benevolencija. Although it was originally difficult to get the messaged information from their grassroots groups, they are getting much more information now after modifying their SMS system and teaching their civil society contacts to use specific, short codes that indicate different problems and events.

Benesch, though her project did not directly use ICTs, realized through her research for

this project that, while translation of messages through the use of new media can present a challenge in terms of hastening the spread of hate speech, it also allows populations to better hold their political leaders to account, because they can more easily observe what these leaders are saying and doing. She found, in her research on Kenyan political leaders, that simply *knowing* that their words might be translated and transmitted to other language and cultural groups functioned as a deterrent to using harmful language.

Similarly, the participants discussed the potentially transformative shift that has come about as ICTs allow those with *positive* messages of peacebuilding to gain larger audiences. The consensus among the group was that more projects should concentrate on empowering those with a positive message. Corduwener observed that, for those who are not political leaders, the ability to reach large audiences is something new for much of Africa. As Benesch stated, “those who have power and want to use it in a negative way” already understand the way messages can affect the attitudes and behaviors of the audience, while many of those with a positive message, particularly members of civil society, do not always have the same understanding of the power of media. Benesch found that in her project, one way to utilize this shift was to sensitize those actors with a positive message and access to large audiences to the power of media, and to the harms of dangerous speech, and “let them take care of spreading the message to others.”

Crowd-sourcing platforms

Crowd-sourcing platforms, like those developed by Ushahidi, were also seen as having great potential to aid in peacebuilding outcomes. While the use of Ushahidi is limited by the fact that it is internet-based, and therefore inapplicable in certain settings, all three project directors saw these kinds of platforms as crucial for centralizing disparate streams of information. In the realm of harmful speech, these platforms can provide leaders with an early warning system – alerting them to where and when potentially violent situations are brewing. With regard to violence and dangerous

situations more broadly, these platforms can centralize information in a way that will allow organizations to reach vulnerable populations more quickly.

Benesch, however, cautioned about the danger of ‘overusing’ these kinds of platforms. She observed that in Kenya, several funders, as well as the Kenyan government, set up early warning systems for hate speech using these crowd-sourcing platforms. The result was that members of the public with information on sources of hate speech did not know to which crowd-sourcing platform they should send their information, and this resulted in the different platforms all having a diluted set of data. In this case, combining or coordinating such systems would be more useful than creating new ones.

Moderating expectations of ICTs

The overall conclusion that our participants seemed to come to regarding using new technologies in interventions was that it is vital to understand the context you are entering into, and to the extent possible, work with the communication system that is already in place. Part of this also means sensitizing populations to new technologies. While the Internews project had some difficulty in getting isolated populations to use SMS, Corduener believed that a communication system between the community radio stations contributed to the overall success of the project in terms of creating a two-way flow of information between humanitarian agencies and community radio stations. Not only was the communication infrastructure already there, but the state of the radio stations was such that they were ready and eager to implement the new program. Likewise, Benesch found that teaming up with a television program that was already successful and popular made more sense than creating a new program from scratch. There is significant potential for integrating the use of ICTs into some of these established communications infrastructures, but working within the existing infrastructure is pivotal to the overall effectiveness of such technologies.

Key Takeaways:

- 1. Before implementing a project that uses mobile phones, understand the local mobile phone infrastructure.** This has two key components: 1) Is there mobile coverage? 2) What is the percentage of ownership? This information is, unfortunately, not always easy to come by before a project begins. However, an overestimation of the infrastructure can result in a misconception of the feasibility of a project.
- 2. Before implementing a project that involves SMS, make sure this is a technology that the population is willing and able to use.** Even if the technology is available, many people in rural areas are still unable or unwilling to use SMS, either because they are not literate, they cannot afford the cost of sending and receiving messages, or because of a lack of trust – either in the technology itself, in the persons receiving and sending messages, or in the idea that their messages will remain private and they will not face consequences for sending a message (such as one reporting violence or hate speech). SMS messages are an exciting addition to peacebuilding toolkits, but understanding how the target population may use SMS is crucial to the success of a project.
- 3. Before implementing a project that involves a crowd-sourcing platform, make sure the use of the technology is appropriate.** This means, for one, that projects need to be mindful of other similar crowd-sourcing platforms in the area. Competition between crowd-sourcing platforms can dilute both and make functions such as early warning systems less useful. Secondly, as with mobile phones, projects need to be aware that in some areas with low use of internet or mobile phones, crowd-sourcing platforms function better as ways for internet-enabled groups, like radio stations, NGOs, and civil society organizations, to communicate with each other, rather than as ways for the general public to send information to these groups.

4. **To counteract hate speech, consider focusing on positive speech.** The group agreed that while teaching audiences to understand the dangers of hate speech was important, using these mass media channels as a way to disseminate positive speech was an important and often overlooked way of reducing incitement to violence.
5. **The benefits of a strong local partner cannot be overestimated.** All three of the groups agreed that a strong local partner adds enormously to the project, in part because they will have a much better understanding of the local context, the necessary interventions, and the potential pitfalls of a project.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

All of the learning group participants admitted that we, as a community of researchers and program implementers, still have much to learn about the role of media in peacebuilding, and that the field is still relatively new. Making sure that new projects add to the knowledge base and the evidence base when it comes to the role of media in peacebuilding, and ICTs in particular, is therefore vital.

No matter how prepared a group is for an intervention, or how much experience the organization has in the field, interventions can face many hurdles. Being able to discuss these in a learning group environment not only revealed that many of the challenges the groups faced were similar, but made it easier to see ways of addressing those challenges.

The learning group discussion revealed that proper monitoring and evaluation faced problems for all three projects from the start, in part because none of the groups were able to thoroughly assess the environment, project assumptions, and project goals before the projects began. While all the groups were very familiar with the countries and contexts in which they were intervening, the complex relationship between media, ICTs, and peacebuilding required a more substantive planning period

than the project timeframe allowed for. Despite awareness that an initial pre-implementation assessment is important, all three projects faced challenges of collecting the information necessary to begin the project properly and all three groups struggled to fit this period into a 12-month timeline. This resulted in particular ramifications:

- ❖ Radio la Benevolencija realized, after training 300 civil society members to recognize and report hate speech, that not all of the trainees were committed to the work Radio la Benevolencija was doing, or cared about the goals of the intervention, which would likely lead to an abandonment of the program for those individuals once funding ended.
- ❖ Internews surveyed most humanitarian groups and radio stations during a pre-implementation assessment to find out what information they needed, and where they got their information, but were not able to fully assess the media landscape or the communications infrastructure, which caused them to realize only midway through the project the low level of SMS use by the public.
- ❖ For the WPI project, Benesch first assessed the public understanding of ‘hate speech’ and its role in the 2008 elections, but did not have sufficient time to assess the needs of the *government* in terms of policy changes, which was her target audience for the project.

Pre-implementation assessment periods

These challenges led to a thoughtful discussion about the best way to begin a project, and about the obvious benefits of paying close attention to needs as articulated by the population itself, rather than as articulated by implementers and donors. One conclusion that came out of the discussion was that working more closely with *communities* early on in the project could, in several cases, save time down the line by making sure that project assumptions and goals line up with the realities of the community, and with their needs.

In retrospect, Ricard reflected, if they had worked specifically with those community members that had *sought* a change in the way local radio received and broadcasted information to local populations, they not only would have had a stronger cohort of trainees, but would have developed a project that evolved together with the community, aligned more closely with the goals this community group wanted to achieve, and would, therefore, have been more sustainable.

Ricard spoke about the feasibility of imposing attitudes and norms about what media *ought* to be onto populations. He observed that when journalists are trained to do journalism more ‘professionally,’ but are not committed to the idea of a strong media sector as a tool for peacebuilding and political participation, then all the project has done is impose a system the population is not interested in, and which will likely disappear once the project, and the funding, leave. When hate speech is profitable for radio stations (for example, because someone is paying them to air it) it is very difficult for outside groups to prevent that unless there are strong norms rejecting this kind of speech. This is why, as Ricard explained, it is so crucial to pay attention to the economic environment and to cultural norms and attitudes.

Building off Ricard’s insights, Corduwener added that his experiences working on media interventions (beyond Internews’ USIP project) had also demonstrated the importance of understanding economic incentives. Corduwener stressed the importance of addressing economic incentives directly, by showing radio stations more profitable ways to manage their business. He told the story of one radio station manager who had to collect five dollars *each morning* from friends and neighbors simply to open the station. This, Corduwener argued, is not a sustainable business plan, and leaves such radio stations vulnerable to less community-oriented sources of income. Corduwener felt that teaching radio station managers how to properly manage the business, and make them more profitable, could act as a deterrent to accepting money to air potentially dangerous information.

The conclusion that it is important to understand an environment before intervening is certainly not new. Nevertheless, *all three* of these projects faced challenges posed by an incomplete assessment. Given the extensive experience of all three groups in such environments, why was this the case? The group identified two major hurdles to properly assessing environments prior to interventions: funding structures, and the challenge of finding good partners.

❖ **Funding structures:** Given the importance of improving our understanding of the role of media and ICTs in peacebuilding, the learning group discussion suggests that USIP and other donors could improve these interventions in the future - the findings that arise from them, and their potential to add to the knowledge base and the evidence base on media and peacebuilding – by requiring a pre-implementation assessment period, and making room for such pre-implementation assessment periods in the funding structure of grants. This would allow groups to develop a better understanding of what the desired outcomes for the project are, and therefore will develop better ways to collect data on them and to monitor success.

❖ **Finding Partners:** Ricard emphasized how important it was to have faith in the ability of local organizations to conduct the work themselves. As Ricard stated, “outsiders always come in and just see chaos and disorganization, but they’re wrong. There are civil society organizations that are very strong, and they know what they’re doing.” All three groups therefore agreed that working with communication systems, and organizations, already on the ground and functioning well, was important for successful projects. However, the groups agreed that finding these partners was difficult, and takes time.

Supporting a strong and independent media sector is vital to increasing peacebuilding. All of the evidence the learning group members have gathered through these projects and others suggests 1) that the most effective peacebuilding efforts occur when communities are empowered

with information that allows them to make their own decisions about what is best for them and their communities, and 2) when the audience has good information they are more likely to avoid violence and conflict. While the importance of a strong media sector is a given for these groups and others that are deeply engaged in media sector strengthening, the discussion coming out of the learning group suggests that groups may need to focus more on working closely with the institutions themselves to understand what they believe their needs are.

Monitoring

The participants viewed project monitoring and midterm evaluations as equally important as final evaluations, if not more so. They stressed the importance of monitoring projects so that changes can be made in time to achieve the project's objectives. Internews' midterm evaluation, which was conducted under the scope of another complimentary project, revealed the low SMS use, and ultimately, according to Corduener, made the project much stronger. Radio la Benevolencija conducted regular focus groups to learn if their programs were meeting the needs of the local population, and set up a feedback system so that the public could tell the team how the SMS tools were working. According to Ricard, they were able to use this information to alter project activities to make them more effective.

Final project evaluations

The group discussion revealed not only a need for donors to more consciously build a pre-implementation assessment period into grants, but also to require evaluations that help answer some of the 'big picture' questions that remain about the role of media in peacebuilding. The use of media in peacebuilding is a complex and understudied field, which is only beginning to receive focused attention by donors. Large gaps remain in scholars' and implementers' understandings of how media can most effectively be used in peacebuilding. While all the projects conducted (or are conducting) evaluations to determine how well they achieved the targets they originally set out for themselves, there was a consensus among the groups that a powerful evaluation ought to go beyond this and answer questions such as:

- ❖ How can we efficiently get information from isolated areas to more well connected areas, and vice versa?
- ❖ Should audience 'inoculation' focus on increasing audience knowledge, or changing attitudes and norms? Are there particular contexts in which it may be more fruitful to focus on one over the other?
- ❖ How can local projects be scaled up?
- ❖ What is the proper balance between top-down messaging and bottom-up efforts to help populations find their own voice through local media?

Key Takeaways

- 1. Longer pre-implementation assessment periods would benefit projects.** All of the groups struggled to fit a proper assessment into the short timeframe, and faced hurdles that, perhaps, could have been avoided with a longer pre-implementation assessment period. Understanding the context before implementing a project is vital for a project's success, particularly in conflict-affected regions, and donors need to recognize that this is a necessary part of projects when they put out grants and when they assess proposals.
- 2. Investigate and address the factors that stand in the way of the project's goals.** For the Internews project this was, in part, the low managerial capacity of radio station staff. For Radio La Benevolencija's project, this was an overall lack of belief in the importance of recognizing and stopping hate speech.
- 3. Projects need to remain adaptable and flexible – especially when there is potential for violence or conflict.** Continuous monitoring may reveal weaknesses in the project design, or potential for improvements. Projects need to remain vigilant of these insights, and be ready to adapt as needed during the course of the intervention.

4. Evaluations need to go beyond measuring outputs. While it may be impossible to show that a given project reduced violence, evaluations need to begin to answer some of the bigger questions regarding the role of media in peacebuilding, rather than simply addressing how many mobile phones were distributed or how many journalists were trained. In order to add to generalized knowledge and improve the efficacy of peacebuilding projects in the long run, evaluations need to find ways to distill findings in a way that adds to the ‘big picture’ questions posed above.

LOOKING FORWARD: DISSEMINATION & COLLABORATION

All the groups enjoyed the workshop, and found it useful to meet each other and learn from each other’s projects. It also allowed them to reflect on their own projects, and consider where collaboration would be useful, such as in the combination of the theoretical underpinnings regarding the effects of hate speech behind Benesch’s research and La Benevolencija’s work.

While the Learning Group workshop was useful for thinking critically about the projects, the participants agreed that it would have provided greater benefits if they had had the chance to meet earlier on in the projects, so that they could have used the insights to improve their project designs as the projects progressed.

While this was part of the intended purpose of the collaborative website set up by Internews – to allow the different groups to talk about their projects while they were taking place – this did not occur for two primary reasons. First, the participants agreed that it was not until they were able to discuss their projects face-to-face that they truly saw the overlap and the elements common to the three very different projects. Working on the ground, in difficult conditions and under severe time constraints, the groups did not see a great value in taking the time to learn about the other projects when they could not see the important aspects of media and

peacebuilding they held in common. Secondly, although the groups did try to use the website, there were technical problems which made the collaborative functions less useful. Future learning groups like this would therefore benefit from an earlier group meeting so the different groups can get a sense of the other projects, coupled with a website that would easily allow them to share information. The group meeting should ideally take place *before* the projects begin, as it can be difficult (and stressful) to leave the project, even for a few days, in order to meet with the other members of the learning group. The participants additionally suggested that gathering a larger group of people working in the area of media and peacebuilding, rather than only three groups, may have also been more informative (though they also acknowledged that having more than four or five participants may have made it difficult to have a productive discussion).

The group also discussed the unfortunate fact that competition for funding between groups may stifle collaboration. They agreed that collaboration is much easier when the work of two or more different organizations is complementary, and each can contribute something unique to a project. One suggestion for counteracting this was for funders to emphasize the desire for collaboration in calls for proposals.⁴

This extended to dissemination as well. The teams lamented the fact that it was difficult to get data from other organizations, and would like to see more data sharing. They saw a potentially large benefit of groups like CIMA that seem to be doing a good job of bringing together the work of different groups working in the field, and functioning as a kind of ‘neutral ground’ on which organizations could come together and share information.

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4 The groups acknowledged that this occurs on the donor end as well, and sometimes results in organizations funding very similar projects in the same location – which also makes it difficult for groups to work together. As Benesch stated, “I wouldn’t want to be a journalist in Kenya” because there are so many trainings, run by different organizations, that they are pressured to attend.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the USIP learning group was a unique and important opportunity for three implementers in the communications for peacebuilding field to come together and discuss the outcomes, challenges and successes of their respective projects. The meeting highlighted the ways that seemingly different projects can have significant overlap, and the enormous potential for organizations to learn from their peers, ultimately strengthening their own interventions and improving services provided to beneficiary communities. Through a discussion of the collective experiences of the three USIP grantees, clear general themes emerged as central to strengthening overall project implementation in the communication for peacebuilding field. The overwhelming consensus that came out of the workshop and seemed to undergird all of the discussions was that gaining an in-depth, nuanced understanding of the target population's needs and desires is essential to both the immediate success and long term sustainability of projects. Presumptions about what a community wants and desires can lead to projects that ignore the immediate needs of the community they purport to benefit, and that have a low potential for continued success once the funding runs out. Without an understanding and respect for the community's own goals, practitioners will also find it difficult to gain the trust of target communities and to engage them in project activities.

Understanding the role of media and communication in peacebuilding has been of keen interest to both program implementers and funders in recent years, but knowledge about the role of media in conflict-affected regions, and about the best ways to undergo interventions, is still incipient. Evaluations that not only determine the level of success of an individual project, but also contribute to the knowledge base more broadly, and help us learn as a community of practice how to better implement these kinds of projects, is vital.

There have been some efforts to create guidelines regarding evaluations in conflict-affected regions that will help achieve these

goals of increasing the knowledge base, and that might be helpful in future iterations of these types of projects, and in future learning groups. The evaluation principles that came out of a 2010 meeting in Caux, Switzerland, with an international group of funders, program implementers, and researchers, refer specifically to ways that media and communication interventions in conflict-affected regions can be improved (referred to as the 'Caux' principles).⁵ Among others, these principles include carefully selecting conflict-specific project indicators, keeping projects in conflict-affected regions adaptable to changing conditions, sharing knowledge with others as frequently as possible, and collaborating with local groups (who are usually more familiar with local conditions than the implementers themselves). The learning group solidly confirmed the need for these kinds of practices in order to improve evaluations and increase shared knowledge.

Search for Common Ground's Learning Portal for Design, Monitoring & Evaluation⁶ offers a space where researchers and practitioners can share knowledge on M&E practices with each other in a way that fosters the kind of learning and collaboration that was the goal of this learning group. One way to improve the efficacy of the learning group, share its findings, and make the results more accessible to others might be to encourage future learning groups to share their M&E practices and findings through this website. This may also address the fact, mentioned in the section above, that the groups found it difficult and unfortunate that they could not easily access data and findings from other organizations.

Overall, the learning group was a successful forum for discussing key lessons learned and general takeaways for future communications for peacebuilding projects. All of the participants believed that more frequent, systematic discussion forums before, during and following project implementation would strengthen their overall projects and would help them more effectively collaborate with others.

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5 Arsenault, A., Himelfarb, S., and Abbott, S. (2011). *Evaluating media interventions in conflict countries: Toward developing common principles and a community of practice*. United States Institute of Peace.

6 www.dmeformpeace.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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