EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF MEDIA INTERVENTIONS IN CONFLICT COUNTRIES

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From Mapping Information Ecologies to Evaluating Media Interventions:

An Experts Survey on Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries

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Introduction

This report outlines the results of a survey of opinions about the role and practice of monitoring and evaluation of media interventions and media assistance in conflict countries. It aims to address a paradox that has characterized these types of interventions in recent years: the growing perception that media and communications serve as critical drivers of change in conflict environments, accompanied by an uncertainty about the efficacy of individual activities. This survey was initiated out of the belief that the first step towards better assessment is soliciting the opinions of a range of stakeholders involved in these programs: the donors that fund the projects, the implementers working in the field, and the methodologists often involved in their assessment.

Survey participants were asked to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of projects in their purview with a specific focus on how these projects were and should be evaluated. Donors and implementers were asked about the aims and objectives of their programs in conflict scenarios and the kind of evaluation data they consider to be most needed to assess whether the outcomes matched their needs and expectations. Academics and methodologists were asked additional questions on the specific methods that are used and could be used to better test the outputs, outcomes and impacts of an intervention. In total 23 people were interviewed, during November and December 2010: seven interviews were with donors, seven with implementers and nine with academics. Further interviews will be conducted during the Caux Workshop.

Their responses provide insight into beliefs about the utility of media interventions in conflict countries and about the tools employed to evaluate them. Perceived needs, problems, and possible solutions emerge from various points of view, highlighting areas of agreement and of tension among different actors involved in media interventions in conflict countries.

The report proceeds in three separate, but interrelated sections:

Part I addresses the reasons behind expanded calls for results-based programming, and the main obstacles that have prevented implementers from providing clearer results about what can and what cannot be achieved through the use of the media. Themes identified include the fact that the proliferation of new communication technologies complicates the process of identifying the relative contributions of specific media interventions. Moreover, stakeholders across the spectrum believe that a better combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is needed.

Part II illustrates how research can be embedded in the different stages of a project, informing its design and implementation. It highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted by different organizations and indicates, where possible, the connections or disconnections between different phases of a project, from

the mapping of the terrain to the final evaluation and what they mean for the overall success of a project and the possibility of capturing its contributions.

Part III concludes by providing a catalogue of different methods that can be used to assess the change produced by a media intervention at the level of individuals, groups, and larger polities. It indicates how these methods have been used alone and in combination, and how various actors involved in media interventions in conflict scenarios perceive these assessments.

This report is neither exhaustive nor conclusive; rather it is designed as a basis for discussion, in order to promote further debate among other actors and organization operating in the field. The author hopes that Caux Workshop participants will agree to share their perspectives and feedback. This report should be considered as a beta version. A revised report will be released following the close of the workshop.

Summary of findings

- ***A greater space for monitoring and evaluation***. Implementers are under increased pressure to provide clearer evidence of the outcomes and impacts of their interventions. This is due to a variety of reasons, including the pressure on donors to be more cost-effective in the face of shrinking budgets, and to respond more effectively to wider criticisms about development aid. At the same time, donors expressed their interest in allocating a greater share of resources to M&E in order to understand what works and what does not work and which activities should be prioritized in conflict scenarios. There are, therefore, greater opportunities to develop adequate research instruments to assess media interventions, but a number of additional challenges remain, as indicated in the three points below.

- ***The need for clearer theories of change.*** Academics and M&E experts lamented the lack of clarity among donors and implementers about what specific changes they hope to achieve through a media intervention. There is a tendency to assume that the use of the media can promote professionalism or diffuse tensions, but these processes are often too broad to be adequately measured. In order to improve evaluation, it is important to have theories indicating in greater detail why certain activities are undertaken and to reach which goals.

- ***The heterogeneity of the approaches to media and conflict.*** Different donors and different implementing agencies operate in the media and conflict field according to different mandates and interests. Some see the media as an end in itself, others as a means that can be used to reach different objectives. This makes pooling resources more difficult and evaluations may tend to address very different parameters for success.

- ***The emergence of increasingly complex information ecologies.*** In the past, media interventions tended to focus on broadcast media, but the proliferation of new technologies requires employing a variety of media and strategies. Even countries riddled by conflict, mobile and internet usage is transforming information flows; the relevance of a particular medium cannot be assumed anymore. It has to be proven. It has become increasingly important to understand how information flows from one medium to another and which individuals and actors in this information chain have influence and on whom. This endeavour requires different actors involved in media interventions to develop better tools to assess and understand information ecologies and design interventions that are tailored to each context.

- ***Mapping and assessing information ecologies: a greater scope for integrating the instruments adopted by donors, implementers and academics.*** In the initial phases of a project, when the context of an intervention has to be analysed in order to design appropriate strategies, donors, implementers and academics tend to adopt different but potentially complementary instruments; in practice this synergy is rarely realized. Donor organizations have developed increasingly comprehensive and elaborate frameworks to assess the political context of a country where they operate. These frameworks, however, do not to include the media as a relevant dimension. Conversely, implementers tend to focus on the media and on the effects they may produce, and often lack instruments to place them in the historical and socio-political context of the target country or community. This gap may be bridged by academics who are in a privileged position to identify the reciprocal relationships between media, politics and conflicts.

- ***Monitoring media interventions and re-focusing: the need for a larger space for research.*** Conflict environments may require implementers to develop a strategy only after they have acquired greater knowledge of the terrain and its complexities. Donors and implementers report that they frequently work together to reframe the project, when necessary. Methodologists, on the other hand, feel that they are often excluded from this phase. This absence may have important repercussions for the quality of evaluations. Baselines that have been collected at the beginning of a project may cease to be useful and new strategies may not benefit from pre-ordained research frameworks.

- ***Evaluations: providing evidence at a level that matters.*** Evaluations prove the most useful, when a cogent research plan is interwoven into the entire evolution of a project, from conception to conclusion. However, sometimes developing evaluation plans likely to identify the specific contributions of a project may require a more narrow focus than donors may like. Any evaluation of a specific program is unlikely to provide conclusive evidence that macro-level aims and objectives were achieved, (e.g. the program "helped peace and diffused

tensions"). Donors, implementers and academics underlined the need for more meaningful consideration about the levels at which changes are both measurable and meaningful. This negotiation should be based on transparency, pragmatism and can be greatly facilitated by collaborating with local partners, who have a better knowledge of the terrain and can more easily identify the most significant changes.

- ***Disaggregating outcomes: individuals, groups, and polities***. This study is one among many that highlights the need for greater clarity about the ability of media to affect conflict. Drawing upon survey participant responses, Part III catalogues attitudes towards different evaluation techniques, including: audience surveys, focus groups, field experiments, content analysis, observations, case-studies, social network analysis and counterfactuals.

PART I. Monitoring and evaluating in complex information environments

Part I explores the challenges and opportunities of evaluating media interventions in conflict scenarios. It proceeds in three sections. First, It highlights the reasons behind the increasing demand for results-based programming. Second, it outlines what implementers feel are the main obstacles to providing evidence of efficacy. Finally, it probes the heterogeneity of approaches toward media's role in conflict and the corresponding challenges for evaluation.

A greater space for monitoring and evaluation

Donors, implementers and academics who participated in this study generally concur that M&E has become increasingly important component of media interventions in conflict countries. In recent years, M&E has evolved from a relatively marginal component used to assess if and how certain outputs are delivered to a more complex endeavour, aimed at providing feedback throughout a project and demonstrating its wider implications for society and specific peace building activities.

Many pointed towards the important, if under-realized, need for greater transparency of results: the more that program implementers share their results, the greater the opportunity for other actors to learn from their successes and failures, a critical means of improving the overall utility of media interventions.

The emphasis is on impact. Despite some concerns that the resources allocated to M&E are not substantial enough to adequately respond to the increasing demand for results, most implementers and academics involved in M&E activities identified a growing inclination on the part of donors to allocate a larger portion of the budget to research and M&E. As Mark Whitehouse, Vice President for media at IREX, summarized:

> *The growing emphasis on research and M&E is one of the positive changes I have seen in the field in the past few years. This needs to continue and to be taken seriously. When we are offered this possibility it is when we can develop stronger tools to understand what has gone well and what has gone wrong. If we can do a thorough analysis of our project this can benefit not only the project, but the whole organization, creating knowledge that can be shared across different projects, and with other organizations as well. We welcome this tendency. We have to prove that we have made a difference.*

Three main phenomena were perceived to be the drivers of this shift:

1. Greater calls for accountability and transparency among donors.

There is a stronger culture of transparency and accountability among donor organizations. As exemplified by Patrick Merienne, Conflict Adviser for DFID, in times of public sector reform and increasingly tight budgets, it is essential to be able to explain to citizens and political leaders why resources are allocated and what impact they have. As he elaborated:

> *Inputs and outputs are not acceptable any more. Maybe ten years ago as donors we could go back to tax payers and say, "Look! We funded twenty five trainings for journalists on peace media, and we assume that these people have now changed and are contributing to greater harmony". That was pure speculation. Now we have to go further. For example, we need to do a follow-up assessment of the journalists six months down the line, interview both the journalists and people on the ground to understand if the training has really changed what it claimed to change. We want outcomes. We want to know what this training has generated in those journalists and how those journalists are creating the change themselves. That is the outcome we are looking for. I know it is very complex to achieve, but I know that DFID and other donors are ready to allocate a fair share of the budget for the implementing agency to reach such goal.*

2. A need to respond to larger critiques about the utility of development aid.

A second, and related, cause of the greater importance accorded to M&E stems from the broader debate about aid effectiveness. The critiques offered by academics and practitioners to the shortcomings of foreign aid have created a stronger demand for evidence. These critiques have ranged from arguing that aid is ineffective, politicized or, worse, counterproductive (see for example, de Waal, 1997; Duffield, 2001; Easterly, 2006; Keen, 2007). In later sections, this document will explore how the very nature of media interventions in conflict situations, including the combination of volatile environments with the ambition of shaping behaviour or outcomes, makes distilling clear evidence of outcomes particularly challenging. However, some donors, especially those who are less familiar with media interventions, but are conscious of the power of the media and interested in making use of it, indicated that they would be more likely to invest in their deployment in conflict scenarios if there were greater clarity about what the media can and cannot achieve. Stefan Rummel-Shapiro, Senior M&E Advisor for the United Nations Peace Building Support Office, indicated, referring to his unit's interest in using the media to respond to tensions possibly emerging during the recent elections in Guinea:

> *We can only finance a project when we have a clear baseline beforehand and we know exactly what kind of change we can facilitate. We knew that for the presidential elections there were risks of a relapse to previous conflict. And we wanted to use different tools, and also the media, to prevent this from happening, but we could not find clarity about how certain changes could be attributed to the media and not to other factors. […] In a way it would be more useful to be more specific, to say that with a particular use of the media only a very specific thing can be reached, rather than claiming that the media can reduce tension in general. It could allow us to justify why we chose to use the media.*

This raises particular questions that will be addressed in Part II where, in an effort to unpack the current approaches and conceptions of media interventions, the links between assessments and evaluations will be explored.

3. The proliferation of new technologies means that media interventions are subject to greater scrutiny.

Finally, both donors and implementers feel increased accountability in the face of the presence of new communication technologies on the ground. People have unprecedented opportunities to criticize a project that they regard as either not producing the intended or claimed results or when the project is not properly implemented. As Mark Billera, Regional Coordinator for Africa at the Strategies Division of the Office of Democracy and Governance (USAID), pointed out:

> *The expectations have increased and there are so many mobile phones out there now that people can check on projects better. They can communicate with each other, reach out those in charge of a project, or have their voice heard.*

The greater demand for M&E activities and clearer evidence of the results of an intervention, however, has not translated into calls for specific methods. As the next section indicates, it is greater rigour in the research design, rather than the application of a specific technique that is demanded.

Theories and methods: complementarity and innovation

Representatives from donors' organizations commonly cited "focus groups", "interviews" and "surveys" as the methods they would expect to see in evaluations of media interventions. They asked for "more in-depth case studies" as well as for the "use of control groups when possible". They showed interest in innovative methodologies that could promote better understanding of the role and use of new media. Some

interviewers characterized this openness to various methods as evidence of a broader paradigm shift in the practice of evaluation in development contexts emerging in the past few years. As Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist for Search for Common Ground, described:

> *After the hype we had in the 1990s for Randomized Controlled Trials, we saw a move towards more qualitative approaches in the 2000s. Now we can say the main approach is "qual-quant", and organizations like The World Bank, USAID and DFID seem to have accepted and embraced it.*

Similarly, among implementers and academics interviewed there appears to be an appreciation of the complementarity of different methods, beyond the qualitative-quantitative divide. For both Mirjam de Bruijn, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Leiden, who pioneered the application of ethnographic methods for understanding the use of mobile phones in Central Africa, and for Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale University, who employed field experiments to study the influence of radio programs on behaviours and norms in countries such as Rwanda and the DRC, it is the capacity to embed research into a project from the very beginning, rather than the use of a particular method, that offers the possibility of providing the most illuminating results.

At the same time, academics lamented the common lack of understanding and articulation of theories of change among both donors and implementers. This lack of overarching research questions undermines the ability of evaluators to select the best combination of methodologies to assess the outcomes and impacts of a project. A theory of change refers to a clear indication of why certain activities are undertaken, what steps should lead to producing which effects, and the possible unintended consequences that occur as a result of the intervention. Despite the recognition of the difficulties raised by the complexity of conflict environments, many methodologists argued that if both implementers and donors could better define the goals of an intervention, and the assumptions that guide their decisions, better evaluations would result. As Devra Moehler, Assistant Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, indicated:

> *Too often projects are up and running before a theory of change is formulated. Usually the activities are decided first and only at a later stage the organization develops a theory explaining how the activities are going to lead to a desirable outcome. I realise there are many logistical reasons why this happens, but it is really hard to evaluate when there isn't a specific theory of change. You just can't measure everything. You need to have that theory in*

> *order to know which measure you can use and to explain why something was a success or had negative effects. You should try to be as specific as possible.*

Questions of theories of change are closely linked to the heterogeneity of objectives both within and between different types of media interventions. Is the main goal of the intervention stability? Sustainability? Democracy promotion? As explained below, the clear articulation of these goals is further undermined by the different mandates each organizations involved in media and conflict perceive to be a priority.

The heterogeneity of the approaches to media and conflict

As indicated in similar studies exploring the opinions of donors, implementers and academics on media assistance (Myers, 2009), media and governance (Lines, 2009) and media and conflict (Loewenberg & Bonde, 2007), the widespread perception of the significance of the media in promoting different types of change has motivated various organizations to support media initiatives, but in the absence of a coordinated and common vision, different organizations choose different "entry points".

Multilateral organizations tend to approach the issue of media and conflict through the lenses of their institutional mandate. For example, UNESCO takes as its entry point the promotion of free flows of information. As Mogens Schmidt, Director of the Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace at UNESCO explained:

> *UNESCO's mandate is to build peace in the minds of men. […] And according to UNESCO's constitution we also have the mandate to promote and defend free flow of information. This means that in any member state we work together with the governments in order to establish conditions for free media, free circulation of information and knowledge, and of course we are in a constant dialogue with media professionals. […] Then, when you have countries that have fallen into conflict, there is no reason for us not to work there, so we will still work in these countries with the main objectives of seeing how the media can contribute to reconciliation and peace building or conflict resolution, and the re-installation of legislation that is conducive to freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of information.*

For organizations like The World Bank, good governance, not the media, is the priority, which makes the particular field of media and conflict even more removed from its core goals. As Henriette von Kaltenborn-Stachau, a member of the Fragile & Conflict Affected Countries Group at the World Bank, articulates:

> *The interest for media and conflict at the World Bank is fairly limited, but we recognize that the media has a role to play in promoting transparency, accountability and good governance. These issues are central to our mandate, and we are interested in looking at the media as a contributing factor to achieving these governance goals. We are aware of the role media can play in conflict countries, be it to promote peace or to incite violence. Naturally, the role of the media depends on the specifics of conflict and the country situation. If there is an indication that the media have been part of the problem, or can be used to mitigate a problem we take note of it. That said, the Bank's business model mandates that Bank projects are executed with and through the national government, which limits our ability to promote media specific project.*

*B*ilateral donors seem to adopt an even less focused approach. Since they tend not to have a specific mandate, but engage in a very wide spectrum of activities, from education, to health, to conflict. The media are considered as relevant to a range of different kinds of activities, but because they are secondary considerations there is little coordination of media programs. As explained by Patrick Merienne:

> *We are working in support of the broad international development agenda, which is framed by the Millennium Development Goals. So we have different streams of work linked to different issues: economic development, health, education, conflict, and so forth. For each of those strands there may be an advisor, someone working on communication, which means that in the end we may invest quite a lot of resources in communication, but it will be embedded in some of those strands, so in the end it will appear as health, education and not as media. In terms of conflict there have been just a few initiatives that we supported directly, but then we can do work through the BBC or other organizations.*

The breadth of a bilateral donors' mandate often affects the capacity of donor organizations to engage in research activities and make a proper use of M&E results. Evensmo Ivar, Senior Adviser at Norad, for example, admitted that:

> *There is a problem with the lack of human resources. We simply cannot follow these issues, as we would like to. So there is little connection between research and programming in the media sector. And for the media the*

> *thing is that it is very fragmentary, there is budget here and there for the media but it is not coordinated.*

Even in the case of implementing agencies, different organizations tend to approach the issue of media and conflict from different perspectives. Among the organizations represented in this survey, only Search for Common Ground and Fondation Hirondelle have a specific focus on media and conflict. Other organizations operating in this area see operations in conflict countries as an extension of their broader mandate.

Overall, it appears that the multiplicity of entry points into the field of media and conflict undermines the process of coordinating efforts and resources into understanding what specific contribution the media can provide to conflict situations. This emerged as an area where there can be great scope for developing synergies and pooling resources among different organizations.

From intervening through the media to meeting information needs

In order to increase the effectiveness of an intervention, donors, implementers and academics stressed the need to better understand the context in which the intervention has to take place. However, different stakeholders articulated this need in different ways. While academics and implementers cited a need to move from focusing on the media per se towards a more complex understanding of how information flows though different channels, donor organizations tended to take a more media-centred approach.

James Deane, Head of Policy at the BBC World Service Trust, illustrated how his organization is increasingly interested in mapping "information needs".

> *Our principal research focus is not on the media. The principal focus is on the citizens, on the audience. The scope of research is understanding first what people have access to, what media they use in their everyday lives, in general, how they live. Then, from this understanding, we build an information and communication strategy. […]*
>
> *I think there is an international trend at the moment. We have been taking this approach for quite some time, but it was considered relatively unusual. But it seems that we are now moving towards a new media development phase, where organizations are more focused on meeting the information and communication needs of the people. They are somewhat disengaging from the needs of the media, from what is needed to improve the media as institutions, towards an interest for what people need.*

Kathleen Reen, Vice-President for Asia, Environment and New Media at Internews, further underlined the importance of focusing on information needs, especially in conflict environments.

> *When we intervene in a conflict scenario, we do not start thinking about the kinds of media that we want to use. We try to assess the type of information needs the population may have as a result of a particular conflict, crisis, or natural disaster and then we deploy the tools that are needed to address those particular information needs.*

Various stakeholders cited rapid changes in the available communication technologies as a principal reason why a new approach to evaluation is needed. Not surprisingly, mobile phones were pointed out as one of the most important "game changers", in the context of larger informational transformations. As Andrew Blum, Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute for Peace, explained:

> *Among the most important changes there has been the advent of a "many to many model'. This is very important for peacemakers. For example, the project we are working on now, "Communication for peace-building", was supposed to be called "media for peace-building" or "social media for peace-building". But then we realized that we had problems defining what was media and what was not, so we decided that the focus should be on communication per se.*

At the same time, and still recognizing the relevance of technological innovations, some stakeholders stressed the importance of understanding how new tools integrate into different cultural contexts and exploring traditional communication habits in combination with the longer terms patterns of adoption and adaptation of new technologies. In increasingly rich communication environments, the relevance of a particular medium cannot be assumed anymore; it has to be proven empirically. According to Gerry Power, Managing Director of InterMedia UK:

> *We have to really understand what and who is the most important in the contexts where we intervene. Is it the imam, the bishop or the media? NGOs may provide important information though particular channels set up by the donors or supported with donor money, but we have to check where they are in the list of those recognized as "influential players" by the people on the ground.*

From a different, but complementary perspective Mirjam de Bruijn, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Leiden, remarked that, especially in the case of remote and marginalized populations, it is important to study the symbolic value a particular medium holds. The way in which a medium fits in longer-term patterns of domination and suppression may shape its perception and use among different populations. With reference to the conflict in Chad she illustrated that:

> *Some people realized that if they have a phone they become traceable. This behaviour has to be understood in the long history of fear and mistrust between these populations and the government. People are so afraid that they do not want relate with modern technology. But you would not understand the reasons of this behaviour if you do not study the history of the conflict.*

Two main principles seem to inform this more open approach. The first--as explained by Ben O'Loughlin, Reader in International Relations at Royal Holloway University--is detecting the specific relationship people develop with the media in a given locality.

> *We should get a feel of how people live with the media, who they exchange information with, how they relate to institutional information, the information coming from the school, from religious institutions.*

The second principle is asking questions that better suit a transformed communications environment. As Devra Moehler suggested:

> *We have to start asking people how they get information. "How do you get information about facts?" We should not just ask if they like a radio or not, if they trust it or not. We should be moving away from focusing exclusively on attitudes. Communication is something that goes beyond the media.*

These principles highlight the need to develop new tools and better use existing ones, in order to capture the increasing complexity of the media ecologies in conflict countries. Part II and III, focus more specifically on how these principles operate in practice and explores attitudes toward different evaluation tools and strategies.

PART II. The knowledge gap: how research can inform programming in conflict scenarios

As highlighted in Part I, donors, implementers, and academics alike feel that a lack of a clear understanding about how and why the media can be used as an instrument of change impedes the evaluation process. This lack of agreed upon theories of change is even more significant in conflict countries, where the conditions in which the intervention takes place are likely to vary significantly. Moreover, once they are formulated, how do you ensure they are consistent with the situation on the ground? Embedding research in the earliest stages of a project, and allowing it to continue informing project development, can be a way to encourage donors and implementers to elaborate theories of change that are contextually based and adaptable to shifting conditions on the ground.

Part II explores perspectives on the tools that are employed by different actors involved in media operations in different phases of a project.

1. For the assessment and mapping of the terrain,
2. For the monitoring of the activities,
3. For the final evaluation.

It highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and indicates, where possible, the connections or disconnections between these different phases and what they mean for the overall success of a project and the possibility of capturing its contributions. This section does not aim to be exhaustive, and it largely relies on the experiences of donors, implementers and academics that participated in the study. However, in line with the spirit informing this paper, we seek to organize information in ways that can trigger further discussion and incorporate new data and contributions from other actors and organizations operating in the field.

Assessments and Mappings

In the initial phases of a project, when the context of an intervention has to be analysed in order to design appropriate strategies, donors, implementers and academics tend to adopt different instruments that have the potential of complementing each other, but in practice do so to a very limited extent.

Donors

In the past few years, donor organizations have developed increasingly comprehensive and elaborate frameworks with which to assess the context in which they operate. With particular reference to media and conflict, the most relevant are arguably the tools used to map political context, because of their focus on capturing what the political conditions for change are, and which windows of opportunity may be open to different kinds of interventions. Among these instruments are USAID's Democracy and Governance Assessment, DFID's Drivers of Change, SIDA's Power Analysis, and GTZ's Governance Questionnaire. They are based on the assumption that country strategies should be informed by a more profound understanding of the political and historical context and by a better grasp of where power lies in society, both at the macro and at the micro level. They can help both donor and implementing agencies develop their

normative mandate and provide a realistic assessment of what can, and what is unlikely to be achieved. They are usually drafted by teams of external consultants, combining different analytical skills and in-depth knowledge of the place being assessed, and provide a broad picture of the political economy of a country that can be used to inform subsequent assessments focusing on more specific issues. These assessments could also contribute to shaping a media intervention, but to date this has very rarely been the case. Two main reasons have emerged as the most significant in explaining why this has not happened.

First, similarly to what was pointed out in the previous section, with regard to the lack of a clear mandate for the media among donor agencies, the fact that none of these instruments include a specific dimension for communication and information represents an obstacle in seeing the media as an area of intervention, or even as a tool that can support wider strategies aimed at preventing and addressing conflict, as well as reforming governance or other areas. As James Deane, Head of Policy at the BBC World Service Trust, lamented:

> *One of the things we have been discussing with DFID is that they need to incorporate the media much more centrally into the Drivers of Change. We don't know of many more powerful drivers of change in society than the massive increase in access to information and mobile telephony and it is not clear how those issues are integrated into either the Drivers of Change or into DFID's risk analysis. Media continue to be a fairly peripheral component of the analysis, so we have to develop our own analysis.*

The second reason why these kinds of instruments have contributed little to informing media intervention depends, as further detailed below, on the tendency of implementers to focus mostly on mapping the media and communication, while they engage less in the analysis of power in society and of the political economy of a country. As Henriette von Kaltenborn-Stachau, a member of the Fragile & Conflict Affected Countries Group at The World Bank, pointed out:

> *I would like to see more work focusing on the intersection between the media and the state. We need a connection point to balance the build-up of demand for and supply or information. The debate among experts about media development in fragile and conflict-affected situations has been centred on a somewhat fixed set of issues it seems. To be more effective and less stove-piped, this debate needs to widen and link the debate on the media with the current debate on governance and state building.*

*G*reater efforts seem to be needed on the part of both governance and media experts to better integrate the tools they respectively employ to assess the terrain where they operate and aim at producing change.

Implementers

Similarly to donor agencies, some of the implementers have developed assessment tools. Many of these tools are not necessarily linked to a particular project, such as the IREX Media Sustainability Index, which is used to map the status of the media across different countries. However, as Mark Whitehouse, Vice-President for Media at IREX, explained, the assessment of an individual country may also be used for national media development projects.

> *We have a variety of tools we use for assessments. For example our Media Sustainability Index is used to provide us with a picture of the media environment in a specific country. But we use it also in combination with other instruments provided by organizations such as Reporters Sans Frontières and Freedom House. These allow us to get an idea of a country and of its main challenges. Then we look at different actors operating in the media to understand who has influence and on what. Is it mass influence? Is it influence on elites? Is this actor credible? And what is it its potential for change? Can it change? What can the change produce among other actors?*

Other organizations, while still relying on internal resources and experts to assess the media environment in a country where they operate, may refer to frameworks that are developed by other organizations and focus on some specific aspects in accordance with the type of projects implemented. Among the different frameworks available, UNESCO's Media Development Indicators emerged as the most widely used among the organizations contacted for the research. Finn Rasmussen, Programme Coordinator for Media and Conflict at IMS, for example, illustrated that:

> *Before we start we do a comprehensive media assessment. A joint mission, composed by international experts, staff from IMS and local experts visits the country. We interview people in the local media community, donors, government institutions involved in the media and, more broadly, in other projects looking at governance and peace building. We follow the UNESCO media indicators as a main tool to do an assessment. And we can further operationalize some of them to apply to the specificity of the situation, especially to the conflict situation.*

Organizations such as the BBC World Service Trust or Search for Common Ground, which have a dedicated research unit and are often involved also in programming, may rely on different methods that are variously combined according to the context and scope of each project rather than on a template framework. According to James Deane:

> *We place a very strong emphasis on making sure that all of our programmes and our outputs are very much informed by research, that we build a solid formative understanding of the context within which we are operating. If you are going to bring together conflicting parties, if you are going to raise issues that are very*

> *sensitive within the societies where you are working, you must have a really solid understanding of what those issues are from the perspective of the audiences themselves.*

Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist for Search for Common Ground, cited an innovative methodology that was employed by a SFCG project in Nepal, aimed at mapping power within the community before and after the exposure to a youth-oriented radio soap opera. This methodology was piloted in response to the particular situation experienced in Nepal and was not the emanation of a pre-existing framework.

> *The people in our sample were asked to map the conflict itself by drawing a scheme of who has power in the community, of who causes conflict and who helps to solve conflict. And after the exposure we did the map again to see if anything had changed. […] We could do that because we had the trust of the community, it was a long time that our researchers had been working there and they were well known.*

The kind of mapping Ratiba Taouti-Cherif mentions is narrower than the ones illustrated above and can act also as a baseline to understand which kind of change an intervention may produce. More details about how broader assessments and mappings on the one hand and more focused baselines on the other can be constructed in combination are provided below.

Academics

As compared to donors and implementers, academics who were asked to provide insights about how to map the communication environment to support a media intervention in a conflict scenario, suggested using even more open frameworks. This was in line with the argument illustrated in the previous section that, in an increasingly complex media environment, it is important to prove and to understand which media are the most important and how they are used alone and in combination, rather than assuming their relevance. Mirjam de Bruijn, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Leiden, for example, suggested that:

> *You should start by understanding the communication ecology of a particular location. You have to map what are the ICTs available in each particular locality. Because a message can be received and transmitted in different ways according to which other technologies and channels are available in that locality. So, you need to understand if together with a radio, there is access to the internet, or to mobile phones, or if a particular way to transmit communication traditionally is still there or not. This is a descriptive kind of research. You go from village to village, and you observe and you describe and you talk with people.*

Similarly, Ben O'Loughlin, Reader in International Relations at Royal Holloway University, argued that, in order to know that your intervention is relevant for a specific context:

> *You should map the power structure, where authority lies, both in terms of the media institutions and the public authorities, and then any other kind of religious leaders or any other kind of institution that has authority. Because you are going to have to work with that. You can't really work against this kind of established order, unless it's a very, very disordered situation. The audience and the journalists themselves will have expectations and you kind of can't disrupt them too much, so I guess any mapping has to start with that mapping of the power structure. And then you should try to provide a feel, a qualitative feel for how people live with media in that society or that context.*

In order to understand how people live with the media, different strategies and methods were proposed, variously combining observation and interrogation. For example, Mirjam de Bruijn, referring to her work among conflict-affected people in Central Africa, clarified how instruments like oral histories can help understanding not just which channels people use to communicate, or which media they consume, but also the value that is attached to communication and the media.

> *You can do an historical mapping, using oral histories for example. We did something like that in Chad and in Sudan, mapping both communication and mobility. In situations of conflict people often have to migrate. And in many cases communication is not there, is not with them, but there is a desperate need for communication. So, through oral histories you can trace the need of the people for communication, what the media mean for them. For example in the research we did in Chad we mapped how people who are dispersed tried to stay in touch with each other. Before, writing letters was the main way to do that, but now it is clearly disappearing. Now it is the time of mobile phones, and if you put it in an historical perspective you can really understand how much communication matters and how you can provide the kind of communication that is needed.*

Ben O'Loughlin, among other methods, suggested following particular stories or pieces of information, through a combination of observation and interview techniques.

> *You can pick up a story coming from the Diasporic media for example, and see where it flows, how it gets adapted and translated. You cannot really do a systematic and comprehensive study of the relationship between, for example, the radio in the home country and media in the*

> *Diaspora community, but you can try to create a kind of narrative of a piece of news. You follow the story.*

Sarah Oates, Professor of Political Communication at the University of Glasgow, along similar lines, but looking mostly at online communication, suggested looking at particular events to understand what people care about the most and through which means they tend to mobilize.

> *You look at what we call firestorms. You look at big spikes in activities and try to understand what the trends are there. So, you should look at events, rather than at processes. Sometimes we aim a little bit too high, at democratization processes. It is difficult to influence that, especially in the short term. But if you look at particular events, and see how people get mobilized, you would know where to intervene.*

Assessments of the kind illustrated above, as employed by donors, implementers and academics, tend to offer broad perspectives on different aspects that can be relevant for an intervention, from an understanding of the specific opportunities of promoting change, to a mapping of the media scene, to the exploration of how people gather and disseminate information. They have the potential to be used together, even if this has often not been the case. At the same time it is important to note that these assessments tend to be too broad to provide workable baselines. For example, the IREX Media Sustainability Index can be a very useful tool for highlighting critical areas of attention in the media of a particular country. But, as Mark Whitehouse explained:

> *Interventions are not usually large enough to claim that we have influenced the overall score of the media in a given country. It certainly depends of the size of the country. For example in Montenegro we had a huge project, probably the biggest, if you look at per-capita investment in media development. But it was an isolated case. So, in that case we can claim to have promoted a kind of change that can be measured by the Index, but otherwise our interventions are more focused and also the evaluation has to be more focused.*

Assessments and mappings can help better define particular strategies and theories of change, but it is narrower baselines that can allow capturing outputs, outcomes and possibly impacts of an intervention. Assessments can inform the construction of a baseline; greater integration between these different components of a project could be encouraged. As Devra Moehler, Assistant Professor of Communication, at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, suggested:

> *I think it is a useful distinction to gather information first in order to design a programme and gather information at a later stage in order to evaluate it, but I don't think that it is useful to have one only at the beginning and one only at the end. They should both be on-going. The assessment should allow re-focusing if it is needed, if the*

situation is changing. The evaluation at the same time should be planned at the beginning, in order to collect baseline data. And it would be good if the people who have done the assessment could be reached also to help providing a structure for the evaluation, but this does not happens.

As explained below, having a clear baseline can also help implementers understand if their activities are leading towards expected results. However, the resources needed to embed research in this phase of the project tend to be scarce and implementers tend to rely on other means to receive feedback.

Monitoring and re-focusing

Interviewees, almost across the board, recognized the importance of multi-stage research that informs the development of the project, especially in conflict scenarios. Continuing assessments are critical to refocusing goals and actions, if needed. At the same time, however, it emerged that adjustments to an intervention were more likely to be informed by consultations with relevant stakeholders than by research. The practice for an implementer to consult with donors and local stakeholders on a regular bases and possibly readjust the focus of the project was considered positive. At the same time the fact that M&E experts and researchers do not commonly participate in this phase may threaten the results of an overall project. A few excerpts from interviews with different types of actors involved in a project may help clarify this point. Finn Rasmussen, Programme Coordinator for Media and Conflict at IMS, illustrates the perspective of implementers.

I can use the example of Zimbabwe. We have stakeholders meetings with donors, representatives of the media and other organizations. It is a form of on-going assessment, where we can refocus our strategy, share the results of our activities and decide together what can be improved. So we can do it in a collaborative way and make sure it is relevant.

As the quotes below, from Andrew Blum, Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute for Peace, and Patrick Merienne, Conflict Adviser for DFID, indicate, this practice is accepted and often encouraged, especially by those donors who consider themselves active players in specific environments.

We try to be quite flexible. We require our grantees to have a clear plan, but we understand that there is a learning curve. Actually there should be more education among our grantees, because they may think that we are more rigid than we actually are. Obviously changes have to be motivated by the desire of achieving better results, not by poor management.
- Andrew Blum

Engaging donors is a good practice. There are some organisations that see donors as sponsors which will

> *endorse their vision. This can be the case of charities and foundations in particular. But many other donors are actors as well as supporters of their actors. As donors we have a programme, we have a vision, and we are going to support implementing agencies which enable us to implement our vision or who have a similar vision as ours. And then you have to maintain this communication, to engage and if you need more resources and you can show that the results you provided are good, there is absolutely no problem to go and speak with two or three donors and say "Look, that is what we want to do now. Because the situation now is different. Does this fit with your plans?"*
> *-Patrick Merienne*

Flexibility is welcome, and especially in conflict scenarios can lead to better programming. At the same time, this need for adaptability provides challenges for monitoring. As Devra Moehler suggested:

> *If the objectives and activities change, the baseline you have collected at the beginning may not be relevant anymore, and in general it may become difficult to evaluate the results unless you do another piece of research.*

In order to understand how the planned changes are going to affect the possibility of doing rigorous evaluations, it may be a good practice to involve researchers in this phase a well. If research is already embedded in the project, the involvement of researchers in this phase may offer the opportunity to use some of the findings to test the hypotheses and proposals advanced by other stakeholders.

Evaluation

Evaluations normally take place at the end of a project, and in conflict scenarios, where constant adjustments may be needed in order to follow moving targets, it may be possible to understand what has worked and which results have been achieved only in retrospect. However, as most academics and M&E experts contacted for this study pointed out, evaluations can offer clear answers especially, and in some cases solely, when they are planned in the very early stages of a project.

Two main challenges emerge. First, typically the urgent need for intervention precludes incorporating evaluation techniques from the onset of a project. As Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale University, suggested, referring to the case of radio programming, "if you really want to measure impact and find some sort of causality in what you are transmitting it is very important that you work on the research design from the very beginning of a programme". Unfortunately, the urgency of intervening immediately in a conflict environment often prevents this from happening. Second, in order to solve the problem of attribution (i.e. to demonstrate that a particular change is caused by the intervention and not by other phenomena) it is necessary to focus on types of change that are often quite narrow, and, when the scope of an intervention is impacting on a conflict, or preventing one from erupting, these may

be considered too narrow to be of interest to donors. As Mark Billera, at USAID, explained:

> *The levels where it is possible to provide attribution are not necessarily those donors or other actors want to hear about. So, an organization may be asked to show that its intervention has produced change at a level that is high enough so that different actors can understand why the intervention was relevant. But often this is very difficult to obtain.*

Therefore, on the one hand there is a perception that the media can be powerful tools for conflict prevention, but on the other hand the measurable changes that a media intervention can produce may be too limited for the organizations sponsoring such interventions to justify their investments. From the limited sample this study is based on, a number of strategies emerged which can possibly help mitigate this challenge.

1. Transparency

Donor agency representatives in particular, stressed that transparency usually pays back. If a choice has to be made between claiming to achieve higher-level results that may not be reached or adequately measured narrower ones that can be more clearly identified, the second type of strategy is likely to be more successful. Stephan Rummel-Shapiro, M&E expert for the UN Peace Funds, said, "if we could prove that at least some limited results could be achieved, for us this could be an entry point to work with the media". From a different perspective, and stressing more the readiness of organizations of being forthcoming regarding their objectives and their capacity to reach them, Eric Newton, Vice President for Journalism at the Knight Foundation, argued that:

> *In our era, knowledge can be shared and we can learn from our mistakes. I would ask people working in conflict areas to be really honest regarding what they are achieving or are not achieving. Transparency is essential. It is a tool for fairness. I have seen too much of a tendency among NGOs to say that everything they do is great, to defend themselves as institutions as to access more funds. But in our age we do not need that. If an organization is committed towards what it is doing and wants to make things better on the ground it should be forthcoming about its mistakes. At Knight we continued funding organizations that made mistakes, also big ones, but they were open about them and we could all learn from those mistakes. We are in a new era and also NGOs should understand that.*

2. Pragmatism

Most actors operating in conflict environments understand that in such circumstances on the ground conditions typically supersede strict adherence to social science research

principles. While still striving to be as rigorous as possible, organizations that are able to come up with innovative research plans that adapt to the situation on the ground seem to often be rewarded. As Ratiba Taouti-Cherif indicated:

> *When we operate in conflict scenarios we try to be very pragmatic with our sampling. The size may be reduced, we may have to disaggregate, we can reach only certain areas. In brief, we try to come up with a good enough sample plan. […] And then we try to experiment, for example replacing Likert scales with other instruments, or using role-play. But then we also have to be as clear as possible with our colleagues and partners about what we can claim from the research. If we sample five hundred young people we cannot claim the results are representative of the nation.*

Patrick Merienne cited his experience with research in Afghanistan:

> *We use quite a lot of surveys. And in many of these products the researchers are very upfront with what can or cannot be claimed. They should be praised for being up front; there is a massive caveat about the quality of their survey. They are not trying to sell their survey as the panacea and something perfectly scientific and as a true representation of the perception of what the population of Afghanistan think. They explain, you know, security has prevented is from accessing some part of the country, that does not fit with international standard for surveys, etc. And we appreciate that.*

3. Partnering with local organizations

Perhaps most importantly, those surveyed noted the challenges of simply parachuting in evaluators. They stressed that by working and partnering with local institutions it becomes possible to employ techniques and capture changes that are often overlooked by external evaluators. For Gerry Powers, Managing Director of Intermedia UK:

> *It is by building the capacity of local institutions, by providing them with research tools that can be combined with the deep knowledge of the terrain these institutions have, that you can really communicate to other players what is changing and what is not.*

Peter Mwesige, Executive Director of the African Centre for Media Excellence, further stressed this point,

> *This is the only solution if you want to work in complex environments, and if you want to make sure that first you are really helping the situation to get better and then that you can understand what kind of change you are promoting.*

Andrew Blum provided an example of successful partnerships with organization combining different strengths:

> *We have been really happy to work with international organizations that had a long story of collaboration with local institutions and local universities, because they managed to do what would have not been possible with consultants, nor with just local academics.*

Part III focuses more specifically on concrete examples of methods that can be used to capture the changes occurring at different levels, among individuals, groups, and in the society at large, as a result of an intervention and it will address also those that can be employed through an active support of local research organizations.

PART III. Disaggregating outcomes: individuals, groups, polities

In the past few years, scholars and organizations studying and working with the media in conflict scenarios have tried to both challenge existing assumptions about and to better understand media's role in conflict. In order to add more nuance and rigour to the common claim that media can be drivers of change, there have been calls for more comprehensive and frequent impact assessments and for a clearer articulation of the level and target of analysis (see for example Aday et al. 2010). Is it social norms and attitudes that a project wants to affect? Or is it the relationship among or between groups and individuals? Or is it the legal and structural framework within which different forms of communications take place?

This section addresses the calls for identifying methods best suited for capturing significance at different levels of analysis:

1. At the level of individual transformations,
2. At the level of groups and organizations,
3. At the level of the national or sub-national polity.

Individual transformations

Reflecting upon the changes that an intervention may have on individuals (e.g. on media consumers) most participants tended to focus on programmes such as soap operas or talk shows designed with a certain purpose (e.g. to promote dialogue or diffuse tension). While donor representatives expressed interest in identifying the specific contributions of other exercises like journalism training at the individual level, there was agreement that providing attribution for those activities at this level may be difficult.

Audience surveys, focus groups and field experiments were cited as the most common research tools used to identify individual level changes. But utilizing these methods in quickly shifting conflict environments poses significant challenges.

Audience surveys

Conflict environments pose specific challenges for survey researchers For example, populations included in a sample may not be reachable because of security threats, research may be perceived as "political", or the level of education of the population being surveyed may preclude standard survey practices. For example, asking individuals with low literacy levels to express their level of agreement or disagreement along scales is particularly problematic. Additional obstacles emerged as particularly acute. Some donors and implementers, while praising attempts to produce sound social science research, warned that academics often get "too wrapped up in the research design." They pay too much attention to tools and methods, while forgetting that interviewees may not tell the truth, or not trust the research process itself. Another key

issue that was expressed with particular clarity by Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist for Search for Common Ground, was that people living in conflict scenarios often suffer from survey fatigue.

> *In Sierra Leone a lady who was included in our sample refused to participate because she had been surveyed in the past by other organizations and she said, "You keep coming here but nothing in my life has changed, so I don't want to participate anymore".*

Her words underscore how in the case of media interventions and of development assistance in general individuals participating to a research should not just be considered as "bearers of information", but as owners of a project. They have expectations and they demand that these expectations are met by organizations claiming to be promoting change. These ethical and methodological challenges may be assuaged in part, through working more closely with local institutions with better insight into a particular community or issue.

Different interviewees regularly framed mobile phone diffusion as an opportunity for researchers to supplement or supplant traditional surveys in order to better understand the effect of a project on the population. Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale University, for example, mentioned the strategy adopted by a South African NGO producing soap operas to reduce domestic violence.

> *At the end of each episode we gave a hotline number that they could call. In social psychology we call this a "channel factor": it is an opportunity to channel a particular behaviour so we can see if the soap opera was effective or not.*

James Deane, Head of Policy at the BBC World Service Trust, indicated the possibility of doing quick surveys using mobile phones in particular circumstances.

> *You can do a kind of quiz, with two or three questions, a sort of audience survey, but the problem is getting enough information, because you do not get anything about the demographics and the overall media usage. But if you need a quick feedback on a campaign that's definitely something you can look at.*

At the same time, some of the same interviewees warned about according too much importance to the tool itself, rather than looking broadly at the context in which the people may or may not be able to use it. James Deane continued:

> *This cannot be the single measure of impact. Sometimes the nature of the reality in which somebody is living affects the possibility of participating or responding. In some places the first thing that someone would do is not going to pick up their mobile phone and send us a text or call us. It may good to have a hotline, to denounce, and to register how many people use it, but you cannot consider it the only measure of impact.*

Patrick Merienne, Conflict Adviser for DFID, expressed a similar caveat.

> *The feedback is distorted because you risk getting the two extremes. You get the people who call to complain and you get the people who bother to call to compliment you. You don't get the people in the middle who can't be bothered to call, but might have been affected in a more subtle manner.*

Using to mobile phones as a tool to measure impact may also be an expression of a more general transformation in research in developing contexts. As Devra Moehler, Assistant Professor of Communication, at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, explained:

> *To capture the effect of a programme on individuals, household surveys are still the best way. But there have been some shifts with time. There are fewer questions about attitudes, how much we like or dislike a particular programme or radio station. And there has been an increasing focus on facts, on behavioural change, linking communication to specific actions, to something that you can observe. For example when a radio station promotes a particular meeting, it would be great to know how many people go, or if you open a hotline to report on violence as part of your campaign, you can see how many people text you.*

Observation can be a particularly powerful way to understand whether a campaign has been successful or if a series of activities aimed at producing change have had an impact on the ground. As illustrated below, observation can be particularly powerful to track change in collective behaviours.

Focus groups

Focus groups were widely regarded as the most natural tool for understanding how individuals react to a programme, especially in conflict scenarios. They are relatively

easy to set up, they allow for balancing different strata that are relevant for a particular research – gender, age, ethnicity, etc. – and they enable researchers to collect relatively unstructured reactions from a target population. Among donors, there seems to be an expectation that research on a media intervention will contain some data from focus groups. At the same time, a number of shortcomings were highlighted. Focus groups were considered to provide useful feedback for improving programming but not for isolating how messages conveyed in a particular programme are integrated or used by individuals. While the reactions to a particular programme may be quite spontaneous, focus group participants remain aware that they are taking part in a research project. As Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, lamented, "there tends to be the idea among people working in this area that anybody can do focus groups because we are journalists, trainers, we know how to facilitate a discussion. But the problem comes when we have to analyse them. More rigour is needed in the analysis of focus groups".

In order to balance these weaknesses, focus groups need to be paired with other methods, and/or undergirded by more rigorous research designs, including control groups and observations. Projects were also mentioned where focus groups were used creatively to connect different target groups. As an example, a group of radio journalists who participated in a focus group were taught how to conduct one so that they could incorporate the feedback into their programmes. In this model, audience members who participated in the focus group had the opportunity of seeing their input incorporated into the programme.

Field experiments

Field experiments were considered particularly suitable for testing causal arguments. They have been used for quite some time in other areas of development work, such as health and education, and have more recently been included in the monitoring and evaluation of governance programmes. According to the donors, implementers and academics who participated to this study, there is a growing interest in applying them to the study of media interventions; but to date, there have been very few examples, especially in conflict countries.

Donors expressed the fear that field experiments may be too expensive and that they be more useful in identifying what does not work rather than what does work. Conversely, academics who have been using field experiments maintained that, if they are embedded into a programme from the very beginning, they could give important feedback that can improve programming. According to Elizabeth Levy Paluck, who used field experiments in countries such as Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo:

> *Having it clear in your mind what your research design is when a project starts will help you keep the costs low. And then it all depends on the kind of research question you want to ask. If you want to test the causal impact of a*

> *programme on the population, the best instruments that you can use are randomized controlled trials.*

Field experiments involving media programmes require having non- listener/viewer control groups, or groups that are exposed to different kinds of programmes or to the same one through different media. For example, a soap opera was evaluated by comparing three different groups: (1) independent viewers (people who watched it at home), (2) people who watched the episodes on a mobile cinema unit, (3) people who had never seen the program. In order to increase the representativeness of the sample, randomness has to be added to the research design.

Academics stressed that field experiments are particularly powerful tests of causal arguments and identifying intervention effects, but in order to do so the units of analysis have to be kept particularly small. Also, they tend focus on the media per se, or on the message conveyed through a particular medium, but they are less fit to answer questions about information flows and how individuals integrate particular media messages into their overall life or media experience.

Groups and organizations

At group and organizational level, two sets of tools emerged as the most significant: content analysis and participant observation.

Content analysis

Content analysis was frequently cited as a popular means of monitoring and evaluating journalism training and other capacity building activities. It is employed in different phases of a project: at the beginning, to provide an indication of how the main actors and issues are represented and to offer a baseline highlighting which issues should be addressed most urgently; during an intervention, offering an overview of how specific actors, issues and events are covered and possibly detecting if a project is having an effect on the journalists and the outlets it is operating with; and in the end, understanding how trainings or capacity building activities have affected the ability of journalists to write on certain issues, and possibly if this has had an impact on the media scene at large. As Mark Whitehouse, Vice President for Media at IREX, explained:

> *Content analysis can be used to check how things are proceeding, if they are improving or not. And if nothing is changing, it can offer useful indications about how to refocus the target and modify an intervention.*

Content analysis is suitable for medium and long-term projects. These instruments are quite unlikely to capture the effects of short-term projects. Moreover, journalism training commonly focuses on professionalization, but professionalization is an abstract concept that is difficult to capture. One might examine it in terms of the tone of

reporting, at the use of sources, and at other parameters, but content analysis is unlikely to capture whether an outlet has become 'more professional'. Sarah Oates, Professor of Political Communication at the University of Glasgow, put this problem in a larger context.

> *Professionalism has a lot of cultural connotations. A British journalist will interpret it in a very different way than an Italian or a Russian journalist. And in a certain context a certain kind of professionalism can be more relevant than another one. You cannot force the very Western concept of journalistic profession on journalists in different countries.*

Training projects focusing on specific issues (e.g. the environment) may be easier to capture. Giovanna Maiola, Media Advisor at the Osservatorio di Pavia, illustrated how different changes can be tracked.

> *If we take the example of a programme focusing on gender, which is very important dimension in conflict situation, we can look at three things to understand the impact. First of all you look at the time or the space that is given to women. And if it has increased you can register it as a good result. But then you have to look at the issues too, because they can just be given the chance to talk about "soft issues" which reinforce stereotypes. And finally you look at the tone. Are things portrayed in a positive or negative light? If you combine these three dimensions you can have a good representation of what is changing.*

Content analysis may also serve as a negotiation tool with editors and journalists, as a way to make them more aware of certain biases and of the fact that these can be measured. As Finn Rasmussen, Programme Coordinator for Media and Conflict at IMS, explained:

> *In many cases the editors themselves have never seen these kinds of data and they can be very interested. No particular media should be single out and indicated as particularly good or bad, but it is useful to look at particular trends. This can be offered to the papers themselves as a service, to give them an image of how and what they are reporting, so that they know. This is interesting for the editors and managers. And it can be used to raise important issues about balancing and propose new approaches.*

Similarly Giovanna Maiola argued that this can also be the case also with international media, or with media operations aimed at targeting a particular country.

> *Media monitoring can tell you a lot about the local media but also about the international media, because in a situation of conflict or of tension in general, every media is perceived to be political and accusations are made. So if you take the case of Ethiopia for example, VOA has been often accused of being anti-government. So, if you have a media-monitoring programme in place you can respond to these accusations by showing your data.*

These observations illustrate an ongoing subject of debate. Should programs be adapted to fit the available research methods or should new research methods be developed to better capture programme effects?

Observation and case studies

A number of academics cited ethnographic observation as a powerful instrument for detecting community level behaviour change and its relationship to the media intervention at hand. Employing more or less structured observations also responds to the tendency highlighted earlier to move from collecting people's attitudes, asking them for example how much they trust a particular radio or what they think of a particular ethnic group, to registering changes that are grounded in concrete actions. These changes, however, may be quite subtle and, in order to capture them, the researcher must have a substantial familiarity with the community under observation. As Mirjam de Bruijn remarked:

> *Observation is also a great way to understand how media are consumed, but you need a lot of time to come up with a mapping by using this method and you need even more time to understand what changes as a result of the introduction of a new medium or programme. A lot depends on how well you know a particular society. And I don't know, apart from academia, who will allow you to spend so much time tracking change.*

Some suggested studying particular events as a more economical proxy measurement of changes likely to emerge under longer-term observation. Ben O'Loughlin called them "crunch points, moments where a relationship is being tested"; Sara Oates talked about "firestorms, [as] big spikes in activities". Elizabeth Levy Paluck suggested ways to call people to action as an instrument to see how much a particular media intervention may resonate within a particular community.

> *You can ask people at the end of a programme to take action, to do a particular thing, and so we can have researchers there trying to register what happens next.*

Because M&E of media interventions are typically subject to economic constraints and reporting deadlines, observation may be used as part of a narrower case study, limiting the scale and scope of the research. Case study research entails the adoption of a particular strategy rather than the selection of specific methods. It allows making use of data in a structured way and to examine in detail the relations that connect phenomena together. So, observation can be just a component of a case study, where other methods can be employed to track change.
Some donors expressed interest for this type of ethnographic research, but they tended to consider it too expensive for the budgets they normally have for their projects. Andrew Blum, for example, indicated "we simply do not have the resources to pay an anthropologist for two years". At the same time, as it was indicated in the case of field experiments, when a certain type of methodology is embedded into the project from the very beginning and some serious thinking goes into it, it may turn up being much less expensive than it is commonly thought.

Polity

Media interventions related to media law and policy change may produce changes substantial enough to be captured at the level of indexes such as IREX's Media Sustainability Index or Freedom House's Freedom of The Press Index. They can result for example in the passing of a new media law or the creation of a regulatory body. At a superficial level, it may be quite easy to register their impact. A new media law may lead to the licensing of a greater number of media outlets or a new institution may be created to accept complains or to monitor abuses. At the same time, moving beyond the surface may be problematic. Often, change registered at the policy level may satisfy evaluation criteria, but in reality remain cosmetic or counter-intuitive. For example, the liberalization of radio licenses may go hand-in-hand with a decrease in the quality of reporting. As Frances Chetwynd, a media law expert, suggested:

> *In the case of a regulatory body, you really have to know who is who. Otherwise it can just end up being an instrument for those who already have control, or worse. And the same can be said for radios. Who controls their content? We have to look into that too.*

Mark Whitehouse also suggested changes registered as positive in the short-term, may have negative implications in the longer term, which suggests the need for ongoing evaluation.

> *When you work on a new media law and you try to facilitate a certain outcome you have also to think about the future, about the environments this law will create also when the conflict is over. A restrictive law can be effective in the short term in preventing different actors from engaging in reporting that could incite hatred. And we could see this through monitoring and evaluation. So, in a way in the short term it is effective, but what about the long term? What about if this law is used by those in*

> *power to prevent the emergence of critical outlets at a later stage? By the time these uses emerge the donors and implementers might have left already. So, you also have to pay attention at the timeframe. Something that can be evaluated positively in the short term can be evaluated differently if we look at the long term.*

Different academics supported the use of counterfactuals as a means of understanding project effects at different levels of analysis. Counterfactuals are tests where a hypothesized causal factor, in this case a media intervention or part of it, is supposed to have been absent.

Part III highlighted different methods that can be used to capture changes at the levels of individuals, of groups and organizations, and of larger polities. However, there is great scope for further understanding how different methods can be used in combination and how they can capture changes across and between levels. Developing a more refined catalogue of methods and of their application informed by the opinions of key experts operating in this field represents a potential next step following the completion of this survey.

Conclusion

Over 600 million people are currently living in conflict situations. Media and communications represent a powerful but underexplored tool for promoting dialogue, stability, and positive socio-political change. However, more knowledge is needed about how and under what conditions media assistance and media outreach activities are best practiced. This survey provides a snapshot of the current thinking about the reality and the rhetoric surrounding the practice of monitoring and evaluation of media interventions and media assistance in conflict countries. It draws upon the reflections of a range of stakeholders involved in this field: the donors funding the projects, the implementers working in the field, and the academics and the methodologists studying the media in conflict countries or involved in assessments and evaluations. The results presented here are not conclusive, but rather represent a first step in an ongoing conversation about how to better evaluate the utility of media in conflict countries. This report should thus be considered as a beta version. It will be updated through the contributions of other individuals and organizations operating in the field that want to participate to further refining or revising of the concepts presented here.

In summary, the analysis of the opinions collected so far highlighted a few key points:

- There is a greater space and scope for M&E of media intervention in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. However, this opportunity will only be fully exploited through a greater cooperation between donors, implementers and academics. It is not simply a matter for methodologist to come up with more refined tools. Donors and implementers will have to reflect on their mandate with respect to

intervening through the media and, possibly in cooperation with methodologists, elaborate clearer and more detailed theories defining why and how the media are used in conflict scenarios.

- The information ecologies of the spaces where an intervention is likely to take place are becoming increasingly complex. Even in countries riddled by conflict, mobile and internet usage is transforming information flows. However, new media information sources do not supplant old ones, but rather are embedded within and transforming more traditional communication channels and platforms. The relevance of a particular medium cannot be assumed anymore. It has to be proven. This requires developing innovative tools that are able to explain how information flows and how an intervention can fit in each particular communicative context.

- There is awareness that evaluations prove the most useful when a cogent research plan is interwoven into the entire evolution of a project, but this aspiration remains often unrealized in practice. Greater transparency and creativity are needed in order to test what works and what does not work in conflict scenarios. The rhetoric of the media promoting democratization or diffusing tension should be replaced by a narrower and more pragmatic focus on responding to specific information needs, whose effectiveness and impact can be better tested in practice.

Overall, among the stakeholders who participated to this study, there was confidence that this is a critical moment for "media and conflict". There is awareness that the field has reached greater maturity, and those operating in it are less prone to assume that the media can produce this and that effect, but are eager to prove that they are relevant. Stakeholders from across the research spectrum, from anthropologists to economists are beginning to pay greater attention to developing evaluation tools. And as the range of actors attending the Caux Workshop demonstrate, there is a growing understanding by donors, implementers and evaluation specialists that greater dialogue and collaboration represents the best way forward for realizing better programming and better evaluation of media's role in conflict.

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List of interviewees

Mauricio Beltran, Professor of Law, Universidad del Rosario en Bogotá

Mark Billera, Regional Coordinator for Africa at the Strategies Division of the Office of Democracy and Governance (USAID)

Andrew Blum, Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute for Peace

Mirjam de Bruijn, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Leiden

Frances Chetwynd, Media Law Expert

James Deane, Head of Policy at the BBC World Service Trust

Evensmo Ivar, Senior Adviser at Norad

Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale University

Giovanna Maiola, Media Advisor, Osservatorio di Pavia

Patrick Merienne, Conflict Adviser for DFID

Devra Moehler, Assistant Professor of Communication, at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

Peter Mwesige, Executive Director of the African Centre for Media Excellence

Eric Newton, Vice President for Journalism at the Knight Foundation

Sarah Oates, Professor of Political Communication at the University of Glasgow

Ben O'Loughlin, Reader in International Relations at Royal Holloway University

Gerry Power, Managing Director of InterMedia UK

Finn Rasmussen, Programme Coordinator for Media and Conflict at International Media Support

Kathleen Reen, Vice-President for Asia, Environment and New Media at Internews

Stefan Rummel-Shapiro, Senior M&E Advisor for the United Nations Peace Building Support Office

Mogens Schmidt, Deputy Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information and Director, Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace

Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, Design Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist for Search for Common Ground

Henriette von Kaltenborn-Stachau, Fragile & Conflict Affected Countries Group, Operations Policy and Country Services, The World Bank

Mark Whitehouse, Vice President for Media at IREX