

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING

By

Nizeyimana Jean Baptiste and Ouedraogo Salfo

ABSTRACT

The media can play a positive role in peace building/conflict prevention. Recognition of this has led to increasing programmes on media/communications and peace building, with common interventions including training of journalists, and development of pro-peace programme content. However, there are significant challenges in designing and implementing such programmes, and even more in evaluation. While some interventions have generated positive results (e.g. reduced election-related violence), evidence is limited and it is hard to make causal links between interventions and impact. This highlights the need for more research.

This review draws on a mixture of academic papers and grey literature. The literature was largely gender-blind and made no mention of persons with disabilities. The term ‘media’ in this report refers to both mass media (television, radio, newspapers) and to social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, online blogs) because today both are used as sources or tools of news and information (Betz, 2018: 2). ‘Peace building’ is defined as ‘a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation’. In this review peace building is taken in the wider sense to include conflict prevention as well as post-conflict restoration of peace.

Key Words: Effective communication, conflict resolution, Peace building

1. INTRODUCTION

The media can serve as a driver of peace in diverse ways: building bridges between people and groups; improving governance; increasing knowledge of complex issues; providing early warning of potential conflicts; as an outlet to express emotions; and as a motivator for action to promote peace.

Types of media/communication interventions for peacebuilding can also be very diverse, including: media monitoring; media professionalization programmes; peace journalism training; international broadcasting; promotion of an enabling legal and regulatory environment; using media to convey peacebuilding messages; citizen journalism initiatives; and crowdsourcing initiatives to collect and share information. The type of intervention will depend on the context, in particular on the stage of the ‘conflict cycle’.

Key actors involved in media/communication and peacebuilding programming include: NGOs, e.g. Internews, Search for Common Ground and Intermedia; international broadcasters, e.g. BBC World Service, Voice of America; and tech-oriented organizations, e.g. Frontline SMS, Ushahidi.

A number of challenges are faced in carrying out such interventions: willingness and interests of media owners; lack of readership/viewership for peace stories compared to those on violence and conflict; reluctance by journalists on the grounds that the media should be objective; resource constraints; legal and regulatory restrictions; and lack of media outreach. Evaluation of media/communications interventions for peacebuilding is particularly challenging: outcomes are not clearly defined and benefits are hard to measure directly; conducting research can be difficult and dangerous; and it is difficult to attribute solely to the media/communication intervention when other factors are likely involved.

1.1 PROBLEMATIC

In recent times, there have been many conflicts in communities all over the world over the election of district chief executives, chieftaincy, ethnicity and religious violence in parts of the country. The recent disputes emerging from decentralization process, ethnic conflicts, religious violence, political violence between adherents of various political parties, industrial disputes between workers and employers has been a source of concern and contention among the Ghanaian populace. 3 Ethnic conflicts and chieftaincy disputes have many bad effects on our country and communities; first, they lead to violence and loss of lives sometimes. Second, they cause division in communities which extended to educational system. Third, they retard development. Fourth, they tie up overburdened and under-staffed judicial system. These are the issues that are to be explored in this study, in order to understand the causes of conflict and the role of communication in managing such conflicts in communities, particularly inter or intra ethnic conflicts, religious and political violence, creation of new districts and election of chief executives in context of hobbled decentralization process.

2. METHODS

2.1 Relevance of the study

Though there is existing divided sovereignty (the Chiefs and the State) in Ghana, much scholarly work has not been done on modern state expansion and its effect on the Chiefs (the traditional state). The study will contribute to academic knowledge in this field. It will highlight on interaction between local and state institutions generate and escalate conflict based on ethnic idioms. Certain measures will also be suggested for mediating such conflicts.

2.2 Research Design

This chapter addresses the methodological framework within which the study was conceptualized and undertaken. The chapter focused on the chosen approach to fieldwork that was carried out in some conflicting Regions in order to collect data for the study. The study identified and analysed causes of conflicts and the role of communication in managing conflict in using those regions as case study. The chapter further explained the general research method that underlies the study. It was focused on explanation of research techniques and procedures used in the data collection. A purposive sampling technique was used for the data

collection and face-to-face interview with the respondents. Purpose sampling was used because it is popular in qualitative research Patton (1999), and also targets a particular group of people. Steps to follow in processing the data collected and the analysis was also presented. The chapter finally shared experiences and lessons learnt from the field.

This research consists of an exploratory study carried out using a qualitative methodology. The fieldwork was conducted in Kenya. The choice of this country was made in consideration of the severe internal turmoil and inter-communal violence that took place following the 2007 presidential elections, which goes under the name of Kenya Post-Election Violence (PEV). A further reason for this choice was the work carried out by two NGOs in the aftermath of the electoral violence, which included projects that were in line with the sample selection requirements. The projects had to be either at the final stage of execution or completed, and had to be based on a participatory process. The projects selected for this research are, therefore, a participatory video and a participatory theatre initiative that were implemented shortly after the PEV,

3. RESULTS

3.1 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND ITS ROLE

With regard to evidence of impact/effectiveness of media/communication and peacebuilding interventions, key findings of this review are as follows:

Evidence reviews: A 2014 review (Schoemaker & Stremlau) of the contribution of media in war to peace transitions and the role of new ICTs found insufficient evidence to prove these. Gagliardone et al (2015) reviewed and compared literature on the role of ICTs in state-building and peacebuilding in Africa. They too found that empirical evidence on the successful use of ICTs was thin. A 2016 Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) commissioned by DFID looked at a range of interventions, including media and communications interventions, to prevent or mitigate armed violence in developing and middle-income countries (Cramer et al, 2016). It found no overall consistent body of evidence, but the findings suggest that radio, TV programming and digital media can positively affect people's attitudes towards 'others'.

Kenya – Training of journalists in peace journalism as well as a range of peace interventions carried out by the media themselves contributed to a marked reduction in election-related violence in the 2013 elections compared to those in 2007.

Nigeria – Radio programmes on governance issues (an intervention funded by DFID and implemented by BBC Media Action) led to citizens being better able to challenge officials, resolve conflicts and participate in civic life. Training of journalists in peace journalism in the run-up to the 2015 elections enabled the media to play a big role in sensitising the public on the need to eschew violence, leading to largely non-violent elections. The Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) achieved some positive impacts in strengthening peace architecture, broadening societal participation in peacebuilding, and positively influencing policy and practice in the conflict arena to reduce violence, but the sustainability of its effects was uncertain.

Burundi – Studio Ijambo was established by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in Burundi in March 1995. It is an ethnically balanced team of journalists producing radio programmes (notably soap operas) to promote dialogue, peace, and reconciliation. Studio Ijambo’s programmes are widely listened to and appreciated, and have led to people changing their behaviour towards other ethnic groups, as well as pushing on governance issues.

Rwanda – In post-genocide Rwanda, a radio soap opera – Musekweya (‘New Dawn’) was introduced, to teach listeners about the roots of violence, the importance of independent thought, and the dangers of excessive deference to authority. A study found it had shifted perceived norms of open expression and local responsibility for community problems, but attitudes toward interaction across social lines were resistant to change.

Bosnia – Post-conflict (after the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement) various media projects were undertaken, including a three-part campaign to support the repatriation of refugees and return of property. It featured public service announcements, billboards, posters, leaflets, etc. targeting refugees and the wider public. An evaluation of the campaign found

messages came across clearly, and it achieved its main goals of raising awareness and provoking thought on the issue.

Nepal – A number of media assistance programmes have been implemented in Nepal, including a reality show aimed at building trust between police and communities, campaigns for media freedom, provision of media support related to elections, support for post-earthquake accountability reporting and capacity building, and a weekly radio and TV governance programme. Some of these initiatives and activities have shown success in bringing about change regarding governance and accountability issues.

3.2 Summary of the paper findings

The findings of this study demonstrate the impact that communication for development has in the context of peacebuilding interventions, particularly through the use of participatory communication and participatory media. The effects of participatory media productions, both on their participants and on their audience, show a solid connection with processes of conflict transformation as well as reconciliation between individuals and groups. The project activities were successful in achieving the individual and relational changes that are essential components for conflict transformation to occur. At the same time, they have begun to lay the basis for wider social change. In particular, participatory media appear to have contributed to the achievement, within and among communities, of elements such as: • empowerment • behaviour change • healing • unity • interaction • inter-group discussion • peaceful co-existence

Besides addressing the specific aims of this research, I believe that this study's findings convey as a rule the importance of communication for development designs in post-conflict scenarios; most importantly, they remind us of the significance of the human aspect of communication, which cannot be replaced by any other development or peacebuilding methodology.

4 CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown the significant connection between communication for development and peacebuilding. Through a process of literature review of both C4D and conflict transformation and reconciliation theories, I have highlighted the intersection between these bodies of literature which is useful in understanding the process that takes place when opposing groups

engage in participatory media activities in the aftermath of conflict. The experience with video and theatre of two communities in Kenya has been illustrated and analysed to demonstrate the impact that these projects had in addressing individual, relational and social change, to ultimately transform conflict and reconcile former enemies.

In so doing, this study advances knowledge towards the important role that communication for development plays in informing the design of peacebuilding interventions. Conflict transformation and reconciliation are two vital mechanisms that contribute to the achievement of peace at the community level, allowing for a bottom up, widening process. At the same time, more effective instruments are needed that perform the difficult task of reconnecting broken communities and initiating those mechanisms. Communication for development is an important practice within this area.

Since communication is at the centre of human interaction, learning how to shape its use in the light of a development approach that strives for peace enables us to tap into its potential for transforming community conflicts. Participatory communication, in particular, provides a method which facilitates that human connection, as people are encouraged to have a say on matters that affect them. The dialogic aspect of this type of communication, as well as its aptness to group problem-solving, allow for a more inclusive approach to the discussion of issues that are important to the community.

Participation is also crucial in setting in motion those mechanisms that change internal power dynamics and open the path towards positive social change. Applying these concepts to the production of media content leads to the creation of participatory media outputs whose planning, management and content-making are entirely driven by communities, who are given the tools to tell their stories. In post-conflict scenarios, as we have seen, stories become powerful instruments to change the course of a dispute and the negative stereotypes that are embedded in the perception of the events that have occurred.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Nimer, M. (2001). Conflict resolution, culture, and religion: Toward a training model of interreligious peacebuilding. *Journal of Peace Research*, 38(6), 685-704.

- Korac, M. (2006, September). Gender, conflict and peace-building: Lessons from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 510-520). Pergamon.

- Fetherston, A. B. (2000). Peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding: a reconsideration of theoretical frameworks. *International Peacekeeping*, 7(1), 190-218.

- Shank, M., & Schirch, L. (2008). Strategic arts-based peacebuilding. *Peace & Change*, 33(2), 217-242.

- Schirch, L. (2005). *Ritual and symbol in peacebuilding*. Kumarian Press.

- Vestal, A., & Jones, N. A. (2004). Peace building and conflict resolution in preschool children. *Journal of research in childhood education*, 19(2), 131-142.