

Working Paper Series

## **Working Paper 19**

International Media Assistance

A Review of Donor Activities and Lessons Learned

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June 2003



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## Preface

In April 2002, the Conflict Research Unit (CRU) of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’ started with a new project analyzing the impact of international democracy assistance on post-conflict societies. This project, entitled *Democratic Transition in Post-Conflict Societies. Building Local Institutions*, is a collaborative research effort of participating research institutes in Central America, Africa and South Asia and the CRU. In order to obtain a wide variety of experiences and focus on different socio-political settings, case studies include Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique and Sierra Leone. The analyses are conducted by local research teams with the aim of capturing ‘insider’ views on the international community’s influence on the process of democratization in the respective post-conflict societies. The main question addressed is how international democracy assistance can have a positive and more sustainable impact on the process of democratization by strengthening electoral, human rights and media organizations in post-conflict societies.

Apart from the eight case studies that will result in country reports, the CRU project team has asked three experts to write a short background paper on the focus areas of the Democratic Transition project: elections, human rights and media. These review papers aim to brief a wider audience on the latest experiences in these fields. This particular paper on media assistance has been written by Mr Ross Howard. The paper addresses the main aspects in the field of media assistance as well as some of the lessons learned in recent post-conflict contexts.

This important research project would have been impossible without the generous grant and personal commitment from the Division of Communication and Research (DCO) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Conflict Research Unit gratefully acknowledges this support.

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June 2003  
The Hague

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 The Setting	9
1.2 Definitions	10
<b>2. International Media Assistance</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Donor Objectives	13
2.2 Donor Activities	13
2.2.1 <i>Journalistic Professionalism</i>	14
2.2.2 <i>Media-supportive Infrastructure</i>	15
2.2.3 <i>Economic Assistance and Privatization</i>	16
2.2.4 <i>Support For Civil Society Committed to Free Media</i>	16
2.2.5 <i>Intended-outcome Programming</i>	17
2.2.6 <i>Counter-acting Media</i>	17
<b>3. Experiences and Lessons Learned</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Post-conflict Conditions	19
3.2 Problems In Providing Assistance	20
3.3 Lessons Learned	21
3.3.1 <i>Sustainability: Overlooked and Ignored</i>	21
3.3.2 <i>Lack of Coordination</i>	22
3.3.3 <i>The Importance of a Media-supportive Environment</i>	22
3.3.4 <i>Need for Ex-ante Impact Assessment and Cultural Sensitivity</i>	23
3.3.5 <i>Conflicting Priorities</i>	23
3.3.6 <i>Economic Conditions May Thwart Viable and Professional Media</i>	24
<b>4. Recommendations</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Develop More Appropriate Impact Assessment Methodologies</i>	25
<i>Establish Strategic Coordination Mechanisms</i>	25
<i>Do Not Concentrate Exclusively on Privatization of Media</i>	26
<i>Allow More Time, And Focus on Sustainability</i>	26

<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>27</b>
Books, articles and reports	27
Website resources	29
<b>About the Author</b>	<b>32</b>

## Executive Summary

Over the past decade, the quickened pace of international media assistance has cumulatively exceeded hundreds of millions of dollars. The international community has recognized the place of the media in a post-conflict society and its importance in the process of democratization. This increase in attention can be explained by the technology-driven pervasiveness of the news media in the global post-Cold War era; an appreciation of the effectiveness of the preceding decade's media-based relief and development strategies; and increased concern among the international community that irresponsible media may (again) fuel genocidal incidents as was the case in Rwanda. As such, assistance for free and independent media has become an integral part of aid and development programmes of most Western countries and international development organizations. However, media assistance and its impact on the process of democratization remain largely uncharted. The use of media for democratic transitions has not yet produced a significant bibliography of lessons learned and best practices.

The significance of the media is obvious: a reliable news media enables well-informed citizen decision-making that, when freely exercised, in turn contributes to democratization. Reliability here refers to journalism that is accurate, impartial and socially responsible. Education programmes to establish and reinforce these bedrock principles of journalism continue to dominate donors' attention, especially through training activities. At the same time, training journalists and other media professionals is not enough. Supporting the establishment of free and independent media outlets constitutes another form of international media assistance. In many post-conflict countries this has helped create a wide range of print and broadcasting media (including newspapers, television and radio stations) and has stimulated the emergence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoting free speech. Other donor activities with regard to media include assistance to intended-outcome programming, promotion of counter-acting media outlets and the facilitation of a media-supportive infrastructure, including legislation, courts and regulators.

However, particular post-conflict conditions such as state-controlled ownership, lack of appropriate equipment and (self-)censorship have often hampered the development of local institutional capacity in the field of media. Where diversity of media does exist, it has proved to be a minefield of highly 'partisanized' outlets producing unreliable journalism which may in turn destabilize the fragile democratic process. The establishment of a well-functioning media sector with the necessary institutional infrastructure therefore requires long-term commitment from the international community in what is basically a prolonged process of institutionalizing democracy. In addition, it should involve a more coordinated, context-specific and informed approach which merits more research into priority-setting and impact assessment of media assistance. Finally, experiences show that well-functioning, extremely popular and independent media are not always capable of surviving in a post-conflict situation with only limited advertising revenue. Therefore, more attention should be devoted to the economic viability of independent media as a factor in their sustainability.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Setting

The crumbling of Cold War structures and attitudes at the end of the 1980s triggered welcome developments for democratization, among them an accelerated interest in supporting the professionalization and independence of media in previously repressed or violence-stressed societies. There are at least three reasons for this rise in attention.

First, in the 1980s international agencies and donors had demonstrated considerable success in integrating media-based programmes, especially radio programmes, into their strategies for immediate relief in natural disasters and for longer-term humanitarian development. Whether it was using public and private radio for messages directing populations to relief centres, or for extended programmes teaching nutritional or agricultural methods, donor agencies had recognized the effectiveness of media for presenting responses and options to adverse conditions. At the same time, the end of the Cold War removed barriers to the dissemination of national and international news to previously inaccessible audiences. Greater access to many countries enticed donors to explore developing indigenous media in those countries as an alternative form to the previously totalitarian or tightly controlled media. The objective was to encourage growth of an independent, professional media and an alternative, democratic ideology, in the belief that an independent, professional media constitutes an integral part of the democratization process.

Secondly, the media, and especially the electronic media, had achieved a technology-driven ubiquity which enabled its messages to reach even the most remote places. Radio receivers most particularly had become affordable and available everywhere. Television, too, had penetrated deeply in some societies, whereas the circulation of printed material expanded as a result of new printing-distribution technologies and a rising literacy.

Thirdly, media programmes became more prominent in the 1990s as a possible counterforce to the increased use of (especially electronic) media for the opposite and deplored purpose of undermining peace. Sharply increased incidents of hate radio and other propaganda, which exhorted and helped engineer attempted genocides – such as in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina, to cite only two - attracted attention to the negative power of media and launched the search for responses. It also became apparent that a number of states, particularly those emerged from the former Soviet Union, where early media interventions had accompanied apparent democratization, were exhibiting new waves of media censorship and repression. Other states had even relapsed into outright violence. The emerging knowledge of conflict resolution with emphasis on changing disputants' perceptions through controlled communication further intensified the focus on the media as an instrument of reconciliation and democratization in conflict-stressed societies.

As a result, international organizations, bilateral donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to explore opportunities for media support programmes, also known as media assistance. The United Nations (UN) included a major media initiative in the transitional process in

Cambodia (1992-1993), and in almost every other UN intervention since. NGOs specializing in media interventions emerged, including the US-based Search for Common Ground, the *Fondation Hironnelle*, the Baltic Media Centre in Europe, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa. A number of donor countries - including the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the United States - introduced media support programmes within their international aid strategies. Other major organizations such as the Council of Europe, World Bank, and UNESCO invested substantially in media activities as part of democratization and human rights programmes. Foundations such as the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation), Knight Foundation and Thomson Foundation stand out among many other organizations in supporting media activities.<sup>1</sup>

Interest in the media's role in sustaining peace and democratic transition continues to increase.<sup>2</sup> Although no reliable figure for total spending on media interventions has been established, one may, deducting from a reported cumulative USD 600 million by US organizations up to 2002,<sup>3</sup> state that all sources combined represent a decade-long commitment of nearly USD 1 billion. However, acknowledged wisdom about what works and what doesn't, about when to intervene, and how, is only beginning to be identified and shared.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the field of media assistance for human relief and development,<sup>5</sup> the experience with media assistance for democratic transition has not yet produced any significant bibliography of evaluations and most appropriate techniques.

At this point, more than a decade into the rapid growth of media interventions for democratic development and peace building, a review and analysis is therefore particularly needed. This paper seeks to provide a broad overview of some critical issues and practices concerning international assistance for media as an element of democratic institution building in post-conflict societies. The next chapters will examine prominent issues with regard to the nature and purpose of media assistance; present distinctive media conditions in a post-conflict society; examine problems involved in providing media assistance in these societies; discuss critical issues, and present some lessons learned as well as recommendations on the basis of recent media interventions.

## 1.2 Definitions

The term 'media' refers foremost to the news media, or the use of communication channels for the dissemination of public information. These channels comprise the print sector, including newspapers and magazines, and the electronic sectors comprising radio and television as well as the Internet. Journalism as performed by the news media is considered to comprise reporting, commentary, opinion as well as analysis. In Western practice, the gathering and presentation of information by the news media is distinguished by at least three key principles: *accuracy, impartiality and responsibility in the public interest*. These principles apply to reporters, editors, directors, producers, managers, camera-persons, designers, and others, including individuals (freelancers), news agencies and both private and government-owned providers of news and information.

These principles, collectively referred to as 'reliable journalism', deserve elaboration. *Accuracy* refers to contextual as well as factual accuracy. *Impartiality* refers to the composition of news reports

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<sup>1</sup> Spurk, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Spurk, *ibid.* See also Hudock, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Hume, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Howard, 2002; and Di Lorenzo and Moyroud, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Danida, 2001; Scalway and Deane, 2002; and Naimoli, 2002.



which include essential information from both sides of an issue or conflict, the information not being contrived to represent the interests of any one party to the detriment of another. *Responsibility in the public interest* includes adherence to laws and civil codes governing citizen behaviour, as well as adherence to recognized codes of ethical practice for professional journalists proscribing, among others, plagiarism, defamation, corruption, maliciousness, privacy abuse, and conflict of interest.<sup>6</sup>

Reliable journalism also represents the realization of Article 19 of the International Declaration of Human Rights which asserts the right to free speech, and generally includes the right of freely disseminating information via the news media. However, for this to be achieved, there must also be diversity, which means the existence of a sufficient number of media outlets in order to ensure that competing points of view are brought to public attention. Reliance upon a single media outlet or network, no matter how competent, may risk monopolization of information and unbalanced reporting. A diversity of reliable media outlets free from dominant political and economic interests generally constitutes what is known as an independent media or free press.

It is widely believed by both practitioners and donors that achievement of the three principles of reliable journalism produces understanding and awareness among citizens that enables them to make wiser decisions in their own best interest. Since free, independent and reliable news media play such a crucial role, especially in free and fair elections that are normally regarded as the penultimate example of such citizen decision-making, media assistance has become a key priority for any donor promoting democratization.

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<sup>6</sup> International Federation of Journalists' Code at <http://www.ifj.org/>. See also the Statement of Principles by the Canadian Association of Journalists at <http://www.eagle.ca/caj/>

## 2. International Media Assistance

### 2.1 Donor Objectives

Donors engaged in media interventions generally subscribe to the ultimate intention of achieving an independent or free media sector within a democratic post-conflict society. An independent media sector is one in which the media is genuinely independent from interference by owners, state authority or powerful interests which prejudice the news gathering and presentation process according to the essential principles of reliable journalism described above. Independence includes elimination of state or partisan interests' censorship of the news, directly or through agents. Freed from these constraints, the news media enables well-informed citizen decision-making, and as such is a critical element of the process towards democratization. In societies emerging from conflict, an independent media can also play an important role in conflict resolution and reconciliation. As analyst Ali Jalali notes, 'the media informs the society and influences opinions and perceptions that could shape attitudes and behaviour either towards violence or in support of peace and harmony. (...) There is an urgent need to foster the emergence of free and responsible media in the post-conflict society. By fostering dialogue among the people, giving voice to concerns of different segments of the population and debating the controversial issues, a responsible media can mobilize social forces for peace-building'.<sup>7</sup>

In most conflict societies it is not possible to achieve an independent media sector from the very beginning. Even in the optimum case of an immediate withdrawal of all interferences specifically directed against the news media by the state, other factors may preclude a news media sector which is reliable and enhances the democratization process. These factors include the competency of journalists and managers to collect and present reliable information ('professionalism'); the longer-term viability of independent news media outlets ('sustainability'); and the presence of an enabling legal and legislative infrastructure which supports public access to information, enshrines free speech and administers media rights and obligations impartially. Donors have also recognized that beyond achieving independence, news media must play a constructive role in their community as an alternative to destructive reporting practices which promote intolerance, alienation, hate speech, institutionalized racism and sexism as well as other forms of cultural and structural conflict.

### 2.2 Donor Activities

Donors have increasingly engaged in activities specifically tailored to strengthen one or more of the elements of an independent media. The goal of media programmes has been to provide the resources necessary to assist in achieving professionalism, in enabling a media-supportive infrastructure, in establishing a wide range of diverse media outlets and NGOs, in incorporating conflict sensitivity and in countering 'hate media'.

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<sup>7</sup> Jalali, 2002.

### 2.2.1 Journalistic Professionalism

The majority of donors have focused on providing resources and personnel for training journalists in basic skills such as newsgathering, reporting and editing. Post-conflict societies often lack both proper training facilities for journalism within their educational systems and competency requirements for entering the journalistic profession. As a result, on-the-job training, often purely informal, produces journalism which is neither guided by Western principles such as accuracy and impartiality nor by ethical considerations such as avoiding conflict-of-interest.

The donors' intention of basic training activities has been to eliminate factual and contextual errors, inadvertently one-sided or intentionally partisan reports and unreliably sourced information. Media programmes have increasingly included training in specific skills such as investigative reporting and reporting on financial, political or health matters. More recently, significant programmes have focused on journalistic skills related to the causes of and responses to conflict such as ethnic-diversity reporting, human rights reporting, and techniques of conflict analysis in journalism.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to journalistic skills, media interventions have also turned to the business-side of news media outlets, including personnel and financial management as well as marketing and audience research skills, in order to strengthen media outlets' capacity to sustain themselves by market enterprise rather than mere reliance on state or partisan interests' funding which usually entails interference in news presentation.

#### Examples of basic training:

- Since 1998, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has funded a Canadian NGO called IMPACS (Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society) to provide basic journalism training to Cambodian government officials and private radio and television reporters in newsroom and field environments.
- In 2001-2002, the Netherlands-funded Communications Assistance Foundation (CAF) financed basic reporting and technical and management training for 30 small, community-operated radio stations in Colombia.
- Since 1996, the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) has provided basic journalism training to local media in a dozen countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

#### Examples of specific training:

- Since 1996, the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) funded 8- to 15-week courses for journalists from the West Bank and Gaza Strip on the role of journalism in democratic societies, the rule of law, media freedoms, and ethical practices within the media.
- In 2002, the Danish-funded International Media Support (IMS) presented workshops in conflict analysis, diversity reporting and combat safety to journalists in Sri Lanka and Nepal.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. activities by the Reporting Diversity Network from the Media Diversity Institute (<http://www.media-diversity.org/RDN.htm>); and Sri Lanka and Nepal conflict-sensitive journalism programmes by International Media Support (<http://www.i-m-s.dk/>).

- Since 2001, the USAID-funded NGO Internews has trained European and Asian media managers on the campus of Western Kentucky University's journalism school in programming and operations, business practices and in consumer and marketing strategies.
- In 1997, the US-funded Search for Common Ground brought journalists from the separate and ghettoized ethnic minorities of Macedonia together to cooperatively produce major reports in several languages on issues of national importance that superseded enclave perspectives and introduced concepts of conflict reconciliation.

### 2.2.2. Media-supportive Infrastructure

Journalistic professionalism in itself does not ensure that news media will be independent. As Dusan Reljic points out, journalistic training to improve standards of reporting will 'unfortunately remain unsuccessful while authoritarian forms of rule do not allow for media autonomy'.<sup>9</sup> Other analysts have also noted the interdependence of the news media and the courts, regulators, the legislature, and political elites.<sup>10</sup> Thus, independent journalism cannot function effectively for long in an otherwise anti-democratic society. Often, interventions addressing such media-enabling institutions and approaches are not classified as media sector activities, but are considered as support for other aspects of democratization. Their benefits to media independence, however, may be critical. Hence it has become increasingly clear that donors should adopt a more holistic view in assessing potential media programmes, and should discount isolated initiatives which may prove ineffective or even dangerous.<sup>11</sup>

The legal and constitutional environment in which reliable journalism is to prosper includes legislation and jurisprudence governing freedom of speech and dissemination of news and opinions, respect for international conventions and human rights, legislation regarding public access to information, and media rights and responsibilities including provisions for copyright, and provisions dealing with media-related iniquities such as libel, sedition, obscenity and invasion of privacy. The environment also extends to commercial law regulating disclosure of business information. Donors sensitized to the importance of the media-enabling infrastructure have directed their support to revising existing laws, to training lawyers, judges and legislators in media law, providing legal defence funds for journalists, assisting advocates for media freedom, and providing training in international laws and standards.<sup>12</sup> Media programmes have also aimed at developing independent regulatory bodies governing anything media-related, from the allocation of newsprint and broadcasting frequencies to programming content and permissible ownership patterns.

#### Examples:

- The internationally-funded Moscow Media Law and Policy Centre offers media law courses, curriculum development in media law, exchange programmes and resources for policy-makers, lawyers, judges and journalists with the objective to promote the rule of law and media freedoms in the former Soviet Union.

<sup>9</sup> Reljic, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Spurr, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Price and Krug, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed analysis of media law reform issues from an American perspective, see USAID, 1998.

- The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) catalogues legislation in SADC countries that impinges on media freedom in order to alert journalists. MISA has also launched legal defence funds and initiatives, and provides training and advocacy for media law reform.

### *2.2.3. Economic Assistance and Privatization*

This area of media support, aimed at creating a diversity of independent media outlets, represents the second-largest financial commitment by donors. In many cases, international and bilateral donors have contributed financial resources and subsidies to cover start-up or direct operating costs and for the provision of equipment such as transmitters, printing presses and Internet sites for new and potentially independent media outlets. Some donors have encouraged controlling state agencies to allow their media outlets to operate according to private-sector principles or to privatize themselves completely.

#### *Examples:*

- A number of international donors fund the non-profit Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) in the production of independent investigative reports. These are syndicated to major print and broadcasting media financially unable or unwilling to commit resources and political capital to such projects themselves.
- Several donors, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), CIDA and the Soros Foundation contributed USD 10.5 million to create an independent television network (Open Broadcast Network or OBN) in Bosnia which went on the air in 1996.
- Since 1996, the Soros Foundation - through the Prague-based Media Development Loan Fund - has provided USD 11 million in low-interest loans and venture capital financing for news organizations to achieve self-sustaining status in the face of well-financed state or private-interest media.
- In 1997, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provided several tonnes of newsprint and equipment to independent newspapers and electronic media in Bosnia to foster independent media.
- The USAID-supported, Botswana-based Southern Africa Media Development Fund provides low-interest loans and management training to independent media groups in the SADC region.

### *2.2.4. Support For Civil Society Committed to Free Media*

In the process of democratization, a reliable media and supportive infrastructure operate in symbiotic relationship with a healthy civil society. The international community has provided financial support to civil society, media and NGOs committed to a free media. Donors have increasingly funded indigenous and international media rights-watching organizations monitoring and lobbying against censorship and infringements upon media freedoms as well as journalists' professional and personal freedoms. In addition, media programmes have supported organizations monitoring media content and performance as a reflection of a society's political freedoms and level of democracy. The international community has also directed support to the creation of self-governing councils among journalists and media owners in order to encourage professionalism and to recognize good journalism. Although often not considered part of media assistance, other initiatives aim at fostering a more mature information

culture. In such a culture, NGOs and citizens are more confident in having recourse to the media to communicate their views and in using the media as a forum for debate.

Examples:

- The Düsseldorf-based European Institute for the Media (EIM), funded by the European Union (EU) and the OSCE, supports media monitoring to analyse media coverage of elections and conflicts, reinforce media standards and provide indicators for measuring countries' level of democratization.
- The widely-funded International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) monitors infringements on free speech world-wide and activates support networks for journalists and other victims of suppression.

### 2.2.5. *Intended-outcome Programming*

Some donors, particularly through NGOs, are devoting attention to the media for delivery of initiatives overtly encouraging or facilitating conflict resolution. Termed 'intended-outcome programming', the techniques used include radio and television programmes teaching conflict resolution through entertaining radio or television dramas, and the presentation of news focusing on the democratization process. The distinction between conventional journalism and intended-outcome programming remains a hotly debated issue. Different media interventions can overlap, operate side-by-side or may be combined depending upon circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

Examples:

- The USAID-funded Internews Central Asia provides a wide spectrum of media-related assistance in Tajikistan including basic journalism training and youth-oriented programming intended to establish tolerance and models of coexistence.
- In 1998, Search for Common Ground developed multi-lingual television entertainment programming specifically designed to overcome stereotypes and to present positive coping strategies for Macedonian children from highly segmented communities and ethnicities.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.6 *Counter-acting Media*

Although rare, the most 'extreme' form of media assistance includes the use of force to suppress or destroy media outlets directly inciting conflict, such as so-called 'hate radio' which propagates intolerance and implants genocidal attitudes. However, such interventions are inevitably troubling. Disruption of a media outlet, no matter how odious, is often considered as itself an abuse of the right of free speech. Therefore, interventions to remove or destroy media outlets by force are not widely supported or practised. In some cases, jamming radio-television transmissions is considered an appropriate 'half-way' measure. But hate radio is more effectively responded to by creating competing quality media where possible. The ultimate objective is democratization and the establishment of a legal framework which provides for the opportunity to prosecute media offending human rights and counselling hate.

<sup>13</sup> Howard (2002), pp 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on this program, entitled *Nashe Maalo*, see <http://www.cgponline.org/actdetail.cfm?locus=CGP&name=programs&programid=64>

Examples:

- In 1997, NATO forces seized and silenced broadcasting facilities of the Serbian Radio-Television Network in Bosnia. These facilities were later returned upon the broadcaster's commitment to objective standards of news broadcasting.
- The internationally-funded *Reporters Sans Frontières* and subsequently the Swiss-based *Fondation Hirondelle* operated Radio Agatashya to counter genocidal incitements from Radio/Television Libre Mille Collines in Rwanda in 1994. Based in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, Radio Agatashya broadcasts information on humanitarian issues, unbiased and 'calming' news and programmes specifically countering prejudices.

## 3. Experiences and Lessons Learned

### 3.1 Post-conflict Conditions

Post-conflict societies emerge from open conflict with a legacy of violence, abuse of human rights, a suppressed civil society, and a destroyed or neglected infrastructure with attendant effects upon the media. These effects include state-imposed controls preventing reliable journalism and diversity; a continued use of the media for propaganda purposes; insufficient media resources and equipment; absence of journalistic training; and the abrogation of legal and legislative protection for media professionals. Such conditions pose large challenges for the international community keen on promoting free and independent media not only in Asia and Africa, but also in the former Soviet Union republics and in Central Asia. In all these regions, censorship, partisanship and strict state regulation are among the conditions particularly hard to resolve.

State authorities often continue censorship of media content in the name of ‘the national interest’ or for reasons of ‘national security’. The real purpose, however, is to prevent the emergence of a diversity of independent and free outlets. Penalties can be harsh and arbitrary and may include enforced suspension of media outlets. In the absence of an established and fair-minded media-supportive infrastructure of laws, courts and regulators, appeals of arbitrary measures are ineffective if not impossible. In order to avoid creating trouble for themselves or their managers by transgressing the often imprecise definitions of ‘national interest’, journalists intentionally or unconsciously adopt a severely constrained form of reliable journalism. They avoid presenting diverse viewpoints in their news reports, and they refrain from initiating investigations or subjecting to scrutiny the performance of state authorities or powerful interests. Censored and self-censoring journalists and media outlets focus heavily on the self-serving statements and public events generated by mainstream political parties and leading political and military figures. In societies where media repression has long prevailed, untrained apprentices enter the journalistic profession and are informally taught to emulate their self-censoring colleagues. This was the case in Sri Lanka where two decades of civil war and government interference with the media led to a rapid degradation of professional journalism which perpetuated animosities through unreliable reporting.

In many post-conflict environments, where a diversity of media outlets has resumed or been allowed to take root, the outlets tend to represent or be financed by powerful or ambitious interests seeking political or economic influence. Newspapers are the most common example in this respect. What results is a proliferation of intensely partisan media outlets whose owners’ interests intrude into or dictate news judgment, as was e.g. the case in Cambodia. Accuracy, impartiality and social responsibility are consequently compromised in the newsgathering and presentation process. In such cases, conflict-era partisanship is often sustained. Although diversity exists within the media, and outlets are ostensibly independent, they fall far short of providing reliable journalism. With their often inflammatory reporting style and partisan news, these outlets can be highly influential of public opinion and can represent a destabilizing force upon the process of democratization.



In many cases, the state and their allied interests block opponents, independent interests or foreign donors from establishing radio and television outlets. The state argues that unlike newspapers, electronic media use a public resource - the airwaves - which deserves stricter state regulation. The most effective regulation is refusal by the state authorities to grant broadcasting licences, especially to interests in any way connected to political opponents. Those who are granted commercial licences often operate their media with minimal, non-controversial news programming, to avoid conflict with the state regulator. Such outlets often attract large audiences for their entertainment programming but yield little, or only pro-government influence in their news reporting. The state's refusal to license small, politically unaffiliated community radio and television outlets also prevents dialogue and issue-education within local communities, which again continues the population's reliance on state media.

Finally, and taking into account that a reliable news media performs at least several roles - such as informing citizens, enabling debate and monitoring government performance - donors must determine what media roles are most open to engagement, or are, what Spurk calls, most important 'areas of attention'.<sup>15</sup> This has recently led to attempts to establish indicators of media capacity in a conflict-stressed environment which in turn may be used in formulating media-assistance proposals and initiatives.<sup>16</sup> However, neither a complete typology of conditions nor a full framework for interventions yet exists.

### **3.2 Problems In Providing Assistance**

International donors' media-related programmes often face greater challenges in entering a post-conflict society than do other types of assistance such as humanitarian and financial aid or reconstruction activities. The most obvious challenge donors are facing is the state's interest in controlling independent and diverse media capable of informing citizens about alternatives to the ruling regime. As a result, government control of (in particular electronic) media outlets - either directly or through partisan supporters - can remain intense. Similarly, partisan media outlets do not welcome international donors with proposals for practising more professional journalism if it will displease their political backers. Therefore, proposals to launch entirely independent media outlets are rarely met with enthusiasm by the state or powerful interests, and in many contexts this assistance strategy appears not to be very feasible.

In cases where the state has allowed a proliferation of media outlets but many of them are highly partisan, donors may find it difficult to determine the appropriate outlet(s) with whom to partner in offering training and skills development. Any media activity must be seen and respected as fair and transparent but partnership with a particular media outlet will be viewed suspiciously by the outlet's opponents as favouring particular partisan interests. In order to avoid this dilemma, media donors increasingly tend to seek partnerships with institutions such as journalism schools, independent research institutes or professional associations, which can attract participants from a cross-section of interests. In some cases, where political and other allegiances of possible partners compromise donors' credibility and/or capacity, donors have mounted media programmes without an indigenous partner. This, however, has become increasingly rare.

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<sup>15</sup> Spurk, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Spurk, 2002. See also Howard, 2002.

In addition, while the accumulated amount of funding for more than a decade of media assistance is substantial, the accumulated wisdom is less so. Although in many cases the processes and the immediate outcomes of interventions have been recorded, particularly for donors' purposes, the same cannot be said of the effect of the interventions. There is a tendency to report results in terms of what was done, such as the number of journalists trained, rather than assessing impact, such as the percentage of change in impartial and accurate news stories in the ensuing year. Evaluation has (mostly) been ad-hoc.<sup>17</sup> This problem, however, is not unique to media assistance. Overall in the field of conflict resolution, the quality of evaluation of interventions is poor, conforming to the needs of the moment and limited by lack of skills, understanding and resources, according to Church and Shouldice in a new 'state of play' analysis.<sup>18</sup> But this problem is only more apparent in the field of media interventions.<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, 'it is a challenge to conduct professional impact measurement of media assistance projects due to the young state of the field', notes Spurk, but 'up to now only a few efforts have been made to draw lessons from successful media assistance'.<sup>20</sup> There are few analysts and fewer analyses. As a result, donors have been inadequately informed to design effective media assistance programmes.

### 3.3 Lessons Learned

Drawing from a broad range of experiences, a few key lessons learned can be identified.

#### 3.3.1 Sustainability: Overlooked and Ignored

Sustainability - a process for continuing the benefits of the intervention by establishing future indigenous capacity - is increasingly recognised by assistance programmers as a crucial objective in any media programme. Rather than as an afterthought, sustainability needs to be included from the point of conceptualization of an aid programme through to delivery. The importance of sustainability was demonstrated in the UN initiative in Cambodia (1993) where indigenous participants in a brief media programme were left without resources upon the completion of the UN mission's limited objective involving the media, as is illustrated by the following example.

Example:

- In the face of fiercely partisan anti-democratic radio and print outlets, Radio UNTAC was conceived to transmit basic voter education messages for the post-conflict United Nations Transitional Authority mission in Cambodia in 1993. The inclusion of reliable news reporting and innovative programming generated immense popularity and influence for Radio UNTAC. Moreover, it induced competitive media, which was credited in the massive, reasonably democratic vote. It was considered a triumph for media as an element of democratization.<sup>21</sup> However, immediately following the vote all Radio UNTAC activities were halted as part of the scheduled UN withdrawal. UNTAC-trained radio journalists and managers were forced to revert to partisan journalism as employment, in the absence of a successor to Radio UNTAC. The prolific partisan local media remained in place, and flourished. In addition, the failure of UNTAC in establishing successors

<sup>17</sup> Hume, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Church and Shouldice, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication with Ivan Sigal from Internews, November 2002. See also Spurk (2002), p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> Spurk, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Sanderson and Maley, 1998.

to address Cambodia's lack of fair-minded courts, legislators and regulators also undermined indigenous media attempts to sustain more reliable journalism. The media became an instrument of discord and disinformation, which impeded Cambodia's democratic evolution.

### 3.3.2 Lack of Coordination

While in the case of relief and development aid at least some awareness is demonstrated of the need for coordination of many donors' efforts for efficiency and success, media interventions have often lacked clear coordination among donors to concentrate their assets where most effective.<sup>22</sup> Unrestrained, donors can become overly enthusiastic in their funding support, thereby risking redundancy of activities and even rivalry among agencies. This may create a contrived, ineffective and unsustainable media sector. Those complications occurred in post-1996 Bosnia where intensive pre-assessments, reasonable expectations and a coordinated effort by the many donors were significantly lacking. As a result, an enormous influx of funds produced minimal reduction in deeply rooted animosities and caused further set-backs for the democratization process.

#### Examples:

- In 1996, the EU, OSCE and bilateral donors led by the US made available unprecedented funds for the establishment of independent print, radio and television outlets in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The intention was to create a pluralistic, independent media industry to counter local and neighbouring states' media, both state-controlled and private, which fomented ethnic hatred within Bosnia. A large number of bilateral and non-governmental donors participated at their own initiative. Funds were dispensed to numerous independent start-up media outlets in the printing and electronic sectors. However, the effort largely failed. It produced an artificial, donor-dependent industry of mainly inadequately skilled journalists and unprofessional, poorly programmed and redundant outlets unable to compete with popular ethnocentric government outlets. Donor overlap and rivalries created so many media outlets that the overall quality of Bosnian media declined due to a lack of trained professionals. Most of the new outlets were sustained almost exclusively by donor funding and faced closure without it. Local citizens and governments saw the start-up media as foreign – Western - interventions, distrusted them and even attempted to block them. By 2001, unrealistic timelines, an absence of local commitment to the media, unattractive programming and unreliable journalism had produced minimal contribution to democratization.
- The lessons of Bosnia were recognized in the development of the International Media Fund (IMF), a coordinated effort of several international donor organizations involved in media assistance in Macedonia since 1998. The fund provides for coordinated assessments, expertise and grants to urgent media interventions. In 2001, donors funded replacement transmitter facilities for five media outlets in Macedonia, provided bullet-proof jackets and helmets through the Macedonian Journalists Association, and presented conflict safety training courses for more than 100 journalists.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.3.3. The Importance of a Media-supportive Environment

A media-enabling environment of courts and regulators is essential for media professionalism and self-regulation to survive, let alone to flourish. Without a media-supportive infrastructure, journalists are not protected against intimidation. Even worse, without a vigorous regulatory framework media

<sup>22</sup> Stalnaker, 2001. See also Price, 2000; Taylor, 1999; and Curtis, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.medienhilfe.ch/Partner/MAC/IMF/>

owners are vulnerable to corruption, irresponsible competitor's abuses and risk becoming corrupt themselves. In addition, state interference in media rights is likely to go uncontrolled, and citizens withdraw faith in the media as an impartial source of information and as a representative of their interests. An impartial system of regulators, courts and tribunals is required to enforce violations of broadcasting standards, regulate competition, and to address media-related iniquities such as libel and slander, copyright infringement and privacy abuses. The case of Guyana shows that initiatives in one sector of media development were thwarted due to the lack of an appropriate infrastructure, particularly the absence of regulators.

**Example:**

- In 2001, IMPACS, funded by CIDA, assisted journalists and media managers in developing a code of conduct regarding election reporting for the media of Guyana which was largely considered partisan, irresponsibly competitive and unreliable. Although not binding, the code was expected to be governed by a new broadcast regulatory agency for the electronic media. However, in the continued absence of the new regulatory agency the code quickly was abused and consequently abandoned by broadcasters for lack of regulatory restraint on competitors. The print media soon followed suit. Finally, media and public opinion volatility prompted the government of Guyana to postpone the national elections.

### 3.3.4. *Need for Impact Assessment and Cultural Sensitivity*

A proper pre-assessment of the social and cultural environment in which the media interventions are to be carried out is essential. 'Imported' expectations often cannot take root in foreign soil. In addition, evaluation must be an on-going process with the concomitant capacity for flexibility within the assistance strategy in order to respond quickly to important findings.

**Examples:**

- In 1997 in Croatia, USAID and the Open Society Institute provided substantial funds for the launching of an independent popular magazine of reliable journalism and comment, to attract liberal-minded journalists who would explore democratization. The publication attracted journalist contributors but went deeply into debt and closed for lack of advertisers and readership. The media programme inadequately gauged the prevailing Croatian market of popular ethnological and xenophobic attitudes, which supported existing popular magazines. In addition, it fostered suspicion and rejection of alternative ideas at the time, and the magazine was branded an 'intruder' into Croatia.<sup>24</sup>
- The benefit of evaluation and flexible response was also demonstrated by the decision of the American-based NGO Search for Common Ground in 1998 in Bosnia. After three years, when research proved television was a far more popular medium, the organization cancelled its operations of a call-in radio show (on social issues and the identification of common ground). Assessing the environment and recognizing the presence of a large number of other uncoordinated radio projects in Bosnia, Search for Common Ground chose to withdraw from the country and direct its efforts more usefully elsewhere.

### 3.3.5. *Conflicting Priorities*

Priorities in a post-conflict environment may not always favour media development. Short-term needs to maintain peace, including the organization of free and fair elections, may compel the imposition of

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<sup>24</sup> Reljic, 2003.

arbitrary measures upon the media which interfere with the longer-term objective of implanting free press values and practices protected by an impartial legal and regulatory infrastructure.

Example

- In 1998, the Department of Media Affairs of the OSCE assumed temporary authority as regulator and licensor of all media in Kosovo in order to discourage continued ethnocentric hatreds as conveyed by the indigenous media. At the same time, the OSCE introduced a training programme for media outlets and future indigenous regulators. In 2000, on the eve of important elections, the Department produced Codes of Conduct for Election Coverage by all media, and served as regulator with powers of sanction for violation. However, the description of potential violations and sanctions as well as the regulator's arbitrary power and the lack of an appeal procedure were branded by international media-support organizations as dictatorial, dangerous in a post-conflict environment and contrary to democratization.<sup>25</sup> The criticism reinforced alienation by Kosovo indigenous media and political leaders from Western values of journalism and democratization.

### 3.3.6. Economic Conditions May Thwart Viable and Professional Media

Economic conditions may thwart conventional media assistance, and must inform carefully tailored programmes and expectations. For example, programmes focusing on the development of an independent and reliable media sector must take into account the economic realities of the media environment and the lack of a media-supportive infrastructure. Regardless of the number of journalistic competency programmes, a low-functioning economy generates minimal advertising markets and consequently little revenue for independent media operators. In addition, the basic and advanced journalistic skills are often thwarted by media managers opposed to better-skilled reporting which impinges upon their owners' vested interests. Finally, journalists are very often liable to corruption, bribery and intimidation on the job because they obtain very low pay and status for their work.<sup>26</sup>

Example:

- Despite a significant number of basic journalism training courses in Cambodia over the past five years, the benefits, measured in terms of reduced partisanship of mainstream media, remain limited. During the 2002 local elections, the state-controlled electronic media and the few private broadcasters gave grossly disproportionate and biased coverage to the government party. Until now, most of the indigenous print media remains inaccurate and partisan in its news reporting. Much of this slow progress reflects the country's impoverished economy and its corrupt administration, which renders independent media operations financially perilous unless they resort to sponsorship by powerful interests that dictate news agendas. It also makes journalists financially and personally vulnerable and less attracted to prolonged careers in the journalistic profession.

<sup>25</sup> See *Two press groups assail UN media rules*, at:

<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=12788>

<sup>26</sup> See *Most Russian journalists sell favourable stories as 'hidden advertising'*, at <http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=14735>

## 4. Recommendations

As there is little systematic knowledge about the impact of media assistance on the media sector in recipient countries, let alone on the process of democratization, conclusions and lessons learned presented in this paper are merely tentative and require further in-depth study. If recommendations for improvement of media assistance can be drawn from this cursory overview, they may include the following points.

### *Develop More Appropriate Impact Assessment Methodologies*

When evaluating media assistance, analysts must try to determine the impact of media-directed programmes on the media sector (outcome) instead of recording the short-term results of executing a singular project (output). In other words, instead of recording how many journalists were trained, or how many laws were changed, it is far more important to determine to what degree the standard of reliable journalism was raised and the extent to which the fairness of regulatory decisions was enhanced. However, going beyond simply measuring audience feedback and recipient satisfaction does require elaborate data collection and different assessment methodologies. Such research is usually time-consuming, prolonged and expensive. This is one of the reasons why it is normally not included in a (media assistance) project's definition. However, in order to gain a wider positive effect, media assistance programmes need to be designed on the basis of clear lessons learned from the past. Funding agencies must therefore recognise the need for and long-term implications of both *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation. Reference can be made to the extensive literature on charting the impact of media-based human development initiatives. New yardsticks, indicators and assistance frameworks will nevertheless be needed.

### *Establish Strategic Coordination Mechanisms*

The increasing interest in media assistance risks a profusion of capacity-building projects, especially in so-called 'hot spots'. At the same time, less visible but potentially more rewarding opportunities for democratization in other places are overlooked or simply ignored. Afghanistan, and before that Sri Lanka, Bosnia and Cambodia, have been crowded centres of attention. As Reljic warns: 'All initiatives run the risk that at best considerable resources will be wasted. This seems to be a lesson that still has not been learned.' In order to avoid the same pitfalls in the future and establish a focal point for more strategic coordination, Reljic proposes the establishment of a European Media Agency, serving as both a clearing-house and evaluator of EU media-related assistance proposals for targeted countries.<sup>27</sup> One potential model that could serve as an example is the International Media Fund constituting a coordination of efforts by several major international media donors operating within selected countries.

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<sup>27</sup> Reljic, 2003.

*Do Not Concentrate Exclusively on Privatization of Media*

A related emerging challenge is the assessment of appropriate business models for independent media. Many media donors have steered projects towards free-market models based on privatization of state-run media, or have focused exclusively on private sector media. However, well-equipped yet unreliable state media should not be overlooked as resource-rich and high-impact opportunities for reform and improvement. Private-sector media are often limited in reach (especially newspapers), narrowly controlled, exceptionally partisan and unresponsive to reliable journalism practices. State media may in some cases be more amenable to professionalization and may have the advantage of a large broadcasting reach. The success of state-owned media in numerous Western societies competing with private media under a democratic checks-and-balances monitoring system, should not be overlooked as an acceptable model in post-conflict environments.

*Allow More Time, And Focus on Sustainability*

Media assistance in support of democratization rarely is a ‘quick fix’ and effective at the same time. Both processes are gradual and require reinforcement and regeneration. Strengthening or establishing a free and independent media not only requires strong indigenous media organizations but also a media-supportive infrastructure of courts, legislatures and regulators. As a rule, media assistance programmes should include sustainability strategies consisting of train-the-local-trainers activities in order to delegate the media reform process to local stakeholders. Sustainability also requires attention to the economic viability of the leave-behind media assistance project and the targeted media outlets. The fulfilment of organizational and financial sustainability of local media organizations needs to be part of any donor exit strategy.

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## Website resources

### *Article 19*

London-based international NGO advocating media freedoms and providing training in media-supportive infrastructure. See: <http://www.article19.org/>

### *Centre for War, Peace and the News Media (CWPNM)*

Research, journalism monitoring and analysis and specific media capacity-building projects. See: <http://www.nyu.edu/cwpnm>

### *The Communications Initiative*

Communications interventions for sustainable development. Searchable catalogue of media interventions for human development, modest reference to democratization. See: <http://www.comminit.com/>

### *Council of Europe (CoE)*

Extensive programmes of funded training of media professionalism and related assistance. See: [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/media](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/media)

### *European Journalism Centre (EJC)*

Information on training activities and tools for journalists. See: <http://www.ejc.nl/>

### *Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS)*

Research and journalism training for civil society enhancement. See: <http://www.impacs.org/>

### *Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)*

Journalism training, research and media monitoring. See <http://www.iwpr.net/>

### *International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ)*

Provides journalistic training, media management and technical expertise, and an online source called IJNet for media assistance news, training opportunities and reports on media environment. See: <http://www.icfj.org/>

### *International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX)*

A world-wide monitor of abuse of journalists' and writers' free speech; activates support networks for victims of suppression. See <http://www.ifex.org/> Linked to the *Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)*, a non-partisan defence organization for press freedom. See <http://www.cpj.org/>

### *International Media Fund (IMF)*

An association of international donor organizations coordinating media assistance and development in Macedonia. See: <http://archiv.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/MAC/IMF/Facts.htm>

*International Media Support (IMS)*

Specializes in rapid interventions to support professional journalism and media institutions in conflict-stressed environments as an aid to conflict resolution and democratic development. See:

<http://www.i-m-s.dk/>

*Internews*

International NGO supporting independent media in emerging democracies through training, programming and infrastructure development. See: <http://www.internews.org/>

*International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX)*

Journalism training, legal infrastructure, media assistance. See: <http://www.irex.org/>

*Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)*

Regional media monitoring, training, capacity-building, and research to foster free, independent and diverse media throughout Southern Africa. See: <http://www.misanet.org/>

*Open Society Institute and Soros Foundations Network*

Media programmes providing support and training for journalism development, especially in Eastern and Southern Europe. See: <http://www.soros.org/>

*OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media*

Monitors media freedom in OSCE member states and provides early warning of abuses. In addition, the office provides research and support on media freedoms. See: <http://www.osce.org/fom>

*The Panos Institute*

Research, training and support for journalism. See: <http://www.panos.org.uk/>

*Search for Common Ground (SFCG)*

A leading NGO involved in media and peace-building programmes, democratization and impact assessment activities. See: <http://www.sfcg.org/>

*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*

Within UNESCO, the Communications and Information Sector funds and coordinates programmes for strengthening human and technical capacities benefiting media, including specific programmes such as Strengthening Democracy and Good Government Through Media. See: <http://www.unesco.org/>

*Center for Democracy and Governance, USAID*

Although mainly oriented to US missions abroad, the Center published several papers on media reform in post-conflict environments.

See:

[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/democracy\\_and\\_governance/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/)

and <http://www.usaid.gov/democracy/pdfs/pnace630.pdf>

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