

Mark Frohardt, Africa Regional Director, Internews – early intervention

General Dallaire: So it's really interesting to see this instrument of a counter attack in an operation. Next is Mark, Frohardt, I'm not sure if I pronounced that well, from African Regional Director Internews, another agency that we found very, very positive in the field.

Mark Frohardt: Thank you very much. And thank you for this invitation to speak today. The reason I was asked to speak today was because of a paper that was published by USIP on the Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies, and last night Frank commented on how much we'd packed into that paper, and I'd forgotten just how much until I tried to bring down into about 10 minutes any concise thoughts. I think I have managed to do it, but I'm sure I'll be told if I haven't.

Just as media organization such as Hironnelle Foundation, and Panose (?), conflict resolution organizations, such as Search for Common Ground to use media in their programs. Internews often works with journalists, and other media professionals covering conflict within their own communities. This has led us all to develop specialized strategies for addressing situations of conflict, or situations where conflict seems imminent. However, changing the way the media report on current affairs, becomes increasingly difficult the closer a society comes to conflict. In many situations, media assistance programs are simply prohibited by military or political authorities, as they themselves have a vested interest in manipulating the media. When we started looking at ways to determine how and where that we could intervene earlier, we found the various methodologies by different organizations for identifying societies in which violence conflict is likely to occur, and substantial research into the root causes of conflict. What we didn't find, was any significant reference to the use of media in influencing a society toward or away from conflict, and this is where our research began. We started looking for indicators that were based on the evaluation of local media that identified societies in which the media was vulnerable to manipulation, particularly in the use of mobilizing sectors of a population to violent conflict. We entered these indicators also to inform us as to the type of intervention that was required to strengthen local media in order to resist that manipulation.

Our research resulted in a framework consisting of two categories of indicators: those concerning media structure, the way that the media sector is set up. This includes journalist competence, media variety and plurality, and the media's legal environment, and indicators dealing with media content. And these are the indicators, which examine the programming that media outlets produce. The two categories that we found most significant there: one is to content, which instills fear. The other creates a sense that conflict is inevitable. And Rwanda is a case study in all of these. But I won't go into any of the detail there.

This led us to three types of interventions: structural intervention, which starts before the abuse of the media is really evident. Content specific intervention, which can start earlier, but usually targets the manipulation of the media in it's earlier stages, and

aggressive intervention, which we've heard a lot about especially with regard to Rwanda, the recommendations for radio jamming.

I'm going to focus this afternoon specifically on the structural intervention, because I feel this is the most important, and ultimately the most beneficial. The most effective strategy for strengthening a professional media sector and protecting its content from biased influence is through reforms and media structure. Structural reforms have many advantages over interventions that target only content. If they're carried out early enough, they can prevent media abuse from taking place at all. Structural reforms can also go a long way toward obviating future attempts to manipulate the media during periods of social stress. Once in place, these reforms are no longer dependent on foreign assistance, and this is a very important point. So they tend to maintain legitimacy, and they build popular support.

I'm going to mention just very briefly seven types of the structural interventions, just to give you some sense of the comprehensive nature as it is really of any type of this kind of intervention to really be able to do something at a structural level. And the point here is that it is not any one of these interventions, but the more of them that can be implemented, the better chance that they will be successful.

The first is strengthening independent media. This strengthening is often the product of media plurality, financial viability and longevity, all of which make using media to incite violence increasingly difficult. Plurality creates strength in numbers, with a variety of diverse, independent outlets in place if one or several are co-opted, the results are mitigated. Through media expansion and diversification, hate media can be marginalized as it is, for example, in the United States. Longevity contributes to the strength of independent media, because the longer outlets are in place, the more ingrained in society they become, and the more likely that people will make a large outcry if they are shut down, or abused or manipulated.

The next is, finally, independent outlets also must be financially viable enterprises. When journalists lack the requisite resources to do their job, they are more susceptible to co-optation and corruption.

Next is developing journalist competence. The principle method for enhancing human resources is through training, often through peer-to-peer training conducted by journalists, producers, editors and managers. Investigative journalism is critical to blocking efforts to incite conflict, and debunk the inflammatory myths and stereotypes propagated in media. Journalists trained in investigative journalism are more likely to investigate and report on those who are attempting to abuse the media, and to expose their intentions, which can deter or thwart their efforts.

The next is working with the legislature and the judiciary, or government institutions affecting the media. Particular attention should be paid to the legislature, because of its capacity to make and modify law. In many societies susceptible to media abuse, legislation necessary to prosecute media abuse, including legislation that protects

independent or private media outlets, and legislation that addresses hateful or antagonistic media content, such as slander and libel is absent, ineffective or poorly designed. Once the necessary media legislation is in place, it is equally important that the judiciary has the capacity to enforce laws. Among the recommendations of the organization Article 19, following the Rwandan genocide was that the government should seek to strengthen the judiciary to ensure that the necessary steps can be taken within the domestic legal system to prevent the broadcasting to incitement to violence.

Next is promoting diversity in the journalist core and in media ownership, and this one is not easy, but it can be done. One strategy for promoting diversity among journalists is to impress upon the management and ownership of media outlets how they can benefit commercially from diversity. The increased listenership, increased advertising revenues. Promoting diversity in the media ownership is even more complex, but one route is through bilateral aid, particularly aid channelled from development banks through national financial institutions intended for developing small and middle-sized businesses.

The next is licensing and regulation of media outlets. Starting the media outlet should not be an overly complex, time consuming bureaucratic task, nor should regulation be so lax that just anybody at random can start their own radio station. International NGOs can provide the strong impetus for establishing regulations and provide a blueprint for how to implement such regulations.

The next is strengthening domestic and international networks. Because journalists in vulnerable societies are often isolated from both domestic and international colleagues, establishing and strengthening journalist networks can be an effective strategy for combating media abuse. Domestically this can be accomplished through journalist associations and unions, but also broader regional and international networks are helpful, as they provide awareness of international standards of professional journalism, which serve as a basis from which journalists may feel justified beyond their own personal conviction to resist manipulation, because they enjoy the support of a network, and feel part of a larger community of journalists that adhere to a common standard.

Finally, because of these networks, actors with intent to manipulating media may be more hesitant to do so if every time they apply pressure behind the scenes, their actions are made public by either local or international media. Foundation Hirondelle, Search for a Common Ground, Panose(?), and other media organizations that work in these situations are quite familiar at one level or another with these various types of interventions. And I'm going to conclude with one, which I think we think about at times, but have had very little success in really dealing with, because it's normally thought to be outside of our domain, and that is the demand side intervention. The problem often found in societies in which media abuse occurs, and in societies with underdeveloped media in general, is that media consumers, everyday citizens, rarely consider and question the source and credibility of their news. As Alison Des Forges pointed out earlier, during the genocide, most ordinary people saw no reason to call into question the voice of authority that they heard through RTLM radio broadcasts. As Rwandans had never been exposed to alternatives to state-owned or controlled media, they had little understanding of the bias,

which is inherent in all media outlets. Increased public education is not the only approach to enhancing awareness of how media outlets operate. B92, the famous radio station in Serbia, tried to create such an understanding. As one of the managers of the station once said, “the idea was to provoke the public to start thinking about the information they were receiving, and this was the journalists, who were doing this themselves. And also to encourage people not to be passive recipients of information, but to question everything they heard.” Ultimately if there is little demand side public pressure on media to improve their content and behaviour, there is little incentive for media outlets to change.

I’ll just conclude very briefly with just mentioning by title the four recommendations that we came up with at the end of this, and that is that: 1) media in vulnerable societies should be monitored, 2) there should be a greater collaboration between media organizations and conflict resolution organizations in exchange of information, developing methodologies, and shared programming, and 3) media organizations, need along with conflict resolution organizations need to build a better case for monitoring and early intervention to encourage appropriate donor support. This is not going to happen at the last moment. This really is something that is terrain needs to be prepared for this, and donors also need to be prepared and engaged, long before these kinds of things start. And finally, is a systematic review of media behaviour in vulnerable societies should be conducted, and I’ve been told that research which concludes with a recommendation for more research is one of the last things that one should do, but there really is a need for much more to be done, especially to convince donors that they needed to invest in these situations earlier. Thank you.