

A person wearing a yellow t-shirt and patterned shorts is climbing a tall, vertical wooden pole. The pole has several horizontal rungs. The person is seen from behind, reaching up towards the top of the pole. The background is a clear, light blue sky.

# **Improving Media Initiatives in Conflict Zones**

**Concept Note**

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## Table of contents

Orientation .....	2
Abstract.....	3
A.1 About usefulness and quality .....	4
A.2 Approaching reality in conflict zones .....	5
A.3 Why Transparency on Social Change is Important in Conflict Zones.....	6
A.4 Media’s Role in Monitoring Social Change .....	7
A.4.1 A few words on trust .....	7
A.4.2 Can propaganda be constructive? .....	8
A.4.3 Is the mediating function of media a potential or a duty? .....	9
A.5 How to move from reporting social change to monitoring it .....	10
A.6 Expected outcomes of the proposal (Hypotheses / Theory of Change) .....	11
A.7 Challenges .....	12
APPENDICES.....	14
Research Protocol .....	14
My additional documents .....	15

## Orientation

This concept note is an element of different studies and research activities regarding media initiatives in conflict zones, which were carried out in the period from 2009 to 2015. The concept note basically explains why *constituting publicly accessible databases with rudimentary, journalistically validated information on social change* should be included in the design and implementation of media initiatives in conflict zones (details see A.5).

The entire documentation (bibliography etc.) can be found on [www.h-connect.ch](http://www.h-connect.ch) (Menu “Organisation” → Rubric “Media Projects in Conflict Zones”).

The main issues addressed in this project are *quality categories, evaluation and continual improvement*. The different papers were submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Advanced Study Degree in Peace and Conflict Transformation, accredited by the Advanced Studies Centre at the University of Basel / Switzerland.

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## **Abstract**

The topic of this paper - quality of media initiatives in conflict zones<sup>1</sup> - implies two core questions: What is good and what is poor quality (regarding the topic) and what characterizes the *inside* of conflict zones in contrast to their *outside*. Communication channels between *inside* and *outside* are often scarce or shut down, for example when states with a high Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>2</sup> ask their citizens to refrain from travelling when violent clashes occur in Low-HDI-Areas. This is just one example of segregation between these two spheres of observation.

I contend that media initiatives in conflict zones must clearly extend beyond the remit of common media organisations, towards de-escalation, conflict regulation, and development etc. As these are not standard functions for media, the quality debate turns in circles. Two things, at least, are clear: Applying standard media quality criteria is not enough. And media in conflict zones are particularly well positioned to understand and explain their environment – society, social change, power balance etc. – in a holistic way. This second point is highly important for collective decision-making and administrative tasks inside conflict zones and also for objective quality assessments of outsider's aid activities<sup>3</sup>.

In order to empower conflict-affected societies and to improve the efficacy of aid in general, I propose an additional function to media initiatives in conflict zones: *To constitute publicly accessible databases with rudimentary, journalistically validated<sup>4</sup> information on social change* (for details see A.5). As media organisations constantly produce data on social change, the costs for these additional tasks appear to be reasonable when compared to the potential benefits.

The aim of this work is to be useful for practitioners and experts inside and outside conflict zones and particularly to contribute to better mutual understanding between different academic fields involved in media initiatives in conflict zones.

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions are to be found in B.1.1.1.

<sup>2</sup> The Human Development Index (HDI) has been developed by the United Nations as an alternative to the Gross National Income (GNI), in order to be specific on human development. (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD>; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi> (29.7.2014, for both sources)

<sup>3</sup> The terms “aid” and “aid activities” are used in this text to describe different forms of external support to conflict zones like for example humanitarian- and development aid, activities to enforce, maintain or build peace, to deal with the past etc.

<sup>4</sup> Feedback loops in media systems can validate data on social change, but this must involve also non-media actors, particularly public structures formally in charge for monitoring and documentation (statistical services etc.). Inclusiveness is of general importance in outsider interventions in violent environments. Context and stakeholders must be carefully and continually analysed in order to avoid doing harm by marginalising or privileging specific groups in conflict. See Anderson M (1999) regarding the *Do No Harm Principles*.

## A.1 About usefulness and quality

Talking about quality is en vogue, but is also vague: Different sectors such as, for example, industry, education, health, aid activities, finance etc. have different understandings of quality. Simultaneously, new visions of quality emerge<sup>5</sup>.

One problem in the matter discussed here is that data from aid activities can potentially impact living conditions inside conflict zones without the concerned stakeholders being consulted. Therefore, the quality-question must be discussed together with the question of usefulness: Useful for whom and for what?

In accordance with my personal understanding of quality, I want this paper to be useful for improving living conditions in conflict zones. In order to go beyond simply debating media quality, the theoretical considerations in this paper were complemented with field research<sup>6</sup>.

One problem is that quality assessments regarding aid often lead to controversial debates: First because it is a political issue in the so called “donor countries”, second because the correlation between *impact* (social change in conflict zones) and *input* (aid activities) can rarely be attributed with certainty. This is particularly the case in peace building, under which media initiatives in conflict zones are to be subsumed<sup>7</sup>.

In a first phase, this work was oriented by the question: *How to evaluate quality of media initiatives in conflict zones?* First conclusions were formulated in 2009<sup>8</sup>. Subsequently, I included the question: How to *add value* to such initiatives? This with a focus not only on externally supported media initiatives but also on other media organisations in conflict zones, the international media system, interactions between different systems and possible synergies. I am sceptical about the idea of media concepts developed in “rich” countries<sup>9</sup> having the potential to de-escalate violent conflicts in “poorer” societies, without a specific peace-building element being added.

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<sup>5</sup> Some examples: The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI, <https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx>; 15.10.14), Transparency International <http://www.transparency.org/> (19.2.2014) or the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI; <https://eiti.org/>; 15.10.14).

<sup>6</sup> Field research was undertaken in Bukavu (DRC; Capital City of the South Kivu Province) because of personal relations that I have in this region since a first visit in 1984. Please refer to chapter B.2 and Part C for Details. I am referring to this sample of fieldwork throughout this paper for illustrative purposes, referencing to it as “my fieldwork”.

<sup>7</sup> The term Peace Building sums up a variety of activities reaching from diplomacy to mediation or negotiation, institution building, dealing with the past etc. Some selected definitions for peace building can be found on <http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/2013/08/selected-definitions-of-peacebuilding/> (20.8.2014). The difficulties in establishing correlations between input and impact when evaluating peace building activities are further elaborated in B.2.3.1.

<sup>8</sup> Homberger (2009); briefly introduced in B.2.1.

<sup>9</sup> In this paper, the term “rich countries” is used to describe the group of states with high rankings in terms of Gross National Income per capita and/or Human Development Index, which are also referred as “industrialized” or “developed” countries in literature.

## A.2 Approaching reality in conflict zones

Based on what I experienced in roughly two years spent in the Central African Great Lakes Region between 1984 and 2014, as well as on what I learned from international experts and students about other conflict zones, I assume that isolation is a major problem for people affected by violent conflicts<sup>10</sup>. I still remember how puzzled I was in 1993, when asking Mrs. Shangazo, a respected lady in Shabunda (DRC), what outsiders could do to benefit her district, which was already physically isolated then, three years before war affected it. Her somehow disturbing answer was *“Il faut seulement chaque fois venir nous voir”* - “You need only to come and see us every time”.

Poverty and violent conflicts segregate “insiders” like Mrs. Shangazo from the “outsider” community, which is in fact a very heterogeneous entity involving aid, military, business and many other sectors. Physical or armed protection effectively binds together most of this outsider community, with the effect that a specific communication system for outsiders emerges. In this communication system, security issues are often the core topic, together with specific project related issues and observations on social realities and social change.

For the majority of those most affected by violent conflicts, such information platforms are not accessible, with the effect that different communication systems, even different “truths” exist in parallel. Without relations of trust and objective, publicly accessible information on social realities and social change, factual errors and destructive propaganda can circulate unrecognized in these segregated communication systems.

The fact that the survival of those most affected by violent conflicts often depends on outsider’s emergency responses might provoke additional frustrations: Representatives of aid initiatives are perceived as powerful persons and the “beneficiaries” can expect that this power is used to correct unjust power balances in their environment.

Besides the scarcity of trustable relations and communication, traumas are a second element of segregation between *inside* and *outside*: In conflict zones, violence does not surprise but most of the time still happens unexpectedly. This traumatises victims, relatives, friends and bystanders. Outsiders most often do not share this type of experience, which implies a risk of re-traumatising victims by ignoring or recalling dramas behind smiling faces.

Aid to conflict zones contributes substantially to local or regional economies and subsequently influences power constellations. In such circumstances, illegal or immoral

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<sup>10</sup> Another argument to support the assumption that scarce insider-outsider communication might be problematic is the fact that “conflict countries” covered intensively by international media over the last years appear as having low or very low internet connection rates (percentage of individuals using Internet). Some examples: Eritrea 0,9% (last on the list), Somalia 1.5%, DR Congo 1.9%, Afghanistan 5.9%, Iraq 9.2%, Libya 16.5%, Syria 26.2%, compared to industrialized countries, reaching up to 95% and more (Norway for example has 95.05% of all individuals using Internet). All data are according to the International Telecommunication Union ITU; <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>, 28.7.2014 (Downloadable Excel-Sheet in the rubric “Core indicators on access to and use of ICT by households and individuals”, comparing 228 countries and specific geographical areas).

business practices (corruption etc.) are a third constitutive element for possibly diverging perceptions of reality among different communities: Individuals and groups involved in immoral activities have interests in dissimulating their practice, which is likely to hinder a realistic understanding of context, stakeholders and interests in a conflict.

To understand reality in conflict zones it is necessary to go beyond all those segregation lines. This is time consuming and demands relations of trust as well as access to objective information on social realities and social change. Understanding interests and needs behind power constellations can orient towards communalities, common interests and cooperation. Lack of care in this regard carries the risk of outsiders disconnecting themselves from reality inside conflict zones – and contributing to the deterioration of situations, sometimes even despite the best intentions<sup>11</sup>.

In all this, I see *strong arguments* for outsiders to work collectively with insiders on monitoring social change in conflict zones and on constituting *reliable, publicly accessible databases with essential information on social change in different geographical areas*. Media initiatives appear as potential catalysts to bridge insider-outsider gaps, to initiate meaningful insider-outsider cooperation, and to function as feedback channels for validating data according to journalistic standards – feedback processes that are also crucial for collective decision-making and state building in conflict zones.

### **A.3 Why Transparency on Social Change is Important in Conflict Zones**

Nobody doubts that objective data on social realities and social change is important for planning public services and infrastructure, for other administrative tasks and generally for collective decision making. Most states maintain statistical services for this purpose. But obtaining reliable data in this regard is complex and costly<sup>12</sup>. Warfare and poverty affect the capacity of such services and also public accessibility to objective data on social change.

Further, objective data on social change is a prerequisite to assess the quality and performance of aid activities<sup>13</sup>. It appears that *insider needs and outsider needs meet in transparency on social change*: Insiders need it to shape their future; Outsiders need it to evaluate the impact of their aid activities. These fundamentally different perspectives imply

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<sup>11</sup> Foreign Policy (2015.02.02) – as an example – reports on a well intentioned initiative – the so called „section 1502“ in the Dodd-Frank Financial Reform, passed by the US Congress in 2010 – aimed at stopping commercialisation of conflict minerals, which turned out to have „propelled millions of miners and their families deeper into poverty“ (quotation attributed to the Washington Post of November 30, 2014). <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/02/how-dodd-frank-is-failing-congo-mining-conflict-minerals/>; 14.2.2015

<sup>12</sup> For Switzerland, with roughly 8 million inhabitants, the budget for statistical services is approximately CHF 170 million. [http://www.efv.admin.ch/d/downloads/finanzberichterstattung/budget/2014/VA14\\_Band\\_2A\\_d.pdf](http://www.efv.admin.ch/d/downloads/finanzberichterstattung/budget/2014/VA14_Band_2A_d.pdf) (20.8.2014)

<sup>13</sup> The OECD (1991, 9; Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance) claim, „An evaluation must [...] contain such information as background [...]“.

the risk of insiders and outsiders monitoring social change separately, which would be first of all an economic nonsense and secondly could disconnect outsiders from realities inside the conflict zone<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, the **key recommendation of this paper** is to consider the monitoring of social change as *a specific function in society* to which stakeholders should contribute *collectively*. In consequence, evaluations of aid should be referenced to such public monitoring of social change. Ad hoc data collected throughout evaluation processes can improve the aid system when made public and when it contributes to constant questioning, validating and completing of public databases<sup>15</sup>.

## **A.4 Media's Role in Monitoring Social Change**

Literally, media means in the middle. But pragmatists argue that independence in media is not possible as long as news must sell. Market failure and market concentration in the media sector is often described as threatening democracy, whilst media and the entertainment industry tend to converge<sup>16</sup>. However, the role of media in social change is similar to the cultural sector: Both observe and reflect, which are vital functions in society.

### **A.4.1 A few words on trust**

Trust is a keyword linking media sciences to conflict studies: In media, trust is an essential factor of economic success, as it binds recipients to “their” media. In conflict studies trust is often the key to conflict regulation<sup>17</sup>. When it comes to trust, everybody is an expert as trust

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<sup>14</sup> In this regard, the nexus between journalists covering conflict zones from the outside and specialists for conflict analysis is of particular relevance for this paper: Without sufficient connections to reality in the conflict zones, the understanding of the conflict risks being actualized only by external experts, what can become an entry point for propaganda and (tactical) disinformation into international media and communication systems. A journalist interviewed in Bukavu / DRC says: “[*Understanding*] starts with living together with the population. I think that this is the first thing” (my translation).

<sup>15</sup> Which resonates with the above mentioned OECD Principles, stating: “*What is often needed is evaluation on a more comprehensive scale and an aggregation of evaluation results*” (OCDE, 1991; 8)

<sup>16</sup> Puppis (2007, 78, 65ff) demonstrates how market fails in the media sector: “*Because of the limited willingness of recipients to pay for media use, refinancing media organisation on the public market (alone) is not possible. Media need to orient themselves to alternative financing sources. If media are active in advertising market, the advertising industry obtains a possibility to influence content*”. Further (pp. 65 et seq.), he looks at media regulations and sees state subsidies as one regulatory instrument, among others. He distinguishes three arguments to justify media regulations: Technical reasons (e.g. limited availability of frequencies etc.), commercial reasons (market failure in public goods like information; danger of market concentration etc.) and socio-political reasons (vital importance of objective media for democracies; cultural value of media etc.). (My translations). Peace Nobel Shirin Ebadi is explicit: “*...the principal [five] owners of American media control and manage assets that amount to five thousand billion dollars. This concentration and accumulation of capital becomes so powerful that it eclipses the role of the individual in society*”. (Solbach et al., 2008, 17). In her opinion, freedom of expression must be biased to serve democracies: “*And, of course, that means freedom for the opponents of the government [...]. It is the opponents who should be free to disseminate their views in any way they wish*” (pp. 15).

<sup>17</sup> Field research in the DRC revealed that trust is also crucial to get information about remote, rural areas with difficult access when fighting occurs. Local media say that they work with „rural correspondents“ who serve as information sources but also as channels to receive feedback from recipients.

is based on personal or collective experience and learning. As pointed out by Luhmann (1968, 53; see also B.1.2.5), trusting is *deliberately* taking the risk of being exploited or dominated. Taking risks and getting rewarded – a trial and error mechanism – allows trust to build up. He describes trust as a mechanism to reduce the complexity of social systems and points out that the pressure on individuals to trust in systems rather than other individuals is increasing: Public health and education systems, public transport systems, banking systems – and media – are just a few examples of trust-dependent systems.

When assessing the quality of media initiatives in conflict zones, one main challenge is to understand the “mechanisms” of trust in the context being observed. This challenge is manifold and implies a number of sub-questions: What levels, forms or expressions of trust exist in the conflict zone and how do they change or interact? Is a specific media seen as trustworthy? By whom? Can outsiders realistically evaluate trust related aspects in conflict zones?

Surveys and interviews are current methods to approach such questions but have substantial uncertainties: Do or can resource-persons tell the truth? Do they recognize behavioural change as such? Are evaluation procedures and quality criteria comprehensible to people living in conflict zones? Such studies demand extensive time frames and considerable financial means. If these resources are scarce, approximations based on existing statistical data appear feasible but must be at least rudimentarily validated. Feedback loops in media systems appears to be an interesting option in this regard<sup>18</sup>. As pointed out in A.3, surveys should certainly contribute to transparency with regard to social change and power constellations.

#### A.4.2 *Can propaganda be constructive?*

Manipulation is in fact not always as bad as the term suggests: Chiropractors manipulate their patients, technicians manipulate engines - to name just two examples of manipulation generally considered as *constructive*. Media initiatives and other peace building activities in conflict zones are designed to manipulate society. Promoters of such activities who are not transparent about their intentions might face difficulties when trying to convince stakeholders about the usefulness, legitimacy and constructiveness of their propaganda<sup>19</sup>.

The objective of propaganda<sup>20</sup> is to change the behaviour of recipients, most often by

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<sup>18</sup> Study designs with statistical control groups are ambivalent in conflict zones: It can be seen as immoral to cut specific groups from specific services in order to figure out changes in other groups having these services delivered.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, promoters of media initiatives in conflict zones chose diverging slogans like for example “*Media for peace and human dignity*” (Fondation Hironnelle, <http://www.hironnelle.org/>); “[*Empowering*] groups and individuals who are the target of hate speech and ensuing acts” (Radio La Benevolencija Humanitarian Tools Foundation; <http://www.labenevolencija.org/la-benevolencija/mission-and-vision/>); „*End violent conflict*“, Search for Common Ground, <https://www.sfcg.org/>; All examples viewed on 28.7.2014.

<sup>20</sup> According to Jowett, G., & O’Donnell, V. (1986) “*Propaganda, in its most neutral sense, means to disseminate or promote particular ideas*”.



promising future advantages or by scaremongering. But before behaviour changes, trust needs to be established, at least to a minimal degree. Otherwise, promises or scare tactics would not convince. Thus, to be constructive, campaigns promising future advantages must be first of all transparent about their authors, networks and interests.

But who has the legitimacy to define, what is constructive and what not? How to reconcile eventually diverging visions of sponsors, implementers and beneficiaries? One aim of this paper is to draw attention away from the destructive-constructive dilemma and focus on *mechanisms of propaganda* instead. These are similar for constructive and for destructive media outlets, as usually no separate media systems are installed. I am convinced that understanding how and why propaganda works is useful for people living in conflict zones. Insiders and outsiders certainly have their deficits, but they can always opt for cooperation.<sup>21</sup>

#### A.4.3 *Is the mediating function of media a potential or a duty?*

Impartiality links the roles of mediators and of media<sup>22</sup>: Both impact violently escalated conflicts, but only mediators have a clear duty: De-escalation and conflict regulation. Media reporting certainly has an impact on how actors and their (conflicting) interests are perceived, but this impact is not determined in advance as long as freedom of the press counts as the highest imperative in media. Howard (2002, 9) firmly questions, whether this is morally correct by stating: “[I]t is increasingly obvious that the professional norms of journalism do not trump fundamental moral obligations”. This dilemma inspired Johan Galtung et al to develop the concept of peace journalism<sup>23</sup> some fifty years ago. But not many of the elements of this are implemented in today’s leading media<sup>24</sup>.

Whether, and which, media are able and willing to control the impact of their reporting on escalated conflicts is an interesting question but must be left open here in order not to

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<sup>21</sup> My field research provides some support for this assumption, but as it is also my personal opinion and the field study is based on a small sample, this cannot be considered as evidence. Explaining how manipulation and propaganda works is distinct from explaining that information, opinion and advertising must be separated – a golden rule in journalism, transferred to national laws in many countries.

<sup>22</sup> As media and mediators consider viewpoints of different (ideally all) parties, a rigid argumentation would rather claim *all-partiality* instead of impartiality, at least from mediators.

<sup>23</sup> Galtung J (2008b) recommends journalists “go for the less newsworthy to get a balanced picture” and “be conscious of the tendency to cast non-elite in a negative light, to disregard the structural, and to go for the negative, like the violence, rather than the positive, like the solutions”.

<sup>24</sup> This implementation problem of peace journalism inspired me to propose *Connective Journalism* as an alternative, more neutral concept (Homerger, 2014). Howard (2001, 12) proposes “to view the media as several stages in a continuum of intervention”. His model moves from stage 1 (“conventional journalism”) to stage 5 which is “directly interventionist media programming, which includes and extends beyond conventional techniques to use soap operas, street theatre videos and comic books [...] with an intended outcome in mind to foster society ‘as we’d like it’”. Howard himself uses quotation marks for «as we’d like it» and leaves out whether he asked the beneficiaries if they “like it”. From the sources I interviewed in my field research, some were sceptical about entertaining media content, giving the credits rather to media offering space for dialogue. To all this, McGoldrick & Lynch (2001) contribute with a list of Do’s and Don’ts for peace journalism, enriching the original concept of Galtung.

overstretch the paper. Of relevance are the media's *potential to impact*<sup>25</sup> and the ways to *value this potential*. Again, the question of destructive or constructive could be asked, but it is more important to distinguish media initiatives in conflict zones from media in general: The first have a clear task with regard to the conflict, similar to the task of a mediator: De-escalation, in the first place, but it can go beyond this, towards development, economic growth, reducing social inequalities etc. Other media, inside and outside conflict zones have the same potential, theoretically, but most often adopt a neutral position in this regard.

In this regard, one problem is that media professionals covering conflicts from outside the conflict zone usually lack the necessary know-how to achieve de-escalation inside the respective conflict zone. Therefore, media initiatives in conflict zones must provide adequate support in terms of peace building and/or conflict analysis to regional and international media so these can value their potential to stabilize conflict zones.

### **A.5 How to move from reporting social change to monitoring it**

Having discussed why it makes sense to involve media in systematic and public monitoring of social change for peace building purposes, the question is now: How to do this? Regardless of their environment, media have the knowledge and the networks to cover social change. It is just that, after reporting, outlets usually end up in archives or, in conflict zones, sometimes in waste bins. The idea here is to create synergies between journalistic work and the constitution of publicly accessible databases on social change.

The following is just a very brief process description.

**Step 1: Identification of actors, relevant indicators and geographical limitations** – leads directly to the most difficult conceptual questions. How to decide which indicators reliably represent social change? Who to involve in this decision making process? How to manage the task under budget pressure?

The fact that the satisfaction of *basic needs* is determinative for individuals' and groups' social reality is an argument to link the choice of indicators to it<sup>26</sup>. Further, journalists' accessibility to data needs to have priority. Having highlighted scarce Insider-Outsider contacts as one characteristic of conflict zones, the physical presence of foreigners could be another possible indicator. But as all this is closely linked to quality definitions, the recommendation must be to involve the concerned beneficiaries in the detailed decision

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<sup>25</sup> The potential of media to impact conflicts must not be questioned as such: The destructive role of media in the world wars and more recently in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda are two examples that are publicly not contested. In addition to which, none of the interviewed persons in my fieldwork questions the potential of media to end violence and some even go as far as seeing the end of violence as the ultimate goal of media.

<sup>26</sup> A classical source of inspiration in this regard is Maslow A.H. (1943). The framework of the Human Development Index (HDI) is another recommendable source of inspiration in the quest of indicators for the monitoring of social change, even if covering all 54 indicators included in this concept is far from realistic for the purpose discussed here. The website <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data> is transparent on methodological details about how to monitor social realities and social change.

making regarding this question (to be further elaborated in chapter B.2).

On the other hand, indicators, data collection methods and geographical aspects must be determined at an early stage of the project because later changes might impede the creation of consistent databases suitable for comparative purposes. Therefore, a basic set of indicators needs to be defined from start; additional criteria or other geographical areas can be added later.

**Step 2: Investigation and focussed media coverage at fixed intervals** – is aimed at obtaining a baseline and subsequent datasets on the fixed indicators, and at crosschecking data through feedback loops in media systems. Covering topics related to basic needs and social change is likely to be of relevance for recipients in conflict zones and arouse their interest.

**Step 3: Documentation and presenting trends** – focusses on inspiring (political) dialogue and on minimizing disinformation, speculation, destructive propaganda and tensions related to this. The Internet appears to be the tool of choice for data storage and presenting overviews and trends. Additionally, the findings need to be presented and discussed in local media in order to assure they are constantly discussed and validated, and to include those communities that do not have access to the Internet. Moreover, an effort should be made to arouse the interest of outsider communities in order to bridge the insider-outsider gaps described.

Linking the monitoring and documenting of social change to journalistic activities helps minimize efforts. Steps two and three offer the chance for multiple synergies whilst step one is oriented at project design and mobilizing resources.

## **A.6 Expected outcomes of the proposal (Hypotheses / Theory of Change)**

These reflections, together with earlier studies and field research allowed the following three hypotheses to be developed, which all have the same starting point:

***(1) Public access to journalistically validated data on social change in conflict zones facilitates the constitution and maintenance of fact-oriented media landscapes, which in turn is constitutive for dialogue, trust building and inclusiveness in collective decision making.***

***(2) Further, publicly accessible, journalistically validated data on social change in a particular conflict zone can potentially raise interest from the “outside-world” (media, research, cultural sector, business, sports etc.), counter isolation and (re)integrate conflict zones in regional and international communities and networks.***

***(3) In regard to aid activities, publicly accessible, journalistically validated data on social change has the potential to avoid multiple parallel monitoring processes, which reduces spending and increases the efficiency of aid.***

Overall, the **Theory of Change**<sup>27</sup> has *publicly accessible, journalistically validated data on social change* as its input variable. This is expected to effect changes in the following five output variables: *Fact-orientation* in the media landscape (increase), *Trust* (increase), *Inclusiveness* in decision making (increase), *Interest* of outsider communities (increase), *(Re)-integration* into regional / international communities (increase) and *Efficiency* of aid activities (increase).

The expected causal links from the availability of objective (journalistically validated) information to the output variables are not automatisms but require deliberate promotion. Further, the cause effect chain, from input to output, is not restricted to media: Availability of objective information can potentially have the expected impacts also via other channels like for example public administrations, civil society organisations, diaspora, cooperation in terms of culture, education etc.

## **A.7 Challenges**

The following list of risks and challenges might look discouraging. Nevertheless, it would look quite similar even without adding the monitoring of social change to media initiatives in conflict zones.

The most critical element in the concept presented here is its dependency on the readiness of different actors inside a conflict zone to cooperate<sup>28</sup>. Cooperation is important to avoid market distortion: Charging one organisation with the whole task would allocate disproportionate funding to it and leave other local media organisations discriminated against and the initiative dependent on external funding. Further, cooperation between media organisations is required to assure data validation through different feedback channels.

The proposal to create public databases on social change in fact encourages media to go beyond their classical role “in the middle” and complement other (public) functions, most likely statistical services. This can create more problems than it solves when representatives formally in charge of this function interpret complementation as disrespectful or even threatening. Conversely, convincing specialists for statistics, social sciences etc. to become involved in the initiative might substantially increase overall performance. The end-goal must be efficient collective decision-making and financially independent structures that fulfil their role in society (media, statistical and other public services, civil society etc.). Combining

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<sup>27</sup> Church & Rogers (2006, 10 et seq.) dedicate a whole chapter to understanding change in conflictive situations and strongly recommend making theories of change explicit. In their words: “the changes sought [in peace building programs] should be [made] evident in a well designed programme”.

<sup>28</sup> My fieldwork indicates a certain degree of mistrust in the media ecosystem of Bukavu/South Kivu, contrasted by the viewpoint of several journalists interviewed, who have experienced cooperation among different media as positive. Such exercises in media cooperation have apparently been organized by external donors to cover important events, i.e. elections etc.

initiatives in institution building, political dialogue, and in the media sector appears to be a highly synergetic option.

On a more general level, the acceptance of the idea by powerful individuals and ruling groups is not pre-given but must be acquired by making potential advantages comprehensible. The choice of indicators is essential in this regard: Many statistical figures such as, for example, the total population or ethnical attributions can be politicized or even abused for segregation and worse. Innocent indicators do not exist, but focussing on basic needs like health, education etc. and on trends instead of rankings (which potentially stigmatize the most vulnerable) are less sensitive or polarizing.

Motivating different stakeholders - some occasionally in competition with each other - to cooperate implies a danger of paralysis when having too many stakeholders on board. The issue can be managed by limiting the number of representatives per *type* of contributor in the system (which potentially opens the system for contributors from outside the media sector).

Another risk lies in the limitations that arise when monitoring of social change is realized as a “by-product” of media organisations: Small budgets allow only a few indicators to be monitored and only a small number of actualisations per time period. This need not be an obstacle (or can even be a plus) if information is systematized into accurate and relevant essentials. Considering the usual geographical fragmentation of conflict zones, priority should be given to monitoring different geographical areas, with few indicators.

Technological challenges are data storage, data safety and visualisation, and are linked to the choice of criteria and geographical areas to be monitored. The risk of creating “data cemeteries”, which nobody uses, and which even discriminate against people without Internet connection, is not negligible. Involving different stakeholders raises the chances that they exploit the “Wiki’s”, to which they contribute. In the case of media, an incentive could be that meaningful and accurate content can be produced with less effort.

The legal context and its practical implementation in conflict zones are particularly challenging issues, as media in conflict zones are often subject to oppression. Including the legal situation in the monitoring of social change increases the degree of complexity and carries a certain risk of conflict with stakeholders who have something to hide. However, not addressing this challenge carries a risk of being incomplete and having poor impact.

Overall, long-term engagement appears as a must in the matter discussed here, not only because short-term orientation would potentially put the life and wellbeing of project staff at risk.

## APPENDICES

### Research Protocol

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Documents</b>
Feb. 2009	Degree dissertation; Basic research on quality criteria for media projects in conflict zones	Medienprojekte und Medienwirkungen in Konfliktzonen – Grundlagen für die Herleitung von Qualitätskriterien
Nov. 2010	Interim Study Report (Summary of the 2009 paper in English)	Evaluating the Quality and Impact of Media Initiatives in Conflict Zones – A Set of Guidelines
March 2011	Plans to complement the basic research of 2009 with field research in the DRC, as Thesis in the MAS Programme of World Peace Academy	Study Concept (in German)
Nov 2011	Establishment of a formal framework for field research	Conditions d'interview (in French)
Dec 2011 – Jan 2012	Eight in-depth interviews in Bukavu / DRC, as part of a one month stay in Bujumbura (Burundi) and Bukavu	Recordings, Transcripts of Interviews 1 and 2 and some attempts at categorisation
Feb. 2012	Development of an essay about impressions during the stay in Bujumbura and Bukavu	Bukavu, via Bujumbura: 6 portraits – and some open questions (in German; French Version followed in 2013)
March 2012	Extension of the research focus towards <i>"How to add value to media initiatives in conflict zones by combining quality and performance assessment with the monitoring of social change?"</i>	Research Proposal
July 2013	Rethinking the system for categorisation and coding of the interviews from winter 2011/12, as the first version appeared to be too detailed	
Nov. 2013 – Jan. 2014	Another two months stay in South Kivu for <i>a)</i> Further developing the MAS Thesis and <i>b)</i> Conducting an external evaluation for a local NGO after ten years of existence	Context Analysis of the rural Kivu-Maniema Region (as part of the evaluation report, which is not public; both documents in French)
Oct. 2014	Presentation of provisional findings on the occasion of the Swiss African Research days in Berne	Towards improving media initiatives in Conflict Zones (Draft Concept Note in English and a Draft Report on Field Research in French)
Jan. 2015 – Feb. 2015	Transcribing and coding the remaining interviews and conclusion on field research, focussing on <i>recommendations expressed by the interviewed persons and addressed to promoters of media initiatives in conflict zones</i>	Media in Conflict Zones: Perceptions and Expectations; Report on Field Research, in French, with an Abstract and Content Analysis in English

## My additional documents

2009: Medienprojekte und Medienwirkungen in Konfliktzonen - Grundlagen zur Herleitung von Qualitätskriterien. Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Organisation > Media projects in conflict zones

2010: Evaluating the Quality and Impact of Media Initiatives in Conflict Zones - Interim Study report. Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Organisation > Media projects in conflict zones

2012: Research Proposal. Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Organisation > Media projects in conflict zones

2012: Bukavu ... via Bujumbura – Portraits, and some open questions. Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Culture > Essays

2012: Connective Journalism – How to overcome the implementation problems of peace journalism. Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Culture > Essays

2014: Context Analysis, Kivu-Maniema rural. Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Organisation > Focus Congo / Great Lakes > Shabunda 2014

2015: Improving Media Initiatives in Conflict Zones – Reconsidering Quality Criteria (full documentation). Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Organisation > Media projects in conflict zones

2015: Médias en zone de conflit : perceptions et attentes / Media in Conflict Zones: Perceptions and expectations (par rapport à l'enquête sur le terrain / related to field research). Go to: <http://www.h-connect.ch/> > Organisation > Media projects in conflict zones