

Media Graduation from Potential to Actual Power in Africa's Conflict Resolution: Experience from the East and Horn of Africa

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Introduction

The media has for a long time been recognised as a catalyst in the many intra- and inter-state conflicts that have afflicted the African continent. This paper analyses the pre-testing results of a regional media conflict transformation project that was recently carried out in East Africa and the Horn of Africa regions. The paper premises the analysis on three media theories: gatekeeping, agenda setting and socialisation. The project trained journalists from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan in coverage of conflict transformation issues. The project further developed a regional training manual designed to socialise journalists and media practitioners in the principles of conflict resolution journalism. Pre-testing results revealed that journalists on their own could not attain the ideals of a regional media conflict transformation strategy. What are needed are networks of information resources working in a structured manner with media outlets, the gatekeepers and agenda setters, and training institutions.

Part two of the regional project aims to create a network for countries in the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and Southern Africa. Ideally, the network should ensure that gatekeepers facilitate an agenda-setting action to socialise the region politically in a way that effectively resolves or transforms conflicts. This paper represents an analysis of pre-testing results and the thinking behind phase two of the project. The initiative undertaken to harness

media for the purposes of transforming conflicts is considered innovative. This paper also represents the outcome of an ongoing regional training initiative undertaken by the University of Nairobi School of Journalism and the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) with financial support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The project targeted print and broadcast journalists from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan, and set about developing a dialogue around issues regarding the media coverage of conflict and corruption in their respective countries. Of particular interest to the initiative was the manner in which journalists reflected the reality of African conflict. So too was the development of their skills in coverage of such issues. The ultimate goal of the project was to create a team of journalists who could address issues in a manner that pre-empted conflicts in Africa while promoting peace through the media. The targeted journalists from the four eastern African countries came together in a Media and Conflict Resolution workshop held in Nairobi in May 2004. The three-day encounter addressed the following key issues:

- Conflicts and corruption as they have seen and covered these;
- The development of analytical frameworks for understanding and addressing conflict issues;
- Ethical considerations that apply when covering conflict issues;
- Tools and techniques for covering conflict in the print and broadcast media.

The participants after the training in Nairobi went home to put into practice the tools and techniques they had learned, and a training manual was developed for the purposes of replicating the exercise in universities throughout the region. The manual was pre-tested in Ethiopia and Uganda to ascertain its viability as a capacity-building resource. This paper reviews the exercise; it presents an analysis of findings and recommendations for the next phase. It recognises the importance of such an initiative for harnessing the capacity of media in regional conflict transformation exercises. The media's agenda-setting capabilities are discussed from a standpoint which suggests that these are the resources that need to be constructively harnessed in conflict resolution exercises. The

Rwandan genocide, for instance, instigated by a radio bulletin, demonstrates how such agenda-setting powers can work the other way – to foment conflict – with deadly consequences. Rwanda will always serve as a reminder of how such awesome power has to be handled responsibly.

Pre-test results of the training manual further suggest deep linkages between conflicts such that media conflict resolution initiatives will not sustain themselves without supporting networks in the region. The elements working against these initiatives include the difficult political environment prevailing within the region and lack of access to information. Working conditions in many media establishments militate against African journalists in ways that prevent them from competing with their well-endowed Western counterparts in the coverage of conflicts. Such issues are raised in the analysis. Recommendations include the systematic development of a regional network which would provide media practitioners with an enabling environment.

Goals of the Pre-Testing Exercise

The aim of the pre-testing exercise was to practically apply the manual in actual training contexts to see how it would respond to the practical needs of equipping journalists with required skills for reporting on conflicts in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa. The following objectives guided the exercise using focus group discussion techniques:

- The need to determine how useful the training manual is in imparting skills that are helpful when reporting on conflict and corruption-related issues in the Eastern and Horn of Africa region;
- The need to determine whether proactive thinking, a concept the manual stresses, makes for a better identification of issues and stories on conflicts and corruption;
- The need to determine whether proactive formats communicate conflict-related issues effectively, giving due regard to ethical considerations and conflict transformation needs.

Why Pre-Test in Uganda and Ethiopia?

Uganda and Ethiopia were chosen as grounds for the pre-test exercise for several reasons. In the case of Ethiopia, the impetus was mainly the intermittent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and a media system that is almost entirely controlled by the government. It was critical to understand how journalists in such contexts behaved with information sources and what their attitudes were towards the mainly official sources they have to rely on especially in representing conflict situations, and whether the manual made any useful suggestions for them. The context of an ongoing conflict also provided an ideal chance to practically test the proactive approach advocated by the manual, especially in relation to key issues such as the origination of story ideas, representation, handling sources, and balancing views and perspectives while reporting conflicts. In this regard, it was critical to find out whether journalists in such contexts would relate the key issues in the manual to the practical situation they were already dealing with. In addition, it suffices to mention that the pre-test exercise would not have been complete without journalists interacting in a practical situation with potential information resources. Addis Ababa provided access to such critical information from sources like the African Union (AU), and the United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), among others.

For Uganda, the ongoing 20-year war in the north of the country was a key consideration. It was critical to understand how Ugandan journalists would relate issues in the manual to their experiences while reporting on the ongoing conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel forces and the Uganda People Defence Forces (UPDF), the government army, in the north. The consulting team was keen to see whether the manual provided new perspectives for them in handling this protracted conflict. Furthermore, the training manual advocates a reporting format that requires journalists to relate historical processes to current events. Going beyond the event enables audiences to understand cause and effect. In this regard, the history of Uganda, a country that has in recent years been enmeshed in endless conflict, provided an ideal situation for the pre-test. Finally, Uganda also provided access to a key information resource, the Nile Basin Initiative, which has its headquarters in Entebbe. Given its

proximity, journalists could directly interact with such critical information resources while strengthening their networks of information resources.

Overview of Results

Pre-testing workshops in Uganda and Ethiopia had critical revelations, the main ones being as follows:

The manual was useful, but more so in classroom situations and workshops than in in-house training of journalists covering conflicts. Given this reality, it became clear that greater relevance to in-house training would need the cooperation of training managers in media houses. The manual would also have to work with specific stories that were produced by reporters. The manual was designed with the region in mind. However, hardly any journalist was able to comprehend how regional issues related to their specific situations. Trainers could comprehend the linkage between regional and national issues; thus, the challenge for them was sensitising their students in thinking the same way. More needed to be done to build regional conceptual frameworks that tie into local realities. That fact became apparent during the pre-testing exercise.

Proactive reporting formats were well received. Indeed, it was generally accepted that any format that helped journalists to capture and interpret issues was preferable to conventional events-oriented journalism. This format however requires time, a commodity that media houses do not give readily to journalists. It also requires media houses to rework management structures in such a way as to give reporters a say in editorial decision-making. Current structures are parochial; reporters are assigned stories, and they do not have much room to feed into editorial decision-making processes.

Political considerations, especially in Ethiopia, also played a huge role in disempowering journalists. Choices regarding what to cover and how were defined by tensions and the regime in power. Obvious questions regarding ways and means of creating an enabling environment for journalists arose. A way forward for now seems to be through collaboration and networking with fellow journalists in the region who can provide alternative outlets for stories. The thinking around alternative editorial management formats also looks feasible. Short of this, the set-up seems designed to undermine proactive principles.

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In difficult political situations, training institutions, as opposed to media houses, were probably best suited for working with the manual. They found it attractive, especially given the fact that there are very few locally produced manuals or journalism textbooks. They appreciated the fact that all the examples used in the manual were local. They were also clear that for Africa, proactive journalism was needed.

Issues regarding how the manual translates into the harsh political environment that confronted industry were not easy to address. However, in discussions, the example of Kenya suggested that regimes and political realities change. Often, they change quite suddenly and in a manner that opens up a space for professionals. At the point where that happens in Uganda and Ethiopia, it would be good to have a corps of proactive journalists ready and capable of managing ensuing issues. The example of Kenya also suggested that when such freedom comes, the biggest problems would be those of ethics and professionalism. Indeed, freedom without responsibility now constitutes the biggest threat to journalism in Kenya. It was for this reason that the Media Council of Kenya was set up to, amongst other things, develop a code of ethics and professional conduct; receive complaints from the public on behalf of industry regarding coverage; and complement the efforts of training institutions in the development of competent, ethically grounded journalists. The section in the manual on ethics had some relevance to Uganda, where a code exists. A media council also exists, but it is struggling to determine whether to be a statutory body and suffer government interference, or become self-regulating. However, none of the above exists in Ethiopia.

Chapter by Chapter Review of Pre-Test Results

Chapter One

The first chapter notes that reporting events is easier than addressing issues. With events, as long as you accurately represent what happened and who said what, why, when, where and how (5Ws and an H), you are just about there in journalism. It is not that straightforward when there is no event and

you have to identify an issue that can be developed into a newsworthy story. This chapter gives attention to where the thinking starts when conflict media journalists are developing issues that an editor could look at and smile about. When editors smile, ideas stand a very good chance of being incorporated into the daily or weekly news diary. Reporters dread it when they frown. More often than not, reporters opt to avoid making suggestions regarding story ideas lest they be rejected.

Chapter one of the manual suggests the following:

- There are ways of organising ideas around conflict transformation issues without the facility of any event.
- It is important for a reporter to involve the editor in simple brainstorming exercises. The editors make the final decision on what is newsworthy and what is not. Thus, reporters can influence the decisions editors make by using such exercises.
- Developing matrices that stimulate and structure thought processes is very important.
- Following the same approach when engaging information sources in a similar dialogue gives better results.

As mentioned in the overview, the parochial structure of newsrooms does not lend itself well to such dialogue. Reporters hardly get to brainstorm or discuss issues with their editors. They are usually assigned stories on a daily basis. The pressure to get the story in before the end of the day allows them little room for conducting research. However, there were certain special assignment arrangements that have the potential for creating the kind of room issues field-based reporting needs. There were instances, particularly in Ugandan media houses, where journalists, working with training managers, were able to enjoy such space. Indeed, during the sessions in Uganda, one editor suggested he was willing to explore possibilities for in-house training using the manual in this way. And that so long as the story ideas were usable, it would make the effort worthwhile. Criticism of chapter one focused mainly on the need for more examples. For each matrix that was proposed, examples were needed so that the picture of how they worked was made clear. Exercises for all sections assumed

that such examples would come out of practical sessions. However, the call for more examples was well taken and indeed, they would enrich the chapter.

Such an approach would also counter criticism from trainers, some of whom felt the manual was too theoretical. Some felt it would have been better to simplify the manual to a generic formula and that building in context made it too academic. The opposite side of that argument suggested that there were too many generic versions formulated and imported from America and Europe. What we needed, some argued, were Africa-specific manuals that used examples from the continent and captured its unique realities. It became apparent in discussions that it was not only reporters who needed such a manual for training. Trainers also needed to be trained in how to use it. Unique as it was, the suggestion was that prior to training journalists, the trainers themselves needed to go through the rigours. It is from them that the examples and usage of brainstorming techniques would derive. But first, trainers needed to learn how to use the conflict training manual, especially at the conceptual and issues level.

Chapter Two

This section addresses investigative journalistic techniques that are useful in sourcing information and objectively representing it to diverse audiences. Given the fact that this manual is for African journalists, 'Afro-centric' perspectives are highlighted. Some attention is given also to 'multicultural perspectives', thus recognising that there is more than one way to perceive events. Discussion on perspectives was thin. In Ethiopia especially, journalists and trainer were hearing about 'Afro-centricity' and 'multiculturalism' in journalism for the first time. In the thinking leading up to the draft, 'Afro-centricity' and 'multiculturalism' were two perspectives that were considered important when building context. 'Afro-centricity' puts African interests first and weighs the rest of the world in terms that are relative to those interests. 'Multiculturalism' suggests that even as this is going on, reporters need to be able to manage the plurality of cultures in the so-called 'global village'. Working with both requires practice and awareness of what meaning you are conveying and to whom. Such a discussion probably could not have come out of a pre-testing scenario. However,

there was general agreement about how important such perspectives were for African journalists.

Chapter two contained a plethora of definitions for conflict. Those were welcome. Some felt the definitions should have come at the beginning of the manual. Others felt that they could have even come in the appendices. That fact that they were there was welcomed by all. This section addressed packaging formats under the heading 'putting it all together'. It offered journalists several alternatives to the inverted pyramid, which was weak when addressing issues. Issues-based reporting also relied heavily on the manner in which ideas were structured and put together. Formats for that are contained in the manual. Some trainers felt they were really useful. Others needed examples to see exactly how they worked. Criticism of the overall chapter lay in the way each component was potentially its own chapter. In this regard, the section did not hold together. It could well be that with additional examples for each they could become chapters in their own right.

Chapter Three

It has been said that no ethical standards are built into the mass media. The ethics of each responsible communicator contribute to the making of professional codes of conduct to which most media people can subscribe. It has also been said that no statement of professional ethics is aimed at a particular circumstance or chain of reports about any one situation. On the contrary, this manual subscribes to the notion that all constructive codes are useful because they consist of practical general rules that can be transgressed only at the greatest personal and public risk. The individual communicator always has to face up to the ethical imperatives in deciding how to deal with a detail or a whole story. No formulation of collective wisdom substitutes for the individual searching his/her own conscience.

Few professional journalists today accept the notion that the press merely reports what is happening in a detached manner. At times of social crisis, reports can and often do alter the social scene, thereby helping to create attitudes material to events that will follow. A scare headline should not appear just to increase

newsstand sales. Reports about conflicts in Africa must educate without making the situation worse. Stories about the exploits of warlords should not glorify their deeds, thus manufacturing anti-heroes who despite infamous activities become popular models of decisive action. Journalists should become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to educate the public through responsible dissemination of scrupulously prepared reports. They should become more sensitive to what amounts to censorship through interpretation. If information from a conflict situation is blurted out to the public without appropriate review of the situation, the welfare of society is made hostage to media irresponsibility.

Social norms serve as moral guideposts. They come in the form of shared values; a balance between the rights and interests of autonomous individuals and their obligations to society; justice and the notion of fairness in which all individuals are treated alike in terms of what they deserve; and freedom of choice. This section of the conflict transformation manual addresses ethical imperatives through case studies that highlight conflict related issues. The responsibility for determining the validity of each case ultimately lies with individual journalists. The following cases are reviewed:

- Media's coverage of the 7 August 1998 bombing of America's embassies in East Africa;
- Why didn't we know about the Rwandan genocide in time to stop it?;
- Mohamed Amin and the cameraman's perspective;
- Compromising truth and meaning with images of the good, the bad, and the ugly;
- Source/reporter checklist;
- The dangers of stereotyping in conflict situations;
- Watching out for official government spokespersons;
- A checklist on ethics and deception;
- Humanitarian ethics in disaster and war;
- The ethics of war reporting;
- Diversity factors which need to be considered;
- Airwaves and the ethical problems they present.

Pre-testing forums recognised how over time, this section of the manual would grow. Emerging issues and events would dictate that growth. Efforts to monitor developments would of necessity have to be undertaken, presumably by universities and research-based institutions that are a part of the media conflict management initiative. It was noted that somewhere along the line, evolving scenarios would need to be subsumed under a broad conceptual framework that enables people to piece everything together. However, the case study approach for now seemed to be the most reasonable option.

Chapter Four

This section of the manual reviews the social, economic and political developments that are fuelling conflicts in Africa. Trans-national corruption, which ranges beyond the mandate of national governments, is growing at an alarming rate and is also reviewed. Though global in origin, this corruption is fuelling many of the conflicts that are breaking out and unfolding in Africa. This section highlights some of these problem areas. The discussion is in no way exhaustive. Priority is given to raising certain issues by reviewing what experts in the field are saying. Thereafter, the section raises talking points that focus on emerging concepts that conflict journalism may want to address. In the ideal setting, this section of the manual should provoke forward-looking ideas that approximate the unfolding regional and global conflict scenario. It should lend itself to forums in which editors, civil society organisations, private sector organisations and all those institutions that have an interest in transforming conflicts are able to get together and debate. For the journalist, such forums are ideal. They congregate information sources and media house policy-makers in a dialogue that brings everyone on board as far as understanding emerging issues is concerned. It also brings to bear on media house policy-makers and information resources the need to collaborate in this manner, and the importance of doing so if we are to tackle conflict and corruption effectively in the 21st century. At issue in this section of the manual are the following:

- Reconsideration of the concept of the fourth estate;
- Global power shifts that are breeding new forms of anarchy;
- The criminalisation of the state in Africa;

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- Corruption in East Africa;
- The international humanitarian aid factor;
- The AU convention;
- Transparency International's assessments;
- Coming to terms with political corruption;
- The forging of global opinion;
- The Al Jazeera phenomenon – can it serve as a global conflict mediation model for African broadcasters?;
- Reconstituting the state of Somalia – can it work this time around?

The Conflict Journalism Network (CJN)

CJN was the outcome of the first training workshop, which took place in 2004. It brought journalists in from Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya for a three-day encounter. They probed conflict and corruption issues as they have seen and covered them and defined the role they should play in promoting such coverage. Over the span of three days they also identified techniques that best communicated and captured key issues. It was from that workshop that the training manual gained its conceptual outline. The journalists set themselves certain goals, the obvious one being to go back home and put these skills to good use. The network which they formed during the Nairobi encounter was meant to ensure that they communicated regularly with each other and shared information regarding conflict-related stories.

Three things became apparent during the pre-testing exercise. One was that no one was communicating. The second, which partly explains the first, lay in the fact that people had either changed jobs or had been transferred to other sections of their respective organisations. A third element, specific to Ethiopia, derived from the fact that of the three journalists who came to Nairobi, two had fled the country; the third, a lady, had been jailed for stories she filed which had presumably offended the government. An overall picture one gets from such outcomes lies in the fact that covering conflict-related issues in Africa can be extremely dangerous. The initiative that was being pre-tested had no capacity

to deal with political and economic fall-out. Ethiopia was going through a post-election period. One could feel the tension in Addis Ababa. Indeed, that part of the pre-testing exercise was delayed because of post-election trouble. Uganda, preparing for elections in 2006, underwent the same strife.

An initiative such as the media conflict resolution project is seen as very short term for many institutions. Many ask, 'after the workshops, then what?' There are also many training workshops which end on completion of sessions. One has to adopt a long-term perspective on the initiative to imagine where it could go and what it could do. Such a perspective should recognise that the need for conflict resolution mechanisms is growing. A number of newly established institutions have been set up to do that. They include Nile Basin and Great Lakes initiatives. While recognising the importance of the media in brokering peace and development, they have yet to understand how this resource could be most effectively harnessed. What they lack is a strategic regional framework that maps out that kind of a picture. CJNI fits squarely into that kind of matrix. However, under current circumstances, it has no location or legitimacy. Nor can it easily be institutionalised. A proposed solution is built into the next section of this paper. This is the development of a regional media conflict transformation framework which would make the connections needed to build the picture that is lacking while defining mechanisms for institutionalising media conflict resolution initiatives such as this one. This, it would seem, is the way forward.

Building the Media Conflict Resolution Framework

Based on pre-testing results, it was proposed that follow-up activities use research-based information to develop a functional regional media conflict resolution environment. In conventional media reality, this meant the following:

- Looking at the gatekeeping behaviour of media managers and reporters to determine what influences the decisions they make on conflict-related issues;

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- Looking at the agenda they set and the manner in which it influences decision-making on conflict and corruption-related issues;
- Defining mechanisms – institutional and individual – for influencing both in a manner that optimally ensures that media coverage of conflict and corruption helps to manage such problems.

Proposed Action

Given the need to more effectively address conflict resolution issues through the media and the manifest weaknesses of piecemeal activity, this document proposes the following:

- Research activity designed to define the holistic structure that is needed to sustain a media conflict resolution activity in eastern and southern Africa;
- A research strategy designed to monitor and evaluate impact;
- A research strategy designed to influence decision-making on media conflict transformation initiatives based on empirical evidence drawn from gatekeeping and agenda-setting studies as well as audience surveys.

Agenda Setting in Media Conflict Resolution

Agenda-setting theories provide the theoretical basis for approaching media conflict resolution in the prescribed manner. Historically, a major concern of communication theory has been to investigate the effects of mass communication. The mass media have become a major force in society, and it is reasonable to wonder about the effects that this force is producing. Are the effects of mass communication large or small? Are they malevolent or benign? Are they obvious or subtle? Do they act as a catalyst in provoking conflicts? Communication theorists have tried to answer these questions, as well as others, about the effects of mass communication. One of the effects seems to be to direct our attention to certain problems or issues. This effect is called the agenda-setting function of the mass media.

A few days before the 1980 US presidential election between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, most public opinion polls said the race was too close to

call. Two days before the election, the news media played up a story that the American hostages being held in Iran might be released. As it turned out, they were not. When the election results were known a few days later, Reagan had won an overwhelming victory, carrying all but six states. One possible explanation for this outcome lay in the concept of agenda-setting. By playing up the hostage release story, the news media increased the public's awareness of the Iranian hostage issue. For many members of the public, the hostage issue might have moved from a low position on the list of issues that concerned them to a high one. It is very likely that raising the hostage issue on the people's agenda would work against Carter, because many people might have regarded the hostage crisis as one of the great failures of his administration. This explanation is only hypothetical; however, it has been suggested as a possibility by psychologist Donald Kinder and political scientist Shanto Iyengar.² Agenda setting is one of the ways that the mass media can have an effect on the public. Agenda setting is the idea that the news media, by their display of news, come to determine the issues the public thinks and talks about.

Each day editors and news directors – the gatekeepers in the news media systems – must decide which items to pass and which to reject. Furthermore, the items passed through the gate are not treated equally when presented to the audience. Some are used at length, others severely cut. Some are lead-off items in a newscast. Others follow much later. Newspapers clearly state the value they place on the salience of an item through headline size and placement within a newspaper. The causal chain clearly includes the gatekeepers who make the decisions about giving greater relative emphasis to one story versus another. The thinking around gatekeeping is important to the media conflict resolution project in this regard. Assumptions of the project had to do with getting journalists to understand their role as the first point of contact with a story, to balance issues, understand the importance of ethical considerations such as stereotyping; and managing an 'Afro-centric' reality versus a 'Eurocentric' version of the way things are. As mentioned earlier, the African view for interpreting issues was given a lot of salience in this media conflict resolution project. So too was the fact that gatekeepers need to understand that they are speaking for the African continent first. The chain of causality includes

gatekeepers who make decisions about giving greater relative emphasis to one story versus another. They do not act in a vacuum. They process the news according to well-understood criteria that are related in part to their socially derived conceptions of the proper role of the press in society and to the practical necessity of attracting and holding their audiences.³

Gatekeeping, media agenda setting, and the construction of individual agendas by members of the public are part of a complex social system. The system includes at least three classes of variables: those that govern the processing and delivering of news in a given pattern of selection and emphasis; and those that determine who will be exposed and how they will interpret the media content. Key factors that shape the agenda provided by the media are the values and beliefs used by reporters as part of a surveillance process. What events should be considered as news? The nature of the medium is another consideration. Newspapers can devote space in depth while television can only give a few minutes at most to an important story. Editors provide another level of screening. They have to select from available stories what they can fit into the time or space that they have at their disposal. Sometimes they must cut a story or move it to a back page, even though they may regard it as important. Sometimes there just is not enough news. This means that the less important stories can come to occupy the front page or the first slot on the broadcast.

The causal chain that sets the media agenda is a complex one indeed. If the agenda is not handled in a balanced and objective way, this raises questions on public debates and the level of meaning of that debate. Then you have the gatekeeper, an intervening variable who determines that based on however he/she has been socialised. Media conflict resolution recognises that agenda-setting and gatekeeping theories are critical factors in the political socialisation dynamic. They define issues and the rules of the game. Studies on war and the media vividly illustrate the agenda-setting dynamic in action. They recognise three key narratives concerning the role of the mainstream media in communicating conflict, including media as critical observer, as publicist, and most recently, as battleground, the surface upon which war is imagined and executed.⁴ The idea that journalists are impartial and independent monitors of military conduct is cherished by many media professionals and

liberal commentators. It assumes that correspondents are able and willing to shrug off ideological and organisational restrictions to keep a watchful eye on the activities of military combatants. It also implies that journalists are prepared to confront the arguments of powerful voices in government and the military that are responsible for both strategic and tactical decisions in the time of war.

The most celebrated example of this 'adversarial' conception of the journalists' role is US coverage of the Vietnam War where the uncensored and brutal portrayal of American casualties undermined public support and effectively 'lost the war'. One of the key turning points of the war was the transmission of a special report by the country's most celebrated news anchor, Walter Cronkite of CBS. Having just returned from a visit to Vietnam, he argued that the war was a bloody stalemate and that outright military victory was virtually impossible. Upon watching this, President Johnson is alleged to have remarked to his aides that "it is all over". Broadcast coverage of US corpses and critical comments about US involvement were argued to have transformed public opinion. Television pictures of Vietnam, according to President Nixon, "showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war... the result was a serious demoralisation of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home".

The adversarial model suggests that the prying eyes and investigative reports of committed journalists force governments to be more open in their justifications for war and more transparent in their conduct of military operations. The third model of communicating conflicts assumes that military and media networks have converged to the point where they are now virtually indistinguishable: that media constitute the spaces in which wars are fought and are the main ways through which populations (or audiences) experience war. The argument here is not whether media promote or oppose particular conflicts but that they are the means by which contemporary conflicts are literally played out. The idea of the media as a battleground is related to two somewhat disconnected developments: the post-modernist critique of reality that foregrounds the importance of the spectacle; and technological innovations that have led to a situation in which war is increasingly technologised, and

mediated. The Gulf War represents an example of this phenomenon. Agenda-setting dynamics have evolved to this level.

The transmission of live images of these conflicts is almost instantaneous. The slaughter of man by man makes perfect fodder for especially television news which not only tries to report the conflicts but tries to get the 'gem' of that report. A television war reporter scores highest when he/she captures the action 'live' (when the hardest hits are scored, and maximum destruction is captured by the camera). The Western world's broadcasting ethic now is to go 'live' as fast as possible with the news. If human lives are being crushed in these 'live' reports, well and good. If there are going to be questions, they will be asked and answered later. Whether the transmission of the events will exacerbate the conflict or not is really not the concern of the news station. In the rat race that television journalism is, you dare not hesitate to go on with the news because whoever is first with the biggest stories gets the highest ratings. That might be tragic but it is what motivates broadcast news. Yet, the media constitute a major human resource whose potential to help prevent and moderate social violence begs to be discussed, evaluated, and, where appropriate, mobilised.⁵

The case of the Ethiopian famine in 1984, and the ability of one conscientious cameraman, Mohamed Amin to see and act represent the more positive contribution of electronic journalism's agenda-setting function. The spectacle of thousands of people starving to death is what brought Ethiopia's famine to the fore in global forums.⁶ Were it not for the spectacle, the world would never have known and thousands more Ethiopians would have starved to death. A book which highlights the life of Mohamed Amin, Kenya's a ward-winning photographer and the man who brought Ethiopia to the attention of the world, notes;

The events which brought about the Ethiopian famine of 1984 add up to a litany of despair seldom recorded in the annals of global disasters. The cruellest acts of nature and man fused into circumstances of such horrifying magnitude that, even with the passage of years, it is still hard to contemplate the consequences.

Media Graduation in Africa's Conflict Resolution

Mo's pivotal role in focusing world attention on the plight of starving millions must be seen as a landmark in the agenda-setting role of Africa's media. It was not just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. After all, Mo fought for months for permission to visit the relief camps. Had he not been so determined, had he not stubbornly refused to be thwarted by a bungling bureaucracy mindful of its own lacklustre role in the nightmare, the harsh facts might never have been exposed. Put simply: if Mo had not acted when he did in the way he did, millions more men, women and children would have starved to death.⁷

The statistics created their own macabre record book: in a country of 33 million people, 7.7 million were affected by the drought, 5.5 million were starving and 2.2 million were obliged to leave their homes to seek help. In Alamata camp, two doctors, three nurses and three nutritionists were tending to 100,000 people. Another 90,000 victims waited patiently outside the camp for aid. The doctors had enough food for 3,000. The chance of more supplies was remote at the camp itself because the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) rebels had cut off the area, and any convoys that did attempt the journey were likely to fall foul of the impoverished and hungry guerrillas. There was not much to talk about. The journalists went about their respective tasks in a subdued mood. Amin filmed it all, never flinching from the worst tragedies. People were literally dying in front of his camera. Already he realised they were witnessing a disaster of catastrophic proportions and he knew it was their duty to document it and bring it to the attention of the world.

Rwanda in media circles is described as a country which from one broadcast bulletin triggered a holocaust. From April to July 1994 following that bulletin, approximately 500,000 Rwandan Tutsis and Hutu moderates were exterminated in the most efficient and complete genocide of modern times.⁸ Western media blamed the international community for not intervening quickly but the media were also blamed for not immediately recognising the extent of the carnage and mobilising world attention to it. They failed to report that a nationwide killing

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campaign was underway in Rwanda until almost three weeks into the violence. By that time, some 250,000 Tutsi had already been massacred. During those first weeks of genocide, Western reporting was marred by four lapses. First, it mistook genocide for civil war. Violence was then reported as being on the wane when in fact it was mounting. On April 11, just four days after the fighting had started, the *New York Times* reported that fighting in Rwanda had “diminished in intensity”.

The exodus of reporters which was to follow was so thorough that it virtually halted Western press coverage. European newspapers that had been providing daily coverage of the violence in Kigali stopped cold on April 18. Ironically, this was when the slaughter reached its peak. Early published death counts were gross underestimates, sometimes by a factor of ten. Moreover, for nearly two weeks, Western news organisations focused almost exclusively on Kigali, a city that contained only 4% of Rwanda’s population, and did not report the far broader tragedy that was unfolding around them. At least three factors help to account for these reporting lapses. First, the evacuation of foreign nationals left few reporters in the country after the first few days or in the capital after the first week. Second, the situation was legitimately confusing. Tutsi rebels were winning the civil war and retaliating against suspected civilian Hutu extremists at the same time as the civilian Tutsi population was being systematically exterminated. Third, even experts were slow to appreciate what was happening. No human rights group even suggested the possibility of genocide until April 19.

In the wake of Rwanda’s tragedy, the media harshly criticised the United Nations and its Western members for not immediately recognising the killing campaign and reacting to prevent it. Such criticism is only partially valid. American and other Western officials dragged their feet after the genocide was reported, avoiding use of the word genocide for weeks for fear of being compelled to intervene. But the media must share the blame for failing to provide prompt notice of the genocide. In obscure parts of the world, where Western governments do not invest significant intelligence assets, the news business is relied upon to serve as a surrogate early warning system. In Rwanda, it did not fulfil this role.

Perhaps the main reason that Africa-based Western correspondents have had difficulty reporting ethnic violence accurately is that at least one of the sides does not want them to, and reporters cannot confirm many allegations without risking their lives by visiting combat zones. There is no moral requirement for journalists to make such a personal sacrifice. But so long as reporters do not confirm the facts on the ground, they must try to do everything else possible to piece together the real story for readers – in full awareness that combatants, government and private agencies are all trying to manipulate them.

Emerging Issues

As the fourth estate, the media amongst other things has been expected to promote democratic principles by acting as a check on the judiciary, the executive and the legislature on behalf of society. In Africa, it has played out this role against overwhelming odds – including the preponderance of overbearing governments and the lack of financial, human and technical resources. Despite the odds, society's expectations of the media have remained the same, namely:

- The projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in society;
- The presentation and clarification of their goals and values;
- Full access to the day's intelligence.

It is in this way that constituents can hold governments accountable. In this way, they could also participate in the process of dialogue and consensus building. Emerging conflicts in the 21st century are bringing pressure to bear on the media to go beyond the scope of national interests. By virtue of their regional and global dimensions, journalists have to learn to identify and manage their multifaceted cultural, economic and political dimensions. Hence in part the need for a training manual like this one. Hence, also, there is a need to begin holding regional and global social, economic and political institutions accountable to humanity. The scope of the task demands that media houses find the necessary technical, human and financial resources. The challenge for

African journalists, especially those who specialise in covering conflicts, lies in situating their own media houses at that level.

Global power shifts are breeding new forms of anarchy. The ‘underground empire’ today has more power, wealth and status than many nations. It flies no flag on the terrace of the United Nations, but it has larger armies, more capable intelligence agencies, and more influential diplomatic services than many countries do.⁹ for example, the ability of a drug cartel to corrupt, terrorise, and paralyse the Colombian government for years, having first shifted its balance of trade, suggests what other outlaw groups, not necessarily narcotics traffickers, may also be able to do before long. Governments are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with these new actors on the world stage. Governments are too bureaucratic. Their responses are too slow. They are linked into so many foreign relationships that require consultation and agreement with allies, and must cater to so many domestic political interest groups, that it takes them too long to react to initiatives by druglords or religious fanatics and terrorists.

By contrast many of the global gladiators, guerrillas and drug cartels in particular, are non- or even pre-bureaucratic. A single charismatic leader calls the shots quickly and with chilling – or killing – effect. In other cases, it is unclear who the leaders really are. Governments stagger away confused from conflicts with them. With whom can one make a deal? If a deal is possible, how is one to know if the people making it can actually deliver? Can they really return hostages, stem the flow of drugs, prevent bomb attacks on embassies, or cut down on piracy? The few international laws that have reduced global anarchy in the past are totally inadequate to deal with the new global realities. In a world of satellites, lasers, computers, briefcase weapons, precision targeting, and a choice of viruses with which to attack people or computers, nations as we now know them may well find themselves up against potent adversaries, some no more than a millionth their size.

The criminalisation of the state in sub-Saharan Africa appears to be an emerging issue. On the one hand, authoritarian regimes continue to make use of tried and tested practices sometimes in a form more systematic than in the past. This is the case notably when such regimes are associated with ‘strategies of tension’ manipulated or controlled by tyrants seeking to restore their fortunes

(e.g. Zaire, Cameroon, Kenya, Togo) or sometimes in diluted form, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, in the twilight years of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, and during the premiership of Alassane Ouattara.¹⁰ On the other hand, it is notable that in new regimes, even when they have been democratically elected, new forms of political mobilisation, such as militias and armed groups, constitute vectors of criminalisation. In the former Zaire, the main opposition party had no hesitation in helping itself to a share of the available booty in the diamond trade.

In Zambia, several leading members of the governing party were implicated in drug scandals. In Madagascar, Congo and the Central African Republic, presidents newly elected by universal suffrage have sought parallel financing from organisations which are clearly fronts for money laundering or for fraud on a grand scale. The implication of military or paramilitary organisations in the wholesale looting of cities, in the theft of humanitarian aid and in the trafficking of drugs, diamond or other natural resources has been apparent in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Burundi, and Rwanda. It has been the pattern for a longer period in Chad, Angola, and Mozambique, to the point where several conflicts south of the Sahara can be understood as stemming from economic logic rather than from any political, ethnic or religious calculus.

Several branches of criminal activity, without being entirely new, are clearly assuming greater importance. Apart from drug trafficking and the laundering of the profits of criminal activity, the illegal export of diamonds, gold, precious or at least valuable minerals, agricultural products, works of art and game meat seems to be increasing at an impressive speed, particularly, but certainly not exclusively in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), even though other illegal exports may be in decline, such as ivory, because of the reduction in demand caused by the banning of the international ivory trade in 1989. The sovereign right to mint currency has been flouted in several countries by importing or printing banknotes without any form of supervision by the central bank or the ministry of finance, and in such a manner that colossal sums have been diverted for private use, generally at the instigation of politically influential figures such as in the former Zaire and Kenya.

In several countries, members of the political elite are owners of night-clubs which are well known centres of prostitution, and are even suspected of

involvement in networks or organised prostitution in Europe. Perhaps more importantly, some armed groups have moved on from enlisting young people as soldiers by force, as both the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) did in Angola and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) in Mozambique, to forcing people into slavery for the purpose of economic production, as has happened in Sierra Leone, and especially Liberia, or exporting captives for sale, for example from Southern Sudan and, possibly, the east of Chad and the Central African Republic.

Over the few years, corruption has continued to dominate political contests and development strategies in Eastern Africa. The media still thrives on exposés of corrupt transactions in government, although there has been an increase in government efforts to establish or give teeth to existing anti-corruption institutions, and parliaments play a key role in holding governments to account. Across the region, there is ever more news about governments taking action against corrupt officials, as accusations of graft have become a major political weapon.¹¹ Yet the positive news stories do not always mean that governments in the region have seriously committed themselves to fight corruption. Anti-corruption institutions are frequently under-funded, and government actions are often just a veneer, intended to meet donor conditionality in a region where most governments depend on foreign aid to support their budgets.

International financial institutions have argued that liberalisation and privatisation would reduce the scale and scope of government, thereby minimising the incidences of corruption. After a decade of free-market reforms, however, the state remains the largest consumer and employer. Market reforms have merely altered the way in which corruption occurs, allowing governments to award contracts and tenders to reward loyal supporters or buy off potential opponents. The pattern of corruption also partly reflects the many armed conflicts in the region, in the DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The conflicts have provided opportunities for illicit access to natural resources, and in some cases aid officials have taken advantage of the desperation of refugees.

Increasing evidence has emerged of the central role of the private sector in corruption in Eastern Africa. Surveys and prominent cases hint at the

extent of bribes paid by both Eastern African and multinational businesses and also at the level of private to private corruption and fraud. In the arena of international humanitarian assistance, a question being asked is how the needs of civilians can be balanced against the negative consequences of the assistance provided, particularly when the abuse of humanitarian aid by one or several of the conflicting parties fuels the conflict, as has happened in the camps around Rwanda and has proven to be the case in Liberia.¹² How is it possible to choose between a silent presence helping the victims and speaking out about unacceptable human rights abuses at the risk of expulsion? This is a dilemma which we have faced and which we still face most crucially in the Great Lakes region, but also in Sudan and in Chechnya. What is the role of the United Nations protection forces in such situations as those in and around Rwanda? Or in Bosnia where we have witnessed their presence dramatically misleading refugees and displaced persons by giving an impression of ensuring a security which in reality did not exist?

The issue of how to protect civilians in conflicts which not only deliberately target civilians, but use them as hostages and human shields, is thus of essence in the current humanitarian environment. Who can guarantee protection? What is the role of humanitarian organisations? Who should intervene when humanitarian assistance can no longer be provided for civilian victims of conflict? However, beyond the issue of protection in zones of conflict, we are also faced with an increasing problem of access to safe areas for people who are persecuted on political, ethnic, religious or other grounds. Over these past few years, the global growth of violence and conflict has swelled the world's refugees and displaced populations to over 50 million people.

The international system for protection of refugees established after the Second World War is being challenged by growing demands for asylum and by a change in attitude among many Western governments. Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, refugees were often considered as welcome symbols of the failure of the communist system. Today they are considered economic migrants and as an extra burden in a difficult social and economic climate. There is great concern that refugees are no longer granted the right to protection and asylum, and that forced repatriation and even rejection may become acceptable

solutions. The situation is even more dramatic for the internally displaced persons who are not recognised as traditional refugees because they have failed to cross international borders. These people are even more vulnerable, as they have neither international protection nor the effective protection of their own governments.

In about 20 years' time, it is expected that 60% of the world's population will live in urban areas, increasing the number of people living under difficult conditions in under-serviced townships and breeding even greater poverty and violence. What should the role of humanitarian organisations be? What is the role of governments? Should we become providers of services on an international scale, fighting the negative effects of an economic crisis, or should we denounce the growing egocentrism in our society and put pressure on governments to take action? Today approximately 13 million children are displaced within the borders of their own countries, uprooted from their homes by armed conflict, violence and the violation of human rights. These children are often 'invisible' to the outside world. Frequently difficult to access, their numbers uncounted for and their diversity unrecognised, they are often beyond the reach of international protection and assistance. Yet they are among the most vulnerable to human rights abuse.

Conflicts that cause extensive internal displacement are, by and large, civil wars in the poorest parts of the world. They are characterised by the collapse of already weak economies and infrastructures. Many have their roots in ideologies and ethnic divisions used by political leaders to control access to power or resources. Half of the world's population of internally displaced children live in Africa. The largest number, over two million, are in Sudan. The government army, pro-government militia groups and the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) have all assaulted civilians. The SPLA has forcibly recruited children. The pro-government militia has abducted thousands of others. In Angola, the collapse of the Peace Accord in 1998 led to renewed fighting in the 25-year civil war, and further internal flight, bringing the total number of internally displaced children by the year 2000 to approximately one million. War in Sierra Leone was characterised by gross human rights abuses against children – sometimes committed by other

children fighting as soldiers. Such rights abuses, and the fear that they generate, are primary reasons why families flee their homes. A peace agreement signed in 1999 remains precarious. The total number of internally displaced children was estimated by 2000 to be between 300,000 and 1,000,000.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, political rivalry, inter-ethnic rivalry, gross human rights abuses and full-scale civil war involving the armies of neighbouring states internally displaced 450,000 children. The chaos and instability of the situation has meant that humanitarian agencies could not gain access to them. In northern Uganda, attacks by the armed LRA, combined with a forced relocation policy by the government, caused 400,000 people to abandon their homes between 1995 and 1999. After several months of relative tranquillity, the LRA recommenced military operations at the start of the year 2000. In Burundi, 800,000 were forcibly moved into so-called regroupment camps by the government in 1996 (including up to 350,000 in September 1999). About half were children. The government claimed that this was for their own protection; however, it also admitted that another goal was to prevent armed opposition groups from getting supplies and shelter. Conditions in the camps were poor and disease rife. After international protests, in January 2000, the government told the UN Security Council that a number of camps would be closed. Civil unrest combined with flooding and drought to cause the internal displacement of approximately 175,000 children in Somalia during its war years. The majority at the time were living in poorly conditioned camps in and around the capital, Mogadishu.

Conclusion

The emerging issues sampled here only constitute the tip of the iceberg as far as conflict-related issues are concerned. The amount of work that is going to be put into addressing issues effectively and in a manner that helps to transform conflicts is massive. The training manual initiative looks insignificant standing against such odds. Pre-test results show that even before the start, it has already begun tottering. It needs the network of institutions mentioned in this

paper to support it in a cohesive and sustained manner. With that support, the agenda-setting function of the media could transcend being merely potential to becoming one of the most powerful agents of conflict transformation in Africa.

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