



THE FOUNDATION FOR
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

To shoot or not to shoot? The messenger dilemma

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Contact persons:

Jane Prasetyo
FDC
Tel: 61 7 3236 4633
janeprasetyo@fdc.org.au

Level 2, 283 Elizabeth Street (PO Box 10445 Adelaide Street) BrisbaneQld4000Australia
Tel: 61 7 3236 4633 Fax: 61 7 3236 4696 info@fdc.org.au www.fdc.org.au

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About the authors

Ms R. Jane Prasetyo is an FDC program officer with a primary focus in participatory development and community initiatives. She also has strong interests in social capital theory and in communication technologies and the role they can play in global development. Ms Prasetyo has worked in Indonesia for both large and small local NGOs and in the education sector, as well as with Indigenous Australian communities. She has trained in business, human resource management and social administration.

Ms Rebecca McHugh has been working with FDC over the past two months under the auspices of AusAID Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Alumni program. Prior to conducting research with FDC, Rebecca was based in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, as an AYAD, where she lectured in Australian Studies at the National Social Sciences and Humanities University. Rebecca has studied sociology and international relations at The University of Queensland, and will undertake postgraduate studies in International Development later this year.

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Abstract

The role of the media in civil society is a hotly contested issue in contemporary social theory. The Foundation for Development Cooperation (FDC) is currently addressing this issue with a particular focus on the interactions between the media and civil society in conflict situations. FDC is an independent non-profit organisation committed to strategic research, policy development and advocacy for sustainable development and poverty reduction in Asia and the Pacific.

The recent terrorist attacks against the United States have created a global climate of suspicion and instability. Evidence gathered for this paper would suggest that the September 11 attacks, and subsequent 'war on terrorism', have severely impacted upon the operations of both global and localised media. The ability of media workers to perform those functions society has traditionally expected of them has been considerably compromised.

This paper examines the interactions between global and local media and society in the present climate. Given the constraints currently affecting media operations across the globe it is argued that a new role for media operating in conflict situations be explored. It is hoped that a platform for positive media contributions towards conflict resolution and peace building can be established, based on the principles of peace journalism and more interventionist media strategies in societies experiencing violent conflict.

Introduction

The question of what is an appropriate role for the media in conflict situations has stimulated much debate in recent times. The last century has been the most violent in human history and the media's role in significant armed conflict over this time has varied widely (Manoff, 1998:1). At times the media has been implicated as a weapon of violence, being used to propagate 'messages of intolerance or disinformation that manipulate public sentiment' (Howard, 2002:1). Conversely, the media has also served as a powerful tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, mitigating violence and giving a voice to groups involved in, or suffering from, conflict situations.

Advances in communications technology in recent times have given 'mass media' a global reach, enabling media players to access, and potentially influence, a growing world audience. It is precisely this expanding sphere of influence that has prompted calls for a thorough exploration of the potential of the media to prevent or terminate conflict, 'because, taken together, the diverse mass media technologies, institutions, professionals, norms and practices constitute one of the most powerful forces now shaping the lives of individuals and the fate of peoples and nations' (Manoff, 1998:2).

Coexistent with global mass media forms are various local media, which despite their smaller audiences can be equally pivotal in determining how potential conflict situations will be played out in society. The active role played by radio Mille Collines in inciting genocidal violence in Rwanda provides a chilling example of the power of local media in conflict situations (Hieber, 1998:2).

However, just as the media can impact upon the progress and outcomes of conflict, so too can conflicts impact upon the operations of the media. This grows increasingly apparent in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, as reports of media censorship (both self-imposed and externally enforced) fuel growing concerns about controlling interests, subjective coverage and the public's 'right to know'. As the 'war on terrorism' gradually erodes global media freedoms and compromises its integrity, local media become important sources of independent news.

This paper explores the interplay between global and local media and society in conflict situations. Ways in which conflict and media impact upon one another and influence social action and opinion are discussed initially in general terms, and subsequently in relation to the case of the Maluku media centre in Ambon, Indonesia. Finally, an argument for the strengthening of the media's capacity to prevent conflict and advance peacebuilding initiatives is presented.

The changing role of the media

The role of the media and media technologies in a society experiencing violent conflict is a highly contentious and complicated issue. Traditionally, the role of the media in any society has been to perform the following five functions: (1) surveillance of the environment; (2) to provide comment on, or analysis of, situations unfolding in the environment; (3) to educate audiences; (4) to provide entertainment; and (5) to support the economic system (Granato, 1991:21). In conflict situations, this has traditionally been translated to mean providing updated information about what is happening and who is involved, holding the people involved accountable to the public and interpreting events, providing a certain degree of relief from the distress caused by conflict, and providing a means for certain economic functions to continue despite conflict.

Globalisation, and the social, cultural, political and technological changes it has accelerated into being, has fundamentally altered the nature of the media and its interactions with society. Globalisation has resulted in the emergence of a global media with international ownership and a global audience (Feist, 2001:711–2). Media technology now allows for the real-time reportage of events, and is empowering ordinary citizens with the means to transmit information around the world, even though they are not media professionals (Feist, 2001:712). In the global village ‘geopolitical borders are porous to information flows, allowing all kinds of data to move across, over and through frontiers as if these do not exist’ (Studemeister, 1998:1). The question of ‘who’ is media, let alone ‘what’ their role is, becomes a clouded issue in a global world.

This is strikingly evident when the role of the media in conflict situations is examined. Issues revolving around media accountability, intervention and subjectivity become particularly complicated in conflict situations. In the case of a globalised media, the complexity is more pronounced, such that ‘traditional assumptions of the relationship between the media, humanitarian organisations and all others involved in conflict and emergencies are fast becoming outdated and even irrelevant’ (Gowing, 2002:1). However the new, global reach of the media has at least produced some agreement that the media today ‘constitute a major human resource whose potential to help prevent and moderate social violence begs to be discussed, evaluated and, where appropriate, mobilized’ (Botes, 1998: 4).

Global media and conflict

Social research has identified a number of observable impacts of global media coverage on societies experiencing conflict. The following list provides a general overview of some of the positive and negative consequences of global mass media operating in conflict situations.

The end of the news cycle

Instant electronic communications, 24-hour news networks and the Internet have all but eliminated the news cycle (Feist, 2001:712). Television’s ability to broadcast instantaneous images of international crises has placed a new burden on diplomats and governments: the demand that they provide an immediate response. Failure to do so can convey the message that the people at the highest level have lost control of the situation, causing panic (Peace Watch 1997:2). Arguably, this makes governments more accountable to the public for their actions and makes the connection between action and reaction in conflict situations more obvious. Real time coverage also enables the media to become an alternative, and direct, channel through which to conduct diplomacy (Peace Watch 1997:2).

The ‘CNN effect’

The CNN effect is a theory that compelling television images, such as images of a humanitarian crisis, can provoke humanitarian responses from world leaders and policy makers. It is argued that such responses are stimulated by pressure from the public, who are affected by evocative images and urge leaders to ‘do something’ (Neuman, 1996:109). The CNN effect can therefore also act in reverse, whereby leaders are motivated to disengage from a conflict situation as a result of coverage of casualties incurred by ‘home troops’ (Feist, 2001:713).

However, the powerful global media that supposedly produces the CNN effect, may also be simultaneously undermining it. Media commentator Warren Strobel argues that sensational images of violence and conflict have gradually desensitised international audiences such that now, 'we are perfectly capable of watching horrible things on our TV screens and doing nothing' (1997). Competition between major media corporations for market share and prestige tends to exacerbate the situation, such that 'all too often, mass media succumbs to sensationalism in conflict situations' (Hieber, 1998:3). Sensationalistic reportage of conflict not only numbs world audiences to the suffering of the people involved, but can also incite discord in the conflict zone itself, by giving airtime to the most radical positions and antagonistic parties involved (Hieber, 1998:3).

Global coverage, global audiences

On the reception side of media, advances in media technologies is rapidly increasing the number of people who can receive international broadcasts. Consequently, people all over the world are more freely able to access and send information, and in the case of the Internet they can do this anonymously. This can have innumerable positive effects, such as keeping people in touch with international developments, side-stepping heavily censored or controlled media produced by oppressive government regimes and creating a format for exposing such regimes and pressuring them to institute greater civil and political liberties for their populations (World Bank, 2000:45). In addition, it is argued that a world connected through communications is more open to cultural differences and exchanges and consequently less likely to engage in conflict based on cultural or religious differences (Feist, 2001:715).

Naturally, a medium that can be used to unite people against conflict, can similarly act to unite them as a force to create conflict. Examples abound of terrorist and other militant groups that have made use of global media forms to obtain strategic information, collaborate with distant sympathisers and transmit messages of hate world wide (Ayers, 1999:132). An additional danger of a global media concerns the concentration of ownership in major networks and consequent narrowing of perspectives controlling media content. Global media are profit driven and accountable to stakeholders with enormous economic and political power. This compromises their objectivity in international conflict situations when commercial interests are placed at risk, or powerful national governments are involved (Gowing, 2002:2).

Shaw (1999) further argues that because global media networks originate from powerful Western nations, their content tends to reflect Western understandings of conflict situations and represent Western global interests. As such, global media coverage of conflict not taking place in a Western nation applies a Western lens to events, 'representing people as pure victims rather than as protagonists or combatants, and through the authoritative voices of Western reporters, rather than in their own words' (Shaw, 1999:218). This has led to an increased emphasis on local media sources as more reliable and objective in many conflict situations.

Local media and conflict

Civil conflict situations tend to have long and complicated histories revolving around issues of ethnicity, religion or territorial disputes. Local media workers who understand local histories, language and cultural nuances are better placed than global networks to provide audiences with detailed understandings of such situations (Feist, 2001:712). The combination of cheap, lightweight technology and the proliferation of transmission platforms means more people with such understandings can produce coverage of conflict for audiences sceptical of global media interests.

One consequence of advances in communication technologies has been that the established media are no longer viewed obediently as the high priests of what is expected to be the most reliable information. Local media have the ability to create a rival, alternative agenda of issues and coverage and in some instances can both expose and challenge the inherent editorial shortcomings of traditional media in conflict (Gowing, 2002:2).

Local media play other important roles in conflict situations besides simply exposing stories from a local perspective to global audiences. For local audiences, people who are living in the conflict zone itself, knowledge acquisition is extremely important. As Hieber notes, 'the psychological effect of information in situations where uncertainty and fear reign is immeasurable ... giving people a sense of control over their destiny by providing them with listener-friendly information about their current environment is a crucial step in helping diffuse the tension and chaos which characterizes war' (1998). When conflict situations are too volatile for global networks to consider committing reporters to the area, or when the conflict is not considered to be sufficiently 'headline' worthy to cover, local media are the only source of information for societies experiencing violence and disorder.

Local media also serve to counteract the Western bias evident in global media forms, particularly in situations when this bias is most inappropriate or most unrepresentative of the social reality of viewers. This role is exemplified by Al Jazeera Satellite TV, which is broadcast from Qatar and provides a number of Arab nations with an independent source of information and entertainment whilst still reflecting the religious and cultural values of its audience (al-Hail, 2000).

Furthermore, local media can draw global attention to the plight of civilians caught up in conflicts that are considered too 'marginal' to attract the interest of major networks. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has praised small media groups for providing this function in society, stating that 'if the first casualty of war is the truth, the next victims are those who are unable to draw attention to their need for protection ... giving these victims a voice can be vital for mobilizing the support necessary to protect human life' (OCHA Online, 2002).

However, despite enormous potential for accurate, sensitive coverage, local media forms can be compromised by the simple fact of their involvement in the conflict, or the cultural and other ties of their workers which bind them personally to the conflict situation and occlude objective coverage as a result. Information about a conflict situation which comes from an individual 'in the field' is often perceived to be the most credible because of the proximity of the reporter to 'the action'. However, media technologies now enable anyone to provide such reports, including people with no training in the principles of good journalism, such as balance, impartiality and accuracy (Gowing, 2002:1). As Gowing argues, this is problematic because 'a growing number [of people reporting on conflict] are motivated advocates or partial campaigners who have found low-cost, low-tech, but highly effective ways firstly to record and then distribute their information and views in near real time' (2002:1).

Through the Internet, chat forums and cable television, such 'reports' bypass and challenge the layered filtering systems of established broadcast and publishing news media, and are often not subjected to any editorial scrutiny or standards at all. Consequently, seemingly insightful 'insider reports', which come from a source close to a site of conflict, can amount to little more than war propaganda designed to draw support from a global audience (Stroehlein, 2002:1).

A war against journalism?

Given the strengths and shortcomings of both small-scale and large-scale media operations in conflict situations, it is unsurprising that the media can often achieve maximum positive impact on conflict situations, on societies involved in conflict situations, and on the larger global audience witnessing them unfolding, when coverage represents a balance of local and international perspectives. This may take place in the form of global media networks employing local reporters and incorporating local accounts of events into their programming, or local reporters using the broadcast facilities of major networks to distribute information at the scene of the conflict. Generally, the benefits to societies in conflict, and societies concerned by conflicts taking place elsewhere, include accurate, sensitive reporting and reliable, ongoing updates.

However, when conflict takes place on a global scale, as in the case of the 'war on terrorism' the relationship between global and local media disintegrates. Global war simultaneously unmasks the fraudulent presumption that the 'global audience' of global media is a uniform, 'civil' society of viewers, while casting suspicion over the 'objectivity' of local, 'ringside' accounts. As more nations become involved, the 'local' site of conflict becomes a fragmented and nebulous concept. Protagonists become conflated with antagonists as individuals within nations and across nations align themselves according to personal rather than national sentiments. In the case of the 'war on terrorism' this situation is exacerbated by further uncertainty as to what constitutes terrorism, and therefore who the 'enemy' is? Suddenly, the media's very purpose in conflict — to provide a balanced and impartial account of events — is called into question. In an unbounded, indefinite war against an intangible and context-dependent concept, what is a balanced and impartial account of events?

As the International Federation of Journalism describes in a recent report on war propagandism: 'the campaign after September 11 is a war of a very different kind with no clearly defined enemy, no hard-and-fast objective, and no obvious point of conclusion. Inevitably it creates a pervasive atmosphere of paranoia in which the spirit of press freedom and pluralism is fragile and vulnerable' (White, 2001:1)

The immediate reaction in many countries to the events of September 11 was to limit media activities — ostensibly in the interest of national security. Paul McMasters of the First Amendment Ombudsmen lists a number of incidences of press censorship or imposed restrictions in the wake of the attacks, including: the grounding of news helicopters, the confinement of press coverage of US military operations to official reports and briefings, the cutting of press contacts by defence contractors and the pressuring of journalists not to air full interviews with Osama Bin Laden or Al Qaeda members (2001:2).

Since September 11, Americans have seen their Freedom of Information Act (1974) repealed, several federal agency websites dismantled, and government powers to monitor telephones, e-mail and Internet traffic expanded (Rosen, 2002: 2). The US Government has also bought the rights to all commercial satellite imagery previously available to the general public in a bid to restrict access to such information (Herold, 2001:23).

Further afield, media workers from around South-East Asia and the Pacific surveyed by FDC have reported a number of concerning impacts of the September 11 attacks on their operations. 'I become extremely cautious in writing to contacts whose servers went through America', stated one respondent. Other respondents noted that critical reports about America and the war on terrorism, made publicly or privately, had suddenly become a risky undertaking, 'especially when 'powers' were being extended to imprison without rights of redress'. Media workers further expressed anger at the amount of 'disinformation' and

emotive coverage 'flooding out of the US'. Local and international news not related to the war on terrorism, as well as related stories not in accordance with US views, has been 'crowded out' of television and print news.

A survey of media coverage in more than 20 countries conducted by the International Federation of Journalists also concluded that attempts to manipulate media messages has been damaging to the overall quality of coverage of the conflict. The IFJ report on journalism, civil liberties and the war on terrorism warns of the dangers of such manipulation, arguing that it has impacted on the quality and impartiality of coverage, and leads to the promotion of prejudice and cultural misunderstanding (IFJ, 2001:2).

Under these conditions media activities since September 11 have generally followed what Johan Galtung describes as 'the low road of war journalism — chasing wars, the elites that run them and a win-lose outcome' (1998:1). 'War journalism', according to Galtung, often exacerbates violence and conflict situations due to its overt emphasis on the question of 'who wins?'. This approach to media coverage of conflict 'sees conflict as a gladiator circus and draws upon the model of sports reporting where winning is not everything, it is the only thing' (1998:2). Resulting coverage thus 'succumbs to sensationalism in conflict situations ... giving airtime or print space to the most radical positions ... with techniques designed to incite discord rather than help appease tension' (Hieber, 1998:3). War journalism propagates rumours, spreads fear by giving voice to violent messages and promotes stereotypical representations of parties to the conflict.

'When information grows scant and the press grows timid, punditry and prattle rush to fill the credible-information void. Paranoia, panic and poor policies are the likely result' (McMasters, 2001:3).

Since September 11, coverage of the 'war on terrorism' has increasingly resembled war journalism. This has not always been a product of irresponsible journalism, but rather a frightening consequence of a restricted and manipulated media. Coverage of the US strike on Afghanistan exemplifies this point. So far, coverage of civilian casualties in Afghanistan has been scant, in order to limit knowledge of the true human costs of the operation. US media spin has described mass civilian casualties as 'collateral damage', or underestimated the number of deaths and injuries associated with each US bombing raid. Media reports have generally portrayed Afghans as expendable, due to their supposed allegiance to 'fanatical muslim terrorists' such as Osama Bin Laden (Herold, 2001: 20).

However, US military casualties are described in a very different way, as Marc Herald demonstrates: 'The Afghans are not "white", whereas the overwhelming majority of pilots and elite ground troops are. This 'fact' serves to amplify the positive benefit-cost ratio of sacrificing the darker-skinned Afghans today, so that 'white' American soldiers may be saved tomorrow' (Herold, 2001:21).

With journalists' access to the frontline severely restricted, media workers are increasingly dependent on official reports from the US Government. This has led many commentators to describe the present global climate as a 'media war' or 'propaganda war'. Stories about the conflict in Afghanistan are increasingly portrayed as 'a fight of good against evil' (Straus, 2001:2). Media on all sides of the conflict are resorting to stereotypical depictions of 'the enemy' — whoever they may be. Whether you are reading about the 'war on terrorism' or the 'jihad against America', you will have been informed of the immoral and malevolent nature of the other side's troops (Straus, 2001:3).

Within this climate of suspicion and fear, small media groups involved in local conflicts have begun conducting their own witch hunts. Internet 'reports' from conflict zones abound which identify local enemies as 'terrorists', presumably in the hopes of attracting US sympathy and support (Stroehlein, 2002:2). This trend has been pronounced in Kosovo, where some sections of the Russian and Macedonian media, dissatisfied with the NATO-led solution in Kosovo, regularly and falsely claim that Al Queda maintains terrorist training camps in Kosovo.

It is said that the first casualty of war is the truth, and certainly it would seem that access to 'truth' has been severely restricted since September 11. However, given that propagandist reporting and a heavily censored press can serve to exacerbate conflict, a number of social theorists have argued it is time to reconsider the role of the press in conflict situations. They argue that the media can actively intervene in conflict situations to promote peaceful resolutions and an end to violence. Such a media strategy would represent an alternative to war journalism that would draw upon the media's influence in society to produce positive outcomes in conflict situations.

Peace journalism: envisaging a positive role for the media in conflict situations

There are at present two broad approaches to media intervention in conflict areas. The first is centered on traditional journalism, and 'seeks to report conflicts for a general audience in a manner aimed at promoting peace rather than inflaming existing tensions' (Hieber, 1998: 2). The second is more proactive, and builds upon 'media designed for specific audiences with a predetermined agenda' (Hieber, 1998:2).

In seeking to outline a more positive and effective role for the media in conflict situations, journalist Jannie Botes suggests we should begin with questions such as 'what do conflict prevention and management require of the media?', and 'how can the media be of greatest positive use to a society experiencing conflict?' (1998:9). Traditionally, media workers have shrunk away from suggestions that they may play an active role in conflict prevention, intervention or resolution, arguing that this contravenes a journalists mandate to report events objectively, while remaining impartial and independent of those engaged in conflict.

However, as Botes counter-argues, objectivity in reporting is an unattainable ideal as there is an irreducible contingency in all accounts of the world that belies the claims of journalists that they can simply report 'the truth' (1998:7). While journalistic techniques can be used to make reporting as objective as possible, this near-objectivity does not have to be sacrificed in peace journalism. The same techniques may be employed in such a way as to encourage conflict resolution and peacebuilding (1998:9).

There a number of ways in which media operations in conflict situations can actively contribute to peaceful outcomes. Rob Manoff lists several strategies that range between the two broad approaches described at the beginning of this section. The following list represents a summary of ways in which the media can contribute to peacebuilding through peace journalism strategies:

1. By channelling communication between parties in such a way as to promote appreciation of the complex factors impinging on the conflict situation and create appreciation of and tolerance for the negotiation process itself.
2. By building confidence and trust between parties to the conflict by de-objectifying the opposition and challenging widely held stereotypes. The media can help reduce suspicion through their reporting of contested issues, and can increase trust through reporting of stories that illustrate that accommodation is possible.

3. By counteracting misperceptions held by parties to a conflict, by reporting such misperceptions as a story in and of itself. This can encourage parties to revise such views, moving closer to the prevention or resolution of a conflict in the process.
4. By analysing conflict through the application of frameworks derived from conflict resolution and related fields to enhance systematically the public's understanding of key aspects of the conflict, as well as the mechanisms in place to help manage it.
5. By providing an emotional outlet for parties to the conflict by making available space or airtime for the expression of grievances, thereby enabling conflict to be fought out in the media rather than in the streets.
6. By encouraging the balance of power by weakening stronger parties and strengthening weaker parties in the eyes of the public, to encourage parties to negotiate when they otherwise might not have out of concern for the perception of their relative positions.
7. By framing and defining the conflict and the issues and interests involved in such a way as to highlight the potential for peaceful resolution. This might involve emphasising the common ground between parties to the conflict or potential solutions that benefit all concerned.

The above strategies when employed during different stages of a conflict situation in a sensitive and professional manner can serve to speed up peace processes and contribute to lasting peacebuilding solutions (IMPACS, 2002:10). The benefits for media workers include an enhanced role in conflict situations and a more positive relationship with societies experiencing conflict.

An additional benefit of peace journalism strategies is that they tend to improve the personal safety of journalists working in conflict zones (OCHA, 2002:3). Media workers covering violent situations are often treated with hostility and aggression by parties to a conflict because their operations are perceived as a threat (Gowing, 2002:2). Journalists can expose violent attacks on civilians or human rights violations by governments. Real-time reportage may also be a source of information about the tactics and resources of combatants. Consequently, journalists have increasingly been directly targeted in conflicts by warring factions. Journalists engaging in peace journalism are less likely to become victims of the violence they are covering because their activities will promote conflict resolution and greater understanding between parties to a conflict. Peace journalists are less likely to follow sensationalist stories that incite discord or propagate rumours, and as such will not be perceived as being actively engaged in conflict (OCHA, 2002:3).

The Maluku media centre

A practical example of global and local media interactions impacting upon both the coverage and outcome of conflict and, consequently, on the society exposed to the conflict, is provided by the Maluku media centre in Ambon, Indonesia.

When violence and conflict broke out in Maluku, local media found their ability to cover events and disseminate information severely compromised. Access to impartial information became an impossibility as Muslim and Christian journalists became unable to contact one another, or enter areas of the region that belong to 'the opposition', for fear of being attacked. Furthermore, resource deficiencies that had previously been addressed through technology and resource sharing between Muslim and Christian media workers were suddenly exacerbated, as the religious conflict began to dominate the working lives of journalists and other media workers and prevented further resource sharing.

As journalists were suddenly only able to make contact with people of the same religious background, coverage of the conflict began to divide clearly into reconstructed accounts of the Muslim and Christian sides of the conflict. In the words of a Maluku journalist, media workers 'were not only lured into the trap of conflict sentiment, but also became war propagandists' (AJI, 2002:1).

Acknowledging the potential role for media in resolving conflict in Maluku, the Alliance of Independent Journalist (AJI) in Indonesia undertook several initiatives in Maluku to encourage the practice of professionalism and peace journalism by all media workers in the area. Key to the success of various initiatives was the establishment of the Maluku media center, a centre for the promotion and support of peace journalism and cooperation between Muslim and Christian reporters.

The centre functions principally as a place of interaction and dialogue for journalists of all religious persuasions and is used by widely by Maluku media workers for this purpose. As such, the centre has provided for the exchange of information and views on the conflict from both sides, which increases the objectivity and balance of journalists' reports. The media simultaneously provides training for newly recruited journalists and has created a safe haven for journalists who find their news rooms targeted in violent exchanges.

A number of additional benefits have resulted from the establishment of the media centre, including the establishment of networks and dialogue partnerships between government and local NGOs in Ambon. Through the work of the media centre, trust in the objective coverage of events by journalists has been rebuilt and the centre has subsequently been used by government and NGO groups seeking otherwise inaccessible information about the conflict. A further benefit associated with the centre has been the general promotion of the peace process in Ambon, through the dissemination of information supporting peacebuilding initiatives and positive reporting on the peace process. Peace talks were covered in a positive light, and were rather more successful than previous talks as a result (AJI, 2002:2).

Recommendations

The above case study illustrates the active and positive role that can be played by media operators in conflict situations. While intervention is not a traditional strategy of media workers in conflict situations, the impact of media on society and the current global reach of the media and its messages suggest that media power could be more effectively leveraged to mitigate conflict situations. Advocates of this position point to the social benefits that can result when an active and sensitive media mobilises human and technological resources for the cause of peace promotion.

The current climate of uncertainty surrounding the 'war on terrorism' has limited the ability of global and local media to perform their traditional functions in our societies. It is time to consider revising this role, given prevailing circumstances, with the goal of establishing a more active, interventionist media focused on peace journalism. To this end the following recommendations outline a plan of action for the development of a more positive role for media in conflict situations in our region:

- Establish a website for the reportage of incidents of media censorship and propagandism in conflict situations, to provide for access to accurate information, and to encourage free and unbiased coverage of issues and events. This site would resemble the already established 'media channel' (www.mediachannel.org) which examines the

operations of Western media but would be region-specific, focusing solely on conflict situations in our region, and the impacts of conflict further afield on our region.

- Contribute funding towards scholarships for 'peace journalism' studies, to allow for the training of journalists in the region willing to contribute to peace journalism initiatives.
- Undertake further research to develop an operational framework for peace journalism in our region. This might build on the operational framework for media and peacebuilding developed by the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS), but should incorporate regional examples and case studies.
- Devote funding to support the establishment of Maluku-style media centres in other areas in our region experiencing conflict.

Conclusion

The media performs a number of vital functions in societies experiencing conflict, and has an observable impact on those societies. When media operators follow basic principles of good journalism and have access to accurate, impartial information, these impacts are positive. When the operations of the media are compromised by a conflict situation the result is a dysfunctional relationship between media and society, which can impact negatively on the society and efforts for conflict resolution.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, global media and local media have been severely compromised in their functioning. Given the potential negative consequences for global society as well as the individual societies it comprises, it is perhaps time to consider a new role for the media in conflict situations — specifically, a role which goes beyond mere information provision and impartial coverage of events and moves towards active intervention in conflict situation for the causes of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

Research conducted by a number of social theorists has outlined how such a role may be possible, without contravening traditional codes of ethics or principles of practice associated with various media activities. Building on this research in our region with the goal of implementing peace journalism could potentially contribute to broader peacebuilding initiatives and generally inculcate a system of free and open communications and peaceful information and resource sharing in our region.

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