

activate

The quarterly
journal of IMPACS,
the Institute
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guest editorial

Three years ago a Cambodian journalist living in exile unknowingly changed the face of IMPACS. Pin Samkon, the former director of the Khmer Journalists Association, asked IMPACS to assist journalists in his country to prepare for their second democratic election. I politely declined the offer, but promised to raise the issue with then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy. Much to my surprise, within a week of meeting Mr. Axworthy, two of his staff called me to inquire how IMPACS intended to move forward in Cambodia. So began IMPACS' foray into media and peacebuilding.

IMPACS' involvement in the field has evolved dramatically since that first conversation with Samkon. In addition to training journalists in Cambodia, IMPACS has helped shape a peacebuilding effort with editors and owners of the indigenous language press in South Asia, an election project in Guyana and a training project for journalists for the International Criminal Court ratification process. We have hosted four international roundtables on media and peacebuilding issues including a session in Japan and we have written the first research paper on the issue for the Canadian government. Most recently, the Canadian International Development Agency approached IMPACS to write an operational framework to help guide international donors in their media and peacebuilding interventions.

All of this work has taught us that Canada has something unique to offer this field. We are the first country in the world to make media and peacebuilding a priority in our international peacebuilding funding. We also have a pool of outstanding trainers and policy officials who are internationally recognized experts in the field.



These Canadians are part of a larger international movement of organizations and individuals committed to seeing the media play a constructive role in building lasting peace in conflict regions.

In this issue of *Activate*, we would like to introduce to you some of these people and their initiatives. The authors and organizations profiled here offer some of the most innovative approaches to media and peacebuilding. Their starting place is within the media itself – as editors, owners, producers and journalists. In some cases they work within non-government organizations and in other cases they work directly within a print or broadcast media house.

Although their articles may not appear readily transferable to the Canadian voluntary organization reading this issue, I would suggest that they are. There is a great deal we can learn from how the media works internally and how they develop creative alternatives to address difficult social issues, like peace and reconciliation.

SHAUNA SYLVESTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IMPACS

We are the first country in the world to make **media and peacebuilding a priority** in our international peacebuilding funding.

Cambodia

BY WAYNE SHARPE

Working with Radio Journalists to Support a Fragile Democracy

To fully understand the role of the media in peacebuilding efforts, it is important to understand the pivotal role the media plays in every modern struggle for power. Take, for example, the fall of Slobodon Milosevic in Serbia last October. Protesters stormed the parliament in Belgrade, but they simultaneously seized the headquarters of state television. State television was considered to be the single most crucial pillar of the Milosevic regime. He had used it to promote nationalist fervor, and in the media-deprived countryside, Milosevic had a captive audience. The official name of the state broadcaster was Radio Television Serbia; its name on the streets of Belgrade was TV Bastille. The protestors knew that control of the state TV was key to their success in overthrowing the military regime.

As in times of conflict, the media also plays a critical role in peaceful times. It is a natural place to start when working to prevent conflict in a war-affected society. In Cambodia the task is daunting. Cambodian's media history is one of intimidation, imprisonment and assassination. While a certain amount of tension between a free and challenging media and the government is considered healthy in any country or setting, in Cambodia the tensions are heightened by journal-

ists who are reckless in their reporting and officials who are too quick to stifle free expression.

The goal of the IMPACS Cambodia Radio Journalists' Training Project is to strengthen the peacebuilding process by assisting in the development of more independent, open and accountable radio media in Cambodia. IMPACS strives to help create an institution for public scrutiny that serves Cambodia's transition to democracy by improving the quality of information disseminated through media and by increasing the flow of information through the development of radio journalism.

Radio is the focus of the project for three reasons:


1. most Cambodians rely on radio as their primary source of information,
2. radio has been passed over in previous international training efforts, and
3. Canadians, because of the long tradition of training at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, are especially talented in radio training.

The IMPACS radio training has been supplemented with classroom lectures at two local partner institutions, the Royal University of Phnom Penh and the Cambodian Communications Institute.

As in times of conflict, the media also plays a critical role in peaceful times. It is a natural place to start when working to prevent conflict in a war-affected society.

The radio training, which ran from September 1999 to December 2000, was conducted on site and focused on developing skills in interviewing, writing, editing, performance, and media ethics. Where equipment was lacking, IMPACS provided inexpensive, mobile recording equipment.

The outcome of the training has been immediate and gratifying. The difference in programming can already be heard on the air: more voices are heard, different viewpoints are shared and the dialogue, between the government of Cambodia and its citizens, is begun.

The IMPACS Cambodia Radio Journalists' Training Project will continue in 2001 and beyond, by working with radio journalists and with the new generation of journalists in the classroom. Sometime in 2001, Cambodia will hold local elections, an event that will severely test their fragile peace. The media will play a pivotal role in informing the electorate of their rights and their choices, and IMPACS will offer election coverage training to help the media play a constructive role during this critical test of Cambodia's resolve to be a free and fair society. 

Wayne Sharpe is a journalist and communications consultant who, from 1995 to 1999 was the Executive Director of the International Freedom of Expression exchange (IFEX), a network of 45 freedom of expression organizations and Executive Director of Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. Mr. Sharpe is currently directing IMPACS Cambodia Radio Journalists' Training Program, improving the skills of Cambodian journalists and building their capacity to train themselves.



A reporter with FM 105, the radio station run by the Women's Media Centre, on assignment in Phnom Penh.

What is Peace Journalism?

BY ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK AND JAKE LYNCH

CONFLICT AND PEACE FORUM

Professor Johan Galtung, Peace Studies professor and director of the TRANSCEND network, started using the term, 'Peace Journalism' in the 1970s. Conflict and Peace Forums, a think-tank based near Maidenhead, UK, developed Galtung's original ideas in a series of international conferences at Taplow Court from 1997–99, and in publications: The Peace Journalism Option (1998); What Are Journalists For? (1999), and, Using Conflict Analysis in Reporting (2000).

After the deadliest and most violent century in human history, the world is all too well schooled in the language of war and hatred.

Peace Journalism can help teach another language, a language rooted in non-violence and creativity in thinking about conflicts.

There is a pervasive belief, especially in English-speaking countries in the West, that journalists “just report the facts.”

The problem with this belief has become steadily more obvious in a media-savvy world: many people know how to create and tailor facts for journalists to report. Indeed, most governments think of their actions and statements as part of a “media strategy” which cannot be separated from the business of running their country’s affairs.

What this means is that the facts do not crop up innocently, waiting for journalists to discover and report them. The reporting, and a calculation about its effects – on public opinion, for instance – is usually already built into the facts. And governments rely on this reporting to help bolster their own images and attack their opponents.

But, how does a government know what facts to create, or how to present these facts so that reporting is done the way that those players would like? Only from their experience of reading, watching and listening to stories in the past. This means that every time a journalist reports on an issue, that story adds another layer to the collective understanding of how journalists are likely to respond in similar situations.

In this way journalists influence the kind of facts likely to be provided for them to report in the future – the future behaviour of, say, parties

to a conflict. Journalists, their sources and their audiences are counterparts in a feedback loop of cause and effect.

So the claim that journalists “just report the facts” gives an incomplete, and in some cases, inaccurate account of the journalist’s role. All journalism is an intervention between the story originator – in this case the government – and the audience – the public. And journalists make choices about the ethics of each intervention.

Peace Journalism seeks to minimize the rift between opposed parties by not repeating “facts” that demonize or set the stage for conflict. Therefore, the basic question a Peace Journalist would ask before crafting any story would be “what can I do with my intervention to enhance the prospects for peace?”

In a phrase, Peace Journalism is a broader, fairer and more accurate way of framing stories, drawing on the insights of conflict analysis and transformation. The Peace Journalism approach provides a new road map for tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their reporting – the ethics of journalistic intervention. It opens up a literacy of non-violence and creativity as applied to the practical job of everyday reporting.

It follows that Peace Journalism holds the greatest appeal for journalists working in



Jake Lynch

Radio reporter interviewing refugees in Palu, Central Sulawesi.

situations where it is impossible to avoid thinking about their responsibility for the consequences of their reporting. Much pioneering work was done by the Media Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa, through the transition from Apartheid.

Journalists in Indonesia have collaborated with the present authors in training dialogues about Peace Journalism and in a recent field trip to Poso, in Central Sulawesi (see photo). The area has been riven by conflict and periodic outbreaks of violence for the last two years of Indonesia's shaky transition from the New Order of President Suharto. Participants produced Peace Journalism treatments for eight national publications as well as TV and radio.

This work, the work of Professor Johan Galtung, along with training dialogues and conferences in many countries over the past few years, form the basis for the first practical Peace Journalism Manual, from which the following list of "Dos and Don'ts" is taken:

What a Peace Journalist would strive to do

1. **AVOID** portraying a conflict as consisting of only two parties contesting one goal. The logical outcome is for one to win and the other to lose.
INSTEAD a Peace Journalist would disaggregate the two parties into many smaller groups, pursuing many goals, opening up more creative potential for a range of outcomes.
2. **AVOID** accepting stark distinctions between self and other. These can be used to build the sense that another party is a threat or "beyond the pale" of civilised behaviour: both key justifications for violence.
INSTEAD seek the "other" in the "self" and vice versa. If a party is presenting itself as "the goodies", ask questions about how different its behaviour really is to that it ascribes to "the baddies" – isn't it ashamed of itself?

3. **AVOID** treating a conflict as if it is only going on in the place and at the time that violence is occurring.
INSTEAD try to trace the links and consequences for people in other places now and in the future. Ask:
 - Who are all the people with a stake in the outcome?
 - What will happen if...?
 - What lessons will people draw from watching these events unfold as part of a global audience?
 - How will they enter the calculations of parties to future conflicts near and far?
4. **AVOID** assessing the merits of a violent action or policy of violence in terms of its visible effects only.
INSTEAD try to find ways of reporting on the invisible effects. For example, the long-term consequences of psychological damage and trauma, perhaps increasing the likelihood that those affected will be violent in future, either against other people or, as a group, against other groups or other countries.
5. **AVOID** letting parties define themselves by simply quoting their leaders' restatement of familiar demands or positions.
INSTEAD enquire deeper into goals:
 - How are people on the ground affected by the conflict in everyday life?
 - What do they want changed?
 - Is the position stated by their leaders the only way or the best way to achieve the changes they want?

This may help to empower parties to articulate their goals and make creative outcomes more likely.
6. **AVOID** concentrating always on what divides the parties and the differences between what they say they want.
INSTEAD try asking questions which may reveal areas of common ground. Lead your report with answers which suggest some goals maybe shared or at least compatible.
7. **AVOID** only reporting the violent acts and describing "the horror." If you exclude everything else, you suggest that the only explanation for violence is previous violence (revenge); the only remedy, more violence (coercion/punishment).
INSTEAD show how people have been blocked and frustrated or deprived in everyday life as a way of explaining the violence.
8. **AVOID** blaming someone for "starting it."
INSTEAD try looking at how shared problems and issues are leading to consequences which all the parties say they never intended.
9. **AVOID** focusing exclusively on the suffering, fears and grievances of only one party. This divides the parties into villains and victims and suggests that coercing or punishing the villains represents a solution.
INSTEAD treat as equally newsworthy the suffering, fears and grievance of all sides.
10. **AVOID** victimizing language like destitute, devastated, defenceless, pathetic and tragedy which only tells us what has been done to and could be done for a group of people. This disempowers them and limits the options for change.
INSTEAD report on what has been done and could be done by the people. Don't just ask them how they feel, also ask them how they are coping and what they think. Can they suggest any solutions?
11. **AVOID** imprecise use of emotive words to describe what has happened to people.
 - "Genocide" means the wiping-out of an entire people.
 - "Decimated" (of a population) means reducing it by a tenth of its former size.
 - "Tragedy" is a form of drama, originally Greek, in which someone's fault or weakness proves his or her undoing.
 - "Assassination" is the murder of a head of state.

- “Massacre” is the deliberate killing of people known to be unarmed and defenceless. (Are we sure? Or might these people have died in battle?)
- “Systematic” (for example, raping, or forcing people from their homes) means the actions have been organised in a deliberate pattern. (Is this the actual case or have there been a number of unrelated, albeit extremely nasty incidents?)

INSTEAD always be precise about what we know. Do not minimise suffering but reserve the strongest language for the gravest situations or you will beggar the language and help to justify disproportionate responses which escalate the violence.

12. **AVOID** demonising *adjectives* like vicious, cruel, brutal and barbaric. These always describe one party’s view of what another party has done. To use them puts the journalist on that side and helps to justify an escalation of violence.

INSTEAD report what you know about the wrongdoing and give as much information as you can about the reliability of other people’s reports or descriptions of it.

13. **AVOID** demonising *labels* like terrorist, extremist, fanatic or fundamentalist. These are always given by us to them. No one ever uses them to describe himself or herself and so for a journalist to use them is always to take sides. They mean the person is unreasonable, therefore it seems to make less sense to reason (negotiate) with them.

INSTEAD try calling people by the names they give themselves. Or be more precise in your descriptions.

14. **AVOID** focusing exclusively on the human rights abuses, misdemeanours and wrongdoings of only one side.

INSTEAD try to name ALL wrongdoers and treat as equally serious the allegations made

by all sides in a conflict. Treating seriously does not mean taking at face value, but instead making equal efforts to establish whether any evidence exists to back them up, treating the victims with equal respect and the chances of finding and punishing the wrongdoers as being of equal importance.


15. **AVOID** making an opinion or claim seem like an established fact. (“Eurico Guterres, said to be responsible for a massacre in East Timor...”)

INSTEAD tell your readers or your audience who said what. (“Eurico Guterres, accused by a top UN official of ordering a massacre in East Timor...”) That way you avoid signing yourself and your news service up to the allegations made by one party in the conflict against another.

16. **AVOID** greeting the signing of documents by leaders, which bring about military victory or ceasefire, as necessarily creating peace.

INSTEAD try to report on the issues which remain and which may still lead people to commit further acts of violence in the future. Ask, What is being done to strengthen means on the ground to handle and resolve conflict non-violently, to address development or structural needs in the society and to create a culture of peace?

17. **AVOID** waiting for leaders on “our” side to suggest or offer solutions.

INSTEAD pick up and explore peace initiatives wherever they come from. Ask questions to ministers, for example, about ideas put forward by grassroots organisations. Assess peace perspectives against what you know about the issues that the parties are really trying to address. Do not ignore proposed solutions because they do not coincide with established positions. 

Annabel McGoldrick is a co-founder of Conflict and Peace Forums (CPF), based near Maidenhead, UK. She was Project Co-ordinator during the series of international Peace Journalism conferences held at Taplow Court from 1997-1999. An experienced reporter and producer in radio and television, she has covered conflicts in Thailand and Burma, and Yugoslavia, helping to make the BBC Counterblast programme, *Against The War*, with Harold Pinter, during the Kosovo crisis in 1999. She teaches the MA module in Peace-Building Media, Theory and Practice, at the University of Sydney, and has trained journalists in these techniques in Indonesia and the Caucasus.

Jake Lynch is an experienced international correspondent for television and newspapers. He was the Independent reporter in Sydney in 1998-99 and spent the Kosovo crisis based at Nato HQ in Brussels, for the 24-hour channel, SkyNews. He has covered conflicts in Ireland and Yugoslavia as well as countless political and diplomatic stories in Europe and the UK. The author of *CPF papers, What Are Journalists For?* (1999) and *Using Conflict Analysis in Reporting* (2000), he teaches the MA module in Peace-Building Media, Theory and Practice, at the University of Sydney, and has trained journalists in these techniques in Indonesia, the UK, Norway, the Middle East and the Caucasus.

Our Neighbourhood

BY LISA SHOCHAT
COMMON GROUND PRODUCTIONS

What happens when the creators of Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch partner with a non-profit organization that holds the goal of promoting multi-ethnic dialogue and preventing violence? In Macedonia, the result is *Nashe Maalo*.

Nashe Maalo (“Our Neighbourhood” in Macedonian) is a popular kids’ TV show, geared to the 7 to 12-year-old crowd. The half-hour episodes feature six children of Albanian, Macedonian, Roma and Turkish backgrounds who live in an imaginary building in Skopje. These kids share a secret that binds them together – the building they live in is alive! Her name is Karmen and, in addition to being the kids’ confidante and friend, she possesses a supernatural power: she can magically transport them into their neighbours’ cultural and psychological milieus. These scenes open the eyes of our characters to other people’s ways of thinking and living.

The importance of *Nashe Maalo*

Although Macedonia has escaped bloodshed within its borders in recent years, the war over Kosovo has dealt a hard blow to Macedonia’s inter-ethnic relations. Two-thirds of Macedonia’s population is ethnic Macedonian, with the remainder comprising ethnic Albanians (23%), Turks (4%) and several smaller groups, including Roma, at 2% each. The groups tend to lead lives rigidly, segregated by language, residence and education, and interact with each other only on a superficial level. *Nashe Maalo* is a central tool of Search for Common Ground’s approach to



building tolerance and understanding across these barriers in Macedonia’s emerging democracy.

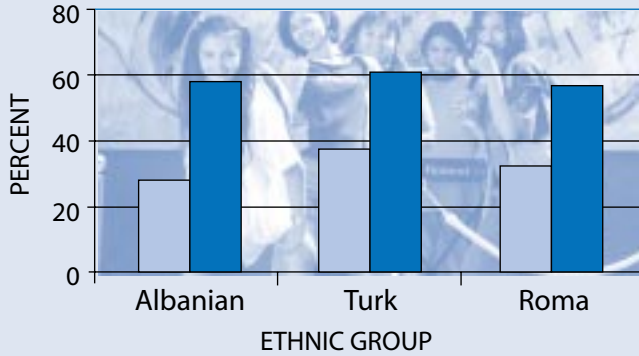
And, research indicates that the project is working. The show has grabbed kids’ imaginations, is entertaining and makes kids want to see more – no small challenge in a children’s entertainment environment that emphasizes violent, fast-paced action cartoons.

At a deeper level, *Nashe Maalo* has already begun to make real inroads into overcoming deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes between ethnic groups in Macedonia. Before the series went to air, researchers interviewed 240 children at eight schools in the Skopje region (sixty 10-year-olds from each of the four ethnic groups represented on the show) and found that many children demonstrated negative, stereotyped perceptions of members of ethnic groups other than their own. Following the first season of just eight episodes, interviews with these same children indicated



that more of them held positive perceptions of “the other.” For example, there was a significant increase among ethnic Macedonian children, who after viewing *Nashe Maalo*, said that they would be willing to invite a child from the ethnic Albanian, Roma and Turkish groups to their homes.

Change in percentage of Ethnic Macedonian children willing to invite a child from another Ethnic group into their home

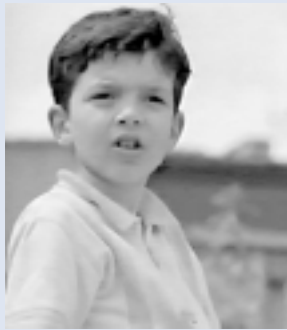


The implications of this series go far beyond the borders of Macedonia as a potential tool to complement violence-prevention efforts by international peace negotiators. Common Ground Productions is now investigating ways

in which the model can be used in Cyprus.

Thinking back to the days when I used to watch *Sesame Street*, and the implied messages in the interactions between Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch,

Mr. Hooper, Maria and Gordon, it really comes as no surprise that the partnership between Sesame Workshop and Search for Common Ground has been so successful. ☺



Lisa Shochat has been working in the conflict resolution field for over five years. Before working for Common Ground Productions, she held positions as Staff Mediator at the Center for Resolution of Environmental Disputes, Outreach Coordinator at the Institute for Study of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Site Manager for the East European Folklife Center. Her Bachelor and Master's Degrees are in Sociology. Contact Lisa at lschocat@sfcg.org.

Search for Common Ground, based in Washington, DC, USA, and the European Centre for Common Ground, based in Brussels, Belgium, established in 1982 and 1995 respectively, are partner NGOs that work together to prevent violence and transform conflict in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the USA (www.sfcg.org).

Common Ground Productions, the media-production division of Search for Common Ground, aims at creating television, radio, and Internet programming for the reduction or prevention of conflict (www.cgponline.org).

Sesame Workshop (formerly known as Children's Television Workshop, CTW) is a non-profit production organization that uses media as an educational force in the lives of children. Its products include television, online, CD-ROMs, magazines, books, film, community outreach, and licensing.

Best known as the creators of Sesame Street, the Workshop produces programming that has been broadcast in 148 countries, including 20 co-productions reflecting local languages, customs, and educational needs (www.ctw.org).




Media and Peacebuilding: Mapping the Possibilities

BY ROSS HOWARD

Since 1998, IMPACS has been exploring and developing media as a peacebuilding tool in regions such as South-East Asia. Now, under contract to CIDA and with European partners, IMPACS is assembling the first "framework" or wide-ranging description of policies and strategies for media in peacebuilding. The project aims to define the types of media, the conflict situations and entry points for media interventions, the key questions to determine the scope of intervention, the best techniques to evaluate the progress and outcome, and to identify the lessons already learned. The project outcome, aimed at NGOs, funders, media, policy makers, academics and the public, will be released by summer 2001. For more information about the Framework, contact IMPACS at media@impacs.org.

The good news is that the media can be highly effective in reducing conflict in strife-ridden societies. International agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) are increasingly convinced that an unbiased and diverse media ranks almost as high as emergency relief in countries facing or active in war. Reliable information – such as where to get food, when is it safe to return, what common ground exists among all sides – is an essential element of stabilizing a society. In countries moving towards democratic government, a free and accountable media, one that monitors rights abuses and promotes divergent opinions, helps deter a return to violence. A biased or hate-mongering media can sabotage almost any other peacebuilding effort.

But the role of media in conflict resolution is still evolving and is deceptively complex. The definition of media, the Western traditions of journalistic neutrality and commercial imperatives, the distinction between peace programming and propaganda, all need clarification. And the potential – consider the reach of a single transmitter – deserves far greater recognition in the field of conflict resolution.

One useful tool for mapping out the potential is to view the media as several stages in a continuum of intervention. The continuum can help NGOs determine how to approach and effectively use the media. It is also useful to conventional journalists in examining their work and the potential impact of that work, beyond traditional limitations. 

1

Stage One is conventional journalism as we know it in Western countries. In this “as we see it” style, reporters practice what is called objective or neutral journalism, reporting just the facts and suppressing biases and taking no responsibility for consumer reactions. The potential for peacebuilding here lies in promoting the basics of journalism skills and ethics, through training, and in fostering the democratic institutions – legislated media freedoms, broadcast standards, etc.

2

Stage Two requires higher standards and a sense of journalistic responsibility. It requires consciously avoiding Western or cultural stereotypes, sensationalization, and recklessness such as exposing interviewees to persecution. For peacebuilders, the opportunity lies in sensitizing journalists and advancing the infrastructure of a free media, including independent diverse sources and modern technology.

3

Stage Three is journalism struggling with the consequences of neutrality which can become complicity. This new journalism assumes a responsibility for what comes of the reporting of events; it seeks stories which maximize the chance for peacebuilding. It can be advocacy and still be objective. There are war correspondents; why not peace correspondents? Peacebuilders’ intervention here can help journalists fulfill the role of reconciliation – by training in conflict resolution – rather than ripping a society apart.

4

Stage Four is beyond conventional journalism driven by competitive, commercial or political advantage-seeking, and into constructive media for the express purposes of peacebuilding. Sometimes it includes having journalists play the role of facilitators, bringing divergent perspectives to the table. Often it is program-based, using purchased time or independently-established outlets including publications, television studios, radio transmitters or the internet to supply education, health, resettlement or other practical information. The UN now builds this programming into every peace-making intervention. NGOs are building a track record in working with local communities to use this media constructively.

5

Stage Five is directly interventionist media programming, which includes and extends beyond conventional techniques to use soap operas, street theatre, videos and comic books – in other words, whatever it takes to get out a message crafted to foster peaceful resolution of conflict. It includes cartoon programming aimed at former child soldiers in Angola and Sierra Leone, multilingual advice for refugees from Rwanda, and a soap opera for hostile neighborhoods in Kosovo. It is programming with an intended outcome in mind, to foster society “as we’d like it.” It is a long way from conventional “as we see it” journalism. It is creative, effective and a rapidly expanding opportunity for peacebuilders.

Ross Howard is Research Coordinator for IMPACS’ Media and Peacebuilding Framework project. A Vancouver-based freelance journalist, author and film-maker, he is a former senior correspondent for The Globe and Mail newspaper.

A New Generation for Peace

BY PHIL BOB HELLMICH
SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

In late 1997, a 16-year-old boy walked into the office of Talking Drum Studio in Monrovia, Liberia, and asked if he could try an idea. He and a small group of children had created the “Children’s Bureau of Information,” through which they wanted to give a voice to the children of Liberia, to help other children recover from seven years of civil war. They had the idea, and probably more importantly, children’s spirit and perspective.

Talking Drum Studio, a project of Search for Common Ground, provided these children the opportunity to learn how to produce radio programs. One thing led to another, and before long, the Children’s Bureau of Information and TDS were producing a weekly show entitled *Golden Kids News*, which was carried by a local radio station. The impact was almost immediate: children’s voices were being broadcast and people stopped to listen.

UNHCR later approached Talking Drum Studio to see if we would produce another program specifically for children who had been displaced during the war and were trying to rebuild their lives. Thus, was created *Children’s World*, a program “by children for children affected by war.” This weekly program is also entirely designed by children, with adult support, and features poetry, songs, and storytelling, along with news and music.

When we started another Talking

Drum Studio in Freetown, Sierra Leone in April 2000, the first program produced was *Golden Kids News*. The impact was even more noticeable than in Liberia, as soldiers in the UN peace-keeping mission, market people, and taxi drivers alike stopped by the studio to comment about the children’s programs. All seven radio stations in Sierra Leone are carrying *Golden Kids News* and are frequently asked to replay each program.



Kenneth Conteh

“Cub” reporters from Talking Drum Studio’s *Golden Kids News* interview the President of Sierra Leone, the Honorable T.J. Kabbah. They asked him when the country would be getting a new first lady, something many people in the country wanted to know but were afraid to ask.

The United Nations Office for Children and Armed Conflict and the Japanese government have asked both Talking Drum Studios to create even more children’s radio programming, this time aimed at former child combatants as part of a world-wide “Voice of Children” initiative. The UN initiative is also looking at how the experience in Liberia and Sierra Leone can be adapted to other countries.

When I asked one of Talking Drum Studio’s producers about her experience working with children, she

said, “very often adults believe that kids do not have any thoughts of their own. This is a fallacy. What we have discovered is that children do have their own fears and concerns and, given a chance, they express their thoughts very well.”

The first time I watched a *Children’s World* program being produced in Liberia, I was immediately impressed by the image of a small child sitting with large earphones, speaking into an even larger microphone. When she began to speak, “This is Brandy Crawford, and this is *Children’s World*, a program produced by children for children affected by war,” I immediately understood on a visceral level the power of the programming. I struggled to hold back tears, as the innocence and purity of a child reaching out to other children in the face of horrible atrocities awakened something in my own heart: compassion, beauty and hope, the very essences of being human that will need to be cultivated if we are to move beyond war.

Footnote: the young boy who introduced the *Golden Kids News* concept later became a Child Ambassador for UNICEF and recently received a full-ride scholarship at Brown University. ☺

Phil Bob Hellmich is the West Africa Regional Director for Search for Common Ground. Phil Bob has over eleven years of experience working in international development and conflict resolution, including four years with the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone. He has been published in the *Washington Post*, and numerous other newspapers, magazines and publications around the United States. Contact him at phelmich@sfcg.org.

Conflict: A Reporter's Perspective

BY MIKE CRAWLEY

I recently traveled to a place that's not on any tour company's African holiday itinerary: Mogadishu, the bombed-out capital of Somalia.

Mogadishu's city centre looks like the photos of Dresden after the Second World War, its buildings nothing but misshapen empty husks. A quarter-million displaced people live in smashed and looted factories. Dotted all around the city are young men with big rifles, the remnants of the warring militias who tore the country apart. Everywhere I went, five bodyguards surrounded me, all armed with semi-automatic weapons.

I went there as part of my job. I'm a journalist based in Nairobi, covering a part of the world where conflict has often been a way of life. When I list the countries I've visited in the two years since I left Canada – places like Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kosovo – many people wonder how I do it.

What they should be wondering is how the people in those countries do it. I have the greatest privilege: I can leave. I'm constantly inspired by people who, rather than throw up their hands in the face of conflict, struggle to make their societies better. They include people you've never heard of, like Edda Mukabagwiza, who works with a Rwandan human rights group helping genocide widows retain their property in a society where women have never been allowed to inherit. Then there's Nelson Mandela, whom I covered trying to sort out the tangled Burundian civil war. A photo I took of him sits on the wall above the desk where I'm writing.

I've met local reporters who take far greater risks than I trying to exercise the freedom

Canadian journalists take for granted, in places where democracy is nominal.


What I've seen has made me a different person from who I would have been had I stayed in Canada.

In southern Sudan, I saw precisely how profoundly a 17-year civil war has affected the society when I visited what I was told would be a Grade 3 classroom. Virtually everyone in the class was a teenager or older. The war had disrupted school so often that the children couldn't progress.

In Kosovo, I walked across the bridge linking the north and south parts of Mitrovica, a city divided on ethnic lines. Serbs live in the north, Albanians in the south, and the bridge was deserted except for a few tense French peacekeepers.

Even in relatively peaceful Kenya, I've seen how politically motivated violence between ethnic groups left a legacy of empty hotel rooms and restaurants on the country's beautiful coast fully two years after the clashes.

I've been to mass gravesites in Kosovo and Somalia, interviewed rebel leaders from Burundi and Sudan, met refugees from Congo and Somalia. Different incidents in different places, but one theme has linked them all for me: people told me to tell their stories. "Tell the world how the conflict is affecting us," they've said, seeing in me as a journalist the power to move the world from indifference to action.

Remember their pleas the next time you want to flick the channel or tune out the radio or turn the page when confronted with yet another story about conflict in a place far away. 



Mike Crawley is a Canadian journalist. He reports regularly for the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Globe and Mail* and Gemini News Service.

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