

TUESDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2008 (14.30pm – 16.00pm)

Workshop 12: Strengthening Collaborative Approaches to Media and Conflict

HORIZON, LEVEL 9/ RG, English

Workshop Title: Strengthening Collaborative Approaches to Media and Conflict

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Language: (Please mark one) English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic

Workshop description:

1. What are the main points you want to raise in the workshop?

In crisis situations media can either induce tension or contribute to stabilization of the situation. With the potential role media can play in crisis situations gaining ever increasing international prominence, media support and freedom of expression actors must increasingly seek to expand their capacity to respond quickly and collaboratively to crisis situations.

The aim of the workshop would therefore be to discuss how non-state actors can work to promote independent and professional media that are able to react more swiftly and effectively to crisis situations, as well as extract lessons learnt for improved collective methodologies that support the media's ability to promote reconciliation.

Amongst the media development community, International Media Support (IMS) has found a broad-based consensus about the relevance and need for the media to identify and anticipate emerging crisis, as well as to address and resolve crisis through support to professional media and the defence of press freedoms. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in gathering and applying experiences and lessons learnt.

Furthermore, many global media support and press freedom organisations are constrained by institutional processes and lack of funding to facilitate such rapid reaction work in unstable circumstances. This workshop proposal therefore seeks to discuss the structures and mechanism needed to improve such collaborative and cooperative engagements in crisis situations.

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2. Give some background information to the issue you want to raise.

Through its inherent functions as a collator and disseminator of information, the media plays a central role in both raising awareness and spreading knowledge at the local, national and international levels. When a free, professional and well-resourced media community is active, it can play the role of being able to both warn of impending crisis through access to broad grass-roots information and monitor press freedoms, which often serves as a barometer of broader socio-political stability.

Moreover, as the fourth estate of democracy, the media acts as a watchdog over governance, ensuring transparency, spreading awareness, reconciling communities, and facilitating public engagement in decision making. In this regard, the media is an essential component of immediate and medium term post-crisis recovery.

In this regard, groupings of national and international actors, such as the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Resolution in West Africa', established in 2003, or the 'International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission' (in South Asia), established in 2005, have been formed to improve coordination and maximise impact. IMS has played a central role in these such informal groups, which bring participating organisations together on an ad-hoc country specific basis with the goal of increasing cooperation and coordination on media and conflict and press freedom activities relating to specific countries. This also relates to the international debate about aid effectiveness, which underlines the need for harmonization of efforts (amongst international actors) and alignment with local actors to ensure relevance and maximise impact.

To date, groups such as these have worked together in the following countries:

- Colombia (2004 – 08)
- Gambia (2006 – 08)
- Kenya (2008)
- Liberia (2003 – 07)
- Mexico (2008)
- Nepal (2005 – 08)
- Zimbabwe (2007 – 08)

Joint activities undertaken by such groups have entailed:

- Joint strategy planning and information sharing;
- Country-specific assessments and report on the media;
- Lobbying and advocacy with national and international target groups;
- Pooling resources and implementation of joint projects;
- Assistance to policy makers and national authorities;

3. List three key questions you want the workshop to address.

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In crisis situations media support organisations are faced with a number of challenges, such as ensuring safety of journalists, independent news-coverage, maintaining professional distance and adherence to codes of conduct. Although international media support organisations often work with local actors to address such problems, initiatives are often isolated with international organisations each having their own focus and processes hindering swift and coordinated action.

This therefore poses a number of challenges, such as how to enhance information sharing, provide structures for joint media support engagements, promote understanding of the role of the media in crisis situations, and enhance media and crisis reduction methodologies.

The three questions for the workshop would therefore be:

- a) What best practices and experiences exist on the role of media support and press freedom to function as crisis resolving and recovery tools.
- b) What mechanisms and structures can be established for international, regional and national media support and press freedom organisations to strengthen their ability to respond in a rapid, collective and coordinated manner to crisis, and how can such structures be made sustainable?
- c) How can access to field-based analysis and sharing of information amongst national, regional and international media support and press freedom actors be improved?

4. What would be the main desired outcome of the workshop?

The desired outcomes would be the further development and share methodologies for collective approaches on media support, press freedom and crisis situations. In addition, further clarity could be established on the role and usability of collaborative country-specific media assessments, which result in comprehensive reports outlining strategic and operations plans for media support.

Based around the existing informal groupings (as mentioned previously) the groups of cooperating organisations could also be expanded through the inclusion of more GFMD participants, possibly including the identification of joint media and crisis projects.

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