

Responsive Programming:
A Model for Developing Conflict
Resolution Media and Other Interventions
Based on the Work of
Talking Drum Studio
Monrovia, Liberia

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Common Ground Productions
Search For Common Ground
October 1999

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is an exploration of different approaches to programming for conflict resolution media and its complementary interventions. It presents a new model for media communicators to use in creating programming focused on peacebuilding. It is based on the authors' recent mission to Liberia to assess the work of Talking Drum Studio, a conflict resolution organization of media producers, journalists, and activists. Talking Drum Studio is a project of Common Ground Productions/Search for Common Ground, an organization based in Washington, DC that works to develop and model conflict resolution strategies and solutions via media in contentious social and political environments. Common Ground Productions has two main tracks of activity and interest. The first is producing media for peacebuilding. The second is research about the use of media for peacebuilding - its applications, impact, and effects. During our recent mission to Liberia, we focused on these two tracks of activity as well as on an exploration of how curriculum and instructional objectives can direct conflict resolution programming and its complementary interventions.

Our work is a continuation of the exploration begun by Common Ground Productions (CGP) in 1998 that resulted in the development of a new research methodology that can be useful to media practitioners working in war-disrupted zones who need information about their audience(s) and the current status of a conflict in order to produce appropriate and salient programming. In addition to developing the "Rapid Survey Methodology for Broadcasters in War Zones", CGP began to consider how different approaches to creating programming would impact upon the peacebuilding process. CGP began with an exploration of the role of curriculum-driven and instructional objectives-based programming for its projects in Burundi and Macedonia. We continued their exploration with the staff at Talking Drum Studio (TDS) in Liberia. Based on our observations and research with TDS staff, we generated a new model for conflict resolution communicators to use in developing media-based interventions. It incorporates the use of curriculum and what we call "responsive programming" into a framework of intended outcomes for conflict resolution. It is a process of continuous, formative assessment that is informed by conflict resolution strategies and dovetails with the periodic use of the Rapid Survey Methodology.

The objectives of our research and evaluation mission to Talking Drum Studio in Monrovia, Liberia included an evaluation of the processes they use to develop conflict resolution media. We formally observed what TDS is doing on a day-to-day basis, and worked with them to generate for us and for them a clear understanding of the procedures that they employ. We analyzed the procedures and put them together in a framework that accurately characterized what they do. With the addition of a more formal assessment component, that framework became the "Responsive Programming Model" that we describe in this report.

This report is organized into the following sections:

1. Talking Drum Studio: Conflict Resolution Communicators
2. Intended Outcomes for Peacebuilding
3. Curriculum-based and Responsive Programming: A Combined Approach to Achieving Intended Conflict Resolution Outcomes at Talking Drum Studio
4. Responsive Programming": The New Model for Conflict Resolution Communicators
5. Ongoing Research to Support Curriculum and Responsive Programming Approaches

TALKING DRUM STUDIO: CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMUNICATORS

As evaluators, we found that Talking Drum Studio had formulated a new way for journalists to operate in a long-term conflict situation. It was already doing what many conflict resolution theorists are proposing as possibilities. TDS producers engage in conflict resolution from a multi-channel approach to communication. They use various media formats and channels to stimulate the peacebuilding process in Liberia. Their professional training in development and behavior change communication as well as journalism makes them more than simply objective broadcasters. They respond to breaking news and on-going issues in different ways depending on the nature of the events and issues, the relationship of the events and issues to the conflict, and the journalists' understanding of the social and political mechanisms that exist today in Liberia. They also consider the needs of their various audiences for information, education, and exposure to the issues, and the resources available to the studio. Our discussions with the staff revealed that their long-term goal of building a sustainable peace is founded on a commitment to the conflict resolution strategies of analysis, prevention and intervention vis a vis their journalistic approach.

TDS has daily staff meetings that have a twofold purpose: meetings serve as a useful studio management operations practice; and, in the broader context of what the studio is trying to do, meetings allow staff to stay abreast of current events, and to evaluate their options for responding as a studio to the changes and new situations that arise. They calculate their initial responses to breaking events carefully with full awareness of the power of the media to inflame or calm, generate trust or fear, and expand or narrow the ensuing dialogue.

Producers explore new ideas, share feedback, and response to programs and interventions, exchange perspectives on current events, and develop short and long-term work plans.

Thematic Programs

Talking Drum Studio packages their peacebuilding radio broadcasting into nine thematic programs per week. The producers treat topics of interest to their target audiences either in a single program or in a mini-series format. They often address themes through campaigns developed jointly by producers from the various programs. This means that a particular health issue, for example, may be treated by an in-depth report on the women's program ("Woman"), by a taped round-table discussion with people representing different opinions on the issue ("One Step Beyond"), and then referred to by characters in a dramatic presentation by TDS performers ("Common Ground Drama") – all in the same week.

Each of these programs would follow a basic conflict resolution strategy salient to the work of TDS such as giving voice to all parties to a conflict, building trust, analyzing the conflict, stimulating dialogue, reducing tension and modeling conflict resolution approaches among others. For a full description of TDS' nine thematic programs, please reference the appendix.

Conflict Resolution Activities that Complement Programming

As mentioned previously, TDS staff engages in a variety of creative conflict resolution activities that support and complement radio programming. These activities vary according to the nature and urgency of the news and issues at hand. They treat specific issues that are addressed in the thematic programs and support information campaign themes and messages. Sometimes a non-broadcast approach is selected as the initial response to breaking news. These complementary activities expand the impact of TDS on peacebuilding because they move beyond one-way broadcast communication to interpersonal and interactive communication in various public and private arenas. These multi-channel activities include:

1. Wire service-type distribution of print media which increases exposure for TDS and increases their opportunity to communicate news and information about issues and populations that otherwise are not covered by other media outlets.
2. Live performance drama in streets, schools, and other community locations that utilize an "investigative drama" approach and can be either follow-up to radio drama themes or drama written for the specific situation. It engages the audience in entertainment and critical dialogue while demonstrating conflict resolution strategies in action.
3. Regular and topical communication and meetings with government to maintain a dialogue with politicians on topical issues and build a "culture of trust" within which TDS and government can work together.
4. Convening "Media Against Conflict", an organization of media professionals who hold monthly meetings to assess their work re: peacebuilding and to develop campaign conflict resolution messages for use across media type and media outlets. Media Against Conflict also furthers the professional development of journalists and other media workers.
5. Direct facilitation of conflict resolution processes, which demonstrates conflict resolution strategies and methods as a realistic alternative to armed fighting and conflict. This activity directly aids peacebuilding in Liberia.

INTENDED OUTCOMES FOR PEACEBUILDING

Common Ground Productions has a strong interest in assessing their contribution to peacebuilding. After all, their organizational mission is to “create innovative programming that is dedicated to transforming conflict into cooperative action. CGP programming emphasizes a common ground approach that departs from the adversarial way in which issues are usually presented by the media. The aim is to show that even contentious issues can be examined in ways that inform and entertain, while still promoting the search for solutions.”¹ It is imperative for CGP to document and to measure the impact of their programs so that it can justify continuing work in the way that it does. If the CGP approach or any of its various aspects don’t contribute sufficiently to peacebuilding, then the approach can be adjusted or adapted to achieve greater effectiveness. To that end, CGP has a goal of developing effective approaches leading toward measurable conflict resolution outcomes for its media programming and related activities. The new model for programming that TDS is piloting is a first step towards developing a system for documenting CGP conflict resolution communication activities that will eventually include the definition of measurable outcomes.

There are other reasons for Common Ground Productions and its projects to assess their work. In addition to documenting progress and impact, and adjusting programs to changing circumstances, they can begin to model their approach for other organizations with similar peacebuilding objectives. This relates more broadly to the role CGP plays in the field of media and conflict. As journalists the world over are reflecting on ways that their reporting impacts upon conflict (either positively, negatively or not at all), CGP is trying out new approaches to journalism with the intended outcome of *furthering conflict resolution*. Rather than adopting the stance that journalists are neutral spectators to events and developments, CGP believes that simply telling the news is not enough. Using media as a tool for positive change means that journalists at Talking Drum Studio and other CGP studios actively pursue ways to improve the social and political context in which the conflict exists.

Since 1997, Talking Drum Studio has acted on the same premise articulated by Hannes Siebert in 1998 that the response of media in a conflict can change “as the anatomy of the conflict changes.”² Siebert could have been describing TDS and the objectives that underpin its responsive model of programming when he wrote about the “potential” roles of media in conflict resolution. TDS is playing many of the roles that he lists, including:

- being a medium of communication between conflicting parties;
- generating options to violent conflict;
- reflecting the ordinary person’s desire and need for peace
- communicating the process of negotiations to the constituencies involved;
- securing a free flow of accurate and constructive information;
- playing a watchdog role to help ensure long-term accountability from leaders to

- the people; and
- providing a forum for on-going dialogue.

Rob Manoff also presented his ideas on the many possibilities and potential roles for media in conflict situations in *Role Plays: Potential media roles in conflict prevention and management*³. The approach to programming that Manoff offers as a challenge to media organizations has already been operationalized by TDS. Manoff writes, "There is ample evidence that objective, fair, accurate and timely journalism is an effective way to help prevent or manage conflicts. But at the same time there are a wide variety of media-based strategies that have nothing whatsoever to do with journalism that may be strikingly effective in their turn. We need to recognise that in intervening in a conflict, we need what advertising people call a 'good media mix' in which journalism is but one of the constituent ingredients." Talking Drum Studio mixes its broadcast journalism with print news releases, live community and street "investigative" theater, direct facilitation of conflict resolution, and other proactive conflict resolution interventions. Every program it produces and every activity it undertakes have a common basis in conflict resolution strategies and practices that include these which Manoff delineates:

- channeling communication between parties
- educating
- building confidence
- counteracting misperceptions
- analyzing conflict
- de-objectifying the protagonists for each other
- identifying the interests underlying the issues
- providing an emotional outlet
- encouraging a balance of power
- framing and defining the conflict
- building consensus
- building solutions.

These strategies form the umbrella under which TDS producers formulate the specific content and format of programs and activities in the media mix of curriculum-based and responsive programming approaches.

The approach to peacebuilding employed by TDS is only one of several approaches that CGP is testing. Common Ground's Studio Ijambo in Burundi is beginning to explore the idea of applying conflict resolution curriculum to its radio programs including Sangwe Youth Music Program and to a soap opera series. Another is a project in Macedonia where CGP is working with Children's Television Workshop to produce a children's television series that is based on specific instructional objectives regarding ethnic respect and tolerance and modeling conflict resolution strategies. Both of these approaches will be evaluated to gauge their impact on the peace process in their respective regions of conflict.

Conflict Resolution Framework

All of the producers at TDS have participated in professional development courses in conflict resolution theory and practice. We found, however, that they have been working diligently and productively towards building a sustainable peace in Liberia without a consistently clear acknowledgement of the conflict resolution strategies that they apply to their work. Our evaluation mission to Liberia helped the staff at TDS recognize and delineate their current approach as conflict resolution communicators and begin to establish methods to monitor and document their progress towards intended conflict resolution outcomes. As a result, TDS producers began to construct an intentional framework of conflict resolution strategies to wrap around their mix of curriculum-based and responsive programming.

CURRICULUM-BASED AND RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING: A COMBINED APPROACH TO ACHIEVING INTENDED CONFLICT RESOLUTION OUTCOMES AT TALKING DRUM STUDIO

The producers at TDS utilize two general approaches to programming: curriculum-based and responsive programming. Their choice of approach to treat a specific theme or issue is based on the information generated by cycles of conflict mapping, audience research and program assessment. Although these approaches are different, their objectives and strengths complement each other in the program mix.

Curriculum-based Programming

Generally speaking, the use of a curriculum for education implies a carefully calculated, progressive and cumulative approach to teaching that often includes a master plan of instructional objectives. Planning research is conducted before the curriculum is designed to construct objectives appropriate to the needs of the target audience. Evaluation is used as a mechanism to validate the effectiveness of the curriculum after it has been implemented. The use of a curriculum is an effective approach to designing educational courses and programs under many circumstances such as in classrooms and training workshops. Curriculum-based programming is also useful for broadcast programming. In any case, certain predictable conditions must prevail for successful learning to occur. For curriculum-based media programming, these conditions include the following assumptions among others:

- that continuity of programming is possible and predictable according to a schedule;
- that political and social stability will allow this continuity and progressive delivery of content;
- that the primary audience is well-defined and understood for design and evaluation purposes;
- that the audience has a relatively controlled, consistent, and uninterrupted environment for viewing and/or listening to the teacher/presenter; and,
- that the audience has regular viewing/listening habits.

These conditions are viable for most educational settings and many audience groups. These conditions are neither normal nor viable, however, for most population groups in war-disrupted countries or regions. Lack of or diminished infrastructure and limitations on resources often preclude people's regular attention to media. War and conflict disrupt media production and broadcast schedules. Target audience groups defy clear definition when the population is on the move as refugees or displaced persons within their own country. Instructional and behavioral objectives can become moot when the conditions for their acquisition and application change.

Example of TDS's Curriculum Approach

"*Coming Home*", a regularly broadcast thematic program, provides current news and interviews of salience to refugees and internally displaced persons in combination with curriculum-based content. The curriculum is developed according to objectives defined by the Liberian office of UNHCR and the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission. Although TDS has not formally evaluated the impact of this program, they have collected positive anecdotal feedback from community leaders and returnees. Additionally, UNHCR has renewed their sponsorship of the program with TDS three times, which indicates their satisfaction with "*Coming Home*." TDS producers also point to the rapid return of refugees to their homes and villages as an indicator of one aspect of increased stability in Liberia, one that they feel that they have contributed to through this program.

Broadcasters who are interested in supporting conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes in war-disrupted zones have a need to develop alternatives to standard curriculum-based programming and traditional journalistic reporting practices. Talking Drum Studio has been developing an approach that is more responsive than curriculum to current events and the fluctuating needs of their audience that we are calling "responsive programming."

Responsive Programming

Responsive programming is goal-oriented and driven, but less formally structured and more adaptable than curriculum-based programming. Formative research drives program design and also is used as a monitoring mechanism to guide changes in format, content and complementary activities throughout the life of the program and/or intervention effort as the context and circumstances of the conflict change. It is a suitable approach to program development in circumstances that are unpredictable or changing because formative research generates information to feed into programming decisions on a regular basis. As the circumstances and nature of the conflict change, the needs of the audience for information and education about the conflict and its related issues change. Responsive programming demands that producers keep track of these changing needs as they make decisions regarding media channels, content and format. They therefore must engage in a process of continuous assessment of their programming activities and adapt their plans accordingly.

Examples of TDS's Responsive Programming Approach

The authors conducted two case studies to evaluate the impact of TDS programs on peacebuilding in Liberia that illustrate the effectiveness of the responsive programming

approach. Both cases incorporated a mix of the strategies that were identified above. Both demonstrate successful interventions in a conflict situation. The general principles that the producers emphasized either consciously or unconsciously in their role as conflict resolution journalists varied according to each situation. Their decisions on how and when to intervene were guided by maximizing the benefit to society as a whole.

In one case, an on-going dialogue on regional economic issues broadcast by the TDS program *One Step Beyond* led to exposure of the issue of high immigrant work permit fees in Liberia for immigrants who come from other West African countries. The issue of work permit fees had become divisive for West African governments and labor rights organizations. For its programs, TDS selected a mediation model that they believed was appropriate for this case. Well-defined issues and parties were brought to the table for dialogue. In that context, TDS staff provided a safe environment for parties representing the government and the ECOWAS Citizens Union (ECU) to discuss the issue of worker fees. They first created a forum to allow all parties to the conflict to express their needs, perceptions, and opinions. Secondly, TDS assisted them in generating solutions. This approach eventually led to an adjustment of policies on this issue by the government.

The discussions were recorded and broadcast throughout the negotiating process that occurred over several weeks' time. The public was allowed to monitor the process and their feedback to officials and studio staff contributed to reaching a resolution. *One Step Beyond* brought the involvement of the public into the discussion.

Interviews that we conducted during the case studies validated the success of the approach to peacebuilding that TDS followed. Excerpts from this case study data illustrate this success:

How does this solution affect peace in the region?

This solution makes people feel that they are treated fairly, and regard Liberia in a positive manner. Given the tensions in this region, it is important to build trust among people from neighboring countries.

What role did TDS producers play to resolve these issues?

First, TDS contacted government officials to talk on the air with us. Immigration officials contacted and met with us to discuss these issues. TDS facilitated our meeting with government officials because they (the government) take TDS seriously; they listen to what is said on TDS. TDS acted like a bridge between us and the government.

Do you think that TDS's role contributed to reaching a resolution?

TDS's intervention directly led to the resolution. This is the first radio in the region that breaks barriers of all kinds, linguistic and ethnic. TDS educates people across the borders, especially about peace and stability. This is why we continue to work with TDS on other issues; we know that they can have an impact.

How did TDS's role help peacebuilding in the region?

By contributing to reducing fees, and uncovering harassment of ECOWAS workers, people in the region get to interact more freely, which leads to building trust and confidence. Second, if citizens of neighboring countries are not treated well, there will be negative consequences and reactions. Third, if fees are high, the ECOWAS nationals may be jailed or deported because of not paying the fees. This could worsen relationships between those countries. Finally, when fees are affordable, people engage in economic activities that by nature promote the welfare of individuals and countries.

For a full report and discussion on the case studies conducted in Liberia in April 1999, please refer to the report: *Conflict Mapping and Media Programs Assessment: The Case of Liberia's Talking Drum Studio, 1999*.

"RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING": THE NEW MODEL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMUNICATORS

The new model for conflict resolution communicators that we developed in conjunction with the staff at TDS draws upon development communication and behavior change communication practices. In fact, an executive producer at TDS emphasized the importance of the training and experience that TDS staffers have in these two disciplines. The model joins formative research and situation mapping methodologies to identify priority needs to address and to inform decisions on content, audience, design approach, and the choice of format.

Primary to this model is the consideration that must be given to audience participation in the conflict resolution process. Additionally, conflict mapping and analysis must always be at the forefront of the producers' work. The research that determines the choice of curriculum or responsive programming, specific media channels, format, and content always starts with an examination of the current status of the conflict, the needs of the audience for information and education, and the media resources available to reach the audience. This work is to a great extent context and culture specific. The methodology is applicable cross-culturally, but the specific conflict resolution approach that results from the research will vary from place to place and be applicable and appropriate only in the local context.

The most salient features of this model are that:

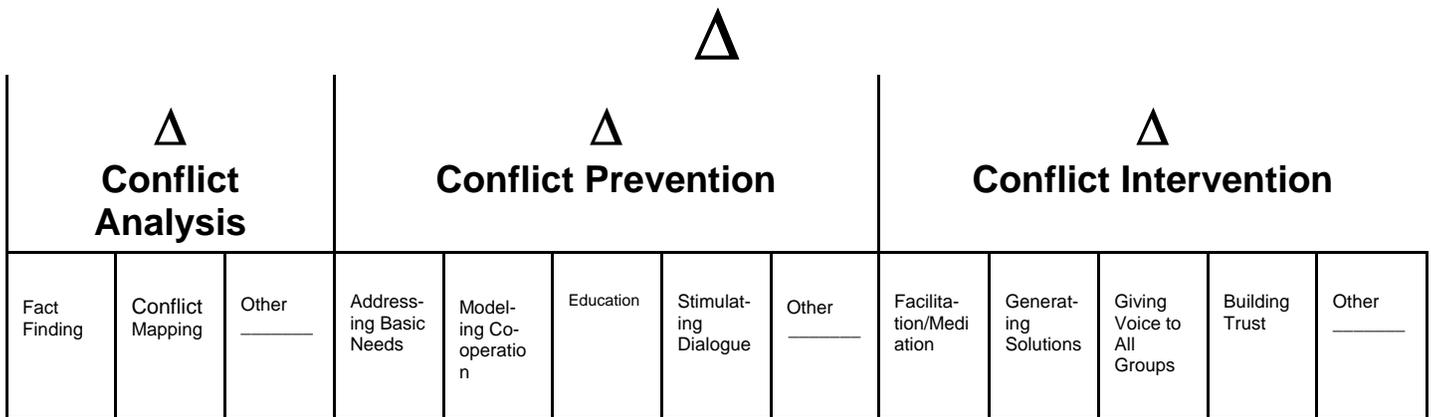
- It can be used for development of curriculum-based program series or for stand-alone/single broadcast programs;
- It is responsive to current events, "the changing anatomy of the conflict";
- It is flexible in both substance (issues, content) and mode (activity, media channel) so it is able to engage more parties with a range of activities as needed;
- Assessment is conducted continuously for feedback and feed forward (formative evaluation mechanisms are in place to monitor progress, changing needs and context).
- Conflict resolution strategies and principles are the basis for all programs and activities.

There is a constant balancing of focus between the two primary elements of TDS programming: the long- and short-term conflict resolution goals and the specific subjects and issues that are addressed in the programs. In other words, each program must be developed in accordance with TDS' mission of peacebuilding in Liberia. Its themes must be developed according to the needs of the audience for exposure to specific information and education as well as according to guidelines dictated by principles of conflict resolution. Both of these elements of programming are essential to conflict resolution communication.

The Responsive Programming Model

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Culture of Dialogue and Good Will



Goals and/or Mission:

Issue(s) (eg., girls schooling, trauma, unemployment, disarmament, etc.):

Target Audience (eg., women, children, warring factions, etc.):

Objectives (eg., awareness of trauma counseling services; teach symptoms of malaria; change in work permit policy):

Format and Channel(s): (eg., drama, interviews, news, features):

What program(s):

Supporting Activities (eg., print materials, direct mediation, etc.):

Sources of Information and Content Expertise (eg., NGOs, doctors, gov't officials, etc.):

Assessment/Feedback Mechanisms (eg., audience comments, observation, producer follow-up, use of services, etc.):

Feedforward to Future Programs (eg., changes in format, reformulation of objectives, etc. based on Feedback):

Using the Model

The steps of this model are presented below in an order that makes logical but not necessarily realistic sense. The decisions that producers make at each step do not stand in isolation from the other steps and often are made concurrently. The model presents an organic process that responds to each conflict situation differently as circumstances demand. Therefore, the order of steps that follows is generally the order in which they are conducted, but is not inflexible.

A "Culture of Dialogue and Good Will" crowns this model for conflict resolution communicators. This refers to the relationship of the media organization with its audience and with the key actors and all other parties to the conflict in question. The media organization must be open to listening to and communicating with everyone who wishes involvement in the conflict, and to a responsible, positive expansion of the ensuing dialogue. TDS has engendered a great deal of trust at all levels of the political and social environment in Liberia. This is due to their diligent efforts to monitor current events and the responses of the government, other organizations, and the public. TDS educates itself about the events, people, and topics that it covers, and presents its stories with respect for each player and opinion involved. They have established a norm for communication that has made it easier for them to gain the proper entry to a conflict and credibility with all parties. This "culture" is inspired by the long-term goals of conflict resolution.

Beneath the umbrella of culture, the short-term conflict resolution strategies that TDS applies fall into the three general categories of conflict analysis, prevention, and intervention. These strategies are the touchstones that TDS producers return to time and again in their responsive programming approach to media. A facilitated discussion with producers at TDS revealed that they consciously apply these strategies as they develop radio programs and complementary activities.

These first two levels of the model are not the first two chronological considerations for programming. In fact, the culture is cultivated in an on-going process that the studio embraces on a constant basis. The short-term strategies of conflict resolution are integrated into the more overt processes of formative research that follow.

An Example to Illustrate the Model

An actual situation that has developed in Liberia can serve as an illustration throughout the description of the program development processes of this model. One of the consequences of war in Liberia was an increase in the number of orphans. Many children lost their parents to violence; many parents lost their children in the confusion of displacement from their homes or to youth conscription activities. Still other children were abandoned due to impoverished economic conditions or the social disapproval of children born as a result of rape. These factors have triggered the need for care of an increasing number of children. Traditionally, "orphans" are cared for by extended family and community/village members in Liberia. Under the present circumstances there has been an increased demand for institutions to care for these children. Some institutions are well run, honest, and effective in meeting this need. Others have sprung up with questionable motives such as illegitimate access to sources of financial and material relief assistance. Those orphanages in the latter category are causing serious problems for local communities and families, and to the future of the affected children. The directors of these unlawful institutions promulgate any number of scams that use children, not only orphans, to qualify and receive aid that they use for their own economic benefit. Children, whether legitimate orphans or not, are not receiving the benefits that they deserve or, at least, have been promised. UNICEF's Program for Children in Difficult Circumstances has been leading a fight to uncover the dishonest orphanages and promote private adoption rather than institutionalization for children in need.

This is an example of the kinds of issues that TDS embraces in its conflict resolution programming precisely because it is characteristic of the breakdown of the social norms that have traditionally existed in Liberia. The issue is one that disrupts the progress towards social stability and peace because of the illegal and immoral treatment of children, the illegal acquisition of relief funds, food, and supplies on the part of "orphanages", and the lack of accountability of the government in monitoring these institutions and protecting Liberia's children. This situation will serve as an example that will thread throughout the following description of the next steps of our model for conflict resolution communicators.⁴

Goals

Each program or conflict resolution activity is stimulated by the definition of a goal. Most commonly, program goals are identified through a process of situation mapping which consists of measuring: (1) the nature, extent, and dynamics of a conflict; (2) the nature and extent of any disruption in the traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution; and, (3) the presence of factors that might tend to advance or impede conflict resolution. Sometimes, however, goals are generated by an outside organization that wants access to media channels. In either case, the producers select a goal or goals that fit with their

mission and standards. When the goal is suggested from outside, producers would not normally produce a program that promotes the work of a single organization, but might rather feature the work of that same organization within a broader context and in a manner consistent with conflict resolution strategies.

In the case of the orphanage issue, TDS would conduct some investigative research as a first step towards developing goals for programming and/or intervention. Journalists could meet with UNICEF, orphanage directors, children, families, government officials working in relevant offices, and NGOs and other social welfare organizations working with children. From this research they would decide how to approach the issue using conflict resolution strategies. For illustrative purposes, we'll say that many Liberians are not familiar with the issues regarding orphanages, which leads producers to choose conflict analysis as a goal in this example. The goal, then, would be to educate Liberians about the causes of the increased need for care of orphaned children and the current context in which care is being provided. Additionally, the research would have uncovered the basic nature of the problems and identified the population groups most impacted by the situation.

Issues and Audiences

The next step in the model would be to break the goal down into specific issues and audiences. Producers would engage in further research at this point. They would investigate the topics and issues at hand and the potentially relevant target audience(s). This research can take many forms including interviews, mini-surveys, and focus groups. It also relies on cultural, social, and political observations. The recent evaluation of TDS revealed a need for TDS to strengthen its background research for some of its longer, in-depth feature reporting for thematic programs. This could be addressed through referral to content experts or other specialists for subjects that TDS regularly reports. Every source of information and content expertise should be documented throughout the process of program/activity development for follow-up and/or future reference. The research results should lead at this point to the definition and selection of specific audiences and issues.

To continue our example, the producers would continue analysis of the current status of care for orphans, including the nature of the organizations that provide care and the specific needs of the children. Additional audience research would be conducted to determine the needs for information among the groups that could most influence the situation. In this example, information and analysis could benefit families that are considering placing their children in orphanages, families that are considering adopting needy children, social welfare organizations that work with children, relief organizations that provide financial and material assistance to orphanages, and government officials who work to develop and/or enforce relevant policy. Let's say that producers chose government officials, relief organizations, and youth welfare organizations as their priority audiences to begin addressing the orphanage issue.

Objectives

Producers must then decide the specific objectives that they want to achieve for each audience group. This is another time to reflect upon conflict resolution strategies and for producers to draw upon their training in behavior change and development communication. Each objective will fall into one of three general categories: knowledge, attitudes, and practices, and may or may not be amenable to treatment by radio or other intervention strategies. Communication practitioners understand the strengths and limitations of different communication channels in effecting change. They must define objectives that they feel are realistic and then, in the next step, identify the best format and media channel(s) for each. They should include in those objectives the conflict resolution strategies that they will incorporate into the program or related intervention as well.

In keeping with the interrelated nature of the decisions that producers must make in this model, the discussion and selection of specific objectives for the orphanage example will be continued in the next section on “Format and Media Channel(s).”

Format and Media Channel(s)

There are several types of decisions that need to be made at this stage of the program development process. In order to reach the chosen audiences and corresponding objectives, program producers must decide whether a campaign or a single program/series will work best. Then, based on that decision, the choice of curriculum-based versus responsive programming will be made along with a choice of format such as drama, interviews, features, etc. A determination of the media channel(s) accompanies the choice of format.

This is the stage when producers must refine their approach to targeting government officials, relief agencies and youth welfare proponents with information about the needs of orphans and the current status of care provided to them with the goal of conflict analysis. Specific objectives must be matched to each audience group. In this example, our imaginary (proposed) audience research and observations revealed that all three audiences are comprised of relatively well-educated people who appreciate serious coverage of current events. They spend most of their time between work, home, and official functions and, therefore, listen to radio or watch TV in the early morning or late evening hours. The audience is comprised fairly evenly between men and women. Importantly, the research also revealed that most of the audience is generally aware of the current plight of orphans but doesn't know details regarding orphan living conditions or how the orphanage directors are managing and funding their operations. Given this information, producers can make more specific choices about how they will develop their programs to meet their goal of presenting an analysis of the conflict.

In this case, producers would probably select a responsive programming rather than

curriculum-based approach to reach these audiences. The nature of this issue is not suited to a long-term, cumulative approach to teaching, but rather focused on an immediate problem that can be addressed through motivating political and social actions more than behavior change or skills acquisition. In order to reach each of the three groups through a responsive programming approach, for example, producers may decide to develop a series of feature stories about orphanages in Monrovia to run on *Common Ground News* over several weeks. Each feature would have an objective of educating about a specific aspect of orphanage funding, management, and living conditions. Additionally, producers could organize a round table discussion for *One Step Beyond* with representatives from a material relief organization, UNICEF, and the government to discuss policies and practices regarding the support and licensing of orphanages. A third activity could engage the TDS drama team in portraying a scene about an inspection of an orphanage by a relief agency. The choice of drama would be to reach a broad audience in addition to the specific target audience. This would serve to heighten general public awareness of the issues and possibly bring some pressure on the specific target audiences to explain their current policies and practices regarding orphanages.

Each of these three programming activities would serve the goal of analyzing the orphanage situation with the objectives of giving voice to concerned parties and educating and motivating people who can affect the operations of orphanages.

Assessment Mechanisms

This is the last step of program development although no less important than the others. It allows the organization to determine whether their programs are furthering the cause of peace. Assessing the impact of programs can be as simple as documenting informal audience feedback following the radio broadcast or other activity. It can involve structured interviews or discussions with members of the target audience, or creative measures of listener feedback such as a call for opinions delivered to a TDS mobile unit at the central marketplace on a set afternoon. Mini-surveys or other forms of data collection such as counting the number of requests for assistance at a mental health clinic after a show identifying it as a resource are also viable forms of assessment. The point is to identify ways to measure achievement of objectives and to actually conduct the measurements. The benefit of predetermining a methodology for assessment is that it will contribute to more conscientious program development and to the establishment of a system of documentation.

The information generated by program assessment serves multiple purposes as was described in a previous section. For this model, however, the short term objectives of assessment are to provide feedback on progress towards program and activity objectives and to feed information forward into future program decisions. This latter purpose aids continuity of programs and the progression towards long-term organizational objectives. It might, for example, uncover the need to reformulate program objectives, change a format, or add a target audience. The documentation of audience feedback should serve as a rich

source of ideas for immediate or deferred program development.

The assessment process should also serve as an opportunity to verify whether or not conflict resolution strategies are guiding programming. Producers can ask themselves how their program, for example, analyzed the conflict (fact finding), helped prevent escalation of the conflict (stimulated dialogue), and intervened in the conflict (gave voice to conflict parties).

In our orphanage example, assessment of whether initial program objectives were met can take several forms. Assessment should evaluate whether all parties to the problem felt that they were heard, and that accurate representation of the facts was presented. Interviews of government and agency officials can be conducted to determine whether they heard the radio programs and if they learned new information about orphanages. They could be asked about whether the programs sparked any changes in their policies or their practices. Producers could monitor other media for related articles and editorials about orphanages that may have been inspired by the TDS programming. They might also go directly to orphanage directors to learn their responses to the programming activities. By collecting audience feedback, producers can determine the need for further education efforts that target the same or additional audiences, or the opportunity to expand activities to generate possible solutions to the problem. They could determine the need to pursue different conflict resolution strategies such as intervention to urge compliance with policies and change illegal practices. In summary, assessment should be done to check the effectiveness of the programs, as well as to feed information forward in to future programming activities.

Realistically, organizations do not have the financial or human resources to document every aspect of program development and impact. This model provides a framework for program development that engenders a pattern of careful planning and continuous assessment within the context of short and long-term conflict resolution goals and objectives. It can be applied to every program from time-to-time, or for a few programs all the time, until the producers discover patterns of progress, strengths and needs. It is meant to inform and support the work of media practitioners working for peace in whatever form is most efficient, meaningful, and beneficial to them.

ONGOING RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CURRICULUM AND RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

Despite the apparent effectiveness of the TDS curriculum-based and responsive approach to designing conflict resolution media and interventions, the authors uncovered a need for more systematic documentation of TDS' progress. A facilitated discussion with TDS staff revealed that the producers are not formally documenting audience responses and other forms of feedback regarding their programs and other activities as was evidenced in the case of "*Coming Home*" described above. As evaluators, we believe that TDS should be collecting this feedback for several purposes that include among others:

- Collection of information to feed forward into future programs and interventions
- Documentation of their progress towards building a sustainable peace
- Documentation of activities for program funders and sponsors
- Documentation of methodology and processes that can be applied, tested, and strengthened in other settings
- Collection of success stories to share with other organizations with similar goals
- Development of a professional resume for the studio and for individual producers

The authors were able to demonstrate the importance of formal assessment activities to the producers. Continuing the case of the "*Coming Home*" as an example, data collected in a survey of 400 listeners to TDS programs shows that 89% of respondents reported that TDS delivers programming of concern to refugees (n=356 out of a sample of 400). 74% of these respondents stated that this type of programming is "*very effective*." 85% of the total sample reported that they had been displaced from their home at some point due to the war (n=301). Out of this 85%, 72% (n=218) reported that TDS produces "*very effective*" programming of concern to refugees. Given that "*Coming Home*" is the primary channel for reporting on refugee and resettlement issues, the producers of that program can use this data as an affirmation of their efforts.

The need for creative and on-going assessment and documentation of their work is the primary aspect of TDS operations that needs strengthening. With that in mind, we were able to design a model for programming that incorporates assessment into their current approach. A graphic depiction of the model follows:

There are three major elements of research that support "the model" and are described below. They are conflict mapping, audience research and program assessment. For an organization with a mission to encourage and support peacebuilding activities, research can help identify and describe specific goals and the ways to measure progress towards them.

Conflict Mapping

Conflict mapping is a process that conflict resolution practitioners utilize to analyze a conflict situation. This process can range in effort from a formal, exhaustive research study to an informal "sounding" of the situation. The authors carried out an extensive conflict mapping process in Monrovia in order to provide TDS with an up-to-date and broad picture of the socio-political context of the conflict there. The information generated by this effort will be useful to the producers primarily for future programming ideas and for designing approaches to their conflict resolution activities. It may also be useful in the exploration of other research questions such as determining and operationalizing measurable indicators of peace in Liberia. The mapping activities included key informant interviews, qualitative and quantitative data collection from 400 survey respondents, and two case studies. (For a detailed report on the conflict mapping study, please see the report: *Conflict Mapping and Media Programs Assessment: The Case of Liberia's Talking Drum Studio*, 1999.)

An extensive study such as was conducted in April 1999 in Monrovia is not an activity that TDS could replicate frequently due to the time and financial investment required. However, it is something that as part of this new model, they should adapt and repeat on a smaller scale as needed. For example, TDS could conduct mini-surveys or focus groups from time-to-time that are focused specifically on a topic of current importance in the conflict. They also could conduct research with a specific audience group that they feel needs attention. For example, this research could be a study that would focus on how the group is most affected by the conflict and strive to uncover ways that TDS could serve their needs. Because the symptoms of conflict are ever-changing, the studio keeps up with it by constantly monitoring events across the country via correspondents and by regular, frequent communication with key players in government, the private sector, and international agencies as well as other political and social leaders. A large-scale conflict mapping effort such as the one we conducted contributes to understanding the root causes of conflict and current concerns. Smaller-scale conflict mapping studies will help the studio keep current the focus and content of their approach. Conflict mapping and analysis are at the forefront of work in this model.

Audience Research

Meeting the needs of the audience for specific information and education regarding the process of peacebuilding is the goal of conflict resolution communicators. When producers understand the characteristics that define their various audience groups they can target information directly. In our recent evaluation research in Liberia, for example, 19% of the 400 survey respondents reported in an open-ended question that one of the problems that they had suffered from war was the loss of a family member. A consistent

theme in the key informant interviews was that of serious trauma to children and families due to the death of family members. Additionally, the survey data revealed that 96% of the respondents felt that TDS is "*somewhat effective*" or "*very effective*" in dealing with issues of trauma to children. Given these results from the audience research, producers have a clear mandate to continue to develop programming focused on recognizing the effects of trauma, trauma counseling and treatment processes and resources, and providing some solace to a grieving listenership.

Audience research does not require a large-scale effort to be useful. The Rapid Survey for Broadcasters in War Zones is a useful research activity for conflict resolution media organizations to undertake from time to time, but the scale is too large to fit the circumstances, budget, and current needs of many organizations more than about once per year. There are ways to adjust the approach, however. For example, limiting a survey to specific sample groups or narrow topics of interest may yield fruitful results without a major output of resources. Alternately, a small number of focus groups or facilitated discussions can add greatly to the understanding of a target audience or topic without too much expense. Interviews with people who are leaders of organizations that have a good understanding or work with target groups can also be useful for audience research. However, research conducted with respondents who are actual members of the target audience will reveal a more accurate description of the words, opinions, and attitudes related to the issues and topics of interest to the producers.

Program Assessment

Research for program assessment does not have to be difficult. Producers should think of it as a monitoring process to help guide their work. Starting with the list of objectives for the program or other intervention, producers can develop simple means to verify whether the audience understood, learned, acted upon, or was in any other way influenced by the communication. In most cases, assessment will assist in the determination of whether a program/activity has reached its objectives and provide clues as to what the producers can do to continue or conclude that effort.

Some ideas for evaluation methods were discussed above in the step-by-step description of the model for conflict resolution communicators. The authors chose another method of assessment that included two case studies of conflict resolution activities that were conducted by TDS. The methodology included several interviews with people who were directly involved in the conflict and collation of some correspondence and documents that confirmed the results of the conflict resolution activities. This did not involve a great deal of time and generated results that buoyed up the staff and sponsors of the studio. Most importantly, these small studies confirmed that TDS is making progress in its efforts to build peace in Liberia.

No matter what methodology the studio chooses to monitor and assess the effects of its work, it must engage in continuous assessment to guide program development. As long as the focus remains on measuring the intended effects and documenting the results, the effort will be rewarded by better programming that meets the needs of the audience and community.

CONCLUSION

Our responsive programming model answers the challenges put forth by many media theorists who describe the potential for a new kind of journalism that promotes *conflict resolution* rather than *conflict reporting*. Talking Drum Studio began using this approach as a practical response to the conflict in Liberia. They are beginning to document the effects of their work in a more conscious assessment process that applies their findings to future program activities. Additionally, they are beginning to document their contributions and progress to their organizational mission - peacebuilding in Liberia. By focusing their work in an on-going process of conflict mapping and audience research, they have begun to chart new roles for media organizations working in war-disrupted regions.

Responsive programming for peacebuilding is a basic approach to developing media programs and supporting interventions for peacebuilding. It is a process that serves as the core of decision-making for each element of program development, from the identification of audiences and objectives to the selection of format and channels. Like formative research for program development, responsive programming is based on continuous assessment to focus the work. In the context of peacebuilding, the assessment constantly refers back to conflict resolution strategies in order to gauge the producers' progress in creating media that not only reaches its audience in the most effective manner, but supports social and political movement towards a lasting peace.

The model of responsive programming allows for both curriculum-based and responsive approaches to programming. Media practitioners make their choice of approach based on the information generated by the cycles of conflict mapping, audience research and program assessment. A curriculum-based approach is practical when the conditions in the conflict zone are relatively stable. It only becomes untenable when conditions change, which is likely in a war-disrupted area. Therefore, continuous assessment as defined by our model will allow producers to be in touch with the current status of the conflict environment and to make changes and adaptations in their approach as warranted. It also is a first step towards developing a system for documenting CGP conflict resolution communication activities that will eventually include the definition of measurable outcomes for peacebuilding.

¹ USIP proposal page 1.

² Siebert, Hannes. "Debunking the 'Big O'" in *Track Two: Constructive Approaches to Community and Political Conflict*. Vol. 7 No. 4 1998. Page 3.

³ Manoff Rob. *Ibid.*, pages 11 – 16.

⁴ This actual situation was described to the evaluators during a series of key informant interviews conducted in Monrovia in April 1999.