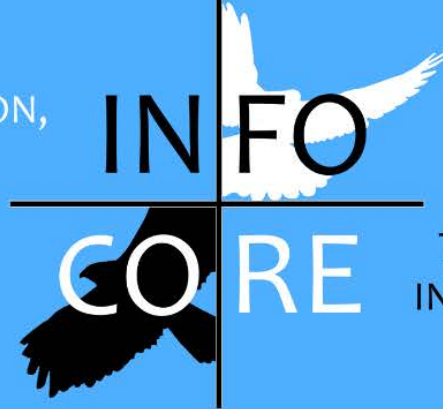


(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

INFOCORE Working paper (03/2014) Mission Statement WP4 “NGOs and the News Media”

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Mission Statement WP4 “NGOs and the News Media”

The focus of this workpackage is on international as well as national/local NGOs whose mission statements are broadly concerned with peace-building, conflict prevention, HR protection, reconciliation or mediation. *We shall not include NGOs that are directly connected to the conflict parties as this is better covered by strategic communication of WP6.* In order to better understand NGOs’ role in this area, we chose to use a typology suggested by the former President of the International Crisis Group, Gareth Evans, who distinguishes between ‘thinking’, ‘talking’, and ‘doing’ NGOs.¹ The ‘thinking’ NGOs are research institutes and think tanks that ‘engage in data gathering, idea generating, network building, paper publishing and conference organising. Their rationale tends to be contributing to the ideas pool and general debate, though some are more sharply focused.’² They tend to influence policy-making not only by providing information and analysis concerning regions and countries at risk, but also by recommending or even designing alternative ways to respond early. The ‘talking’ or advocacy NGOs also engage in research and analysis, but this is only instrumental to spotlight governmental abuses and ‘engaging in tom-tom beating advocacy accordingly.’³ Finally, the ‘doing’ NGOs tend to focus on field operations that bring people together, build confidence, and mediate disputes; they also tend to be much involved in improving governance through training and general capacity building programs. Given the nature of this workpackage, we are most interested in the “thinking” and “talking” NGOs, but cannot include “doing” NGOs on the ground such as MSF or the ICRC, given their importance as sources of information from the ground. In reality, NGOs can often operate across the boundaries such as the ICG, which is both thinking and talking.⁴

We want to analyse how NGOs’ strategies for influencing and using media, their interactions with journalists and other media actors, and various contextual factors shape the production of conflict-related news highlighted as the INFOCORE objective A2. WP4 addresses NGOs both as strategic actors interacting with media, and as parts of a ‘media-like’ flow of conflict related news (conflict-related information gathering, processing, and dissemination toward key actors) that circumvents classic media (‘expert media’), i.e. this covers the framing and agenda-setting parts of the INFORE research design. We know for instance that the International Crisis Group is very effective in reaching policy-communities directly via its newsletters and alerts as well as being usually able to secure a meeting with ministers and senior civil servants for briefings given their network of contacts. They primarily use the news media as part of broader advocacy strategies and to increase the impact of their recommendations, not so much to get attention or share their analysis. We also know that NGOs produced content is part

¹ Evans, G. (2011) ‘Preventing Violent Conflict: What Have We Learned?’, Keynote Address to USIP Second Annual Conference on Preventing Violent Conflict, Washington DC, 1 June 2011. Available at <http://www.gevans.org/speeches/speech438.html>. Accessed August 2011.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ (under review) Chiara de Franco, ‘Non-Governmental Organisations as Warners: The International Crisis Group and Amnesty International’, in Meyer, de Franco, Brante and Otto (under review) ‘Heeding Warnings about War: Learning and Persuasion in Conflict Prevention, CUP.

of Open Source Intelligence Analysis and that intelligence services cultivate systematically as well as try to use ad-hoc NGOs sources. They are also being called-up by the news media to verify particular accounts of conflict parties as seemingly neutral observers, thus making them a source of evidential claims in the language of INFOCORE, This can, however, quickly compromise their neutrality and perceptions on the ground. Local NGOs may be able to play a role in citizens-based early warning and response systems by drawing local leaders attention to situations of potential conflict and facilitating dialogue.

WP4 can conduct many of the necessary interviews with international NGOs in London, Washington and Brussels to assess the backgrounds and professional orientations of NGO actors involved in the conflict news production process, ascertaining their different communication strategies and laying the ground to determine the influences of contextual factors, such as the organizational environment. Similarly, we should be able to conduct most of the relevant interviews among intelligence professionals and policy communities except for Berlin and Paris to gather how and when intelligence professionals and policy-planners use NGOs as providers of open-source intelligence. We will have to rely on interviews conducted by project partners with local NGOs or local subsidiaries of international NGOs in the actual or potential conflict countries. Similarly, we need interview data from journalists, politicians and other relevant actors to gather information about how NGOs are being perceived. We will need to rely on the results of the automatic content analysis to ascertain a quantitative measurement of NGO influence on news media content and the impact on lay-publics.