



Managing
**PUBLIC
INFORMATION**
in a Mediation Process

Ingrid A. Lehmann



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The views expressed in this report are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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Introduction

Traditional diplomacy has tended to eschew media and public exposure. Diplomats and negotiators of the old school prefer to conduct their business in private settings out of the public limelight. While such confidentiality of negotiations is highly prized by most peacemakers, keeping things quiet and behind the scenes has become increasingly difficult.

There are several reasons for this. The “information revolution” of the 1990s drastically changed the process of conveying and receiving information: news is now reported from all corners of the world around the clock and in real time by electronic media. Another aspect of this apparent openness is the increased use of a variety of information tools by the parties to a conflict. In the past, governments generally had a monopoly on information in times of crisis and war. Today, however, nonstate actors, including the antagonists, have access to information channels and frequently use them effectively. Indeed, information has itself become a field of conflict. To some extent, then, the electronic media have helped to level the playing field by making easy-to-use information technology available to all conflict parties. In dealing with these new information challenges, concepts such as *media diplomacy*, *public diplomacy*, *information warfare*, and *Internet war* have evolved and have provided tools that are employed by growing numbers of interlocutors in peace and in war.

Those who aim to make peace in international conflicts need then to be cognizant of the information aspects of their efforts at negotiation and mediation, and must develop strategies to communicate with a variety of public audiences interested in and affected by the negotiations. Local populations are those most directly concerned by violent conflict and usually stand to gain from the results of peace negotiations, but they are often left out of the information loop. As a consequence, local people are

frequently ill-informed and easily misinformed—sometimes deliberately so—about the purposes of a third-party intervention.

The international community's knowledge of the history, origins, and perpetrators of such conflicts is usually scanty and not always factually correct.¹ Furthermore, in war zones fast-paced events require frequent information updates to stay on top of developments. Very few people are able to follow these swift changes. Journalists covering the conflict must try to do so, but they often fall victim to what BBC presenter Nik Gowing has termed the “3Fs”: first, fast, but flawed.

Communication is an art form, but information strategies and practices can be learned by those who must plan an information campaign to convey messages to publics in foreign settings. Effective professional communication can help to

- ▶ gain support for peaceful avenues of managing and resolving an international dispute, locally, regionally, and internationally;
- ▶ promote an informed understanding of the peace process in the area of conflict;
- ▶ maintain support for the peacemakers at their own base (i.e., in the capital or place where their headquarters is located)—such sustenance is vital for continued funding as well as enduring support in international political arenas, such as the UN Security Council;
- ▶ gain the backing of allies and friends of the peacemakers, both governmental and non-governmental, who are expected to play a positive role in helping resolve the conflict at hand and who may not always see eye-to-eye with the primary negotiator;²
- ▶ unify the presentation of the image of the peacemaker and the messages projected by his or her team and other collaborators—often those deployed in such settings have only vague ideas why they are in the theater of conflict and what their main goals are;
- ▶ counteract divisive strategies that may be employed by the conflicting parties or combatants and thus increase the leverage of the third-party mediator vis-à-vis possible spoilers of the peace process;
- ▶ help transform the postsettlement media landscape in the area of conflict by encouraging freedom of expression and transparency of

the political environment, and by assisting in the development of new media and information channels in the peacebuilding phase, if deemed *necessary*.

This handbook sets out six steps and numerous tasks that can be undertaken by mediators and their information teams prior to embarking on negotiations, as well as during and after peace negotiations.

- Step 1 is to thoroughly analyze the information environment in the area of conflict, carefully assessing the main media and civil society actors and the influence they wield.
- Step 2 is to plan early for public information tasks and develop a structure (a well-trained staff, a network of allies, etc.) for information management so that the campaign can swing into action as soon as the mediation begins.
- Step 3 involves designing an information campaign that will support the mediation, bearing in mind strategic communication needs.
- Step 4 is to implement the information campaign locally and internationally, matching target audiences with information products on selected issues. Most tasks will focus on the theater of operations and will involve using all available tools, including radio, television and video, print production, and web-based services. Crisis management in the area of conflict is also an important tool in the information campaign.
- Step 5 is to engage civil society and develop partnership relationships with non-governmental actors.
- Step 6 is to evaluate and assess the information tasks by monitoring the media and surveying local public opinion. After-action reports will assist in the continuing learning process and should be shared with other peacemakers.

These steps form a continuum, and some of them, such as step 5, can and should be performed throughout the mediation process.

The mediation process is itself part of a larger process made up of phases that form a continuum, from prenegotiation to negotiation, agreement to implementation and beyond. These phases are often overlapping, recursive, or simultaneous. Nonetheless, mediators tend to

be busiest during—rather than after—the negotiation of an agreement, and this handbook is written with that phase chiefly in mind.

Managing Public Information in a Mediation Process is designed to help mediators identify areas where they may need more research or preparation, as well as options and strategies relevant to the particular case on which they are working. Examples (*in italics in the text*) from past mediation efforts are provided to illustrate how various strategies have played out in practice and how various factors have facilitated or impeded the mediator's work. These examples are drawn from a wide variety of mediation efforts and are intended to be of use to mediators involved in an equally broad range of situations. Some mediators may represent the United Nations or a regional organization, others may work for a third-party government, and others may be serving in a private or semi-private capacity. Some may be heading UN peace missions, others may be working concurrently with such missions, and others may be operating at the request of one or both of the conflicted parties. The guidance contained here is intended to be appropriate to most, if not all, of these situations.

The Peacemaker's Toolkit

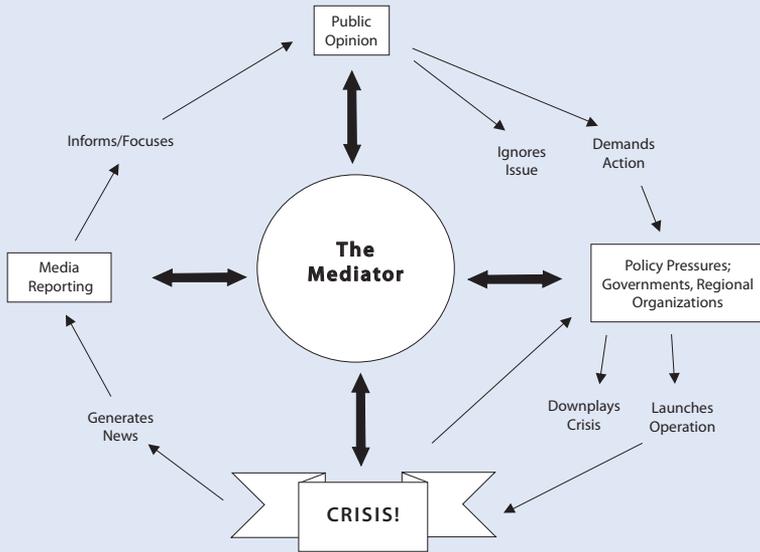
This handbook is part of the series *The Peacemaker's Toolkit*, which is being published by the United States Institute of Peace. The first in the series, *Managing a Mediation Process* by Amy L. Smith and David R. Smock, offers, as its title indicates, an overview of the mediation process, and may be read in conjunction with *Managing Public Information in a Mediation Process*.

For twenty-five years, the United States Institute of Peace has supported the work of mediators through research, training programs, workshops, and publications designed to discover and disseminate the keys to effective mediation. The Institute—mandated by the U.S. Congress to help prevent, manage, and resolve international conflict through nonviolent means—conceived *The Peacemaker's Toolkit* as a way of combining its accumulated expertise with that of other organizations active in the field of mediation. Most publications in the series are produced jointly by the Institute and a partner organization. All publications are carefully reviewed before publication by highly experienced mediators to ensure that the final product will be a useful and reliable resource for practitioners.

The Online Version

There is an online version of *The Peacemaker's Toolkit* that presents not only the text of this handbook but also connects readers to a vast web of information. Links in the online version give readers immediate access to a considerable variety of publications, news reports, directories, and other sources of data regarding ongoing mediation initiatives, case studies, theoretical frameworks, and education and training. These links enable the online *Toolkit* to serve as a “you are here” map to the larger literature available on mediation. The online version can be accessed at http://www.usip.org/mediation/tools_resources/index.html#toolkit.

The Mediator and the Media-Opinion-Policy Loop



This diagram describes an interactive, iterative loop that begins when a crisis occurs somewhere in the world. The media cover the crisis with varying degrees of accuracy and completeness, and that coverage influences the formation of public opinion on the crisis. That opinion impacts the reaction of governments and intergovernmental organizations. It may become a driving force for international policy on the crisis. But the public may also ignore the crisis, as governments and intergovernmental organizations tend initially to downplay crises. However, the initial response to the crisis will influence the effectiveness of the operation that may be launched. Early inaction, for example, usually exacts a price in terms of criticism of the inadequacy of the response; that criticism then generates further news and reenters the loop. The mediator is interested in and influenced by all phases of the loop; he or she must be engaged everywhere and anywhere.

Adapted from Ingrid A. Lehmann, *Peacekeeping and Public Information: Caught in the Crossfire* (London: Cass, 1999).



STEP ONE

Analyze the Information Environment

The first step in managing public information in a mediation process is to analyze the information infrastructure in the theater of conflict. Conflicts, whether international or intrastate, often involve more than two parties, and the mediator must identify each of these and determine their capacities to shape or to be influenced by the information environment.

In addition, if neighboring countries or external actors play a critical role in the evolution and settlement prospects of a conflict, the analysis needs to be extended at an early stage to the political and media landscape of those neighboring countries. Cases in point are the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa, involving the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, or the conflicts in Western Africa engaging the neighboring countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast. Those conflicts have led to the deployment of seven different UN peacekeeping and political missions in a decade.

The following five analytical tasks need to be undertaken by the peacemaker's team as soon as possible to assess the information environment in the area of operation.

Identify Parties to the Conflict and Their Support Mechanisms

- Who and what are the main parties to the conflict? What are their political support systems and their relative acceptance among the wider public? If available, public opinion surveys will be useful for this analysis; if not, pre-deployment trips can serve as informal survey missions.

- What is the level of civic engagement? An important indicator for the level of civic engagement is the roles played by local institutions such as churches, temples, and mosques and the existence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Which of those are likely to support the peace process? What are their means of communication?
- Civic, religious, political, and business leaders with the greatest standing and credibility in the country should be identified with a view to contacting them to gauge their attitude toward the peace process and the possibility of enlisting their support.
- Do the political parties or other interlocutors have their own media? Are propagandistic or hate media active? Who supports them? Who listens to them?
- How do rumors spread? If the country has no significant independent media or is a rumor-based society such as Haiti, where information travels by word of mouth, the main carriers of rumors need to be identified.

Evaluate the Information Infrastructure in the Area of Conflict

This is the most important nuts-and-bolts pre-planning assessment that needs to be carried out in the country. All available resources, including human intelligence as well as library- and Internet-based research tools, must be employed in conducting this assessment.

The mediator must evaluate the information infrastructure from two angles: the population as a whole and the role of the media in particular.

Assess Various Aspects of Communicating with the Population

- **Literacy and Education:** What literacy rates does the country have? What is the level and quality of schooling? Are females educated differently from men, and do they have different literacy rates that would indicate that a different information strategy is needed for them? Are any (other) key communal groups educated separately and/or differently from the norm? Does the country

possess institutions of higher learning? Is the country's elite being trained in-country or abroad? Do the different ethnic groups send their children to separate schools?

- **Languages:** Determine which languages are in use in the population. If a multitude of languages are in use, as is often the case in Africa, is there a lingua franca spoken and understood by all?

In the case of the UN operation in Namibia in 1989, Afrikaans was determined to be that language, but it was used by the UN information program only in the beginning, as it was soon agreed that English would be the future language of independent Namibia. Still, the information program had to be prepared for the use of eleven different languages.

- **Technology:** Is most or much of the country electrified? Which parts are not? The answers to these questions will determine the balance between the use of high-tech and low-tech media. Do “white spots” (areas where the electricity supply is unreliable or nonexistent and where cell phones cannot be used) exist? Determine whether any of these constraints disproportionately affect key target groups for an information campaign (such as rebel groups or internally displaced persons).

Assess the Media and Their Role in the Conflict

- Research the main media in the area of conflict:
 - › **Print:** Identify newspapers and magazines, their readership and political orientation.
 - › **Radio:** Assess the availability of radio sets and identify news-relevant programs and the most popular programs.
 - › **Television:** Determine access to local and international channels by the population, and assess the size and composition of the audiences for those channels.
 - › **Internet:** Determine the number of people with regular access to the Internet and their general level of computer skills.
- Have there been prior instances of ethnic hatred and violence in which local media have played a role? If yes, the media must be monitored before the mediator's team is deployed.

In the case of Rwanda, which is one of the most researched case studies ex post facto, it was known that Radio Television Mille Collines was actively spreading hate propaganda, but no acceptable tools to counteract this propaganda were devised. A UN radio station became active only eighteen months after the peace operation was deployed—too late to be effective in countering hate messages. Rwandan journalists who had fomented the ethnic hatred that led to the genocide were later convicted in an international criminal court.

Determine the Role of the Host Country in the Information Environment

Early on, it is important to analyze the roles that the host country or countries play in shaping the information space. When one or more governments are parties to a conflict, asymmetries in access to information resources (e.g., access to airwaves or to printing supplies) are likely to exist. An unprincipled host will often influence the process unduly, usually by controlling media reporting or by denying the negotiating partner media access. Such governments may also seek to discredit the mediator or even the entire peace process when it suits them to do so. The mediator must be alert to such moves and prepared to react to safeguard the integrity of the mission.

Robust mission leadership is usually required to deal with host country spoilers of the peace process.

In the case of the United Nations Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES) in 1996–97, the UN special representative Jacques Klein managed to project an image of strength in a lawless region of the Balkans. He set up a strong public affairs program that, among its other achievements, produced three-hour radio programs on Radio Vukovar and set up information stalls in a weekly street market open to both ethnic groups.

In Darfur, the international community continues to be severely tested on all fronts, including that of the free flow of information. Radio broadcasts by the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) were part of the Status of Forces Agreement, but the government of Sudan has erected successive administrative and other hurdles to the

reception of UNMIS radio in Darfur and the north of Sudan. The Darfur Lifeline radio station, operated by the BBC World Service Trust, managed to broadcast in the region in 2006, and Radio Miraya, run jointly by the United Nations and the Swiss Foundation Hironnelle operates in part of the area, but the work of journalists is inhibited by the Sudanese government and frequent arrests have produced an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

Under such circumstances, the mediator should encourage—publicly or privately—the UN Security Council and the major powers to bring political pressure to bear on the government or governments concerned. At the same time, the mediator should seek to use the international wire services and media based in neighboring countries or run by expatriates to ensure that the mission’s message is heard within the country despite government efforts to muffle the mission.

Assess the Coverage by International News Media

Media reporting of international conflicts tends to be highly selective and subject to change over time.

In Rwanda, during the genocide in 1994, very few international journalists reported about the country. In early 2008, by contrast, while Kofi Annan mediated in the crisis in Kenya, hundreds of international media organizations covered the negotiations.

News media tend to focus on conflicts that are accessible and occur in areas with a relatively good infrastructure for reporting and broadcasting. This leaves many smaller, less accessible areas of the world outside the scope of international coverage. Peace talks are frequently covered for a few days, but if negotiations drag on or hostilities resume, media will lose interest and the conflict will become one of the many “forgotten wars.” There is also the problem of “conflict fatigue,” which can set in when conflict cycles repeat themselves in countries considered to have little strategic interest, or when the international presence is curtailed, such as in Somalia in the 1990s as that country drifted into a state of failure and hopelessness.

In the period leading up to the mediation effort, it is advisable to conduct a survey of current and recent media coverage of the conflict at hand:

- Which media in what countries report on the conflict on a regular basis? Who are the journalists most knowledgeable and engaged with the issues? Are the media who report regularly influential in shaping opinion among key stakeholders?
- Do these news media employ international correspondents or do they rely on local stringers? Over the years, there has been a significant reduction in the continuous presence of international correspondents in a given theatre. As a consequence, international media have come to place greater reliance on well-informed local journalists, whose influence in shaping international coverage has correspondingly increased. Mediators often focus on international media, but if the mediator neglects local reporters, the mission may experience problems with its coverage not only in the local but also in the international media.
- Are local or international bloggers active in and around the area of conflict? Who are they and where are they based? Bloggers have become an increasingly influential phenomenon in international politics. Some have organized community-based peace initiatives; others have spread false rumors and been manipulated by political parties, as was seen in the postelection conflict in Kenya in early 2008.³

News media in neighboring countries may also play important roles and are often accessible to people in the area of conflict; they must therefore be monitored as closely as possible.

Assess the Influence of Expatriate Communities

Expatriate communities often play an important role in fomenting or resolving conflict, and it is therefore important to judge their impact on the information infrastructure in the area of conflict.

It was reported in early 2008 that the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka receive between 80 and 90 percent of their budget through donations from Tamil exiles.⁴ In other conflicts, diaspora support has been important in the post-conflict stage, especially with respect to reconstruction and resettlement. In Kosovo, for instance, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had assisted some

75,000 refugees to return by the end of 1999, 800,000 had returned on their own, largely financed by their diaspora.

It is important to identify players in the respective expatriate communities who might influence the decision-making process of their ethnic or national groups in the area of conflict. Expatriates sometimes own and operate media in their home country and contact should therefore be made with them to assess their potential roles in the peace process. In some cases, expatriate-owned media have helped the mediator reach audiences not only within diaspora populations but also within the country itself. The power of expatriates to shape public opinion in the area of conflict through interviews, statements, op-ed articles, blogs, and mobile phone messages can be significant, even when they are operating off-shore.

In Somalia, exiled Somalis in neighboring countries were influential in relaying messages to their compatriots inside the country who had few other information sources.



STEP TWO

Plan Early for Information Needs

In the past, public information has often been treated as an afterthought by international negotiators, so that whatever information work has eventually been undertaken has been too little, too late, undermining the prospects of managing public information effectively.

This lack of planning was prevalent in most of the UN operations in the former Yugoslavia, with the exception of UNTAES in 1996–98. This latter organization benefited from the lessons learned during the earlier experiences of the ill-fated UN operations in Croatia and Bosnia and had a strong information campaign from the outset.

A different case, but calamitous from a public relations perspective, was that of the 2004 UN negotiations on Cyprus. The Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities held separate referenda on the United Nations' "Annan plan" in April of that year. The Greek Cypriot population rejected the plan by a margin of three to one following a massive campaign in the sensationalist Greek Cypriot press. The United Nations was unable to counter this campaign, and questions arose about the wisdom of agreeing to a referendum on a peace plan under such unfavorable circumstances.

To reduce the risk of encountering similar problems, the mediator should begin planning for public information tasks as soon as he or she is appointed, making communication a central part of the peacemaking strategy from the outset. Early efforts to develop a structure for the management of public information will pay dividends later on.

If the peacemaking mission is part of a larger peacekeeping mission authorized by the UN Security Council, it would be helpful to have an information mandate included in the authorization. In smaller, less formal mediation exercises, the resources of the UN Secretariat are not

available. Nevertheless, plans can and should be made to prepare for basic information tasks.

Ideally, the structure for the management of information will include a carefully selected and well-trained information team, a mediator able to act as spokesperson for the mission, a means of determining the information infrastructure and logistical needs in the conflict area, a network of contacts with potential allies, and facilities for conflict management. Whether all of these elements can be incorporated into the management structure will depend on a number of factors, including the size and duration of the mediation effort, funding, staffing, and logistics.

Select and Train an Information Team

- At a minimum, the mission's information team should include a spokesperson and an information assistant. The mediator must personally select the spokesperson and a relationship of confidence should exist throughout the mediation effort between them. Once selected, the spokesperson should be included in all political and strategy meetings of the mediator's inner circle.
- Spokespeople and information staff ideally should be trained and ready for deployment when the mediator arrives in theater, even though this is often not the case in practice. It is therefore desirable to scout and select people who have previous field experience and entice them to join the team. Knowledge of the main languages in use in the country is an obvious basic requirement, but not one that is easy to fill.
- In cases where no one on the mediator's team speaks the major language(s), reliable translators or local journalists must be recruited in advance.

Before the first Canadian contingent was deployed to Haiti in 1994, the soldiers and police had extensive contacts with the large Haitian community in Quebec. These expatriate Haitians were invaluable in training and planning for the mission: teaching Francophone Canadians to speak Creole and advising them on a wide range of social, cultural, and historical issues.

When recruiting local staff, it should be borne in mind that local

people may be politically motivated in a way that is counterproductive to the mediation process.

- It is essential that mission staff is briefed by the mediator about the mission's goals and intended outcome so that all team members can speak with one voice.
- To support the head of the peacemaking team, staff could be asked to brainstorm how they, in a realistic best-case scenario, would wish the peacemaking effort to be perceived in the country and abroad.

Prepare the Mediator to Act as Spokesperson for the Mission

- If the mediator is personally inexperienced or unskilled in dealing with the media, he or she should consider undergoing media training.
- The mediator is the most visible person for the mission and will usually make all policy statements in person. However, should the mediation team decide to float a trial balloon or make a sensitive announcement, it may be advisable to let a spokesperson do so on behalf of the mediator.
- When the mission has a message that it wants the media to cover, the media pay attention because of the content of the message, because of the identity of the message bearer, or because of both. The strongest message bearer is the mediator, and thus he or she should deliver those messages that the mission deems most important. However, the mediator must be careful not to become overexposed in the media's eyes; overexposure may undercut the mediator's ability to attract attention even for newsworthy announcements.
- To help the mediator gain the information high ground, the press team should inform news channels from abroad about the mandate, as well as about timetables and expected outcomes of the peacemaking mission.

When another attempt at mediation in the Darfur conflict was made by the United Nations and the African Union in October 2007 in Sirte, Libya, the Sudanese interlocutors had already set the tone of the meeting and influenced media reporting in a way

disadvantageous to the negotiating process. The mediators never got their message across as the Sudanese side appeared to control the regional media and the stories emanating from them. By contrast, in March 2008, prior to another round of direct talks between the two parties to the Cyprus conflict, the secretary-general's special representative Michael Moller sought to prepare the ground by arguing publicly that solving the Cyprus problem would not only increase security but also "make economic sense" by providing great commercial opportunities for both sides.

Conduct Advance Surveys

- ▶ Information specialists must be included in advance planning sessions. If possible, a survey mission to the area of operation should be undertaken to provide firsthand knowledge of the information infrastructure and environment in the country.
- ▶ Equipment and logistics to conduct an in-country information campaign may be available for sale or rent in the theater of conflict. If they are not, arrangements must be made to procure them elsewhere and transport them to the theater ahead of time. This is usually a major logistical undertaking, especially if complex equipment, such as for radio operations or major print production and distribution, is involved. All avenues for local production should therefore be explored beforehand.

Choose Allies

Impartial collaborators should be sought out to inform local audiences of the mediator's intentions before the arrival of the mediator in the theater of conflict. They could help gain popular acceptance of both the negotiation process and its eventual results, including likely agreements. Individuals who might be contacted include religious leaders, women's groups, trade unionists, lawyers, and community activists. Some negotiators have also sought the help of celebrities, such as musicians, actors, and other personalities from the field of entertainment.

In the non-governmental community engaged in international

conflict resolution, emphasis is increasingly placed on the value of creating and working with informal networks of likeminded professionals. Furthermore, some NGOs such as Search for Common Ground have had remarkable success in reaching people directly through unconventional means—such as children’s plays, soap operas, and reality shows—programs that require considerable knowledge of the local information environment and long-term engagement in the country.⁵

Arrange Facilities for Crisis Management

Early on, thought should be given to the need for crisis management in case hostile propaganda or destabilizing events (such as a resumption of fighting or large refugee flows) threaten the peace process or endanger the mission. For example, if a particular ethnic group in the area of conflict is being manipulated by a hostile party and if there is incitement to violence, special information efforts should be directed at that target group in its own language, using the fastest means of communication. Email alerts and text (or SMS) messaging have proven useful in such cases.



STEP THREE

Design a Public Information Strategy

After conducting an initial assessment of the information environment and developing a structure for information management, the team should outline an information strategy for approval by the mediator and his or her political advisers. In the case of a low-key mission modeled on the more traditional approach of “quiet diplomacy,” the spokesperson or information team accompanying the mediator will need to monitor the press and other expressions of public opinion in the country and neighboring countries. Should critical or negative press reporting of the mediator’s work be detected, the team should immediately launch a more proactive information campaign.

All foreign interventions, even if not of a military nature, tend to fuel speculations, suspicions, misperceptions, and attempts at political manipulation. If the peacemaker’s team is not prepared for deliberate misrepresentations of its work by the propagandistic media in conflict areas, it may literally be left speechless when the interveners are accused of political or personal transgressions and local public opinion turns against the foreign presence.

To avoid being caught unprepared, the information team should undertake each of the following tasks.

Develop a Strategic Approach to Communication

The peacemaking team should by now have thought through the mediation’s overall goals and options, which should be clearly defined in easily understandable language. These goals will in turn determine the varying themes of the peacemaking mission. Themes can also be derived from the work of humanitarian agencies already operating in the

country and which may be providing food and emergency assistance, assisting returnees or internally displaced people, or carrying out inoculation campaigns.

At this stage, experienced information officers should be relied on to develop creative communication strategies for the consideration by the head of the mission. This is a time to think big but then to assess realistically what will be feasible given staff and resources. While maintaining a positive approach to the mediation's overall chances of success, the team might also find it useful to use game play and scenario planning to think through different, possibly negative, scenarios for the mission.

Identify Target Audiences

In order to design an information strategy to communicate the mission's purpose, one needs to identify the main audiences and actors one wishes to reach. The following audiences could be considered:

- international media
- international public opinion
- regional media (in countries adjacent to or affected by the conflict zone)
- local media
- local opinion leaders
- parties to the conflict
- partner organizations such as aid and refugee agencies, international military and police forces, and representatives of NGOs and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)
- mission-internal audiences such as international staff and local staff (interpreters, drivers, etc.)

Design Multi-audience Information Products

While the information needs of journalists, NGOs, and the general public may differ, several general information products could be designed for multi-audience communication. Basic information tools that nearly all missions will need are websites and newsletters that state the main goals of the mediation effort, and flyers and news updates that chronicle and explain ongoing developments.

Communicate the Mission's Public Identity

An overarching goal is to establish and maintain credibility for the mediator's team and allow the mission to speak with one voice. This is important not only for controlling the image of the peacemaker but also for gaining and maintaining public support of the peace process as a whole. How the third-party mediator is viewed will affect his or her leverage in negotiations. Support for the peacemaker can increase with visibility and positive communication of the mission's goals. In larger operations, such as UN peacekeeping and peacemaking missions, a corporate identity program has been successfully used to improve public perceptions.

Avoid Creating Unrealistic Expectations

High-profile mediation will generate keen media attention and, as a result, public expectations in the country may be very high: refugees expect to return home, internally displaced people want to reoccupy their residences, prisoners hope to be released, former combatants expect civilian jobs, justice is sought for violators of human rights, international aid is expected to rebuild the infrastructure, and so forth. Such expectations are often unrealistic in the short term and may become the cause of misunderstandings and misperceptions of what the peacemakers can deliver in the near future. When these hopes are dashed, the third-party mediator may be blamed: scapegoating can be a convenient recourse for spoilers. This poses an information dilemma for the mediator, who should try to keep expectations of what can be achieved realistic, without underplaying the mediator's own role and possibilities.

When it comes to managing expectations, local journalists—with their local knowledge and credibility—can be valuable allies.

Internews trained journalists in northern Uganda with the goal of bridging the gap between the official peace negotiations and the people most affected by the conflict. Internews identified fifteen small radio stations in northern Uganda and trained their journalists to provide vital information to their listeners about the peace talks, the situation in the internally displaced camps, and conditions in areas where people displaced by the conflict were expected to start a new life.

Don't Neglect Mission-Internal Opinion

Through their own interactions with local people and international partners, staff members can be the most convincing ambassadors for a mediation effort, or, if misinformed, can hurt the process. Internal communication can be improved by holding regular information meetings and inclusive strategy sessions, as well as by circulating mission updates in newsletters and email alerts.



STEP FOUR

Implement a Communication Program

Anticipate Logistical Problems

By the time peacemakers have set up shop in the area of operations, they should have received most of their equipment for the start-up phase and be able to move around the country for firsthand encounters in the mission area. If they are dealing with an underdeveloped and remote part of the world, mediators may discover that many items necessary for effective information operations may still be missing and may need to be acquired locally or from abroad. UN mission spokespersons have repeatedly encountered such difficulties in the start-up phase and are often able to work only because they use equipment they brought along themselves.⁶

In the UN mission in Cambodia in the early 1990s, the chief of public information had to buy essential equipment in Thailand using his personal funds. In many UN information centers in rural parts of Namibia, furniture and basic items of office equipment were missing when the centers first opened.

At start-up time, all other units of the peacemaking team are usually also strapped for resources. Moreover, as a former head of public information of the UN mission in Sudan reported, public information needs are often considered by administrators as secondary to the mission's main role, or, as he put it, as "an annoying side-show."

Identify Key Themes

Building on the preparatory work done in steps 2 and 3, key substantive issues emanating from the mediation effort should now be identified and

treated as prime themes for the information program. Themes might include acceptance of peace negotiations as such, the role of interim accords, the meaning of cease-fire lines, the need for a separation of forces, demobilization of combatants, establishment of secure environments, repatriation and acceptance of returnees, promoting and enforcing respect for human rights, reconciliation measures, and the administration of justice.

Match Issue-Oriented Themes with Target Audiences

Once the priority themes have been identified, the information team should begin to refine these themes and see which messages can best communicate which themes to the target audiences judged to be important to the mission's goals. Themes thus can become the mission's messages, which will be adjusted over time and as circumstances change. Some organizations review and, if necessary, revise their main messages on a daily basis. In developing messages suitable for the target audiences, cultural frames of reference should be borne in mind. It is also advisable to test the messages before they are widely disseminated by soliciting opinions from individuals who know the local political culture and who can advise on the messages' suitability for targeted information campaigns.

Work with Journalists

Media organizations and their representatives will probably be identified as a key target group by the mediator. Depending on the length of time for which the peacemaking team will be in the conflict area, a local press center should be set up near the mediator's headquarters. This center could consist of just a couple of rooms in a hotel, or it might be a larger, more elaborate facility with a press briefing room with a public address system, a display area for press releases and other handouts for the media, and a work space for journalists.

The best way to reach reporters is through personal contacts. It will help greatly if the spokesperson is personally known to the journalists covering the conflict for the major media outlets. Media liaison officers or information assistants should offer journalists help in getting stories

out about the mission. Among the most frequently used tools in media liaison are holding regular press briefings, arranging interviews with specialists from the mediator's staff, and organizing press visits to show peacemaking activities in the field. Locally recruited information officers (see step 2) should help in making and maintaining contacts with local reporters, who are often the only ones consistently covering the negotiations.

Brief, up-to-date, and factual information bulletins or press releases will be the most suitable communication tools, combined with person-to-person contacts by the press team. Consideration should also be given to granting individual journalists special access to the mediator and the opportunity to accompany him or her during the mediator's daily activities and when traveling.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan provided such access to a number of journalists, among them James Traub of the New York Times and Stanley Meisler, a writer who had been a correspondent for the Los Angeles Times.⁸ Such an arrangement presupposes a special relationship of confidence and trust.

Use Appropriate Forms of Communication

Radio

If a prime target audience is radio listeners, as will be the case in many African countries, it is vital that, if the peacemaking organization does not have its own radio station in the country, it must have guaranteed access to the local radio stations. This is often a problem if the government concerned refuses access to the airwaves or limits or controls such access.

This was the case in 1992 when the Croatian government refused to allow the UN Protection Force access to its airwaves. As noted earlier, despite agreeing to UN radio broadcasts in UNMIS's Status of Forces Agreement, the government of Sudan has sought to prevent programs being heard in Darfur. More positively, in Burundi, Search for Common Ground has been supporting multiethnic reporting through Studio Ijambo, a radio studio that brings together Hutu and Tutsi journalists to jointly produce programs.

While most non-governmental peacemakers do not have the funds or the know-how to operate their own radio programs, they should be able to approach UN or other international radio producers with newsworthy stories and get them broadcast on UN radio where it is in place, such as it was at different times in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Sudan, and Sierra Leone.

Television

In many underdeveloped regions of the world, access by peacemakers to local television channels may be fraught with difficulties, as television is often state-controlled and politically “sanitized” and thus rarely a vibrant medium for public debate.

In Kosovo, which for a long time was under UN administration, it was decided that UN Television would be, for a while, an important additional information outlet for the international community working in Kosovo; the results were mixed.⁹

Regional and international television reporters will usually cover peacemaking efforts only at key moments (e.g., the mediator’s arrival, the initial negotiations, the announcement of election results, and the mediator’s departure). Because producing regular television programs is expensive and poses professional and technological challenges, it is usually not an option for smaller mediation efforts. However, Search for Common Ground has had some success with a locally produced television series in Nigeria, “The Station,” which looks at issues such as child soldiers and street children.

Print Production

In low-tech missions, specific hard-copy information products need to be developed and distributed by the peacemaker’s team. Ideally, these are produced on location. Alternatively, if no production facilities exist in the country or are inaccessible to the mediator’s staff, items such as flyers, handouts, and posters can be produced by the home organization and shipped to the theater of operations. Press releases are best produced in country by the spokesperson’s office in all languages needed to reach media and NGOs. Production in the local languages should also be done in theater, following recruitment of local information staff and translators.

An assessment will have been made in the planning phase as to whether sophisticated graphics and visuals are needed to communicate information to illiterate or semiliterate audiences. The graphic design work for these visuals may have to be prepared before deployment and requires the services of a professional graphic designer with knowledge and understanding of the culture of the country of operations. A graphic designer should then either accompany the mediator's team for a certain time or should be identified and hired locally.

The UN Secretariat calculated in its after-action assessment of the Namibia operation that a total of 590,000 information items were produced and distributed in its one-year deployment in Namibia, in all languages of the country.

Web-Based Information Services and New Technologies

For the outside world, websites are a crucial first entry point to gain information about a peacekeeping or peacemaking effort. Most UN peacekeeping and political missions now have their own websites, which are maintained by the Department of Public Information in New York, with input received from the missions. A very useful site for peacemakers is www.unpeacemaker.org, a service provided by the UN Department of Political Affairs. In addition, informative sites are maintained by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, such as www.reliefweb.int, which provides coverage of humanitarian emergencies, and www.unsudanig.org (United Nations Sudan Information Gateway), which serves the information needs of the humanitarian community in Sudan.

It is advisable that peacemakers use their headquarters' technical facilities to post updates about the mission's activities on a daily basis. For this and other reasons, a back-stopping information officer should be assigned to liaise with mission information staff and to receive and distribute their news items.

Considering that wireless communications are now often the first forms of information infrastructure established in areas emerging from conflict, many humanitarian and peacekeeping missions have recently used mobile phones and services such as SMS messaging to get information to journalists and NGOs in environments where physical mobility is difficult due to security concerns.

Mobile Communication Tools

In remote areas where access to electricity or electronic media is limited, mobile media campaigns have also sometimes relied on videos or radio streaming over the Internet. International peacemakers have used vehicles equipped with satellite Internet communications and with radios, video recorders, or laptops to reach information-starved or misinformed populations. Less high-tech methods, such as pamphlet distribution by vehicles and announcements delivered through bullhorns on trucks, have also proved useful in many missions. In other cases, illiterate audiences have been reached through street theater performances and the physical presence of information officers speaking at village gatherings, markets, or town hall meetings.

Monitor Local and International Media

Media monitoring is a routine, although labor-intensive, activity that can be assigned to well-briefed junior staff members with good language skills. The main local and international media should be monitored on a 24/7 basis, as the public image of the mission may suddenly shift and turn against the mediator with adverse press coverage. Monitoring should also cover online services, activist groups, and bloggers, where they exist.

Depending on the size and skills of the information team, corrective measures should be taken when media reporting has been inaccurate, such as letters to the editor and calls to journalists; if serious cases of malicious distortion and hate propaganda occur, the top mediator should quickly lodge complaints.

Kosovo provides an example: In March 2004, after five years of close mentoring of local media capacities and capabilities by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), exaggerated and unfounded reports by local media turned a relatively minor incident into three days of uncontrolled violence that claimed nineteen lives, left nine hundred injured and four thousand homeless, and destroyed eight hundred homes and thirty religious buildings.

Counter Rumors and Manage Crises

Peacemakers may be faced with sudden adverse publicity and should prepare themselves for that eventuality. Hostile parties and combatants cannot be depended upon to provide a friendly and supportive environment in which to operate information campaigns. Some UN missions have established a “rumor-busting 24-hour hotline” to counter misperceptions about the mission, but such initiatives are labor-intensive and not always feasible. There is also a tendency on the part of some heads of mission to ignore rumors and factually incorrect reporting in the hope that they will go away. This has often proven illusory, as, for example, in the case of the UN operation in the former Yugoslavia, where the local Croatian press had alleged that the UN maintained brothels; these stories were not countered and continued to circulate in the international media (the secretary-general was even asked about the allegation months later on an official visit to Japan).

Things may also change rapidly because of evolving circumstances or unforeseen events.

The spokeswoman for the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan, who together with one local staff member used to handle a few media requests every week, suddenly found herself in September 2001 inundated with media queries from hundreds, even thousands of journalists a day, when international media attention shifted to Afghanistan and Pakistan following the attacks of 9/11.

When crises threaten to overwhelm already overstretched capabilities, local media can provide invaluable support, especially if local journalists have been trained in the arts of conflict resolution.

When angry citizens looted UN food stores at a small town in conflict-ridden Southern Sudan in 2007, a radio reporting team newly trained by Internews helped defuse tensions through their timely and effective coverage of the issue. Although the Nhomlaau FM reporters had begun running the station just a few hours earlier, they were able to provide essential information to the community, inviting World Food Program staff on the air to discuss the issue, as well as giving a voice to the police, other local authorities, and relevant international NGOs. The team was one of the first local-language community radio stations to be set up in a remote part of Sudan.

Problems and challenges cannot be expected to appear sequentially. Rather, problems will often erupt in a nonlinear but interrelated manner. Managing separate but related crises simultaneously will be a severe test for the peacemaker's mission; staying "on message" during such times will be most difficult. In such cases, the political experience and judgment of the mediator will be called upon.



STEP FIVE

Engage Civil Society

Civil society actors are the mediator's most important potential allies in the process of peacemaking. Community and religious leaders, political and environmental activists, trade unionists and business leaders, and women's organizations are among the opinion makers who shape attitudes in most societies. As discussed in steps 1 and 2, opinion leaders and respected individuals should be contacted early on, as they are influential in shaping public opinion about the peacemaking mission.

Developing contacts and maintaining active engagement with local emerging leaders can be very important, especially over the long term.

When UN Secretariat officials under Martti Ahtisaari first went to the territory of South-West Africa (now Namibia) in the mid-1970s, a number of individuals approached the UN survey mission's staff because they felt that the United Nations was the best bet for the future of the country. Among them were young opposition lawyers who, by the time of the country's transition to independence fourteen years later, had become leaders of political parties; in 1990 one of them became the country's first Supreme Court Justice.

Adopt an Inclusive Approach

As Conciliation Resources' Accord Programme outlines, the involvement in the peace process of people outside of the combatant groups encourages a wider sense of ownership of the process and gives greater public legitimacy to the negotiation of political accords.¹⁰ Not only can an inclusive approach lead to greater acceptance of peace agreements, but it can also help broaden the participation of societal

actors in the politics of their country, an important step toward developing “popular sovereignty.”

This process could be seen at work in the aftermath of the war in Lebanon in 2006, when large numbers of young Lebanese decided to reclaim their country and actively engaged themselves in Lebanese politics.

Some peacemakers who are new to another country's political and social environment may not feel comfortable contacting people in strange settings or may lack the necessary language skills to do so. In many countries, such as Somalia or Iraq, the security situation is so precarious that direct civil society contacts are nearly impossible. In such cases, telephone, cell phone, email, or web contacts are preferable, depending on which connectivity exists and is the most reliable. Social and political networking has become an increasingly important aspect of computer-based-communication and, provided that the technology works in the conflict area, can be used by the peacemakers to engage with activists and support networks.¹¹

Reach out to NGOs

Unfortunately, many mediation and peacekeeping missions do not have a good record in dealing with local or international NGOs in areas of conflict. A 2007 study by a staff member of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) diagnosed a continuing “partnership gap” between peacekeepers and locals and presented recommendations for narrowing the gap.¹²

In the past, some UN missions felt the need for a “community relations office” to repair damaged relations between the local community and the peacekeepers, as during the operation in Cambodia, or to settle financial claims, as in the UN mission in Cyprus, where car accidents and their effects had to be dealt with on an ongoing basis.

The mediator should consider direct engagement with civil society activists and NGOs. Adding NGO Briefings for representatives of civil society to the standard array of press briefings for reporters gives the mediator a chance to interact directly with leaders who otherwise may have limited access to the formal mediation process. While these groups may not produce regular media materials, they do communicate with

extensive networks and may be influential in shaping public opinion. NGO Briefings provide a forum for civil society to feed questions, concerns, and ideas back to the mediation team. Most importantly, such meetings would send a message from the mediation team that civil society is an important constituency in the peace process, even if it does not have a formal seat at the negotiation table.

Find Allies among Civic and Peace Journalists

As the major international news media are frequently absent from the scene of small wars and civil conflicts, alternative journalists and civic activists may be potential allies for mediators in getting their message heard. Amateurs equipped with video cameras and cell phone–cameras have often become witnesses and “journalists-for-a-day” in little-known conflict zones. This development has increased transparency, in that citizens who witness events can broadcast them to a wider public. In some instances, such as human rights violations, this transparency can help the mediator by giving him or her the opportunity to raise associated issues with the host country. By the same token, however, the growing transparency of all aspects of public life can also backfire on the mediator and his or her team if their own politically sensitive activities are exposed on the Internet or in the local media, possibly impacting the mediation team’s work and public image.

The concept of “civic journalism”¹³ has gained favor with many activists around the world but is, for good reason, critically eyed by professional journalists and others. Challenges to the traditional media, which primarily report crises and wars, have also been posed by critics who ask questions about the conflict from the “peace perspective.”

Reporting for Peace conducts training that encourages journalists to redefine who and what is newsworthy—to move beyond the “body count” style of war reporting and to identify the ‘hidden’ stories about peacebuilding initiatives that are often ignored by mainstream media. After a Reporting for Peace training in the conflict-ridden region of Poso, Indonesia, a senior government official who saw the broadsheet produced by the participants said, “If only there had been something like this newspaper a few months ago, we might not have experienced the tragedy of the Poso violence.”

Some universities and conflict training institutes have introduced courses in “peace journalism”¹⁴ and “conflict-sensitive journalism”¹⁵ into their curricula. Mediators could explore with their press teams to contact peace activists and their allies in the alternative media and tap their resources as channels for the mediation effort.

Shape the Media Space

Analyzing the media in conflict areas can also lead to the conclusion that the media environment is so rife with ethnic hatred and sectarian strife that alternative media need to be created.¹⁶ In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the wars in the former Yugoslavia, in which local media played a major role in inciting mass violence, peacemakers decided that those media had been so destructive and were now so discredited that new, independent media needed to be established. Such intervention in the media space of sovereign territories is a major and risky undertaking that requires far-reaching political authority of the kind that IGOs such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the OSCE have mustered only in a few countries and for limited periods of time. The discussion of the advisability (and legality) of international intervention in the media landscape of countries emerging from conflict arises whenever new cases of media intervention are proposed.¹⁷

In Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor, IGOs in cooperation with NGOs and private foundations have taken steps to influence and shape the media space in conflict areas. The Open Broadcast Network in Bosnia had significant impact on the media landscape of that country. The OSCE even created a special position in 1997, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, whose basic task is to assist participating states in furthering independent and pluralistic media and who has frequently spoken out on violations of press freedom.

Build Local Capacities

Building and strengthening indigenous capacities is a major challenge in a post-conflict society. Providing the right degree of guidance, taking corrective action when necessary, and ensuring no harm is done are

matters of some delicacy. One must respect but not overrate local capacities, especially as attempts by outsiders to shape or reshape social structures and cultural norms are limited, as experiences in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq have shown.

*In other cases, such as the Philippine Facilitation Project conducted by the United States Institute of Peace from 2003 to 2007, considerable efforts were made to engage educators, journalists, and politicians in the peace process. A training program in conflict management involved a coalition of NGOs working to monitor the cease-fire and foster grassroots peacebuilding between religious communities.*¹⁸

Sometimes, international intervention in the local media space can be of a much more modest kind, consisting, for instance, of exhortations for the existing local media to do a better job of supporting an ongoing peace effort.

Following Kofi Annan's mediation in the Kenyan conflict, a senior member of his team appealed to the Kenyan media in Nairobi to hold political leaders accountable on the power-sharing agreement reached in early 2008. Speaking to reporters at a roundtable organized by Internews, Martin Griffiths, political advisor to Annan, told senior journalists that the country's media have a special responsibility to find ways of ensuring that the deal works and bringing the people of Kenya into the process.

An important element in capacity building is the training of journalists and other information professionals in countries emerging from conflict. The UN Mission in Sudan maintains that it has trained two hundred journalists since 2004, most of them on the job. The UN Mission in Cambodia also trained journalists, but when the mission was withdrawn from the country prematurely, political pressures on journalists quickly increased, and the struggle over press freedom in Cambodia is still ongoing.

Some NGOs have come to the conclusion that the training of journalists may be less effective in conflict regions, because training does not necessarily alter the journalists' professional conduct. These NGOs see greater merit in helping journalists form discussion groups and communities that focus on peacebuilding techniques in their professional work.¹⁹

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting supported the development of the Cross Caucasus Journalism Network, whose aim is to build journalistic connections throughout the Caucasus. Journalists from the territories of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh meet regularly to collaborate with each other as well as to share information with journalists from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia.

Show Respect

In the past, incidents have occurred in which international mediators and peacekeepers have not shown respect for local norms and cultural preferences. For the international mediator, it is important to be aware of and to understand local efforts at peacemaking and resolving conflict, to draw on those experiences, and to acknowledge them publicly when appropriate. Linking the mediator's own activities and plans to efforts that have been made locally to address issues of war and peace sends positive messages to the community. At the same time, historical and cultural sensitivities of the different ethnic communities must be borne in mind, such as dates of remembrance or religious holidays, border issues, or sensitivities over names of countries or territories, colors, and symbols. Showing respect also encourages self-respect among the people in the country, creating a positive, enabling environment for a society emerging from conflict.



STEP SIX

Monitor, Evaluate, and Assess

At regular intervals in the course of the peacemaking mission, the goals and implementation of the information campaign will need to be reviewed. Several useful tools and techniques have been developed over the years by the United Nations and by non-governmental peacemakers to assess their own impact in the field.

Assess Media Coverage

As discussed in step 4, constant monitoring of local, regional, and international media is essential, as press coverage is one of the prime ways to assess how the mediation effort is presented to the public. Given the agenda-setting and agenda-building functions of media, reporting must be monitored to judge its impact on the perceptions, expectations, and aspirations of politicians and citizens—and, indeed, of journalists. Media resonance and reception studies usually require professional analysis by communication scientists skilled in quantitative analysis, and it is likely that the mediator's team will not have the time or resources available to carry out such scientific studies. Common sense, however, should be sufficient to allow the team to deduce from the frequency (or absence) and tone of media reporting on particular issues if there will be an impact on the prevailing opinion in the country concerned and what that impact will likely be.

Survey Local Public Opinion

Surveys are the best way to find out what the local public thinks of the mission. They can be carried out either informally by members of the

mission or—and preferably—by professional opinion pollsters. If funds are available, professional surveys should be conducted at various stages of the mission.

Such vox populi have been undertaken on behalf of DPKO since 2004, in part as a result of severe criticism of the behavior of UN peacekeepers, particularly in Africa.²⁰ In the case of Burundi, for example, large majorities of Burundians believed that the United Nations had performed well in respect of the 2005 elections, but did not feel the peacekeepers had treated the Burundian public with respect. High marks were given to the UN-run Radio ONUB, which people felt was an important point of communication.

Local public opinion surveys have usually been conducted at the end of international missions in the country. It would be preferable, however, if they were also conducted much earlier, even prior to a mission's deployment.

Adjust Messages

The information gained from media monitoring and opinion surveys will allow peacemakers to reassess where they stand at a given point in time. In addition, new developments will occur in the course of the mission. Messages propagated by the information team will need to be adjusted or substantially changed to suit new priorities and changing requirements.

Over time, conflict dynamics may evolve and impact the information environment. For example, when a conflict becomes protracted, the messages employed by the mediator should change. Specific events such as new peace talks, return of refugees, or preparing for elections usually dictate the messages broadcast by the peacemakers. Decisions as to how to adjust messages should always be taken after thorough discussion and close consultation between the information team and the political leadership. The mediator's team may also feel compelled to change its messages in response to crises (e.g., following attacks on the mediator in the press or when spoilers try to destabilize the peace process). Such crises should lead not to a complete change of course by the mediator but to a reassessment of the situation in the light of the mediator's own goals and the strategic approach that was agreed upon in step 3.

Produce After-Action Reports

When a peacekeeping or peacemaking mission concludes or a major actor, such as the mission spokesperson, leaves the area, an end-of-mission assessment should be conducted. Such assessments are often not performed by smaller organizations, but the DPKO now requires its senior managers to prepare after-action reports, which have become useful tools for analysis by the Best Practices Section of the DPKO. An after-action report in the information field will typically include an evaluation of what tasks have been performed well from the communications' perspective and what measures have not worked, so that lessons can be drawn for future missions. After-action reports are also useful because they can be circulated to other organizations and future mediators who can not only build on the experiences of their predecessors but also, and more importantly, maintain existing networks for information exchange.



Conclusion

Our discussion of the six steps recommended for managing public information in a mediation effort shows that communication is an essential element of peacemaking today. Ignoring it will sooner or later exact a price in terms of distorted and negative perceptions of the peacemaking effort, both locally and internationally.

Following the initial analysis outlined in steps 1 and 2, those heading a peacemaking team may decide that a smaller public relations and media effort will be sufficient. Alternatively, they may see the need for a larger effort. While every peacemaking mission will need at least a spokesperson and media analyst, some larger peacekeeping missions have employed hundreds of information staff and had million-dollar budgets at their disposal. In the latter case, information campaigns have been regarded as significant “force multipliers,” but their effectiveness has depended on a variety of political and military factors.

Endeavors at peacemaking have in the past had many communication challenges for which they were not always prepared or which they could not execute professionally. Those missions then lost significant leverage in the area of conflict; their own image and that of their sponsoring organization have often suffered as a consequence. Usually, this has involved a combination of policy and communication failures, as in Bosnia when the United Nations carried out ill-conceived measures such as the creation of “safe areas” in Srebrenica and other enclaves, or when the Security Council reduced the number of UN peacekeepers in Rwanda at the peak of the genocide. Political and military policy failures of this sort are, in many ways, no-win situations from a communications perspective. Nevertheless, in each case, communication, or the lack of it, exacerbated the policy failure and negatively impacted the international image of the United Nations for many years.

Some public relations professionals believe that perceptions of others can be controlled by clever advertising campaigns. While this may be true in the commercial field, experience in international environments has shown repeatedly that the social and political dynamics in a society emerging from conflict follow their own rules. These are often hard for outsiders to comprehend and even harder to work with, as irrational behavior by parties to the conflict can pose extreme challenges for the international community. Furthermore, international actors may also hold different perceptions of events, roles, and the intentions of interlocutors.

A proactive public information campaign, while making use of some of the tools of the public relations profession, should guard against an openly manipulative approach, which is unlikely to work and may well backfire. As the six steps suggested in this handbook indicate, successful public information campaigns in conflict environments are usually the result of professionally planned but transparent communication tasks that require the hard work of dedicated peacemakers and good luck.

Notes

1. For instance, Jan Eliasson, the UN secretary-general's envoy for Darfur, has pointed out that there is much confusion internationally about the Darfur negotiations and the separate North-South Sudanese peace process. Silvio Waisbord, "News Coverage of the Darfur Conflict: A Conversation with Jan Eliasson, United Nations Special Envoy to Darfur," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 13 (Winter 2008): 75–80.
2. See Teresa Whitfield, *Friends Indeed? The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).
3. Angelique Haugerud, "Kenya: Spaces of Hope," *Open Democracy*, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/35633> (accessed January 25, 2008).
4. Rudiger Falksohn and Padma Rai, "Tamil Tigers Exploit Exiles Abroad to Fund Insurgency," *Spiegel Online*, February 14, 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,druck-535316,00.html>.
5. Shira Loewenberg and Bent Norby Bonde, eds., *Media in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Strategies* (Bonn, Germany: Deutsche Welle, 2007), http://www.dw-gmf.de/download/Media_In_Conflict_Prevention.pdf, outlines the results of a conference held in Bonn in 2007.
6. There are several instruction manuals issued by the UN Secretariat on the practical arrangements suggested to their information officers. See United Nations Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Policy and Guidance for Public Information in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, July 2006; United Nations Department of Information, "Public Information and Media Relations in United Nations Peace Operations: Guidance to Special Representatives of the Secretary-General," DPI/2354, September 2004; and *UN Peacemaker, Operational Guidance Note: Addressing the Media in Peace Processes and Agreements* (United Nations Department of Political Affairs, October 2006), http://peacemaker.unlb.org/doc_view.php?d=939.
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8. Traub and Meisler wrote comparatively favorable books about Annan: James Traub, *The Best Intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the Era of American Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), and Stanley Meisler, *Kofi Annan: A Man of Peace in a World of War* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley, 2007).
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12. Comfort Lamptey, *Engaging Civil Society in Peacekeeping* (August 2007), <http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/PBPS/Library/Engaging%20Civil%20Society%20in%20Peacekeeping.pdf>.
13. For more on the nature and potential of civic journalism, see the website of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, www.civicjournalism.org.
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