

# COMMUNICATION FOR PEACEBUILDING

## WORKSHOP REPORT



United States Institute of Peace  
Washington, DC  
January 19-20, 2011



Understanding differences  
Acting on commonalities

## COMMUNICATION FOR PEACEBUILDING WORKSHOP

### Background

In 2011, the United States Institute for Peace is launching the *Communication for Peacebuilding* grant program (CfP). The program will support innovative practice and research designed to increase our understanding of how communication flows and communication technology can best be leveraged to improve the practice of peacebuilding. The project will run for five years with an annual grant-making budget of approximately \$350,000.

The CfP program is based on two premises. **First**, communication is an irreducible element of peacebuilding. **Second**, in conflict-affected areas, communication technologies are restructuring the relationship between international organizations, local peacebuilders, and communities in ways that allow communication flows to be increasingly horizontal and increasingly continuous. This has significant, perhaps transformational, implications for how peacebuilding programs are being implemented.

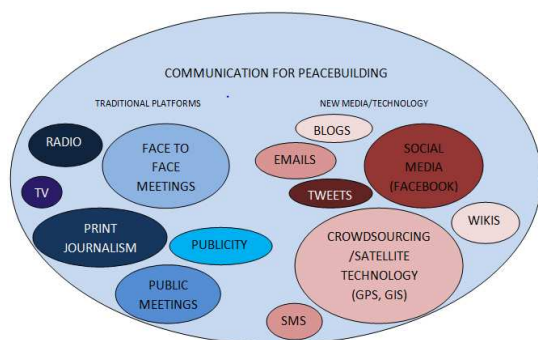
To ensure that the new grant was informed by the latest developments in the field, USIP contracted Search for Common Ground to convene and facilitate a two-day workshop that brought together a wide variety of experts to reflect on three questions:

- What are the current practices (and key organizations) working in the field?
- What are the key challenges within the field that must be overcome if the field is to advance?
- What are the key trends within the field and where is the field heading?

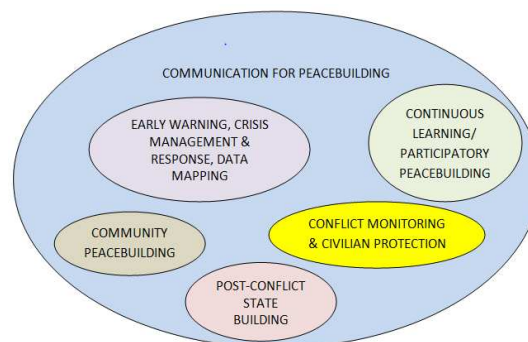
This report is a distillation of the discussion at the workshop. It is not an attempt to provide detailed summaries of each session, rather the report highlights key themes that emerged.

### Introduction

Communication for Peacebuilding covers a multitude of pathways, functions and relationships. We can identify sets of tools for communication and areas of focus where these tools are applied (see diagrams below). It was observed that although tools might be referred to as 'new' or 'traditional', this distinction is blurring as tools are used to complement each other and amplify communication.



TOOLS



FOCUS

The use of the 'new' tools of communication by NGOs, multilaterals and governments is changing what information can be gathered and who can participate in the communication process and is opening up new spaces for the involvement of individuals and communities in crisis and disaster response, conflict monitoring and early warning, civilian protection, community peacebuilding, and state-building activities.

### **An Overview of the Field**

During the workshop a number of examples were shared regarding how communication tools were being used in conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. Areas where there is a lot of activity include **early warning, crisis management and response, and data mapping**. The United Nations has already developed the Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System (GIVAS) in 2009 to collect real-time information in order to better prepare decision makers for a response. The United Nations also has an initiative called Global Pulse that collects information on vulnerable populations, designed to provide real time information to bridge the gap between information and response.<sup>1</sup> The European Commission, through the Joint Research Centre (JRC), has designed the Geo-Spatial Analysis for Global Security and Stability to use the wealth of information given by satellite imagery in order to code findings and troubleshoot potential areas for crisis.<sup>2</sup> Google is also supporting the PAX Initiative, which plans to use the information available through the internet, mobile phones, and satellite imagery to point to potential conflicts. The Feasibility Study for the PAX proposal has now been completed and a PAX discussion website has been launched, inviting input into discussion of the proposal at [www.pax2011.org](http://www.pax2011.org). Organizations like Ushahidi are developing new communication tools to enable data to be gathered submitted via the web and mobile phone and presented on Google Maps (known as crowdsourcing – used most prominently in the disaster response in Haiti and the post election violence in Kenya).

In the area of **community peacebuilding and post-conflict state building**, a range of NGOs have been involved in delivering journalism training, working on the media enabling environment, radio networks, community outreach programs that use theater and inspirational dramas, radio and TV production that builds local capacity. NGOs are also using blogs and wikis to communicate information about conflict issues that provide a space for the exchange of views. We heard examples of conflict-sensitive journalism training in Afghanistan (3D Security), work with local organizations and communities to strengthen journalistic resources that are underdeveloped (Internews), state building and democracy building in Burundi with radio programming (Panos), radio station managers mediating their own conflict in Sierra Leone (Independent Radio Network), providing a diversity of voices on the Palestine-Israeli conflict (All for Peace Radio), and work to increase communication flows from the grassroots (Equal Access).

In terms of **conflict monitoring and civilian protection** we heard of the example of Peacenet operated by Oxfam which used SMS messaging in the post election violence in Kenya to alert a network of conflict mediators to target violent incidents that needed immediate mediation. Other examples included the mapping of slums and human rights violations in Port Harcourt (Stakeholder Democracy Network) and support provided to organizations to enable instantaneous two-way communication on a large scale (FrontlineSMS).

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<sup>1</sup> UN Global Pulse <http://www.unglobalpulse.org/about>

<sup>2</sup> Joint Research Centre, Geo-Spatial Analysis for Global Security and Stability <http://isferea.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Pages/default.aspx>

### **Key Challenges**

The growth in the application of these new approaches and for communication tools raises a number of **key challenges**:

#### ***Collaboration and Improving Information Flow***

- How can we manage the flow of large quantities of information and avoid information overload?
- How do we connect monitoring information with community-based responders, not just international responders?
- How can multiple actors/sectors work more collaboratively? For instance, how can NGOs work better with telecommunication service providers?

#### ***Credibility, Trust and Validity***

- How do we validate information collected from a decentralized group of sources? How do we know which community is speaking? How do we manage the biases inherent in access to communication?
- How can we improve the measurement of the effectiveness of Communication for Peacebuilding approaches, particularly since they are normally one element of a larger approach?
- Given that information is inherently political, how can we improve the credibility and trust between local populations and organizations, between government and NGOs, and between communities and the media?

#### ***Environmental Factors***

- How do we overcome poor accessibility to channels of communication?
- How can we improve the enabling environment to support effective and appropriate regulation and work around government control of content and telecommunication tools?

#### ***Privacy, Security, and Ethical Challenges***

- How can we ensure the protection and privacy of individuals and communities? How can responders ensure that new systems uphold the 'do no harm' principle?
- Given that community-based reporting often raises expectations, how can we ensure that early warning and monitoring information elicits an appropriate response?

### **Key Trends**

Several trends in the field of Communication for Peacebuilding were identified:

- Technology is not a panacea. We are beyond the hype of new media technology, and now looking at the practical application and realistically assessing potential and challenges.
- The continued use of traditional forms of media for building good governance, democracy, and peaceful coexistence will continue. There is an emerging trend around the convergence of tools and how new tools of communication can help amplify the message and accelerate the flow of information.
- The increased availability of mobile phones, better broadband access, social media's increasing role (Twitter, Facebook, etc) and cheaper and greater access to technology has led to greater opportunities to empower local actors as first responders in conflict and crisis-affected areas.

- Increasing availability and use of ever more sophisticated and more easily downloadable applications for crowdsourcing and crowdfunding and the use of maps, satellite images and satellite positioning.
- Increased availability of information will lead to a richer engagement between multilaterals, governments, NGOs, community-based organizations, and for-profits requiring a greater degree of cross-sectoral collaboration.
- The defining line between what is perceived today as new and traditional media will become increasingly blurry and ever-shifting.<sup>3</sup>

### **Summary Comment**

In the workshop discussions, there was a refreshing acknowledgement that we were beyond the hype of a new technology revolution. Practitioners are looking at this new technology realistically and asking where is the evidence, what has worked and how can these tools be used to have maximum impact?

One of the key insights from the workshop was that through better collaboration and integration of communication tools into an overall strategy, projects could be more effective. This suggests that encouraging collaboration and learning across sectors and organizations that take different approaches will be a valuable approach.

There was also a salutary reminder that in places of war, new communication tools often do not exist. Mobile phones are the only new tool that is commonly available. Realistically, radio and cellphones are the primary source of communications in conflict. There are also many other challenges such as access to electricity, illiteracy rates, and access to and cost of internet, mobiles and SMS messaging.

It is clear that the field of Communication for Peacebuilding is marked by experimentation, exploratory small-scale programs, and in many cases, assertions about the effectiveness of new technologies which are backed by scant evidence. This experimentation is not a negative, but in this context, there is a need to develop a knowledge base of evidence-based practice. There are clearly new opportunities and new possibilities being created by the emergence of more distributed, horizontal communication flows, but much of the potential remains unrealized. There is a need to learn about situations where a focus on communication flows are most important, how changes in those flows can best be facilitated, and how these flows can best be harnessed to create positive peacebuilding outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> Sanjana Huttotuwa sums this up nicely in one of his recent blogs  
<http://ict4peace.wordpress.com/2010/11/28/changes-to-media-over-2010/>

## **Annex 1. Participants at the Workshop included:<sup>4</sup>**

**Kimberly Abbott**  
International Crisis Group

**Maysa Baransi-Siniora**  
All for Peace Radio

**Michael Bosse**  
Equal Access International

**Vladimir Bratic**  
Hollins University

**Catherine Dempsey**  
PAX Initiative

**Theo Dolan**  
USIP

**Michael Dwyer**  
Internews

**Sonja Gloeckle**  
Intermedia

**Jon Gosier**  
Ushahidi

**Steve Hansch**  
Georgetown University

**Dennis King**  
US Department of State

**Sean McDonald**  
FrontlineSMS:Legal

**John Marks**  
Search for Common Ground

**Patrick Meier**  
Ushahidi  
International Network of Crisis  
Mappers

**Cat Meurn**  
United Nations Foundation

**Lisa Schirch**  
3D Security/  
Eastern Mennonite University

**Bill Siemering**  
Developing Radio Partners

**Aaron Sundsmo**  
Danya International

**Nicholas van Praag**  
World Bank

**Kitty Warnock**  
Panos

**Adele Waugaman**  
United Nations Foundation

**Ransford Wright**  
Independent Radio Network  
Believers Broadcasting Network

**From USIP and Search for Common  
Ground:**  
**Frank Alexander**  
Search for Common Ground

**Andrew Blum**  
USIP

**Shawn Dunning**  
Search for Common Ground

**Keavy Nahan**  
USIP

**Nick Oatley**  
Search for Common Ground

**Lauren Sauer**  
Search for Common Ground

**Maura Scully**  
Search for Common Ground

**Michael Shipler**  
Search for Common Ground

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<sup>4</sup> Many others experts were invited but were unable to participate due to prior commitments. The views of some of those who were not able to attend will be reflected in a broader report to be released at a later date.