RADIO AS PEACEBUILDER:
A CASE STUDY OF RADIO OKAPI IN THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Michelle Betz
University of Central Florida

By giving voice and visibility to all people - including and especially the poor, the marginalized and members of minorities - the media can help remedy the inequalities, the corruption, the ethnic tensions and the human rights abuses that form the root causes of so many conflicts.

- United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan -

I.   INTRODUCTION

An estimated one-quarter to one-third of United Nations member states are conflict-stressed states or emerging democracies and all of these are multi-ethnic states with racial and/or ethnic divisions. (Cholmondely, 2004). That means that these same countries are, at some point if not currently, going to be going through the process of nation building. One tool that can be used in this process is the media and radio has proven to be particularly adept.

Radio has long been seen as an important tool in the social, economic and political mobilization of developing countries. There have been volumes (Fardon & Furniss; Head Manoff; Wedell; Hyden, Leslie & Ogundimu) written about social development and the utility of radio in addition to how radio might be used in post-conflict and nation building scenarios. However, there has been little, if any, examination of a more holistic approach of how both these bodies of work might be melded together providing some insight into how media, and more specifically radio, might be used as a peacebuilder. This paper seeks to draw elements from both social development and conflict resolution theories, bringing them together to examine how radio could be used in post-conflict and conflict resolution situations. An examination of Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; former Zaire) will serve as a case study of the role radio can play as a post-conflict or peace-building tool.

II.   USE OF RADIO IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Radio has long been used in sub-Saharan Africa due to its accessibility, low cost and high impact among people who may be mostly illiterate; it is the most readily available of all media. As a result, radio can play an important mobilizing role in developing countries (Mwakawago, Wedell). Indeed, radio can play an important

role in four areas: informing, facilitating decision making, educating, and entertaining (Mwakawago 1986, p.87).

One of the longest standing examples of the use of radio as a tool for social development is that of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Since the 1960s the FAO has been using radio as a means of assisting those in rural areas of developing countries. The goal of which was to assist rural workers so they could come up with concrete solutions to the shared problems they faced together. Indeed, this has now become a model for much of community radio in which it is used as an agent for social change; perhaps it can even be examined in the context of nation-building or political development.

There are other examples of radio's ability to convey ideas and messages in basic education. The media were seen as crucial in the UNESCO/UNICEF "Education for All" initiative taken at the Jomtien conference in 1990. Some believe UNICEF used the media effectively for social mobilization in health and other basic education in a number of developing countries. This was particularly effective in areas of conflict or former conflict where health and educational infrastructures had broken down, and where radio was one of the few sources of education as well as information. (Adam)

As a result, this would suggest that the broadcaster is a development agent just as Querre

suggests (A Thousand and One Worlds , 1992) in Myers in Fardon p. 95). However, Querre stresses that it is up to the producers to "create the right environment for broadcasting and a way of thinking familiar to rural life. Dialogue will be genuine and real. Concrete solutions to concrete problems can be discovered together… They will preserve the cultural identity of their audience and hand back to them their right to be heard."

Olorunnisola agrees. He writes that "the value of radio in reducing the stress attached to battling human, animal, and plant diseases, as well as the improvement of housing and water supply was discovered" (1997, p.244). Olorunnisola also suggests, however, that there may be some limitations with this view of broadcaster as agent of social change.

Olorunnisola (JRS 1997, p. 243) discusses the social mobilization which radio may be able to bring about, albeit with some reservations. Indeed, he suggests "the extent to which the social mobilization programs planned and executed in rural Africa [approximately 70% of the DRC's population is rural] have generally failed, may point to the likelihood that, among other conjoint factors, radio's potential as a viable medium has never been fully tapped."

Indeed, if radio's potential has never been fully tapped, one must also ask how it could be. This author would suggest that if we can

look at radio as a development agent, can we then take this a step further and ask, or try to find, a methodology that looks at the broadcaster as peacemaking agent, or to assist in the maintenance of peace in a post-conflict thereby tapping into radio's full potential that Olorunnisola suggests has not yet been achieved. Can radio be used in attempts to manage conflict or promote nation-building? Indeed, this is where conflict resolution

III.   USE OF RADIO IN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: POST-CONFLICT AND PEACEMAKING

For many political scientists and international agencies freedom of communication is a measure of the reality of political liberalization and in such contexts radio and the media in general are seen as core elements that enable democratization. (Daloz and Verrier-Fechette in Fardon p. 181) If the media are crucial for democratization then would it not stand to reason that this process would include conflict resolution and particularly in post-conflict situations? If so, what role can the media play and who controls the media in such situations?

In a background paper prepared for UNESCO, Price (2000) says both NGOs (non-governmental organization) and IGOs (international governmental organizations) need to be factored into political development, although historically they have acted independently of one another. He further suggests that there are primarily two approaches taken when facing a post-conflict media task. The first involves those who believe that to counter war and hate propaganda in many post-conflict situations, the IGOS had to create alternative media outlets that were, at least initially, under IGO control. The second approach, "fostered and encouraged more by NGOs than IGOs, appears less controlling. It focuses on strengthening local, indigenous media outlets, particularly those that strike a new voice, in the hopes of building a public sphere, a civil society, and the long-term machinery for peace and reconstruction." What is interesting to note here is the traditional mandate of NGOs has been apolitical and geared towards social, not political, development, yet at the same time peace and reconstruction can be construed as political terms. Even if not intentional, there is clearly an overlap – a mandate that becomes social *and* political. Price concludes that there needs to be increasing coordination between IGOs and NGOs. As will be discussed, this is precisely what has happened in the case of Radio Okapi where one (IGO) is more political or conflict-oriented while the other (NGO) is geared towards social development yet both are working together towards peacebuilding in the DRC.

In addition to the actors involved in political development there needs to be further examination into the role the media play in conflict

resolution. Robert Manoff, the director of the Center for War, Peace and the News Media at New York University, suggests that "approaches that can loosely be grouped together under the rubric of 'conflict resolution' typically share a greater interest in the potential contributions of non-state actors and might therefore be expected to provide a body of theory and practice more congenial to the development of media interventions." (Manoff Dec 1998) Manoff further suggests numerous potential roles the media can play in the prevention and management of conflict including channeling communication between parties, educating, confidence building, providing an emotional outlet, and framing and defining the conflict – all elements of the conflict resolution process and traditionally the role of diplomats.

Media and conflict experts from around the world met at a 1998 conference in Geneva to examine the legitimacy of intervention for peace by foreign media in a country in conflict. They concluded media intervention during an open conflict situation should meet certain criteria. These criteria included "receiving a mandate from the international community to legitimize the intervention and ensure that it occurs with other forms of assistance. Local staff need to be involved in regular content reviews to make certain that information broadcast is both accurately and effectively portrayed to its audience. Strict impartiality is also crucial, as is complete transparency." Heiber (CCR vol 7 no..4 p.5)

In addition to criteria legitimizing media intervention, there are also different types of intervention. Howard (2002) suggests a model in which there are five types of media intervention varying largely on the stage of the conflict itself. Most pertinent to the case at hand are types four and five. Type four is described as being distinct from conventional journalism and is rather a "pro-active media-based intervention, usually designed for a highly specific audience and purpose". This type of intervention is often the product of an outside actor such as a peacekeeping force or NGO and is often used in a conflict or post-conflict situation. Type five involves programming that is specifically intent upon transforming attitudes, promoting reconciliation and reducing conflict and is usually conducted by nongovernmental organizations. The content of the programming in this case is determined by its appropriateness to fostering peace (Howard 2002, p.11). Again, as will be discussed below, it is precisely these types of intervention that best describe Radio Okapi.

However, simply having access to information that explains can have a profound psychological effect in situations where uncertainty and fear reign. Heiber believes that providing them with listener-friendly information about their current environment can facilitate giving

people a sense of control over their destiny. This, she suggests, is a crucial step in helping defuse the tension and chaos, which often characterize countries at war. But Heiber further suggest that timing of this intervention can be as crucial as the content. She suggests that such interventions can be most effective once active conflict has ended. "By making available space or airtime for the expression of grievances, media is encouraging an essential part of the healing process. During the period of reconciliation and rehabilitation, media can also serve to empower groups which had previously been voiceless." Indeed, this is precisely what is happening in the case of Radio Okapi. (Heiber p. 6-7)

In discussing community radio and rural communities, Olorunnisola (1997 p. 247) asks an important question: can members of a rural community with its own radio service find their voice, experience inclusion and participate actively in national affairs? Indeed, this is important when considering the DRC's large rural population, which is some 70% of the total population. It is also important in ascertaining the effectiveness of a network such as Radio Okapi. However, Olorunnisola continues by suggesting that community radio should play a role not simply in "communal self-help and other developmental efforts" but that "there should be room for the sustenance of national unity through programmatic integration." (Olorunnisola 1997, p.251) Indeed, it

is here that we see the intersection of social and political development – where the need for a holistic model is necessary to understand the fuller implications not simply of community radio, but of the media in general and their role in post-conflict and peacemaking scenarios.

IV. THE NEED FOR A HOLISTIC MODEL OF ANALYSIS

Historically, the disciplines of social development and conflict resolution (a part of political development theory) were largely viewed independent of one another and most often had a clear beginning and end *in and of themselves*. Instead, what is being suggested here is that there is a need for a holistic analysis, the need to examine nation building and conflict resolution in the rubric of both social *and* political development – and to suggest that one should exist without the other is simply short-sighted and does a disservice to both practitioners and academicians. As a result, there is a need to blend the theoretical areas of social development and conflict resolution by combining sociology, political science and media studies. Examining Radio Okapi and using it as a case study serves to illustrate this point and allows us to see how it brings together both social development theories and conflict resolution theories.

There has been some indication that this needed to be done, however, there was never any clear suggestion as to how. In his 1997 paper,

Olorunnisola believed that at that time there was no room in the current arrangement of African radio networks for participation and power sharing in information dissemination. He went on to say that these were two factors that were central to community (i.e. social development) as well as nation building efforts.

More recently, however, at least one media development practitioner suggested precisely this need and its potential utility. "Initiatives such as emergency relief, democratic development, health and education can recognize that media initiatives focused on conflict reduction inevitably benefit them too. The potential for synergy is high." (Howard et al)

V.   THE DRC AND THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Since the mid 1990s, the DRC has been rent by ethnic strife and civil war touched off by a massive influx in 1994 of refugees from fighting in neighboring Rwanda and Burundi. More than three million Congolese have been killed in ongoing conflict.

The government of former president Mobutu Sese Seko was toppled by a rebellion led by Laurent Kabila in 1997 and his regime was subsequently challenged by a Rwanda- and Uganda-backed rebellion in 1998. Troops from Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan intervened to support the Kinshasa regime. A cease-fire was signed in July 1999 by the DRC, Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Namibia, Rwanda, and Congolese armed rebel groups, but sporadic fighting continued. Kabila was assassinated on 16 January 2001 and his son Joseph Kabila was named head of state ten days later. In October 2002, the new president was successful in getting occupying Rwandan forces to withdraw from eastern Congo; two months later, an agreement was signed by all remaining warring parties to end the fighting and set up a government of national unity.

The media in the DRC reflect this ongoing conflict in that the government for most of the country's post-colonial history has tightly controlled them. Journalists are often harassed and jailed and ongoing conflict simply gives the government an excuse to impose even more severe restrictions under the guise of "national security".

Historically, radio was most often used as a propaganda instrument to secure loyalty and support of the colonies during World War II. In 1994, radio in the Great Lakes region of Africa was again in the headlines due to the Rwandan RTLM (Radio-Television Libre Mille Collines). It is likely that not since the Nazi propaganda machine has radio been used so effectively to incite violence. In the case of Rwanda, an estimated 800,000 people were killed, many at the hands of killers incited to violence by the words heard on RTLM. Essentially, radio has had a legacy of divisiveness and hatred in this part of Africa. But if radio can be used so

effectively to promote hate, can it not then also be used at least as effectively to promote peace? This will be a point of discussion later in this paper.

Just as it is in many other African nations, radio in the DRC remains the most popular medium due to the high cost of print publications and low literacy rates. According to the United States Department of State, in early 2002, 10 radio stations operated in Kinshasa, including Radio Okapi, Raga FM, and Elikya. La Voix du Congo, the state controlled broadcast network is also available in the capital and throughout the country. Until the launch of Radio Okapi, La Voix du Congo reached the largest numbers of Congolese.

Opposition parties continue to have difficulty gaining access to state-owned broadcasts, and private radio is consistently less critical of the government than private Congolese newspapers. This may be related to the government's ongoing threats to shut down private stations if they do not comply with the press law. As a result, Radio Okapi is crucial for allowing different voices to be expressed and heard.

There are seven television stations broadcasting in Kinshasa, three of which are controlled by the state. State-owned stations include RTNC, which offers terrestrial and satellite TV, and Television Congolaise, which is affiliated with RTNC. Private TV stations include Antenne A, Canal Z, Canal Kin 1, Canal Kin 2, and Radiotelevision Kin Malebo (RTKM).

In 2001, the government reversed its position and banned foreign broadcasts. In 1999, privately owned radio and television stations in DRC were ordered to cease transmissions of foreign broadcasts. The order was aimed at Elikya, a Catholic station which rebroadcasts Radio Vatican, and Raga FM, which broadcasts Voice of America (VOA), BBC World Service, and Deutsche Welle. In 2001, however, Kikaya worked with VOA to lift the ban. By early 2002, both VOA and BBC had resumed broadcasts in Kinshasa.

Into this mix came Radio Okapi, a radio network named after a rare African forest animal, related to the giraffe. Significantly, it has the same name in all the languages of DRC and is considered to be a symbol of peace.

VI. RADIO OKAPI

Set up in February 2002, Radio Okapi is a joint project of MONUC (the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) and Hirondelle Foundation, a Swiss NGO. With a staff made up of mostly native Congolese journalists and broadcasters, Radio Okapi produces news, music, and information on MONUC activities; it has the goal of becoming the first media outlet to provide national coverage regardless of political affiliation reaching both

government- and rebel-held territory, on FM and shortwave.

In an interview with Radio Netherlands, David Smith, MONUC's Chief of Information, explained what he believes is the strength of Radio Okapi. "There is no single voice that unites all the Congolese people. This radio project will allow people in rebel held territories to speak to people in government-controlled territories for the first time since the war broke out. A big role of the radio will be to convince people that it's in their interest to lay down their arms, and either be repatriated to heir home country, if they come from somewhere else, or to find ways to join civil society and leave the war behind." (Media Network, 2003)

The purpose of Radio Okapi is slightly different than UN radio missions in the past. UNPROFOR's (in former Yugoslavia) main mission was to operate a public information program, the purpose of which was to explain the mission's mandate. UNTAG (Namibia) and UNTAC (in Cambodia) were different also in that their goal was to educate voters about upcoming election processes. In all of these cases, however, the radio mission was solely a part of the United Nations peacekeeping operations. And at least in UNTAC's case, the ultimate goal was simply to provide an environment for free and fair elections and once that was completed the station closed -- there was unfortunately no intention of ongoing intervention.

Radio Okapi is the first radio operation for which the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has partnered with an NGO, perhaps in an effort to evolve and develop new models. Equally, it could be an effort at sustainability, something UNTAC was not able to achieve although it was not a part of its mission.

According to Radio Okapi, which has been on air for 3 years now, the regional stations have multiplied (there are now nine with another one projected) and they believe they have made the first steps towards reunification of the country by way of the only program broadcast across the frontlines in both government- and rebel-held territory, on FM and shortwave. Their journalists have reported on the peace process, both steps forward and backward, successes and failures, hopes and deceptions.

Another of the network's mandate is to explain what the United Nations is doing in the DRC and the limits of that mandate, something that has not always been understood. Foreign combatants, including many Rwandans, for whom the time of disarmament and repatriation has come but who have not yet left are also addressed. Other programming is dedicated to health, education, human rights, culture and music, the last of which is crucial in gaining the interest of Congolese radio listeners. Radio Okapi also intends to collaborate with other media in the DRC, particularly with Congolese radio stations in terms of

both production of content and training.

The decision to broadcast in the five major languages in the DRC (French, Lingala, Swahili, Tshiluba and Kikongo) was very likely crucial to the success of Radio Okapi. Indeed, as Merrill and Fardon et. al. suggest one key issue for African radio stations has always been that of language and in which language to broadcast. Language is closely associated with the issue of culture and the use of one language in broadcasting to the exclusion of others sends a message that one culture is being promoted and safeguarded while others are being neglected.

VII.   RADIO OKAPI AND A HOLISTIC ANALYSIS

As suggested above, in discussing the role of media in conflict and conflict-stressed states, we rely on literature from a number of disciplines: communication, political science and sociology and to rely on only one of these bodies of work merely does a disservice and limits our understanding of the situations and thus the implementation of future such projects. But how does Radio Okapi fit such a holistic model? By examining how aspects of both social development and political development and peacebuilding fit the example of Radio Okapi will serve to further our understanding of the utility of such a model.

Radio Okapi can fit into a model of radio as social developer in several ways. First, an NGO is clearly involved, albeit in partnership with an IGO. Second, at least some of Radio Okapi's programming is dedicated to health, education, human rights, culture and music, crucial as suggested by the past successes of UNESCO and FAO. Indeed, if Olorunnisola is correct than this type of programming can reduce the stress attached to the simple day to day challenges of living in a developing country which could then further lead to political development.

But how does Radio Okapi then fit into a model of political development, conflict resolution and peacebuilding? First, the mere fact that there is an additional station or network broadcasting different voices adds some sense of democratization. In addition, as Price suggests, there needs to be collaboration between NGOs and IGOs, precisely as is being done with Radio Okapi. As a result, there tends to be politicization of the NGO (Hirondelle Foundation) simply because it is associated with the IGO (MONUC). Indeed, in the case of Radio Okapi, the IGO is more political and conflict-oriented while the NGO is geared towards social development, however, both are working towards the same end – peacebuilding, which must, as has been noted, include social development in the DRC. Radio Okapi also plays several of the roles Manoff suggests can be played by media in prevention and

management of conflict including channeling communication between parties, educating and framing and defining the conflict in addition to simply providing information as to the current status of the political environment.

In addition, legitimization of the media intervention, as posited by Heiber, is crucial and in fact this particular intervention is legitimized in that it has received a mandate from the UN while ensuring that others are actively engaged as well (this would include Congolese who work for the network in addition to the Swiss-based Hirondelle Foundation).

Clearly, the case of Radio Okapi can be viewed as a multi-faceted media intervention that begs to be examined more fully than under the rubric of either social development theories or political development theories; neither one nor the other is enough. It is essential that such work be more fully understood so that any future work (both practical and academic) will be successful in assisting in what seems to be the growing field of media and conflict resolution.

VIII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE MEDIA INTERVENTIONS

The lessons taught by Radio Okapi are many.
- There needs to be a myriad of players and partners involved including IGOs, NGOs, and

citizens of the country/ies in question. The UN on its own may not be sufficient particularly in a region where its mission may not be understood.
- We need to find some way to involve ordinary citizens and give them a voice.
- The use of several languages must absolutely be considered if a media intervention is to succeed in a multilingual environment. There is a desire to reach as many people as possible thus the need to broadcast in several languages – a task that can prove daunting, yet not insurmountable.
- There must be long-term planning. There needs to be a balance between short-term (maintenance of order) and long-term goals (building a viable indigenous media system.
- There must be follow up. Some view UNTAC radio mission as a failure precisely because of the lack of follow up. Organizations, be they IGO or NGO, cannot simply parachute in. There must be commitment for the media are not simply injectable; there are no simplistic solutions
- Given the complexities of such situations, the remedies must be transnational for we live in an interactive, transnational world.
- Although there are significant challenges, there needs to be

some way to measure the effectiveness of such projects for how can one quantify the role that radio, or media in general, plays in peacebuilding. Indeed, what are the measures used to gauge peacebuilding?

- Priority needs to be placed on sustaining the impact of such training. Therefore there needs to be some mechanism put in place so that local staff are trained and self-sufficient before foreign staff depart.

- Local partnerships are crucial thus bringing diverse people together to work on a long-term, peacemaking project.

REFERENCES

Adam, G. (1995). Radio's Peacekeeping Potential. *Crosslines,* 3(1).

Cholmondeley, H. (2004). Former staffer UNDP, UNOMIL and UNESCO. Personal communication.

Daloz, J.P. & Verrier-Frechette, K. (2000). Is Radio Pluralism an Instrument of Political Change? In R. Fardon & G. Furniss (Eds.). *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

De Beer, A.S., Kasoma, F.P., Megwa, E.R., & Steyn, E. (1995). Sub-Saharan Africa. In J.C. Merrill (Ed.), *Global Journalism: Survey of international communication*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Fardon R. & Furniss, G. (Eds.), (2000). *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Head, S.W. (1974). *Broadcasting in Africa: A continental survey of radio and television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hieber, L. (1998). Media as Intervention: A report from the field. *Track Two*, 7(4).

Howard, R. (2002). *An Operational Framework for Media and Peacebuilding*. Vancouver: Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society.

Howard, R., Rolt, F., van de Veen, H. & Verhoeven, J. (Eds.). (2003). *The Power of the Media: A Handbook for Peacebuilders.* Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention.

Hyden G., Leslie, M. & Ogundimu, F.F. (Eds.), (2002). *Media and democracy in Africa*; New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.

Manoff, R. (1998). Role Plays: Potential media roles in conflict prevention and management. *Track Two,* 7(4).

Merrill, J.C. (Ed.), (1995). *Global Journalism: Survey of International Communication, 3ʳᵈ ed.* White Plains, NY, Longman Pubs.

Mwakawago, D. (1986). Radio as a Tool for Development. In Wedell, G. (Ed.) *Making Broadcasting Useful: the African Experience. The Development of Radio and Television in Africa in the 1980s*. Manchester, England: University Press, 1986.

Myers, M. (2000). Community Radio and Development: Issues and Examples from Francophone West Africa. In R. Fardon & G. Furniss (Eds.). *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Olorunnisola, A.A. (1997). Radio and Africa rural communities: Structural strategies for social mobilization. *Journal of Radio Studies*, 4, 242-257.

Price, M. (Ed.) (2000). Restructuring the Media in Post-Conflict Societies: Four perspectives: The experience of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. A background Paper for the UNESCO World Press Day Conference in Geneva, May 2000.

Radio Netherlands. (2004). *Peace Radio: Democratic Republic of Congo*. http://www.rnw.nl/realradio/dossiers/html/congo-p.html

U.S. Department of State (2001). *Congo, Democratic Republic of the. Country Report on Human Rights Practices*. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8322.htm)

Wedell, G. (Ed.) (1986) *Making Broadcasting Useful: The development of radio and television in Africa in the 1980s.* Dover, NH: Manchester University Press.

---

*Biographical Statement:

Michelle Betz is a lecturer in the Radio-TV Division where her specialties include broadcast journalism and broadcast performance. Betz also launched and continues to advise the campus radio station, WGKN. Her professional experience includes segment producing for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's network television morning news program. She also assisted with the coverage of the 1994 Winter Olympics in Norway and worked in London for Canadian Television (CTV). She continues to freelance for the Orlando Sentinel, Florida Today, The Toronto Globe

and Mail and CBC Radio and has conducted training for National Public Radio's Next Generation Radio Projects. In 2002, Betz was awarded the Excellence in Journalism Education Fellowship by RTNDF and in 2003 was awarded a Knight International Press Fellowship and spent four months working in Rwanda. Betz was awarded a second Knight International Press Fellowship and will spend 5 months in 2005 in Morocco training journalists. Her research focuses on the role of the media in international conflict and conflict resolution.