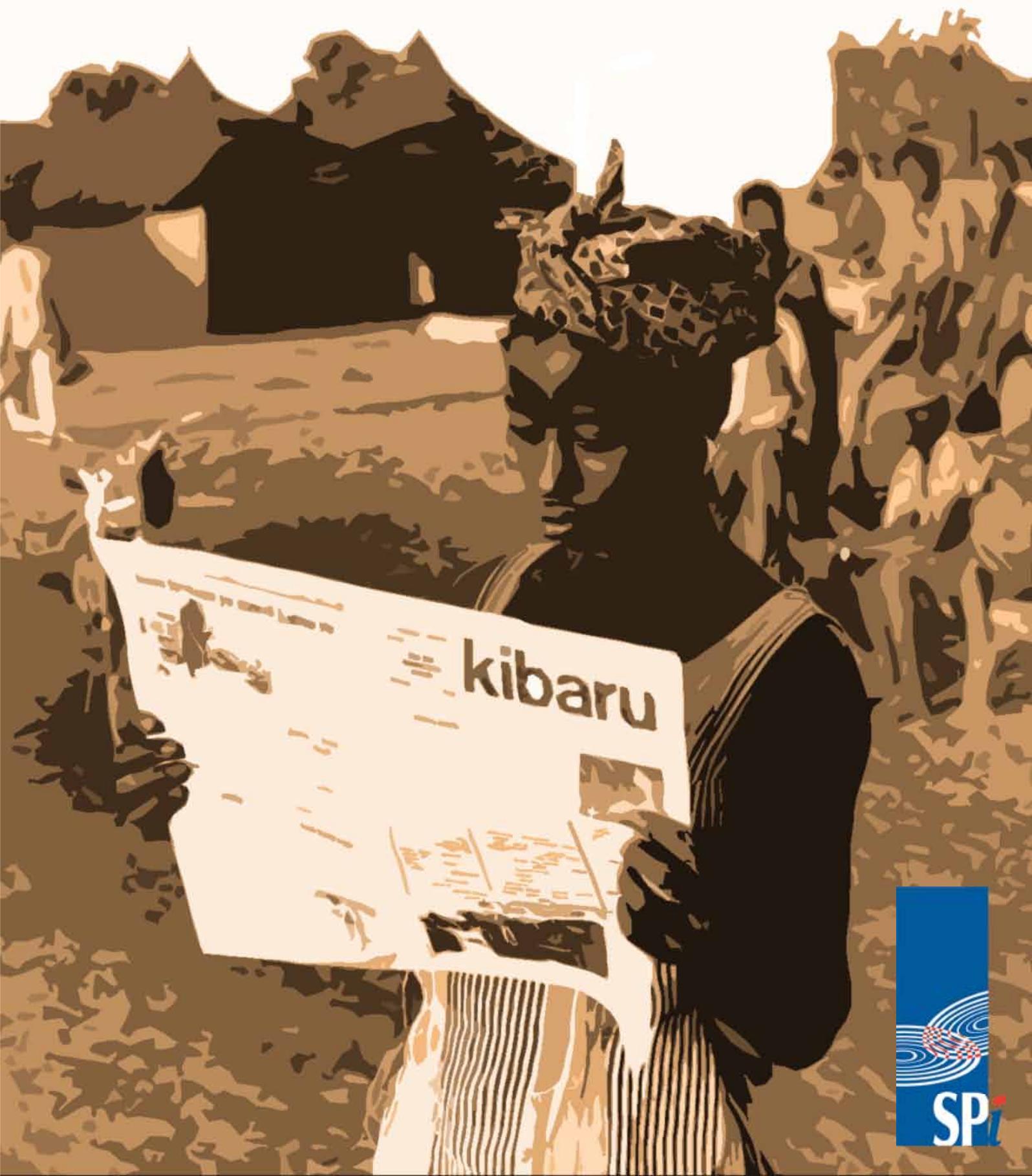


Conflict Sensitive Reporting

A TOOLBOX FOR JOURNALISTS





RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn



School of Journalism & Media Studies
Rhodes University, South Africa



Published by the Conflict Sensitive Journalism Project, Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership, School of Journalism & Media Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

March 2012



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

A UNESCO-supported
publication



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CONFLICT SENSITIVE REPORTING: A TOOLBOX FOR JOURNALISTS

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Background to the toolbox and author's comments

The first draft of this Toolbox for Conflict Sensitive Reporting was written in 2010 as part of a Unesco-supported project run by the Conflict Sensitive Journalism Project (CSJP) at Rhodes University in South Africa. The goal of this project was to develop a new curriculum in conflict sensitive reporting and to pilot this curriculum with reporters from a number of different conflict-affected countries.

The toolbox was developed as takeaway material that could help course participants remember what was covered and enable them to review lessons in greater depth. The new curriculum, together with the toolbox, was first piloted during a workshop in Nairobi in 2010 that the CCSR hosted in partnership with Internews-Kenya. The workshop included participants from Southern Sudan, Northern Uganda and Kenya's Rift Valley; all regions that had recently experienced severe conflict. Since then the course has been offered to participants from other conflict zones and in all instances it has been well received. It became clear during these workshops that journalists were sharing the toolbox with colleagues who had not attended the course and that many were finding it useful. This led to the decision to develop the toolbox further so that it could function as a stand-alone resource for journalists working in areas experiencing conflict.

In developing this toolbox further the CCSR drew on the experience of five seasoned journalists with experience in covering conflict in a wide range of contexts to ensure the ideas presented were relevant and that the different strategies proposed could be useful. The journalists and the author spent a weekend together constructively critiquing the original toolbox and making suggestions about some additions that could prove useful to others reporting on conflict. The comments and suggestions made by the five journalists have greatly enhanced the text and several of the tips and strategies proposed in this toolbox are based on ideas that emerged during this workshop. The journalists therefore played a dual role as editorial board and co-authors of this text.

The team included:

Cris Chinaka – Zimbabwe

As Reuters Correspondent for Southern Africa from 1990 to 1995, Cris has covered wars and conflicts, peace talks and elections in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe between 1990 and 1995. Since then he has served as Reuters' chief correspondent for Zimbabwe and has reported on the dramatic developments that have been happening in his home country for almost two decades. Cris has a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism from the Indian Institute of Mass Communications.

Barbara Among – Uganda

Barbara has covered conflicts of different levels of intensity across Uganda and in nearby countries. She has considerable experience of covering the civil war in Northern Uganda and has been on the frontline of the fighting in Somalia.

Barbara is now the News Editor for weekend papers under the Nation Media Group in Uganda. She has been a senior reporter for the New Vision newspaper and a special correspondent for the East African. Barbara has a degree in mass communication, majoring in print journalism, from Makerere University in Kampala.

Nicodemus Kioko Kivandi – Kenya

Much of Kioko's work has focused on the aftermath of the post-election violence that flared after Kenya's disputed 2007/2008 general election. As a journalist and acting Station Manager for Radio Amani in the Rift Valley he continually grapples with the question of how to understand and report on conflicts between ethnic groups in Kenya. Radio Amani is a community station run by the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru. Kioko is currently reading for an MA in literature from Egerton University.

James Mphande – Malawi

James is a former editor of both The Sunday Times and The Daily Times newspaper in Malawi, publications owned by Blantyre Newspapers Limited. James completed an MBA in 2010 and is now working full-time as a consultant. He has many years of experience as a journalist in Malawi and has covered a wide range of different conflicts. James argues that while Malawi is generally seen to be peaceful there are many low-level conflicts that are simmering.

Setsabile Sibisi – Swaziland

Setsabile is deputy news editor at the state-owned Swazi TV Authority and hosts a regular panel discussion dealing with social issues that are affecting people on the ground in Swaziland. She has extensive experience in covering different forms of conflict.

Peter du Toit – South Africa

Peter has been facilitating conflict sensitive reporting courses for more than fifteen years and has worked with journalists from across Africa and in South East Asia. Prior to becoming a fulltime trainer and educator, Peter worked with provincial newspapers in South Africa and was news editor of a small news agency that concentrated on development news, and cut his journalistic teeth reporting on South African's transition to democracy. He is currently the Deputy Director of the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership (SPI) which falls under the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, and heads the SPI's Conflict Sensitive Journalism Project (CSJP). His qualifications include a BA Hons (Politics) from the University of Port Elizabeth, a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism and Media Studies from Rhodes and an M.Ed from Rhodes.

The thinking behind this toolbox

Journalists across the world face deep dilemmas when it comes to reporting on conflicts that are occurring in and sometimes devastating the communities they live and work in. Every day they respond to the challenges of being part of communities caught up in conflict while at the same time being part of a profession that expects fair and even-handed coverage of these conflicts.

When the people, places, issues, principles and beliefs journalists care about are threatened by conflict, they are often called upon to make difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible choices. Where do the journalists' loyalties lie? Do their allegiances belong to their profession or to their communities? Whose interests should the journalists be trying to serve? These choices become even harder to make when the media houses those journalists work for are owned or managed by people who are promoting the interests of a particular group.

This *Toolbox for Conflict Sensitive Reporting* is intended to address some of these questions and to provide journalists with tools they can use in confronting these challenges.

Core assumptions underpinning this toolbox

There are five interrelated assumptions at the heart of this toolbox that underpin the thinking behind this approach to conflict sensitive reporting.

Assumption One, which is based on lessons from the field of peace and conflict studies, is that conflicts cannot be sustainably managed or resolved unless the needs and interests of all parties involved are satisfied to an acceptable level.

Assumption Two suggests that journalists can make a positive contribution towards the peaceful management and resolution of conflict in their communities by helping to create conditions that allow for the needs and interests of various parties to be met.

Taken together these statements are significant, because they suggest journalists can serve the interests of their own communities only if they also serve the interests of others involved in the conflict. The journalist's ability to make a difference is thus contingent on his or her commitment to providing fair, accurate, responsible and comprehensive¹ coverage and on his or her willingness to explore the hopes, fears, needs and concerns of all parties caught up in a conflict as far as possible.

While fairness, accuracy and responsibility are all generally associated with good, professional news coverage, this toolbox suggests that these characteristics alone may not be enough. If journalists wish to meaningfully contribute to managing and resolving conflict they also need to be aware of the contributions they can make to easing tensions and to enhance their

¹ The term balance is generally used to discuss even-handed treatment of parties in conflict. However, the word balance also suggests that there are two sides involved. The fact is that many conflicts involve more than two sides. Presenting a bipolar picture of a conflict can mean that small but significant stakeholders are neglected which can have serious repercussions. Using the term comprehensive rather than balanced drives home the need to address a wider range of concerns.

understandings of the causes of conflict, the dynamics of conflict escalation and how conflicts can be addressed. Assumption Three is that the more journalists understand about conflict, the better equipped they will be to report on events and processes in way that enhances the likelihood of parties achieving peaceful solutions.

Not only must journalists be aware of the contributions they can make to promoting peace, they should also become conscious of how their reporting can impact negatively on conflict. Inaccurate reports, biased coverage (intentional or not), sensationalism and in some instances outright propaganda can exacerbate conflict and result in loss of life and destruction of property. Veteran Reuters correspondent Cris Chinaka from Zimbabwe is emphatic about this point:

The normal recourse for bad or misleading journalism is the courts. People who have been harmed by the media can generally take action and demand justice through arbitration. But when you are talking about escalated conflict the costs can be measured in lives. There is no going back. You can't deliver justice on bad journalism during times of conflict; not to the people who have been harmed or to those who have lost loved ones.

Assumption Four is that while journalists can make a positive contribution to creating conditions that facilitate the peaceful management and resolution of conflict, this does not mean they should promote the agenda of a particular group or advocate a particular solution. Journalists should be very wary of assuming that they understand why parties in conflict want what they want and do what they do without giving the parties themselves a chance to explain. Keeping an open mind is key and journalists must be aware that solutions that seem self-evident to them may in no way address the concerns of other parties.

The Fifth assumption underpinning this toolbox is that journalists need to be constantly reflecting on the impact of their work and on the degree to which they are meeting the needs of their audiences. Not only does this mean adopting a conflict-sensitive approach to the gathering and presentation of news, but it also means finding ways to tell conflict-sensitive stories in an engaging and compelling manner. If these stories cannot capture the attention of listeners, viewers and readers then the impact of this journalism on a conflict will be limited. This is especially the case today as media channels proliferate and people become more reliant on social media networks for their news and information.

Some editors and journalists have suggested that conflict-sensitive reporting is overly idealistic and that stories that are informed by this way of thinking won't sell or attract audiences. For these journalists stories must foreground the most dramatic events and stories about peace can seldom compete with stories about violent confrontations and public mudslinging. But this does not have to be true; not if journalists can show how peace-related stories concern issues that impact on people's lives. In some cases where conflicts have been ongoing and violent any suggestion that peace might be a possibility can be the most dramatic news of the day. Even the smallest conciliatory gesture that signals the possible beginning of the end of long-term hostilities might warrant a front-page lead. To audiences living with conflict and its consequences there may be nothing

of greater significance and interest than the prospects of a ceasefire or an end to conflict. These stories, however, often remain untold. There are times when journalists need to think beyond the conventions of day-to-day reporting and to consider whether an event demands a more creative response; a response that highlights the unexpected and allows people to see and understand a conflict differently.

Who is this toolbox for?

The toolbox has primarily been developed for journalists who are reporting on conflicts taking place in their own communities and whose coverage will reach the people directly involved in and affected by the conflict. The principles are relevant for journalists covering conflicts within and between communities, between citizens and authorities and between groups whose different identities appear to drive them apart. They are also intended to be of relevance to journalists covering escalated and violent confrontations as well as to those whose work focuses on more low-level disputes that sometimes, but by no means always, have the potential to escalate into conflagrations.

Feedback from people who have already used this text suggests that the ideas included here are also useful to journalists reporting on conflicts for media located outside the conflict zones but whose coverage extends into the conflict arena.

What does the toolbox aim to accomplish?

This toolbox aims to do the following:

- Encourage journalists to recognise that they can make a constructive difference during times of conflict and that they can do so without compromising their roles as providers of fair, accurate and responsible reporting.
- Help journalists to recognise how they may unwittingly exacerbate conflict and encourage them to consider the impact of certain practices.
- Help journalists to see how, by enhancing their understanding of conflict and the theories that explain it, they can provide more informed, accurate and comprehensive coverage.
- Enable journalists to identify a variety of roles they can play in reporting on conflict and explore how, by fulfilling these roles, they can make a difference.
- Suggest strategies that journalists can adopt in reporting on conflict.
- Provide some simple but useful tips and points that can assist journalists in reporting effectively on conflict.

There's a well-worn adage that says "if the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer, then every problem begins to look like a nail." It's an expression that talks directly to the objectives of this Toolbox for Conflict Sensitive Reporting because it does aim to provide journalists with a range of different tools they can use in understanding and analysing conflict. It also aims to show how, by approaching conflict stories in different ways, journalists can make a diverse range of contributions toward peace.

The toolbox makes a few brief points about personal security, but is not intended as a survival guide for reporters working in war zones and other

situations that have turned violent. There are several websites that provide advice on staying safe in hazardous situations including the International News Safety Institute (see <http://www.newssafety.org>), the Committee to Protect Journalists (see <http://cpj.org/reports/2003/02/journalist-safety-guide.php>) and the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (see <http://dartcenter.org/>).

Toolbox structure

This toolbox is divided into seven parts, each of which is designed to build on the other. Part One draws on the field of peace and conflict studies in highlighting some concepts that are useful to journalists wanting to understand conflict. Part Two explores a number of roles journalists can play in making a positive contribution to peace-building. Part Three explores some issues journalists should be reflecting on as they report on conflicts while Part Four explores concepts that can help journalists report comprehensively on conflict. Part Five discusses how journalists should report on conflicts as they develop, Part Six suggests a range of practical reporting strategies and Part Seven provides some general tips for the field. The Toolbox ends by recommending websites that will benefit journalists reporting on conflict.

While it's common for texts of this nature to suggest that readers go directly to the practical sections of the text and to return to the more theoretical sections only if they are interested, it should be noted that this toolbox does not work this way. The theory addressed in Parts One and Two are essential to understanding this approach to conflict-sensitive reporting and provide the basis for the practical suggestions that come later. It's important for readers who want to get the full benefit of this text to engage with the theory from the outset and to consider how they can use it in their work.

Part one: understanding conflict

Think about the last story you covered. Chances are that some form of conflict was at the centre of the story. Why? Because conflict is ubiquitous. It permeates every aspect of social existence. Conflict is also always about change. Among other things, it's about people trying to meet unfulfilled needs, enhance their influence, defend their identities, gain increased access to resources and reduce inequalities and injustice. It can also be about people resisting change and fighting to maintaining privilege. Conflict is an important driver of change and change is at the heart of almost all reporting. It's what makes news news. Journalism is about the impact change has on individuals, communities, groups and nations, political structures, economies and the natural environment. And people rely on journalists to help them orientate themselves to in the world around them and respond to shifting social and political environments. People also rely on the information they get from journalists in deciding how to react to conflict, how they should feel about others in the conflict and how they should behave towards them.

If conflict is such an important part of news and the stories we cover, then it should be clear that the more we understand about conflict—its causes, dynamics and prospects for resolution—the better our reporting will be. Conflict is almost always more complex than it seems and we can make good use of thinking tools from the field of peace and conflict studies to enhance our understanding of what is happening and why. These tools can help us get beyond the rhetoric of groups involved in disputes and confrontations and help us explore the underlying causes of a conflict. They can also help us identify solutions that have the potential to satisfy all of the stakeholders involved. These tools can also help us to understand when we, as journalists, might aggravate conflicts by oversimplifying issues and by using loaded language that promotes antagonism.

The next few pages will introduce a range of useful concepts, theories and tools that can assist us in (1) enhancing our understanding of conflict, (2) equipping us to tell stories about conflicts that explain their complexity, and (3) consider the impact of our own reporting on conflict. What is important about these concepts is that they can be applied in a wide variety of different contexts. Lessons that we learn from small intergroup conflicts can also prove useful when we are looking at conflict on a national or international level.

We'll begin this section by examining a common definition of conflict, before we move to a more detailed look at how different aspects of conflict relate to each other.

1.1 What is conflict?

Some journalists will find the introduction to this section puzzling. They are likely to agree that their stories generally involve change, but dispute the description of these as conflict stories. They will argue that few if any of their stories involve any form of violence and many do not even include angry exchanges of any sort. How, they will ask, can you talk about conflict unless

there is some visible confrontation? This is an important question which sheds light on the way many people think about conflict.

To get clarity on this question we first need to recognise that violence and conflict are not synonymous. Violence is a manifestation of conflict and can serve a range of different functions simultaneously. For instance, when demonstrators from a poorly-serviced informal settlement hurl stones at police cars they can be doing several things at once. These could include:

- venting anger about their frustration at the lack of development in their area;
- communicating dissatisfaction to authorities (the police come to represent the State);
- attracting media attention so that pressure is placed on authorities to do something;
- demonstrating that they are not powerless; and/or,
- threatening authorities with the prospect of heightened violence.

Violence involves one party taking deliberate action to hurt another. It does not have to involve the use of physical force. Violence can also take the form of withholding material goods. Stopping food from reaching refugees causes great suffering and should also be understood as a form of violence. So too, any action that aims to undermine people's sense of self and identity, such as violating human rights or withholding political rights, can be seen as violent. Understood from this perspective the act of stuffing ballot boxes is more than cheating: it's a form of violence perpetrated against the voting public. Along these lines verbal abuse should also be seen as a violent act, because the abuser's goal is to inflict harm on the other.

Conflict is a much more complex phenomenon that may, but does not always, involve parties resorting to violence. For the purposes of this discussion we will work with a definition of conflict provided by South African conflict specialist Mark Anstey² who suggests that:

*Conflict exists in a **relationship** when parties **believe** their aspirations cannot be achieved at the same time, or **perceive** a divergence in their **values, needs or interests** (latent) and **purposefully mobilise** the power that is available to them in an effort to **eliminate, neutralise, or change** each other to **protect or further** their interests in the interaction (manifest conflict).*

From this definition a number of things become clear:

- Conflict takes place within **relationships** and it's clear that the nature of these relationships will have an important influence on the way the conflict plays out. Where parties have longstanding histories of antagonism and hostility the prospects of finding mutually satisfactory outcomes without confrontation is diminished. Where there's a history of having dealt with contentious issues in a constructive manner, the likelihood of a peaceful outcome is enhanced.
- Parties' **beliefs and perceptions** play a tremendously important role in shaping how a conflict plays out. The fact that a party believes something is true can be as important as the reality of whether that belief is justifiable or not. For instance, when one group believes they have a claim on 'ancestral

2 Anstey, M. 2008. Managing Change: Negotiating Conflict. Cape Town: Juta.

land' while another does not recognise historical claims, conflict is likely. Similarly, when one group is convinced another is acting against it in a deliberately threatening way, whether or not the threat is intended can be irrelevant. The group will base its behaviour on what it assumes to be true.

- Conflict will always involve parties' **needs, values and interests** (These points will be discussed in more depth later).
- Conflict can exist in a **latent state** for a long time until one of the parties begins taking steps that will alter the status quo. It's often possible for parties to be largely unaware of the potential for conflict until something happens that alerts people to a problem. Communities may live happily side-by-side sharing common land for grazing until a mineral resource is discovered on that land. Then tensions may begin to rise. Similarly, members of a large church can worship contentedly for years until someone raises the question of ordaining gay priests. People may have been unaware of the issue or preferring to avoid it in the hopes of escaping conflict. However, the moment the question is formally put on the agenda, the conflict tends toward becoming manifest.

Conflict becomes manifest when parties begin to:

- Deliberately **mobilise** the **power** that they have available. This power can take many forms and can include the use of military hardware by governments and rebels, strike action and lock-outs by unions and corporations, hunger strikes by prisoners and demonstrations by marginalised citizens. It can also involve parties using their wealth to buy advertising aimed at swaying public opinion, or the strategic use of social media to win support and to advocate for collective action, consumer boycotts and sit-ins. Often the threat of mobilisation can be enough to make a difference. Parties fearing repercussions may make concessions. However, threats can also result in a hardening of attitudes and a refusal of parties to be accommodating. In some instances parties can tackle conflicts by simply marshalling the most convincing arguments and using these to persuade others to be more accommodating or to drop contentious claims.

While it is true that conflict all too often leads to violence, it should be clear from the above that confrontations are not necessarily a given. There are many instances where conflicts are managed and resolved without confrontation. Often this is because there are established mechanisms for addressing conflicts, which might include the courts, commonly agreed on rules and procedures or longstanding customs. It can also happen that as parties pursue a conflict they become aware of the validity of each other's claims and find ways to accommodate these peacefully. They may also come to understand that the actions taken by an opposing party are based on fear and this can influence how they choose to respond.

If we are going to make a difference in reporting on conflict, then it's important for us to think about it more broadly. We need to understand that conflict involves more than a confrontation that ends with winners and losers; it can also end peacefully with parties finding mutually satisfactory solutions. We also need to recognise that conflict can exist without parties even being aware of the danger of escalation to levels that may be destructive and harmful to all involved.

1.2 Identifying the causes of conflict

It stands to reason that if journalists want to play a role in helping parties to find solutions to conflicts, then they need to understand how the conflict may have started. They may never be able to uncover the precise cause of a conflict, but they can develop informed hypotheses founded on an enhanced understanding of the different factors that cause conflict. These informed hypotheses can help journalists formulate questions that enable them to explore the origins of the conflict in greater depth, which can help them to promote an all-round understanding of what is happening and why. It's important to acknowledge that a conflict may have more than one cause and journalists need to remain alert to the fact that they may well be missing something. Conflicts can be multi-causal and this increases the difficulty of finding lasting solutions.

Experts³ writing about conflict seem to be in agreement that most conflicts can be grouped under a number of descriptive headings that reflect their causal factors. These are:

Scarce Resources

If a community or nation does not have the resources to ensure a reasonable standard of living for everyone, then conflict is likely as groups and individuals compete for scarce resources. These can include material resources such as land and access to water and health services, or other benefits such as jobs and opportunities for personal advancement. Often such confrontations occur because parties want to make different use of the resources. For instance many rural areas in Africa are marked by conflict between nomadic people moving from place to place seeking grazing and pastoralists who do not want nomads crossing their fields. These conflicts are primarily about access to land as a resource, but they also take on ethnic and cultural dimensions as land-owners will tend to belong to one ethnic group while nomads belong to another.

It's not surprising that a large percentage of the world's serious conflicts happen in areas characterised by high levels of poverty. Conflicts over resources can also be severely aggravated in situations where there are noticeable inequalities in the distribution of resources. The theory of relative deprivation argues that when groups feel they are not getting a fair share of a resource of social good conflict is likely⁴. This problem can be aggravated when parties begin to make "invidious comparisons"⁵ with others. For instances, factory workers may be relatively content with their jobs and salaries until such time as they realise that people doing the same jobs, for the same company but in another town, are significantly better paid. The conflict would have been latent until workers became aware of the discrepancy, but it is likely to have escalated the moment they became aware of it.

Resource-based conflict can also occur in situations where dramatic shifts in societies and economies see people having to make compromises on things that

3 Many theorists have written about the sources and causes of conflict. This list has primarily been based on the work of Anstey (2008) and Bradshaw, G. (2008). *Conflict Management for South African Students*. Cape Town: New Voices.

4 See Pruit, D., & Kim, S.H. 2008. *Social conflict: escalation, stalemate and settlement* (3rd edition). Boston: McGraw Hill. p. 19-20.

5 Ibid. p. 23.

they might once have taken for granted. In oil-rich countries where people have grown used to highly-subsidised fuel, tremendous conflicts have occurred once they state has withdrawn the subsidies.

Human Needs⁶

Many conflict theorists argue that all people and groups have a range of basic human needs which need to be satisfied. These include physical needs, such as the need for food, clothing and shelter and physical security against harm. They also include identity needs which include the freedom to associate with people who share their ideological, political and religious beliefs and the freedom to express themselves frankly and openly without being threatened. Individual identity is often linked to groups, and individuals tend to see the group's structures, beliefs and attitudes as part of their extended selves. If something or someone threatens a group's identity then members of that group are also likely to perceive the threat as directed at themselves as individuals.

Group identity needs can have serious implications for conflict because they allow leaders to mobilise people around issues affecting group identity. It is also common for people pursuing their own agendas to manipulate people perceptions of threats to group identity as a way of mobilising people to their advantage. Other needs include the need for control (being able to make and carry out decisions about your own life), and the need for recognition (the expectation that others will acknowledge and respect an individual or a group's life choices).

The desire to fulfil human needs is believed to be so strong that when groups are unable to satisfy them by following conventional and accepted social and political processes they are likely to turn to other more contentious strategies. In so doing they may challenge the state, break laws and adopt violent and sometimes quite brutal tactics.

A key feature of these needs is that they are integral to the individual, are deeply rooted in groups and cannot be bargained away. It may be possible to accommodate these needs in different ways, but the needs themselves cannot be compromised. Addressing needs-based conflicts requires problem-solving processes designed to determine which needs are being frustrated and thinking creatively about how these can be accommodated.

Structural Imbalances

Conflict often occurs when there is an actual or perceived inequality of control of resources and the manner in which these are distributed. This occurs when one dominant group is able to use its power to entrench a privileged position and to use this position to secure an unequal distribution of resources. In pre-1994 South Africa, for example, white control over political processes and the instruments of state power ensured that the white minority controlled most of the country's wealth. In other instances political structures have been established to benefit people from particular ethnic or religious groups, often at the expense of others. Such structural imbalances often have their origins in

6 See Burton, J. 1990. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. London: Macmillan Press for a comprehensive explanation of needs theory.

colonial times when ethnic identities were either manipulated or ignored in the construction of modern states. Conflicts are also likely in post-colonial states when the interests of minority groups are not accommodated by the state. Prime examples of these problems occur when a minority group finds that a dominant group's language and faith have been imposed on them⁷.

Finding solutions to structural conflicts is exceptionally complex and may often involve a complete transformation of the society away from one political system to another more accommodating system. This can be a painful process as people who have benefited from the previous system are likely to be resistant to change, while people who have been oppressed, marginalised and denied access to resources in the past have expectations that cannot realistically be met in the short term. Moving beyond such conflicts means finding ways of addressing immediate problems, but also devising ways in which past inequalities can be redressed. It can also mean finding ways of ensuring previously privileged groups are not excluded from future opportunities in society and that systems are set in place to ensure all are treated fairly in the future.

Information and communication

Many conflicts occur in situations where the parties involved do not have sufficient access to the information they need to make informed decisions. In some instances this may have to do with parties not understanding each other's motives for acting in particular ways and their inability to communicate effectively with each other. It is common for parties in conflict to want to withhold information from each other in the hopes that this will give them an advantage. Anstey (2008) suggests that this strategic withholding of information can be detrimental to everyone. He argues that:

Lack of shared and legitimate information ... gives rise to power struggles and contributes to rising levels of mistrust in relations. Over and above this, it reduces the capacity of the parties to understand each other's stances on issues, contributing to the chances of misjudgement in embarking in trials of strength ... instead of matters being worked out on the basis of a common data base, they are fought out on the basis of position and principle informed by guess work and assumption.⁸

These problems can be exacerbated by the tendency of people to distort information to make it fit into a pre-existing understanding of a situation. People are likely to believe the worst of an opponent and it can become exceptionally difficult for someone wanting to make a conciliatory gesture to ensure someone from the other side understands this.

Instead of being seen as having made an effort to resolve a conflict or build a bridge between rival parties, a group's honest attempt to bring about positive change can be interpreted by the other as strategic manoeuvring to gain an advantage. Seen from this perspective the gesture is likely to be rejected and this in turn can lead to a hardening of attitudes by the party which initially sought to end the conflict.

7 Jeong, H. 2010. Conflict management and resolution: an introduction. London: Routledge. p. 121.

8 Anstey (2008: 29.)

Interpersonal relations

Conflicts between groups may sometimes have their origins in interpersonal conflicts. When influential people in communities are in conflict with each other they will frequently mobilise their supporters to gain an advantage over their opponents. In such instances supporters may participate in such struggles because they are genuinely loyal to their leaders. They may also be reliant on the leader's patronage. When conflicts are allowed to develop in this way they can take on a dynamic of their own, sometimes extending beyond the leader's sphere of influence. This is especially the case when conflicts of this nature turn violent and are accompanied by the destruction of property, injuries and deaths.

Cris Chinaka warns large-scale conflicts are seldom, if ever, the sole cause of a dispute and that people should resist the danger of "hyper-personalisation" which can conceal the real issues and distort the way in which people understand conflict. Cris suggests that:

Africa is dominated by big men and the news media often oversimplify the conflict. It's happened time and time again when some of the big men have left and the conflict is still on the table ... we put emphasis in the wrong areas sometimes.

Cris's argument does not deny the possibility that personality differences lie behind conflict, but it does serve as a caution against placing excessive attention on these issues. For leaders to mobilise people there must be other factors that are impacting on their followers.

Uncertainty

Conflict frequently breaks out during times of change, uncertainty and transition when new norms are being established and groups are grappling with the challenge of dealing with each other. In post-war situations these uncertainties can cause conflict to re-emerge. Differences may have been addressed on a macro-level, but bitterness and hatred between members of previously rival groups can persist. Conflicts can also emerge when combatants who have grown used to using force to achieve their objectives find themselves subject to civilian laws. For these people it can be extremely difficult having to submit to democratic processes that they may feel are not serving their interests. The challenge of dealing with these uncertain situations can be dramatically enhanced in countries that have been through violent transitions because of the proliferation of weapons.

Similarly, as countries adopt new constitutions as a means of addressing previous conflicts, parties can take time to adapt to the new constitutional requirements and the degree to which others' rights and liberties are protected. In situations where state security organs, the police, intelligence services and the military have dominated the political landscape, it can be difficult for them to adapt to being accountable to a civilian authority.

Goal incompatibility

There are many instances where parties' goals might be incompatible and which might result in conflict. A village might want to utilise unploughed land for growing crops while conservationists want to see the indigenous forest protected. A developer may want to build on seemingly vacant land, while a community might want to protect the graves of ancestors buried there. The list of possible confrontations is endless and the challenge is to find ways to meet the needs of all parties to a degree that all find satisfactory. It's important to note that it does not matter whether or not the parties' goals are actually incompatible, the fact that they perceive them to be so is all that is necessary for the conflict to exist.

However, while these categorisations provide a useful aid in helping to identify the causes of a conflict, the reality is that they seldom, if ever, occur in isolation. It's commonly the case that while one of these issues is dominant, the other factors may also be contributing to the conflict. For example: a conflict may appear to be structural in origin with members of a particular ethnic group being privileged over others, but it will also involve issues of human needs as the group that is being discriminated against feels that its identity needs are being ignored. At the same time the group that has benefitted from its dominance will also fear the impact of change and how this might spoil their ability to satisfy their own needs. It's also common that interpersonal differences between leaders of rival political factions will also contribute to the emergence of the conflict.

It's notable that in this discussion on conflict causes there is no mention of ethnicity or religion as causes of conflict. Although conflicts are often explained in terms of ethnic, religious, cultural or national differences we believe these terms are generally just labels that are used to conceal something else. We do not believe that the fact that people have different ethnic or religious backgrounds is a cause of conflict in itself. Conflicts may well have ethnic or religious dimensions to them, but the underlying causes of these conflicts will lie elsewhere, such as in the dimensions outlined above. People don't act violently just because they are different. In our opinion it is often easier for those in power to mobilise people along ethnic, cultural and religious lines than it is to garner support for their positions without these elements. People who share common cultures, values and beliefs are more likely to unite around the cause than people who don't, but we maintain that this is not ever a sufficient explanation for conflict. Having examined some of the factors that can play a causal role in starting conflict, the next section will explore some of the dynamics of what happens as conflicts escalate.

1.3 Stages of conflict development

This section concentrates on some of the different stages that conflicts go through as they escalate and begins to consider some of the different roles journalists might play in enabling parties to address conflicts constructively.



Latent conflict

Latent conflict occurs when conditions that have the potential to result in conflict exist, but have not yet been recognised by the parties involved. Latent conflict might be said to exist when a group decides to pursue a goal without recognising that this might be, or appear to be, incompatible with the goals of another group. The following are some examples of latent conflict:

- A group of farmers decides to set traps to stop predators stealing their sheep. In their minds the animals are vermin who are threatening their livelihoods. The farmers may be unaware that if they use the traps this might lead to conflicts developing between themselves and conservationists and animal-rights activists.
- Women in particular societies have dressed conservatively for generations, always wearing long dresses. In time some of the women decide they want to follow more modern trends and begin wearing skirts, mini-skirts and tight jeans. In doing so they may be setting themselves up for confrontations with men who cling to traditional values.
- A minority group in a particular country decides that it no longer wishes to remain part of the country or province dominated by people from another group. The conflict can remain latent until people decide they want to take action. The moment the minority group begins making demands for a territory of its own the conflict begins to emerge.
- People living in a particular community may have been tolerant of poor service delivery for many years. However, when they observe that other communities are getting services and that they are being left behind their frustration can develop.
- There are gross inequalities of incomes across a society which stem from the way in which the society is structured. Attempts to bring about change through conventional channels such as elections and political processes are thwarted. Resentment over the inequalities grows and people start to mobilise to bring about change.

There might be people who think that so long as a conflict remains latent, all is well. They may recognise that the conditions are there, but prefer to ignore them in the interests of keeping the peace. The problem with this approach is that issues never get addressed. The reality is that unless something happens it's unlikely that the concerns of all parties involved will be addressed. People can become increasingly frustrated and less tolerant of others without the conflict even having begun to really emerge. At times it can be important to identify latent conflicts and to make the issues visible so that they can be addressed.

Emerging conflict

Emerging conflict begins when groups perceive that they have mutually incompatible goals. It can also begin to emerge when a disadvantaged group decides that conditions are unjust and that they are no longer prepared to tolerate the status quo. In many cases groups have accepted the rule of dominant groups for lengthy periods, but as these communities became more conscious of their own exploitation they recognised the need for change. Conflict can emerge when one group starts to express the need for change, while the other makes it clear that they will resist change. At this stage it can be clear that parties acknowledge the existence of conflict and they may well have identified their opponents. They might have entered into negotiations and begun to signal that there is a need for change, while other groups might be making it equally clear that change will be resisted.

Manifest non-violent conflict

Non-violent conflict occurs when groups begin to mobilise their power in order to bring about change, while other groups prepare to resist it. This stage is often characterised by threats and attempts by parties to persuade others to see the conflict from their point of view and to persuade them to change their views. At the same time they will often try to mobilise as much support as possible. In doing so they will want to demonstrate that they are strong and that they have the capacity to either force the other to give in or will be able to resist any attempt to force them to capitulate. They will also try to convince outsiders that their cause is just, hoping external pressure will force opponents to relinquish their positions.

This stage of conflict can include relatively benign attempts to persuade others to concede to the party's demands. However, if the other parties refuse to make concessions or to capitulate, the initial party's actions can shift from persuasion to threats.

Violent conflict

Actual violent conflict begins when parties start using physical force against one another. This can mark the beginning of an extremely destructive phase that introduces a mass of new dynamics into the conflict. Not only will parties need to ultimately find ways of addressing the issues that originally led to the conflict, but they will also have to find ways of reconciling people and communities that have lost loved ones or been harmed during the confrontation.

An important aspect here is the fact that the progression from one level to the next is generally marked by a **triggering event** — something that happens which can push parties to escalate the conflict. Once conflicts become manifest this can mark the start of a **spiral of conflict**. Conflict triggers can take on many forms and may even be only tangentially related to the conflict. For example, when tensions exist between different political groups living in an informal settlement a dispute over a stolen chicken can trigger a massive confrontation between people from different factions. The excessive use of force by the police in controlling or preventing a demonstration has frequently served to trigger widespread violence when communities are demanding improved services. A dramatic example of a conflict trigger that had global ramifications was the death of Mohammed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor who set himself alight on 17 December 2010. Bouazizi's protest against the confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation he experienced at the hands of a municipal official sparked the uprising in Tunisia that marked the beginning of what has come to be known as the "Arab Spring" a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that swept around countries in the Arab world including Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco. The source of the demonstrations is believed to have been widespread dissatisfaction with authoritarian leadership, poverty, unemployment, human rights violations and government corruption. In the wake of Bouazizi's protest, four governments have been overthrown and several leaders have announced their intentions to step down at the end of their current terms.

When it comes to reporting on conflict journalists tend to concentrate their coverage on the last two stages of conflict escalation, frequently ignoring the latent and emerging stages of a conflict. This focus on the moments of real action rather than on the overall process can have a number of negative

implications. It can lead to audiences developing a distorted understanding of events. Instead of recognising that a conflict has welled up over time in response to a range of different issues, audiences can be left thinking the conflict flared without warning. Under these circumstances people will commonly blame those who seem to be the most belligerent without understanding that these people may have made repeated attempts to address issues without threats and violence. It can also mean that journalists miss out on opportunities to sound early warning signals about impending confrontations and this can mean people miss out on chances to solve conflicts before they become destructive.

Journalists will only be able to identify latent and emerging conflicts if they are spending time with communities and taking the time to learn about the things that are of concern. Journalists who stay in the newsroom and wait for things to happen will seldom pick up on conflicts until they reach the stages of actual confrontation.

1.4 Moderators and aggravators

Whether or not a conflict progresses through the four stages of escalation depends on a number of factors which can either moderate or exacerbate the conflict. If these factors can play a moderating role then it is possible that when events occur that might trigger escalation, the parties will be able to manage the situation and prevent it from escalating. If these moderators are absent or present, but in a negative sense, this can greatly increase the likelihood of conflicts escalating, being violently expressed and sometimes spiralling out of control. Being conscious of these factors can help reporters anticipate the likelihood of conflicts escalating and equip them to ask questions that highlight the potential consequences of allowing conflicts to escalate. Anstey⁹ identifies a range of factors that can either serve to moderate or aggravate a conflict. These include:

- **History.** Where parties share a common history of addressing previous conflicts peaceably this can help to reduce tensions and provide them with mechanisms and approaches they can draw on in preventing escalation. It can also mean they are able to work from a basis of trust. A history of antagonism and violence, however, will generally aggravate the conflict. Confronted with a conflict trigger, people will often reflect on past experiences and fall back on old prejudices, and this can lead to elevated levels of anger and exacerbate the potential for violence. Violent confrontations between groups will seldom occur unless there have been previous confrontations.
- **Shared values.** Where parties recognise each other's legitimacy and right to exist, this can contribute to creating conditions for peaceful dialogue. When parties refuse to acknowledge each other's rights to property, citizenship and political representation then the prospects for negotiation are limited and conflicts are likely to spiral.
- **The availability of alternatives.** When parties recognise that there are a range of possible solutions to a conflict they are less likely to allow it to escalate. However, in situations where they feel compromise is impossible they will often adopt all-or-nothing positions resulting in rapid escalation. It's especially important for people on the ground to be aware of alternative approaches to conflict so that they are not led into confrontations without being able to consider alternatives.

- **Acceptable conflict management forums.** If parties have access to mutually acceptable forums for dealing with conflict, this can help to prevent violence. Parties must regard these forums as both fair and effective. Without these forums parties may feel they have no choice but to use force.
- **Perceptions of justice.** If parties believe their goals are legitimate, this increases their likelihood of pursuing their goals and mobilising resources to achieve them. Clearly when both parties believe their cause is just, this can lead to severely escalated conflict.
- **Communication.** Where communication channels exist between parties the likelihood of conflict escalating is reduced. Conversely, if there are no effective communication channels then the possibility of misunderstandings and conflict spiralling increases.

1.5 What happens as conflicts escalate

Drawing on the work of a number of theorists, Anstey¹⁰ offers a useful model of conflict escalation that illustrates the changes that happen between parties as conflicts escalate. This model is useful because it helps journalists to anticipate what is likely to happen as a conflict develops and spirals. This can inform the kinds of questions we ask and our decisions about who to talk to. These shifts can include:

- **Issues and demands.** At the start of a conflict parties are likely to have a relatively limited range of demands and the issues they are talking about can often be quite well defined. However, as the conflict develops and parties become more entrenched, the number of demands can increase and the issues become less clearly defined. It can become harder to establish what the conflict is really all about and this in turn can impact on the prospects for resolutions.
- **Resources.** When a conflict starts out, parties will have invested only a small amount in trying to achieve their goals. However, as the conflict continues and the issues escalate they use up more and more of their resources. The more heavily invested parties become the more difficult it can be for them to withdraw or to compromise without achieving tangible benefits.
- **Participants.** The number of groups involved in a conflict frequently increases as it develops. A conflict between political parties can draw in people from different ethnic groups and religions which can see the conflict take on a whole range of different dimensions related to values and identity.
- **Perceptions.** The way groups perceive each other can change radically as conflict develops and stereotypes and prejudices become more entrenched. Groups begin to demonize each other and to project their own fears onto their opponents. They will also tend to believe that the other side should bear all the blame for aggression and conflict. A consequence of this is that parties take no responsibility for resolving the conflict themselves.
- **Communication.** Communication between groups changes from being relatively open and accurate to becoming hostile and antagonistic. These communications can also be distorted by parties' perceptions of each other to the extent that gestures towards reconciliation can be dismissed as deceitful attempts to gain tactical advantages.
- **Internal power dynamics.** It's common in times of crisis for groups to want to push more authoritative, less democratic people into leadership positions because they feel more secure with decisive leadership. This happens during

¹⁰ Ibid.:

conflict as the more hawkish leaders come to dominate over the doves. The dominance of the hawks in conflict can lead to greater intransigence and see parties becoming less amenable to compromises that might satisfy everyone.

As these changes happen within and between parties there are also likely to be significant changes in the tactics parties employ in trying to achieve their goals. These are:



As we can see from this model, as a conflict begins to emerge groups' feelings about each other will generally be neutral or even positive. As such they will still be in a position where they feel they can engage in joint **problem-solving**. This is the stage at which parties are most likely to be able to resolve conflict constructively. However, as the conflict escalates and various triggers raise emotions, the relationship between parties deteriorates and they will start trying to **persuade** the other to compromise, back-down or surrender. It's common at this stage for parties to try to convince opponents and other groups not directly involved in the conflict of the legitimacy of their demands.

If parties are unable to convince opponents to accede to their demands they are likely to begin using **threats**. These threats can involve warnings of the use of force, or the withdrawal of rewards. They can also involve parties mobilising resources to convince opponents of the seriousness of their threats. At an international level this might include conducting war games close to another nation's borders or testing missiles to demonstrate that they have the capacity to inflict harm. At a more local level this could involve protest marches and boycotts, all of which could be aimed at showing that a party has the power to mobilise the masses in support of their cause.

If opponents do not respond to threats, parties are likely to resort to force, including **violence**. At this stage parties will do whatever they can to mobilise their power, while simultaneously trying to reduce the goal-seeking potential of their opponents.

** Note: In some situations where the relationship between groups has deteriorated, it's possible that parties may not go through all of these stages when a latent conflict begins to emerge. The absence of a **valued relationship** and **trust** can mean that parties may behave in ways that feature higher up on the conflict escalation model.*

Just as a group's tactics can change as conflict escalates, so goals can also shift. At the start of a conflict parties are generally concerned with achieving the goals they have identified for themselves. They focus on their own interests and are less concerned with what other parties are doing. However, as conflict escalates parties become more aware that other parties are frustrating their attempts to achieve their goals. They begin throwing more resources into the conflict in the hope that their opponents will back down. However, **the more parties invest in a conflict the more important it becomes for them to succeed**. The more

they feel their opponents are deliberately frustrating their cause, the more they will want to defeat the other party. Winning, not just achieving their goals, can become a motive for continuing the conflict¹¹.

If the conflict escalates to the point where parties are inflicting harm on each other, they may reach a point where they feel winning is no longer enough and that their opponents must be punished. At this stage groups may lose sight of their original goals and begin to concentrate their energies on inflicting harm on each other and getting revenge. In many instances this can involve the use of extreme violence and tactics designed to inflict pain, such as drive-by shootings and car bombings.

1.6 Hazards of escalation

The primary problem with conflict escalation is that it relates to what was earlier referred to as the spiralling effect. As conflicts continue they become more and more complex and intense with issues increasing along with costs. An act of violence attracts an act of retaliation and this in turn attracts further retribution. The process becomes self-reinforcing as parties inflict more and more harm on each other. The more harm parties inflict on each other, the more issues there are to address before a climate of calm can be established and restored. The following are some consequences of conflict escalation that can complicate peace processes:

- Groups fear *losing face*. As conflict escalates it becomes increasingly difficult for leaders to argue in favour of compromise without losing face or being seen to be weak. During the course of a conflict leaders will spend a great deal of time posturing to their supporters and opponents. This makes it difficult to step back from hard-line positions without appearing to be weak and to be giving in. This can be made even more difficult if the media seek to rub the leaders' noses in their concessions. Is the glass half full or half empty? Did Party X make a generous concession in the name of progress or did Party X throw in the towel, quit or admit defeat?
- Groups develop *tunnel vision*. As conflict escalates parties become locked into promoting and defending their own positions and it becomes difficult for them to consider proposals from others. They often experience tunnel vision and find it difficult to view conflict creatively or recognise other parties' needs and interests.
- Groups can become more *cohesive*. As conflicts escalate group cohesion tends to become stronger. Groups apply pressure to their own members to conform to conflict modes of thinking and anyone advocating a moderate stance or approach to conflict can be discredited or branded as a traitor; sometimes with fatal consequences for the individual.
- Groups seek *revenge*. The suffering caused in conflict often leaves people with a strong desire to see opponents punished, especially as groups are seldom willing to recognise that harm is often inflicted on both sides. Groups that have been involved in human rights violations may fear reprisals once the conflict has ended and may feel it is better to continue fighting. How these issues are addressed can become deal breakers as parties take steps to resolve conflicts.
- The fact that conflicts can become so complex can leave groups at a loss as to where to start.

¹¹ Pruitt, D. 2007 Social conflict: some basic principles. *Journal of Dispute Resolution*, 151.

1.7 Recognising when violence is likely

It is important for journalists to be able to recognise when a conflict has reached the point when, given the right triggers, it can become violent. By recognising the signs we are well placed to ask questions that might help raise awareness about the dangers of a conflict being allowed to escalate and which help to encourage interventions before violent outbreaks occur. Being able to anticipate what might happen also places journalists in a better position to be able to manage conflict more effectively rather than being caught by surprise when violence emerges. Keep a look out for the following trends¹²:

- A high level of discontent and frustration on the part of one or all of the groups.
- One or more of the parties is threatened by the demands of another or by the prospects of change.
- There is an absence of trusted forums, procedures, or third parties for negotiation purposes or one or more parties feel that the available systems for regulating conflict are 'rigged' or unfair.
- Systems of social control, e.g. the police force, cannot be trusted.
- Parties cannot see alternatives to violence which might allow them to further or protect their interests.
- Parties believe violence is ideologically acceptable and, given the circumstances, legitimate.
- There is a track-record of violence in the relations between the parties.
- There is a breakdown of social norms as people struggle to find new ways of dealing with difference or change.
- Individuals do not see themselves as responsible within their group for preventing violence.
- There is evidence that group members have lost the ability to empathise.
- Crowd situations create a feeling of anonymity and decreased responsibility.
- Communication channels in the conflict are poor, allowing for rumours of potential attacks and violence and prompting people to misread situations.

If journalists are going to be able to anticipate the prospects of violence and to be able to reflect on this in reporting, then we need to become very familiar with the history of the relationship between the parties. This can mean conducting in-depth secondary research, but it can also mean simply spending time with the parties, talking to them about their pasts and asking questions that can enhance our understanding of the relationships between them.

1.8 Approaches to conflict

The conflict escalation model discussed earlier suggests a directly confrontational relationship between parties, but it's important to note that this need not be the case. Parties have a range of options that they can choose from which do not involve engaging in open hostilities. Some of these options can be highly advantageous to all the stakeholders, while others are likely to be detrimental to some parties in the short term and to all of them in the longer term. If journalists are aware of the challenges and benefits offered by these different approaches they will be equipped to ask relevant questions that shed light on the parties' strategies and on the likely consequences of their choices.

¹² See Anstey (2008: 324-325)

The following are different approaches that parties in conflict will commonly employ in order to achieve their goals. We begin with approaches that share the common assumption that conflicts must be **competitive** processes involving **winners and losers**; where one group's gains must in some way reflect the other group's losses. Having looked at the consequences of approaches underpinned by competitive assumptions we'll explore the benefits of parties adopting a **collaborative** approach to managing and resolving disputes¹³.

Domination or total victory:

Parties attempt to use their power to defeat the other party and to force them to concede. Such attempts can involve the use of physical force, mobilising people to participate in consumer boycotts, mass demonstrations and legal challenges.

Outcomes of this approach include the following:

- Parties come to believe that whoever can mobilise the most force will get what they want. The more frequently this happens the more this belief will be reinforced and the more parties will rely on outright power to achieve goals.
- Parties are deprived of the opportunity to learn about the other side and to grow themselves.
- Parties will mobilise as much force as they can to secure an outright victory. However, this in turn promotes a defensive response from the group that is being threatened. Both groups will be forced to commit more and more resources and both will sustain heavy losses. In the resulting conflict spiral the costs may exceed the benefits.
- Parties do not get to address the real causes behind the conflict.
- Parties deny themselves the opportunity to develop relationships with members of the other group which can help to mitigate future conflicts.
- Defeated parties remain unsatisfied and it is likely the conflict will resume at a later stage, possibly with more devastating consequences.

Avoidance or accommodation:

Parties fearing that the costs of engaging in conflict may be too high often either try to ignore the problem or try to accommodate their opponents. One example could involve a dominant group refusing to acknowledge the needs and interests of a minority group out of fear that this might disrupt the status quo. Another example could involve a weaker party making substantial concessions because it fears the power of the stronger contender.

Outcomes include:

- Avoidance generally only postpones the inevitable. Parties will eventually have to deal with the issues causing the conflict.
- Parties are deprived of the opportunity to grow because they do not get to tackle the problem jointly.
- Parties do not get to learn about the other parties' needs and interests.
- Parties don't get to clarify misperceptions or question their own stereotypes.
- Groups whose needs are not addressed can become increasingly frustrated which can make conflicts more difficult to resolve at a later stage.
- Small concessions made by a group that hopes to avoid the real issues are unlikely to satisfy the other party and more and more demands may be made.

¹³ Four approaches to conflict are described in greater detail by conflict specialist Dudley Weeks in Weeks, D. The eight essentials steps in conflict resolution. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam

Quick fixes:

Parties attempt to find the quickest and simplest solution to the problem, without trying to address the real issues behind the conflict. Rushing to make compromises may satisfy everyone initially, but unless real care is taken to ensure that agreements made address the substantial needs of all stakeholders, problems are likely to emerge down the line.

Outcomes include:

- The illusion is created that the problem has been addressed.
- Failure to address the substantive issues means the solution is likely to be temporary.
- If agreements fail, parties may lose confidence in the value of working together.
- The person responsible for the 'solution' may receive undue recognition despite the fact that it is likely only to be temporary.

Bargaining:

- Parties enter a process of give and take, with each trying to make as few concessions as possible while trying to get as much from the opposition as they can.

Outcomes include:

- Parties become focused on the issues on the table instead of trying to find solutions which will address the underlying causes of the conflict. Rather than spending time trying to find the best solution for everyone, parties dedicate their time to calculating how to make the smallest concessions possible.
- Power becomes defined by each party's ability to extract greater concessions from other parties.
- Parties see conflict as having a definite winner and loser (zero-sum game).
- Losers are likely to feel frustrated and this enhances the likelihood of further conflict.
- Parties are forced to give up on things that may be important to them.
- Relationships are likely to deteriorate or stagnate.
- The process is extremely time-consuming because parties become locked into positions, and for various reasons such as the investment of extensive time and resources, are unwilling to budge.

It's clear that each of the four approaches described above come with a range of negative consequences that may impact on the parties both in the long and the short-term. These impacts can be summarised as follows:

- They tend to result in **zero-sum gains**. What is gained by one side must be conceded by the other.
- Parties will be working **against** each other rather than developing working relationships that might help them address future conflicts. They are likely to build up deeper resentments and long-lasting antagonisms that result in future conflicts flaring up more easily.
- The **solutions** parties arrive at may often be short-term ones. The fact that one party has been forced to concede does not mean they will not come back with heightened grievances in the future. Defeated groups often utilise highly destructive measures to pursue their causes.

- If the conflict is needs-based then the failure to satisfy needs will result in the conflict re-emerging in a different form and very often with additional vigour. Deep resentment and frustration can result in a lowering of inhibitions that in normal circumstances might prevent violence.

Collaborative approaches

Collaborative approaches can circumvent these negative outcomes because parties will recognise that achieving their own goals at the other's expense will not lead to the conflict being resolved. Instead of working against each other, parties will seek to tackle the problems together and find solutions that satisfy everyone's needs to an acceptable degree. It's possible that parties will not automatically turn to collaborative approaches. They may agree to participate in such processes only once they have tried to gain the upper hand in competitive confrontations and have reached a stalemate. Even when parties are collaborating they will still seek to get the best deal that they can for themselves, but they must acknowledge that unless the final solution also benefits others the outcome will not be in their interests.

Collaborative approaches to conflict will generally achieve results that are characterised by:

- **Positive-sum gains** where all parties feel that they have gained from the final outcome.
- Parties working **together to jointly agree** on solutions that will satisfy everyone's concerns.
- The generation of creative solutions that often benefit all parties to a greater degree than a compromise solution would have.
- High levels of **communication** between the parties. For them to be able to tackle conflict on a collaborative level they must be able to develop strong communication channels between them. These communication channels can pave the way for managing conflicts peacefully in the future.
- There should also be increased levels of **trust** and improved relationships between groups. Parties should develop a stronger understanding of each other's values, fears and needs as this will also promote more peaceful approaches to future conflicts.

It's natural to assume that a collaborative approach to conflict offers the best conditions for the development of an agreement that will satisfy all groups concerned and allow parties to establish processes and relationships that will enable them to manage future conflict peacefully. However, it's seldom that simple. Reaching the point where parties can approach conflicts collaboratively can take time and the intervention of third parties. We will look briefly at how these interventions can help in the next section.

1.9 Third party roles in conflict management and resolution

There are two reasons why we need to focus on third-party interventions. The first is that the more we understand the different roles that third parties play in conflict, the more effective we can be in reporting on peace processes involving external interventions. The second reason is that we, as journalists, can benefit from comparing our own contributions with the roles played by third parties. We'll begin this discussion by focusing briefly on the different forms of third

party intervention before focusing specifically on the roles that mediators play in helping parties to resolve conflict.

Conflict theorists tend to distinguish between three different kinds of third party intervention in conflict, namely: peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building. Each of these roles can be critical in different situations although they will involve very different processes.

Peace-keeping

Peace-keeping is sometimes necessary when a conflict has escalated to the point where there is potential for violence or when fighting has already broken out and/or when the relationships between parties have deteriorated to the point where groups will not trust each other to uphold peace agreements. It generally involves some form of armed intervention by an external force, but might also include the presence of unarmed observers. The objectives in peace-keeping are to prevent parties from inflicting further harm on each other and to create a space in which negotiations and dialogue can take place. Peace-keepers are very often drawn from the military, but in more localised conflicts the police force can also play a peace-keeping role. It's essential for peace-keepers to treat both sides fairly and to establish credibility with contending parties and local communities as soon as possible. Peace-keepers will not always be welcome by all parties. This is especially so where one party is militarily dominant and peace-keepers prevent them from maximising the gains they might achieve through the use of force.

Peace-making

Peace-making involves the intervention of a third party who assists parties to find solutions to conflict. Often this third party comes from outside the community affected by conflict. The peace-maker's role normally involves helping to create bridges between parties, allowing them to seek creative solutions and to explore problem-solving processes. The intervention of peace-makers is often aimed at helping parties take the first steps towards a longer lasting process in which they cooperate in solving conflict. However, the peace-maker's role is primarily to help parties address issues of immediate concern.

Peace-building

This is the long-term approach of looking at ways of helping parties to secure peace in the future. Peace-building is aimed at helping parties find solutions to the social, economic and psychological problems that are likely to result in conflict breaking out in the future. Peace-building is particularly concerned with improving the quality of life for people at grass-roots level and is intended to have long-term reconstructive and preventative goals. At the heart of the process is a focus on enabling social restructuring to take place to ensure that groups that have been marginalized and excluded are able to participate actively in the political and economic life of a society. The peace-building process can include truth and reconciliations commissions (TRCs) designed to address the emotional trauma resulting from a conflict and processes, such as constitutional revisions that are designed to change the political and economic structuring of a society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa is a

well-known example that — while criticized on several fronts — played a role in helping people to address the pain caused by apartheid.

A more detailed description can be found in the Conflict Management Toolkit developed by the School of Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University in Washington (see <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/cmtoolkit>).

1.10 Mediation

Mediation is perhaps the most common form of third party intervention in conflicts and it is important for journalists to understand the roles that mediators play and how they go about the process of helping parties to resolve conflict. It's important to note, however, that there is no single kind of mediator, and that their different roles and functions can depend on the degree to which parties are willing to relinquish power. On one extreme there are mediators whose sole objective will be to facilitate communication between the parties, while on the other extreme are mediators who use their influence to pressurise parties into accepting particular solutions. Most mediation happens in-between these two extremes and this is the form of mediation that is discussed below.

Mediation specialist Chris Moore provides the following useful definition of mediation:

Mediation is the intervention into a dispute or a negotiation by an acceptable, impartial and neutral third party, who has no authoritative decision-making power, to assist parties in voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute.¹⁴

In breaking down this definition into its main parts, several issues stand out:

- Firstly, mediation needs to be carried out by an acceptable, impartial and neutral third party. Several theorists have argued that it is possible for a mediator to be drawn from one of the groups involved in a conflict, as long as everyone involved is willing to accept him or her as the mediator. The key word is *acceptable*. Mediators cannot push any party's interest exclusively but must act impartially, even where they are perceived as having influence over one of the parties.
- Secondly, the mediator has no *authoritative decision-making power*. The mediator is not in a position to force any of the parties to accept a particular solution. The mediator cannot make decisions about what should or should not be included in any agreement. The mediator may have some control over the procedural issues involved in the mediation. Mediators also cannot bring parties to agreements, but they can help parties find ways of ensuring agreements are upheld.
- Thirdly, the mediator's role is to assist parties in voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable settlement. It is not the mediator's role to give parties answers; instead he or she should help them find their own solutions. In most instances mediators are likely to restrict their contributions to asking questions. The understanding is that parties will be more likely to accept and defend an agreement that they have constructed themselves.

¹⁴ Moore, C. 1986. *The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflict*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

- Lastly, it is important for participation to be voluntary. There is little to be gained from forcing parties to participate unwillingly in a mediation process. Parties that are coerced into mediation are likely to try to disrupt the process and are unlikely to stick to agreements that have been reached.

There are two main types of mediators: **outsiders** and **insiders**. Each can contribute to helping parties in different ways. Outsiders are mediators who are completely removed from the conflict until they are invited to come in and assist. They are normally highly trained in mediation and conflict management skills and, because they are outsiders, are generally accepted as being neutral. The fact that they are not from within the community may also mean they can bring a fresh perspective to the conflict that helps parties see things in a different way.

Insiders, on the other hand, come from the community where the conflict is happening. They are usually respected leaders within the community and people that parties believe they can trust. These mediators may not have the same training as the outsiders, but they compensate for this by having an in-depth understanding of the issues in dispute. However, because they come from the community and are likely to have some interest in the conflict, it can be more difficult for them to convince parties of their neutrality. In some cases it may be possible to counter fears about a mediator's neutrality by pairing mediators from different groups. For instance, in a conflict between Muslims and Christians, it might be possible to bring in religious leaders from both faiths to work together as mediators.

The main aim of any mediation process is to help parties find solutions to their conflicts. These solutions should satisfy the needs and interests of all parties involved, at least to an acceptable level. Ideally the outcomes should be self-enforcing and maintaining them should not require the intervention of an external party.

In achieving this objective, mediators will:¹⁵

- **Try** to get the parties to a point where they no longer need to rely on the assistance of a third party to continue their negotiations in a constructive and peaceful manner.
- **Help** the parties **reduce tensions** in their relationships. In many cases this involves allowing parties to speak frankly about their feelings and emotions in a safe environment without repercussions. This process, known as 'venting', allows parties to put their feelings on the table and to learn how other parties feel about them. Once this has happened it becomes easier for parties to begin tackling the substantive issues.
- Help parties **define issues** more clearly. The mediator's role includes helping parties to see which issues are most important, both to them and to their opponents. In doing this the mediator will help parties prioritise which issues need to be dealt with. Where there has been armed conflict, parties will generally need to address concerns over security before they can move further.
- Broaden the **search for solutions**. Parties often get locked into specific positions, which do not allow them to consider alternative ways of solving conflict. By helping and encouraging parties to consider conflict from a

¹⁵ See Moore (1986).

different perspective, mediators can help parties consider different ways of meeting each others' needs.

- Help to **improve communication** between parties. In many negotiations parties get locked into a situation of accusation and counter-accusation. A great deal of noise gets made, but little is heard. Parties can be so busy trying to pursue their own concerns that they do not listen to each other.
- Help parties to **clarify misperceptions**. Because parties in conflict tend to think and expect the worst of each other, misperceptions are common. Any action taken by one party may be perceived as a threat by the other. Mediators will help parties understand each others' actions and intentions.
- **Empower** weaker parties. In many conflicts people from poorer communities find it extremely difficult to negotiate with people of power who have access to resources and information that gives them an unfair advantage. Mediators need to recognise these differences in power and find ways to ensure that people are negotiating on an equal footing.
- Promote parties' abilities to make the best decisions they can by **providing** them with **information** that may not have been previously available to them. For example, in a wage dispute workers may not be aware that a company is barely breaking even. Providing this information may help them to recognise the need to scale down demands for higher wages in the interests of keeping the company afloat.
- **Protect** parties from each other and limit personal attacks.

Having looked at the roles that mediators play, we will briefly examine the characteristics they must display if they are to be effective. If mediators want to make a positive contribution in helping parties to resolve a conflict then they should:

- Have *credibility*. We have already discussed the importance of neutrality in the mediation process. It should be quite clear that no mediator will be successful if they are not able to secure the trust of all parties involved and ensure that all parties feel they are being treated fairly.
- Be *sensitive* to the needs of parties. Mediation involves more than simply listening to parties expressing their needs and interests; mediators also need to be able to pick up on problems that parties are not talking about and to get these issues onto the negotiation table.
- *Understand* that different situations require different responses.
- *Display* concern for human suffering. While it is clear that mediators cannot afford to get emotional, it is also clear that they must be able to empathise with people and to understand how emotionally draining conflict can be.
- Have an *in-depth understanding* of the issues involved in conflict.
- Be able to *understand* the way parties in conflict feel about each other. Mediators need to be able to help parties to deal with their emotions. It's common for negotiations to get extremely heated. Mediators need to recognise that this is a natural part of the process and to allow parties to talk about these emotions.

1.1.1 Beyond mediation

While mediation between the leaders of groups in conflict can be an effective way to move conflict towards a peaceful solution, such processes will seldom, if ever, be enough in themselves. Efforts to resolve conflicts need to happen at a

wide range of different levels and between people at all levels of society. Some reasons for this are suggested below:

- Leaders do not operate on their own. They can't openly enter into negotiations or participate in mediation processes without at the very least, the tacit agreement of their followers. Similarly, they cannot simply emerge from behind closed doors and expect followers and supporters to abide by peace agreements that do not address their needs and interests. Groups need to know that their concerns have been adequately understood and addressed.
- Parties may be able to reach agreement on the issues that initially caused the conflict, but they may be unable to deal with the damage to relationships that occurred as the conflict escalated. In such instances they may need to engage in specific processes designed to bring about reconciliation between groups. In many societies special cleansing ceremonies can play an important role in helping communities bury the hatchet and to reconcile with others.
- In some instances leaders may have very different interests from some of their followers. Elite groups can often continue to exist in their own enclaves without having to engage with members of other groups, but this is seldom the case for people lower down the economic ladder. These people need to be able to work together, to trade and attend schools without fear that the conflict will flare up again.

For Jean-Paul Lederach, one of the leading scholars in the field of peace and conflict studies, societies that are going through deep-rooted social conflict need to be transformed into mediative spaces where people across the social and political spectrum are able to contribute towards finding solutions. He suggests that:

Building sustainable [peace] processes through which individuals, groups and societies change from relationships defined by cycles of violent conflict toward modalities of nonviolent interaction requires the careful nurturing of social mediative capacity.¹⁶

Lederach proposes that we should consider looking at social conflict as being made up of a web of relationships in which every set of social relationships can be defined by the divisions brought about by the conflict¹⁷. Across communities people who might once have been neighbours, done business, worshipped or played sport together become separated by the conflict and start seeing each other as enemies. These people are unlikely to be involved in formal mediation processes and yet they are left to deal with the emotional and physical harm that has been caused by the conflict. In cases of severely escalated violent conflict they may have lost family members, property and land. For a society to move beyond conflict, the concerns of these people will also need to be addressed.

In such instances top-down approaches to resolving conflicts will only address **some** of the problems; spaces also need to be created for people at grassroots levels to engage with each other and to find ways of dealing with these problems. In many respects people need to engage in the same processes as those employed during the elite negotiations, but these need to happen

¹⁶ Lederach, J.P. 2002. Building mediative capacity in deep-rooted conflict. In *The Fletcher Forum for World Affairs*, 26 (1).

¹⁷ Ibid.

at a societal level. It's not just leaders who need to learn more about the needs and interests of others groups; it's not just leaders who must explore ways of accommodating each other; it's not just leaders who need to learn to communicate with each other. These processes need to happen across societies and involve as many interested parties as possible. Change needs to happen across a society and everyone needs to be afforded an opportunity to participate in the peace process.

The concept of a mediative space is essential to the ideas we will be looking at in Part Two where we focus on the role journalists can play in reporting on conflict. In this section we will argue that journalists can learn a great deal from the roles mediators play and that they can contribute towards the creation of an enabling environment in which parties can find each other in a mediative space. It will **not** however suggest that journalists should think of themselves as **mediators** in the strict sense of the word, but rather that they should recognise that they can play a mediatory role in society.

Part two: how journalists can contribute to peace-keeping, peace-building and peace-making

An outsider will very often see things the parties don't see themselves as they're too close... You may wonder whether the people will be willing to talk with you, and my experience is they are, because they love to talk about their conflict, and they love to try to explain what's going on. Each time you listen to a new conflict party, the conflict changes colours and you see it from a new angle, and a new angle, and once again a new angle. And since they often don't talk with each other, the mediator gets a much better overview than they have themselves.¹⁸

These observations, by Professor Johan Galtung, widely regarded as the father of Peace Studies, show the advantages of having external mediators intervene in conflict situations. We believe that journalists share many of these advantages. They should generally be able to establish a degree of professional distance from the conflict which enables them to get a perspective of the conflict that is not available to the parties. Journalists are generally, but not always, able to talk to people on all sides of a conflict and people are frequently willing to spend time explaining their positions to reporters. Having access to all sides means journalists get to understand the conflict from a range of different angles and play a role in helping people to see different parties' perspectives.

The focus of Part Two will be on exploring a range of different roles that journalists can play in reporting on conflict with many of these roles having been developed by comparing what journalists do on a day-to-day basis with the roles that mediators play in conflicts. While the comparisons are useful it is important to note that we are not suggesting that journalists should deliberately seek to mediate between parties. What we are saying is that journalists, and the media houses they represent, can play a mediatory role in society. They can contribute to the creation of a 'mediative space' that makes it possible for parties to explore conflict in a more collaborative manner.

All of these roles that will be discussed below are consistent with a traditional understanding of good journalism, which Barbie Zelizer¹⁹ suggests tackles "the complicated, unobvious and often embedded angles of seemingly straightforward happenings". These roles do not ask journalists to take sides with parties, but they do ask that journalists consider how their work might contribute towards the peaceful resolution of conflict. They do not ask journalists to tell parties how to behave, but they do suggest that journalists should hold parties accountable for their behaviour. They do not promote particular solutions to conflicts, but they do ask parties to consider the potential impacts of their choices. They do not ask journalists to abandon ideals of fairness and accuracy, but they do require that journalists go beyond

¹⁸ Barach, Ben. 2012. Interview with Johan Galtung. Peace and Collaborative Development Network. Available at <http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blogs/an-interview-with-johan-galtung> [Accessed 12 March 2012].

¹⁹ Zelizer, B. 2004. Taking journalism seriously: news and the academy. California: Saga

the conventions of many established reporting routines. They require that journalists do not accept what they are told at face value, but continuously dig deeper to uncover the real causes of conflict and the motives behind parties' actions. They also require that journalists go beyond the usual sources to seek out others whom, while often ignored, also have important stories to tell.

The remainder of this section is dedicated to a discussion of how journalists can make a difference to helping parties manage and resolve conflict effectively. In considering these roles it's critical to note that they cannot all be accomplished at the same time in every story, but it is hoped that the accumulated effects of these different roles can make a difference over time. Let's now consider the roles that journalists can play.

Can journalist intervene directly in conflicts?

The question of whether journalists should intervene directly in conflict situations prompted interesting debate between members of the editorial team. Everyone felt that that journalists should not actively seek to set themselves up as mediators, but they also recognised that the issue was not that simple. Barbara Among pointed out that "journalists who live and work in the communities they come from can be very good mediators" but warned that they often get too emotionally involved with what is happening to be able to cover events as journalists. It's not that they explicitly seek to mediate, but people often turn to them because they are educated, understand legal and political processes and frequently have established public profiles. In these cases journalists often feel obligated to help out in their communities.

How, the group debated, can journalists get involved in mediating conflicts while still reporting on them? Or, should they simply refuse to help and let the conflict take its course? Could there potentially be a middle ground? Three possible solutions to this dilemma were suggested:

- The journalist could help out and mediate between the parties, but he or she would have to be absolutely clear about his or her role when it came to reporting on the events. The journalist should make it clear in the story that this was an exceptional circumstance and not something that he or she would normally do.
- The journalists could refuse to get directly involved in mediations, but could still play an advisory role by educating parties about their rights and explaining to people what possible avenues they could follow in addressing their concerns. Often they may help to facilitate initial communications between different stakeholders involved in the conflict.
- The journalist could refuse to take on an active role, but, through his or her reporting could pose the necessary questions that parties need to reach solutions for themselves. Such questions can help to foreground individual and group rights, the obligation of service providers and companies and the possibility of particular solutions in particular contexts.

The following anecdote from South Africa serves to illustrate how a journalist found herself unintentionally mediating between wealthy neighbours as she set out to cover a story: The conflict started when one man felt the other's swimming pool was extending across the boundary of his property and encroaching on his land. He demanded the removal of the pool and was preparing to take his neighbour to court. Both were facing a legal battle that would have cost one of them a fortune. The journalist first interviewed the complainant to find out what he was so angry about. During this interview she discovered there were other issues besides the pool that were angering the man. These included the neighbour's tendency to host loud parties and his failure to control his dog's loud barking. When she went to get comment from the other neighbour and asked him to respond to the complaints it became evident that the dispute actually had little to do with the pool and more to do with the relationship between the two men. The story ended with the men sitting down to discuss ways of living harmoniously together as neighbours. Later they learned that the swimming pool was actually encroaching on a thin sliver of municipal land between the two properties, but by then the boundary dispute was no longer an issue and the neighbours continued to live together without further conflict.

2.1 Journalists can provide a channel for communication between parties

Journalists are constantly providing opportunities for parties in conflict to communicate, not only with each other, but also with people who are not directly involved in the conflict. Editorial team member James Mphande suggests that by speaking to people on all sides of a conflict you can “act as a bridge” that makes it possible for “people to talk to each other”. This does not mean bringing them together face to face, but rather “you offer them a platform to share their views so these reach both sides”. In doing so, James argues, journalists can “help parties understand each other’s positions”. Barbara Among agrees, saying:

Conflict is about one person saying something, then I take it as a journalist and I ask the other person and that person will answer back to what the first person is saying. It becomes a balanced story. I’m going to present both sides.

However, in most cases parties will attempt to use the media as a way of getting their point across and applying pressure on their opponents. While this is clearly a form of communication it is not necessarily constructive. If we simply allow parties to use the media as another arena in which to attack each other we are not contributing to peace-building in our communities. We are also failing to provide fair, balanced and accurate coverage. We are getting sucked into the conflict and becoming unwitting and unwilling pawns in someone else’s strategy.

It is not our job to provide a soap-box for parties to fire off volleys of insults and accusations at each other. Our job is to explain what is happening in the world around us. We need to ask the kinds of questions that help parties to explain their needs, values and interests; to talk about their emotions and their fears. If we can do this then we are making a difference. It’s not enough for us to take a statement issued by a party and to script it into a news story. We need to go beyond this and to encourage parties to use the media as a channel for real communication that allows people to learn about each other, to explore differences and to look for solutions. This means getting beyond the rhetoric, beyond the loud mouthed accusations.

There is also a tendency for journalists to concentrate on the views of elites – of those who are directly involved in peace processes, such as politicians, court officials and members of intervention groups. If journalists are going to help foster mediative spaces then they also need to expand on the range of sources they get information from. For Barbara this means that:

... the victims’ voices must be heard in our stories, not just the main players’. The people affected by the actions of elites must be heard. When we offer people challenges through the media they must be open to every individual affected. This makes it possible for people to engage and take forward the issues. The media not just a talk shop, it should be something that seeks to find solutions.

While conflict tends to encourage greater group cohesion, this does not mean that members of particular groups are always entirely of one mind. It may be that different sub-groups within competing groups may share common

concerns and interests and in some cases they may share these commonalities through the media. When this happens journalists can open the doors for real communication.

2.2 Journalists can provide parties with the information they need to make wise decisions in managing and resolving conflict

There are at least two critical roles that journalists can play by providing accurate information in our reports in helping parties to make wise decisions during times of conflict. Firstly, there are a great many conflicts in which groups simply do not know enough to make decisions. They may not understand the history behind a conflict and why one party feels as strongly as it does about something.

A great many conflicts have to do with the fact that groups lack information about each other or about the issues at the heart of a conflict. We can clearly play an important role by providing parties with accurate information that they can trust in making informed decisions. It is important for people to understand that a party may have misunderstood something or be acting on incomplete information. In this way journalists can play a critical role in bridging these information gaps.

Journalists can also play an important role in assessing the information needs of a society and meeting some of these needs. A simple example might relate to elections and voter registration. Voters who are turned away from the polls because they have not registered properly are likely to be angered and feel that their rights have been betrayed and this can lead to violence. If journalists anticipate problems and are able to determine that large numbers of people have not understood the voter registration requirements they can play a role in both educating and holding authorities accountable when it comes to fulfilling their voter education mandates.

Similarly, journalists can play a vital role in ensuring that people get a comprehensive picture of political and policy developments. When new policies are introduced it is common for parties opposed to those new policies to emphasise only those things that are in their interests for people to know about. They will often downplay, ignore or distort information that does not support their positions. Helping people to get a more comprehensive picture can equip people to make better decisions and avoid being misled by people with agendas. Large factories and mining companies, for instance, will be keen to tell people about the benefits they bring to communities, but be very quiet about the negative impact of their operations on the environment and people's health. By doing their research and helping people to understand the impact of such industries journalists can make it possible for local communities to ask the right questions and to mobilise to ensure action is taken to protect their rights and the environment. Such actions can help to prevent serious conflicts later, once the damage has already been done.

Barbara Among suggests that an important part of providing information involves having reporters on the ground covering events as they happen instead of relying on spokespeople from different parties. She says it's vital to get past the one-sided accounts of "spokespeople who are trained to give out well

packaged information” and argues that many organisations, including the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army, have people who represent their interests:

You have to find the truth by sending reporters onto the ground to verify whether the information you get from spokespeople is accurate.

In many instances the process of providing information means identifying areas where people lack information and spending time with experts who can help people understand why decisions are being taken and whether these are wise decisions. Journalists should also identify experts who can help people see whether alternative decisions may not be more beneficial.

It is also useful to speak to people at a grassroots level to find out what they know and do not know about a conflict. By spending time with people and talking to them about their understandings of issues, journalists can often pick up when people have failed to understand key issues that might lie at the heart of a conflict. They can also sometimes pick up on whether leaders have been deliberately withholding and distorting information.

2.3 Journalists can educate parties on/about ways of managing and resolving conflict

Like mediators, we can help parties in conflict by educating them about different processes they can follow in resolving conflicts or seeking out peaceful alternatives. By reporting on successful peace processes in other areas we can show that conflicts can be resolved in a way that satisfy all parties involved. We can also explain how these processes have worked and educate parties about alternatives to violence. Barbara Among agrees arguing that:

... it’s also good to draw examples from past efforts, i.e. What solutions were found? Who were the players? How did they play it out? Draw on examples from different countries and then analyse the results and respond accordingly. We need to look at how conflict has been managed elsewhere.

Since the transition to democracy in South Africa in 1994 several countries have shown an interest in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was established to help people deal with past human rights violations. These countries include Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Fiji, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Peru, South Korea, Sri Lanka and the United States, among others. While these countries are unlikely to adopt the TRC model in its entirety, they will have learned from it and will be able to adapt what they have learned to their own circumstances.

By educating our audiences about peace initiatives in other places, we can help them broaden the search for solutions and encourage them to think about non-violent ways of managing conflict. In many societies where conflict is widespread it is possible to find communities that have managed to avoid getting caught up in conflict spirals, often because of the work of small NGOs and other community organizations. By showing what these groups have been able to achieve in their communities, journalists can help other communities

to identify strategies and processes they can employ in preventing violent outbreaks of conflict. It is key in these instances that journalists recognize the value of these stories and cover them effectively. A youth initiative that has succeeded in bringing young people from opposing sides together in one area might well be replicated in another area.

People involved in conflict resolution are constantly studying each other's methods and adapting them to their own contexts. There is no reason why journalists should not do the same. By finding out how people are managing conflicts that are similar to those being experienced in their areas, journalists can expose communities to a range of different strategies that may be of use.

At the same time bear in mind that our educative role may go well beyond simply considering different strategies that parties can employ in seeking non-violent outcomes to conflict. It can involve providing them with very specific information about political, economic or environmental processes that can aid them in their decision-making. For instance, showing how global climate change is impacting on the availability of water in particular areas may enable parties engaged in conflict to recognize that they share a joint problem and to look for ways of approaching it together.

For journalists this means taking an active interest in conflict in different parts of the world and monitoring the progress that has been made in resolving these conflicts. It can also mean going beyond what appear to be the general causes of conflict and asking for informed expert advice about how conflicts can be addressed.

2.4 Making it possible for parties to trust each other

A lack of trust between parties is a major factor that contributes to on-going conflict and the media can contribute to both breaking down trust and helping parties to establish trust. We can destroy trust by taking remarks out of context and deliberately blowing up the most provocative statements and by only speaking to those representatives whose voices we know will be provocative instead of seeking out the voices of more moderate leaders as well.

Contributing to the building of trust requires journalists to follow conflicts very closely and to make sure that whenever parties make small strides towards peaceful solutions that we cover these stories effectively. Most conflicts are solved through a series of small steps during which parties learn to trust each other. When they have built up confidence through a series of small agreements they can begin to tackle the bigger issues.

Remember, the fact that we reach large audiences means we are not talking only about building confidence between leaders, we are also helping to build confidence and trust between groups. If groups recognise there is progress, this can help to reduce tensions and opportunities for violence.

We can also help build confidence by reporting on peace processes and educating people about the implications of peace agreements. When parties are aware of the publicity that agreements have received, they are more likely to

uphold those agreements. They will be aware of the negative publicity they will attract if they are seen to be breaking their commitments.

There is a tendency among journalists to continually look for the most dramatic events, such as outbreaks of violence, in a time of conflict. But the fact that they are dramatic does not necessarily mean they are the most significant. In a society that is experiencing turmoil, the fact that one community has managed to find a way of preventing violence can be as significant as the fighting that is happening in another community. We tend to think of news as being important when it impacts many people. The cessation of hostilities has an enormous impact on communities and yet these seldom get the same prominence in the press as stories about violence. There are certainly times when it is worth challenging these conventions.

Always bear in mind that helping parties to build trust also means that we do not blow things out of proportion. The fact that people have agreed to start talks does not mean a peace deal has been struck. Overplaying the good can be as harmful as overplaying the bad.

2.5 Counteracting misperceptions

As we saw in our discussion on conflict escalation, misperceptions can play a significant role in promoting further conflict. Journalists are well-placed to identify parties' misperceptions because we should be constantly talking to the different sides and learning about how they feel about issues and each other. Journalists can provide people with an opportunity to explain their misperceptions and then encourage other groups to clarify these issues through the media.

Often this can mean taking the time to listen to what groups are saying about each other, the way they describe each other's cultures and the way they talk about each other's motives. Journalists can come to see the parties' misperceptions as a story in its own right and, by reporting this story, can encourage parties to revise their views, helping them to move closer to the prevention or resolution of the conflict in the process. In doing so they can also enable other groups to explain why they do certain things and why these things are important to them. In some areas people who protest violently against the lack of services in their area are often branded as ill-disciplined, irrational and needlessly destructive. However, if journalists can help others understand the frustration these people are living with and the extent to which they feel they have been marginalised they can help people understand why others do what they do.

As conflicts escalate, people often begin to see members of the other group as sharing the same characteristics and attributes, and class them all as violent and untrustworthy. These stereotypes can mean that if a small section of the opposing group is involved in an act of violence or cruelty, people are likely to feel that the entire group is capable of duplicating these actions. Journalists can help people challenge these views by reporting incidents in which people do not conform to the stereotypes others have of them. In doing so we challenge people to re-evaluate how they look at members of other groups and help them to recognise that not everyone thinks the same way.

There have been numerous stories that illustrate how this can work. During the Rwandan genocide, which was highly polarised along ethnic lines, there were countless examples of people from one tribe sheltering people from another and in the process placing their own lives in tremendous danger. You can probably think of similar examples in your own community. These issues are newsworthy and it is vital that they are covered because they do help to challenge stereotypes and to break down perceptions that everyone from a different group is a potential enemy.

2.6 Analysing conflict

Journalists can help parties to better understand conflict through careful analysis, considering the conflict from different angles and showing how it affects different people. There is a tendency among journalists to simply report on what is happening, but this does not help our readers, listeners and viewers to really understand what is actually going on. In reporting on conflict journalists need to be able to analyse what is happening and to draw on their own analysis in posing the kinds of questions that will help people understand what is going on and why. As Cris Chinaka stresses, we also need to go beyond reporting on events and report on conflict as a process that unfolds and develops over time.

Going beyond events can mean addressing a range of different questions, namely:

- Who are the different parties involved in the conflict? Consider those that are directly involved and other stakeholders with an interest in the conflict. Who stands to profit from the conflict continuing?
- What would appear to be the factors that have caused the conflict?
- How has the conflict developed thus far?
- How has it impacted on the parties involved and other stakeholders with some interests in the conflict?
- What factors may have contributed to the exacerbation, moderation or transformation of the conflict?
- What might it take to bring this conflict to an end?

There may be some danger in presenting our analysis as fact, but there might be scope for presenting this as a column, editorial or opinion piece. However, the principle purpose of conducting an analysis of this nature is to help us determine which sources we should be speaking to and what questions we should be asking of these sources. We can also approach experts and commentators to provide their analysis or to comment on the views that we have developed.

The key word in this context is research. There are too many examples of journalists writing opinion pieces and making significant assumptions without consulting the parties involved. Journalists seldom want to allow others to influence their writing, but there can be value in asking people with particular insights into conflict to look over analytical pieces and editorials and to advise on whether these provide an accurate reflection of a conflict and what needs to happen.

A key factor in developing an analysis of a conflict is that we should never assume that we have arrived at ‘the truth’ – all we have done is develop a hypothesis that can be tested and modified if it is found wanting. Even if parties do not agree with the analysis, the process of thinking about it and looking at conflict from different perspectives can be beneficial and help them develop new ideas.

In many instances the best thing that a journalist can do is to **ask questions**. From the previous section we have some understanding of how conflicts can escalate and this can prompt us to ask questions that help people see how a conflict is developing. We also understand the weaknesses of particular approaches to conflict and this can inform us as we question the way parties are going about approaching conflicts.

2.7 Help identify underlying interests of issues

In most conflicts parties tend to make their positions public, but are reluctant to clearly express the interests underlying these positions. This generally means that parties get locked in a tug-of-war with each side trying to move the other off positions without being aware of the underlying causes. If parties are able to learn about each other’s interests they will be better able to assess whether there are ways of accommodating or compromising with one another. As James Mphande stresses, “parties need to be helped to recognise that it’s possible to end a conflict with a win-win solution where everyone’s needs and interests are accommodated.”

Journalists asking informed, probing questions can play a role in uncovering these interests. This can be done by speaking to leaders as well as by interviewing ordinary members of the different groups about what they think is important. We will develop some strategies for addressing these issues in Part Three.

2.8 Allow parties to express their emotions

We talked about the importance of ‘venting’ during our discussion of the mediation process and it should be clear that journalists can also play an important role in this regard. When parties are experiencing growing frustration, journalists can provide emotional outlets by allowing them to express their feelings through the media. This does not mean allowing parties to use your medium to insult others, but it does mean allowing them to talk about their frustrations and their fears. In their highly influential book *Getting to Yes*, Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton²⁰ discuss the importance of **separating the people from the problem** during negotiations. We suggest that journalists can encourage parties to do the same. Allowing people to hurl insults at others through the media may make for exciting stories, but it does not help the parties or our audiences understand what is really taking place. However, when people are able to talk to journalists about their needs and concerns and see these raised in the media they are able to vent some of their frustrations.

20 Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. 1999. *Getting to yes: negotiating agreement without giving in*. New York: Penguin

Protest marches and other forms of demonstrations are often intended to attract media attention. If parties feel they are being ignored by the media it's likely they will engage in more radical behaviour to ensure that they will get coverage. In South Africa, journalists at the Daily Dispatch newspaper faced the challenge of people calling the newsroom and announcing that they intended to stage a demonstration. When the journalists arrived they found people had been waiting for the media to arrive before they 'started' their demonstrations. Such occurrences placed journalists in very difficult situations. They intended to cover the demonstrations, but did not want to be held responsible for *starting* the demonstrations. The journalists were well aware that if they failed to arrive on the scene when notified, then there was a very good chance of the demonstrators turning to more violent strategies to attract attention.

However, this does not mean that journalists are in any way required to uncritically relay hate-speech or calls to violence. Simply providing a megaphone is not one of our roles. In such situations people need to be challenged about their intentions and called to account.

2.9 Empowering parties

Journalists can play a very important role in helping to encourage a balance of power by **giving a voice to marginalised groups**. If our coverage is balanced and we treat weaker groups in the same way as powerful groups, we help to place both groups on the same level and this can be empowering for weaker parties.

It is also common in conflicts for dominant parties to dismiss their opponents by refusing to acknowledge them at all; often this involves dismissing them as 'thugs' or 'criminal elements'. In doing so they demonstrate that they are unwilling to try and understand why a group is engaging in conflict behaviour and are ignoring underlying issues that may continue to provoke conflict in the future. This obviously limits the chances of any peaceful dialogue happening between the parties.

So, what should we do? Our role is to try to provide people with information they can use in making decisions and to help people understand what is happening in their world. Just because one dominant group has dismissed another group as 'criminals' does not mean we have to accept this position. In fact, we can play an important role by challenging this position. By recognising marginalised groups in the news media, we can make it extremely difficult for dominant groups to ignore them.

At the same time we need to be aware that we might be giving too much prominence to a splinter group that does not have a major constituency or a major interest in a conflict. There is no simple way of dealing with this problem. The fact is that if we ignore smaller groups there is always the possibility that they may escalate the use of violent tactics in order to gain recognition and attention.

2.10 Face-saving and consensus building

It's clear that in many negotiation situations leaders of groups or political parties will often struggle to make concessions that might help to bring conflicts to an end if these are seen to be signs of weakness. Sometimes this has to do with leaders not wanting to lose face and be seen to be giving in, while on other occasions it might be that their constituencies may experience the act of making concessions as humiliating. For parties caught up in such quandaries the fear of media reports representing them as having 'surrendered', 'capitulated', 'thrown in the towel' or 'backed down' may make them less willing to make concessions.

Journalists need to be careful how they use these words. If a group has really surrendered—given in against their will in the face of overwhelming force—then yes, this would be an appropriate phrase. However, if they made a small concession to prevent further bloodshed on the part of both parties or as a gesture of good faith then such a description would certainly not be accurate. In such instances we need to be very careful about the words we choose. It's often best to choose words that have the least emotional baggage.

Example:

Instead of saying:

"Party A has caved in on this point and surrendered to Party B's demands,"

rather say:

"Party A has agreed to meet Party B's demands," or "Party A has agreed to make a concession."

The difference is subtle but it can be very important for parties in conflict. For a leader who is struggling to maintain control of his party the fear of being seen to be weak can be enough to prevent any agreement from being reached. Being seen to have "caved in" could mean the end of his or her hold on power. Being seen to have made a **concession** can actually be made to sound quite positive. Remember, using strong language in cases where parties have only made minor concessions can be detrimental to the parties and misleading to readers and audiences.

Part three: making a difference, some questions for reflection

Perhaps the most important thing that journalists can do in reporting on conflict is to engage in processes of on-going critical reflection. We need to be conscious of the extent to which our own beliefs and attitudes may be shaping the way in which we report on conflicts. It's only after honest reflection that we can follow Setsabile Sibisi's advice that journalists should:

Go into the story with an open mind. Clear your thoughts of any preconceptions and be willing to hear what all those involved have to say ...present the facts without taking any sides. Ensure you're abreast with developments.

We also need to be considering how the institutional values of our media houses are influencing the way we report on conflict. If our media organisations are pursuing agendas that can exacerbate conflict, we need to point out the dangers to decision makers and do what we can to convince them of the benefits of conflict sensitive reporting. Cris Chinaka argues that journalists who report on conflict must set very high standards for themselves, because:

... when you're dealing with conflict you're dealing with very emotional issues; issues that probably involve life and death, issues of peace and governance and issues to do with justice. So we do have a big role, in fact a bigger role than other forms of journalism. It's a big responsibility.

We must accept that, whether we like it or not, when we report on conflict we become part of the conflict context. We cannot simply assume we are detached observers. Our work will always have an influence on the conflict, although we may seldom be able to predict with any certainty what this influence will be. As Barbara Among suggests, "You can actually escalate the war or actually help it calm down or contain the situation by just the way you report on conflict". How we tell stories shapes the way people understand issues and how they relate to each other. Kioko Kivandi agrees. Reflecting on the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya he said:

... we have a responsibility ... we are not just reporting for the sake of reporting, whatever we do as media houses and as journalists, we are there so we can maintain our societies. If those societies are not there then we also have no space, we have no field to play in.

It's also clear that the media helps to shape the way groups behave during conflict as they anticipate the kind of coverage that will follow particular kinds of action. Authors of several important texts on peace journalism, Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, refer to this as the **feedback loop** in which parties will tailor their statements to the media and their actions based on their assumptions

they make about the media coverage they will receive and the way audiences are likely to respond to that coverage.²¹

Every story we broadcast or print has the potential to make a small contribution in promoting peace, but likewise our stories have the potential to exacerbate conflict. The following are some questions we can ask whenever we are working on conflict-related stories. They are captured in the acronym **FAIR** (Fair? Accurate? Impact? Responsible?).

3.1 Is the story fair?

Ask yourself, is the story fair on all parties? Has everyone involved in the conflict had an opportunity to explain his or her side of the story? Has anyone with a stake in the conflict been left out?

Being fair also means recognising that some parties do not have access to the same resources, infrastructure and know-how to work effectively with the news media. Small community-based groups are unlikely to have trained media relations specialists and spin-doctors at their disposal. This does not mean we should neglect them; rather it suggests that journalists should make a special effort to ensure that these people's voices are heard.

Have we been fair to our audience? Have they been given all the information they need to make informed decisions about what is going on? It's important to remain continually aware that our audience is often directly involved in the conflict and that the issues we are addressing are also their issues.

We also need to be aware of our own positions as individuals on the issues involved in conflict and to continually be exploring whether our own preferences and prejudices are influencing the kinds of questions we ask, the sources we select and the language we use. This can be difficult because it's always possible that we may be biased without even being aware of it. Simply assuming an objective position does not eliminate that bias; we need to be continually reflecting on our own responses to the conflict and questioning how this might be shaping our reporting. James Mphande stresses that this can be especially important for journalists who are reporting on conflicts that are close to them:

You need a lot of responsibility because the chances are since this thing [the conflict] is probably affecting you or affecting some members of your family or extended family in some way ... your reporting could also be affected.

Under such circumstances journalists need to acknowledge the potential impact of a conflict on themselves and think carefully about how the conflict is impacting on their ability to treat parties fairly. As Barbara observes:

I think as journalists we see society at its best and worst points; we're there and we meet them at these points, the best and the

²¹ See Lynch, J. & McGoldrick, A. 2005. *Peace Journalism*. Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press for a more detailed explication of this concept. For journalists interested in developing their thoughts about conflict reporting, *Peace Journalism* is a very stimulating and informative text.

worst of it. When you're in a position as a journalist, how do you manoeuvre through this and still stay as professional as possible?

Journalists need to recognise that their potential to make a difference can be dramatically curtailed if they are seen to be taking sides. None of the roles discussed in the last section can be successfully fulfilled if the journalist is not regarded as credible by the parties involved in the conflict.

Note: Journalists tend to report on what the leadership has to say about an issue, but often neglect the views of citizens and communities who are caught up in the conflicts. Have these citizens been given a chance to have their voices heard? Is the manner in which the different parties have been represented fair on them? Would any one party covered in a story feel that they have been misrepresented? What kind of language have we used to describe the different parties, their positions, interests and concerns? All of these factors impact on whether a story is regarded as fair or not.

3.2 Is the story accurate?

Have we got all of the facts straight? Have we verified information presented in the story? Have we made a clear distinction between fact and opinion – ours and those of the parties involved in the conflict? Have we simply accepted what we have been told or have we challenged statements that are potentially untrue? Have we provided sufficient background to the conflict to enable people to make sense of the issues? All conflicts are complex and need to be contextualized.

Being accurate does not just mean reporting what we have been told; it means making sure that as far as possible the information we are broadcasting is verifiable. This means being cautious in using information passed on to us by sources and contemplating the following questions:

Q: **Is the source credible?** Does the source actually know enough about the subject to be able to speak authoritatively on the issue?

Q: **Does the source have a vested interest in the issue?** Could the source be manipulating information to suit his or her own hidden agenda?

Q: **Are there independent sources we can get this information from?**

Q: **Would a variety of sources say the same thing?**

3.3 Impact?

What will the impact of our story be? How will parties respond? Will the way a story has been told serve to exacerbate conflict or help to promote understanding? How, if you were a member of one of the parties involved, would you have responded to the story? Has it opened up the range of options for the parties or has it made it seem that confrontation and violence are the only choices?

3.4 Responsibility?

Whose interests have you served in covering a story in a particular way? Has your primary goal been to serve your audience as well as possible or have you tried to accommodate some other interest group(s)?

Has the story been given the treatment it is worth? Making a big story out of a provocative comment by a minor stakeholder in a conflict may be misleading even if it makes for a great bulletin. This is an area that requires very careful consideration. Similarly, taking one provocative remark out of context can provide the audience with a distorted picture.

Note: while this is particularly pertinent with regard to statements that can exacerbate conflict, the same can be said about statements favouring peace. Just because one person within a party has spoken in favour of pursuing a collaborative approach to the conflict, this does not imply universal acceptance of this view. On the other hand, presenting an overly positive picture may be equally harmful because people can begin to anticipate that progress is being made only to have their hopes dashed. Exaggerating the positive can be as damaging as exaggerating the negative.

What will the impact of your reporting be on your future credibility as a reliable source of information? The moment you lose credibility you also lose the ability to make a positive contribution in times of conflict. It's critical for all journalists to concentrate on being FAIR, but it's especially important for those who work for small media organisations that are close to the communities they are covering. People will always monitor such media closely and will be looking for evidence that locates the media house and its journalists on one or the other side of the conflict.

Part four: conceptual tools for journalists covering conflict

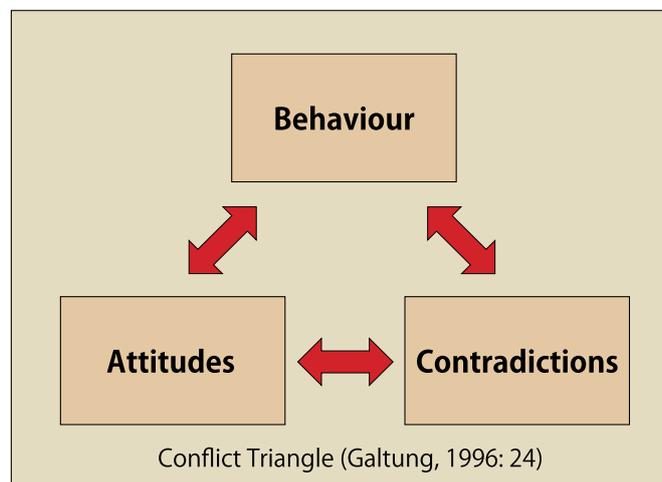
The following four strategies draw on the theory in Part One in helping journalists consider how they can provide audiences with a more comprehensive understanding of a conflict. These strategies or tools require us to go beyond a simple reporting of what is immediately evident to asking some more probing questions.

4.1 Moving beyond behaviours

One of the most common complaints made about the news media by people involved in conflict resolution and peace building is that journalists tend to focus almost exclusively on the behaviour of groups involved in conflict without explaining the reasons behind people's actions. It should be clear from the discussion in Part One that reports that do not provide a context to the conflict provide a distorted picture.

By focusing primarily on the parties' actions reports can leave audiences uncertain as to what caused groups to respond in particular ways. Such reports can make it appear that groups are involved in mindless violence or protest action. It is only when we begin to contextualize what is happening that people can begin to understand the complexities involved.

Johan Galtung proposes a model for understanding conflict that has proved useful to journalists.



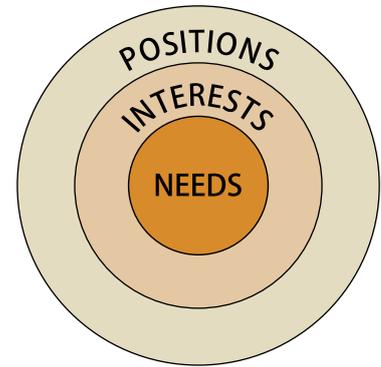
Galtung's conflict triangle suggests that to really understand a conflict we need to look at the contradictions (context) that exist within the societal context that are causing the conflict. We also need to understand the groups' attitudes towards each other and finally how these things play out in terms of behaviour. All of these aspects impact on each other — aggressive behaviour can cause a hardening of attitudes and this can impact on the group's willingness to compromise or accommodate others.

The model has useful implications for journalists reporting on conflict because it demonstrates how reports can only be comprehensive if they provide a context against which audiences can understand behaviour(s). We need to find out about parties' attitudes towards each other and the histories parties might have that have shaped the way they view each other. We also need to explore what it is about the social, political and environmental context that has led to the conflict.

It may be that we will never be fully able to explain what has started a conflict, but it's important to speak to the different parties involved and to give them an opportunity to explain what is happening from their side.

4.2 Getting beyond rhetoric²²

When groups approach conflicts from a competitive standpoint they will tend to express a range of different demands about what they want and how they feel their opponents should behave. However, these demands are generally only positions which conceal underlying interests which are representative of the group's real needs. Often there might be a major gap between what the parties say they want — their **positions** — and what they are really after — their **interests**. These interests are comprised of the different ways in which groups feel their underlying needs can be addressed.



It's common for groups in conflict to become completely locked into their positions and to refuse to move beyond these, even when their actual needs and interests could be addressed in other ways. The end result is that groups see each other as being stubborn and uncompromising and never really come to learn about the things that are important to their opponents. This can eliminate the possibility of groups finding creative solutions to conflicts or alternatively significantly delaying the transformation of the conflict.

If journalists want to paint an accurate picture of what the conflict is really about then they need to get beyond the rhetoric, beyond the different groups' demands and closer to their real interests and underlying needs. This will not be easy, because it means doing more than simply accepting people's demands at face value. It means asking the probing questions that can get beyond the rhetoric. It also means going beyond a single source. By speaking to a range of people at different levels within a group you may get a clearer picture of what the conflict is really about.

The following are questions a journalist might ask in trying to get beneath the surface:

Q: You are making a specific demand, but why is this important to you?

Q: Could there be other ways of addressing your concerns?

²² The conflict onion is used by many to explain the layers of positions, interest and needs. An example of this usage can be found in Fisher, S., Abdi, D.I., Ludin, J., Smith, R., Williams, S. & Williams, S. 2000. Working with conflict: skills and strategies for action. Responding to conflict. London: Zed Books.

It's unlikely that parties will respond openly to such questions the first time they are posed, but as you continue to probe you might be able to gain a deeper insight into the real needs and interests which you can follow-up on. In some instances this will mean spending time with parties, getting to know them and earning their trust, in others it will mean speaking to a variety of people who are willing to share their views. It's also important to pose these questions to a range of different people at different levels within an organization. Doing so can enable you to determine whether demands really represent the views of those across the group or whether they simply reflect the view of the leaders.

4.3 A question of time and place

The fact that conflicts often only make the headlines when they erupt can mean that news can leave people confused.

Reports about a sudden outbreak of violence can portray the groups involved as being irrational and acting without cause. It's important for journalists to locate conflicts within the socio-economic context in which they are taking place. It's crucial to show that oftentimes conflict has a long history and that while a conflict may be occurring between two groups, the actual problems that led to the conflict might have been caused by others. Classic examples of this are the clashes between ethnic groups over land, when the origins of the conflict may have stemmed from colonial interventions centuries before.

We clearly need to describe what is happening at a particular moment in time — the visible behaviour — but we also need to ask what might have happened in the past that shaped the present. What was it that led parties to having the kinds of attitudes and perceptions of each other that has enabled the conflict to escalate? We also need to ask what it is that parties need to do to reduce the tensions between them.

We need to show that conflict is an ongoing process, not a single event. Cris Chinaka makes the crucial point that journalists also need to continually check in with parties to ensure that their positions have not changed:

Journalists must check for consistency. Sometimes you speak to people so often and you think they're on the same page, but they've changed their positions slightly since the last time they presented their plan. It's important to check because there may be inconsistencies or contradictions [between what the journalist believes the party's current position is and the party's actual position].

The fact that a party's position has changed on an issue (even slightly) can be an important story, as can the fact that a party has not changed its position at all.

4.4 Questions journalists can ask

The following are some questions journalists can ask that will help to address the issues raised above²³.

23 From Galtung, Johan. 1998. High Road, Low Road: Charting the Course for Peace Journalism. In Track Two, 7(4). Available at http://www.ccr.uct.ac.za/archive/two/7_4/p07_highroad_lowroad.html. Accessed: 14/05/2010.

Q: What is the conflict about? Who are the parties involved and what are their real goals? Also consider what other parties, beyond the conflict arena where the violence is taking place, are involved?

Q: What are the deeper roots of the conflict? Are there structural imbalances that need to be addressed? What is the history behind the conflict?

Q: What kinds of ideas exist about the outcomes other than the one party imposing itself on the other?

Q: Are there any particularly creative or new ideas about how a conflict might be resolved? Can such ideas be sufficiently powerful to prevent violence?

Q: If violence does occur, what impact will the invisible effects, such as hatred and the wish for revenge and for more glory, **have on the possibilities for peace?**

Q: Who is working to prevent violence? What are their visions of the conflict outcomes?

Q: What methods are they using and how can they be supported?

Part five: reporting on conflicts as they develop

As conflicts develop and unfold there are a range of useful questions we can pose which will help our audiences, including the groups involved in the conflicts, to better understand what is taking place. The following three proposals are all drawn from our discussion focused on conflict and conflict dynamics.

5.1 Approaches to conflict

In Part One we explored the different ways in which parties can approach conflict and we identified five distinct strategies, namely:

- Avoidance
- Total victory
- Bargaining
- Quick fixes
- Collaboration

We noted that with the exception of the collaborative approaches to conflict, each of the other strategies had potential drawbacks. In most cases these approaches end in win-lose or zero-sum outcomes — where the one's losses equal the other's gains — and do not contribute towards enhancing a peaceful relationship between parties. We also noted in the discussion on human needs that conflicts concerning basic human needs cannot simply be negotiated away.

Armed with these understandings of how groups approach conflict, journalists can be well-placed to ask some very useful questions. For instance, if it is evident that a group is seeking to avoid a conflict by simply backing down, journalists could ask questions along these lines:

Q: It seems to me that you are trying to avoid a conflict, even if this means absorbing unwelcome costs... you may be willing to do this now, but are you going to feel the outcome is fair and just in the future? If not, what could this mean for the conflict resuming at a later point?

Q: How can you be sure that having made these concessions now, you will not be asked for more in the future?

Q: How will the way you are approaching this issue impact on your potential to resolve future conflicts with this party? How has it contributed to the development of relationships of trust? Has it led to the opening up of better channels of communication?

Q: What have you learned about the other group that might make it easier for you to resolve future conflicts? What do you think they have learned about you?

Alternatively, if a party is using its power to dominate a conflict and to force another party to make humiliating concessions journalists will want to tease out how parties feel about the impact of their actions. The following are some questions we could ask:

- Q: From the outside it looks like you are not willing to make any compromises to accommodate the needs of the other party. Is this the case?
- Q: How do you expect that this will impact on your future relationship with this party?
- Q: It seems certain you will be able to secure a victory in the short term, but how do you think this will play out in the future? Can you be sure the other party won't be back to challenge you again in the future?
- Q: What would your reaction be if you were placed in the same position as the other party?

5.2 Covering peace processes

When groups engage in peace processes there are a range of things that we as journalists can do to ensure that our audience stays informed, but that we do not actually interfere with the process. The starting point is to recognise that while parties may genuinely be trying to find ways of resolving conflicts, the processes they are employing may not always be well designed or appropriate. They may favour people in power and seem destined to undermine the interests of particular groups. We need to be vigilant and to monitor processes carefully.

When covering peace processes there are several things we can do that can help parties to reach lasting agreements:

- Do not simply accept that because people are engaged in dialogue that they are genuinely looking for solutions. There have been conflicts in which parties have entered into peace negotiations simply to give themselves time to regroup and to prepare themselves for more fighting. It's important that while we focus on what is happening at the negotiation table, we also keep a very careful eye on what other activities the parties are engaged in.
- As negotiations continue and parties make public the progress that has been made, we need to communicate this to people outside of the negotiations and to receive feedback from people on the ground. By doing this we can help parties involved in negotiations understand how different groups are reacting to the agreements that are being made on their behalf.
- Do not just focus on the information that the parties at the table are releasing, but also spend time talking to the people on whose behalf they are negotiating – particularly those at a grassroots level within the group. Give them a chance to speak back to the elites and to ensure that their views are also considered.
- Be aware that negotiations can be extremely sensitive and that there are times when parties cannot afford to let the general public know what is happening until they have formally reached agreements. There have been cases when journalists have published information received from inside-sources and these reports, published and broadcast at sensitive moments in the negotiations, have severely damaged the negotiations.
- Identify people who have been left out and ask the question “What happens next?”
- Recognise that peace-making takes time and that parties cannot be expected to reach agreement in a few hours or even a few days. People often grow impatient as negotiations continue and we need to help people to understand that good agreements do take time.

Remain critical of the processes being used by peace-makers. Peace processes do not always fail because the parties are unwilling to pursue solutions; they also fail because of badly designed peace processes. If we do not have the knowledge and expertise to comment on these issues, then it can be useful to speak to experts who do.

5.3 Questions to ask about peace proposals or agreements

The following questions have been suggested by Johan Galtung for journalists reporting on peace proposals and agreements²⁴. They provide a very useful starting point for guiding journalists on the ways in which journalists can report on peace agreements and the kinds of questions we need to be asking of parties. Each of these questions relates specifically to the likelihood that a peace agreement will last.

- **What was the method behind the plan?** Were all parties involved in the dialogue?
- **Is the plan acceptable to all parties?** If not, what can be done about it?
- **Is the plan, if realised, self-sustainable?** If not, what can be done about it?
- **Is the plan based on autonomous action by the conflicting parties,** or does it depend on outsiders?
- **To what extent is there a process in the plan?** Does it spell out who shall do what, when, how and where?
- **To what extent is the plan based on what only the elites can do?**
- **Does the plan foresee an ongoing conflict-resolution process** or a single-shot agreement? Why?
- **If there has been violence, to what extent does the plan contain elements of rehabilitation/reconstruction, reconciliation and justice?**
- **If the plan does not work, is it reversible?**
- **Even if the plan does work for this conflict, does it create new conflicts or problems? Is it a good deal for all involved?**

5.4 Go beyond the usual suspects

In the discussion on conflict escalation in Part One we noted how, as conflicts develop, there is a tendency for more militant and hardline leaders to come to the fore. While supporters may expect such people to provide firm leadership, they are not necessarily the folk who have the most creative ideas about how conflicts can be managed. By speaking to a wider cross-section of group members we may be able to get a more comprehensive picture about the possible solutions.

It's also critical to remember that just because people belong to a particular group, does not mean they have a single social identity. There are likely to be areas where people share common interests with members of other groups that go beyond the issues involved in a particular conflict. These commonalities can be fascinating to explore and can serve to show that there might be prospects for enhanced understanding and communication that are not immediately evident. Such examples can also make extremely compelling news stories and as such are worth looking out for.

²⁴ Ibid.

People at different levels within groups may have very different ideas about how conflicts can be resolved and they are also likely to have very different experiences of the conflict. It is almost universally true that the people who suffer most during a conflict are those who originally had the least and these people have a right to be heard.

By speaking to people at different levels within groups we not only get a fuller picture of the issues and how people understand the conflict, but we can also broaden our knowledge of how people view each other, the stereotypes and misperceptions they hold and the things that they have in common.

Part six: strategies for conflict sensitive reporting

In this section we look at a number of strategies journalists may want to consider in reporting on conflict. All of these are specifically intended to generate stories that could be of great interest to readers and audiences, but which also have the potential to contribute to the constructive management and resolution of conflict.

6.1. Profiling peace-makers

Profiles of people involved in peace work can be a very useful way of raising people's awareness about peace processes and alternatives to violence when reporting on conflict. Sometimes these profiles might be about people with high status within a society, but some of the most interesting stories can be about normal people who, in the course of their daily lives, are making a difference. They may include people who build bridges between groups at a local level, organizers of peace committees that intervene when violence seems likely, people running peace gardens or crèches for children from different groups. Such stories can play an important role in challenging stereotypes and can challenge enemy images that people have of each other.

While recognising the value of reporting on the work of people involved in peace-building, Cris Chinaka warns that such profiles should never be seen as the only strategy available to journalists involved in conflict sensitive reporting. Cris believes that while profiles are often the easier stories to do they should not come at the expense of in-depth conflict reporting. Profiles should be illustrative of how people can make a difference, but journalists should avoid allowing *"personalities to dominate or overshadow what a conflict is all about"*.

It can also be valuable profiling the work of organisations that are making a difference. Youth organisations, sport clubs, women's cooperatives and a host of other NGOs and CBOs play an important role in bringing people together both during and after violent confrontations.

6.2 Joint interviews

Whether you are working for print or broadcast institutions, journalists can get very interesting stories from sitting down with people from opposing groups and interviewing them together. It's likely to be difficult to get leaders involved in such interviews, because they may not want to be seen speaking to the opposition. However, it can often be possible to get ordinary members of groups involved in such interviews. Some interesting combinations of people might include:

- People who were friends before a conflict broke out and who have managed to sustain their friendship despite being on different sides.
- Young people who attend or have attended the same school.
- Mothers who had children at the same time, but who are now separated by the conflict.
- People who grew up together.
- Married couples from different backgrounds who are managing the challenge of keeping their families together.

The list is endless, but these joint interviews can result in engaging stories that audiences will find both moving and entertaining. These kinds of stories can challenge stereotypes and increase the prospect of peace. In writing these kinds of stories we can contribute toward enhancing the 'mediative' space we discussed in Part One.

When doing these stories, be careful that you are not putting people in danger. There may be times when you might want to keep their identities secret if there is a chance they may be victimised for 'fraternising with the enemy'.

6.3 Exchanging questions

In this example you the journalist asks members of conflicting groups to think of questions they would like to ask of members of the other group. These might relate to why groups are behaving in particular ways, or why groups feel that a particular issue is important to them. Having gathered the questions from the one group, journalists then ask members of the other group to respond. You can then ask the party that has just responded to the questions if they have questions for the other side.

The value of this approach is that it gives parties in conflict that are often unable to communicate with each other directly the opportunity to engage each other on key issues that they otherwise wouldn't get the chance to. We as journalists can generally move freely between parties and are in a position to facilitate these exchanges. From a news point of view it's likely that audiences will find the questions that are posed as revealing and interesting as the responses as these often uncover parties' real concerns.

The results of these exchanges of questions can be exceptionally informative and contribute towards enhancing the understanding between groups. They can also help people located on the periphery of the conflict to get a much better sense of what the issues are and what the parties are concerned about. The approach has the potential to work very well in print features that include the questions and the responses. It also has the potential to work well as a radio feature. An alternative for radio would be to have the person responding to the questions in the studio and to ask the questions during a live broadcast.

This approach does not have to happen at the level of party leadership. It could also work exceptionally well for the journalist to gather the questions from 'ordinary' members of the conflicting parties and to pose those same questions to number of 'ordinary' members from the opposing party or parties. It could be highly significant if the responses vary from person to person, because this may illustrate that opposing groups are not monolithic.

6.4 Asking the same questions of all parties

In this variation of the approach discussed above, Cris Chinaka recommends that we:

should develop the habit of asking similar questions across the board as a way of addressing issues of fairness and getting to the nut of the story.

By asking each party involved in a conflict the same set of questions journalists can help people to identify where they have concerns in common and where they differ. While the questions asked will need to be contextualised, the following are some questions a journalist could ask each of the parties.

- What do you believe is the primary cause of this conflict?
- What, for you/your party/organisation, are the priority issues that you want resolved?
- What would be the most constructive way of approaching this conflict?
- How do you think you could satisfy your demands, while at the same time addressing the concerns of the other party?

Presenting a news feature for print or broadcast which positions the parties' responses to these questions alongside each other could be a way of generating fascinating content that could enhance people's understanding of the issues, the parties positions and the prospects for resolution. Cris suggests that it would be interesting to ask our audiences which questions we should be putting to parties across the board.

6.5 Helping people understand each other's values

The fact that different people operate according to different value systems can also play an important role in conflicts and journalists can help people to understand each other's values. This can serve to assist parties in two ways:

Firstly, if parties' values clash, explaining these values to other parties through the media can help promote understanding. We can do this by asking people several different types of questions, including the following:

- What do you feel people from the other group need to know about you in order for them to understand you better?
- What do you think needs to happen to improve the potential for understanding and tolerance between your group and the others?
- What do you need to learn about the other group that would help you and your supporters understand them better?

Secondly, if parties discover that they share many similar values this can help them to recognise their common humanity and this can play a key role in reducing tensions.

In seeking to help parties to understand each other's values we can play an important role in breaking down harmful stereotypes which:

- Interfere with a group's abilities to develop and express their own identities.
- Contribute to polarisation by lumping people into groups where they may not even feel they belong.
- Reinforce parties' negative perceptions of each other.
- Affect the way parties feel about themselves.

We can do this by:

- Trying to show parties as being collectives of different individuals who, while sharing some of the same values, also have different feelings about issues.
- Showing that not all members of a group favour specific types of behaviour or want to be identified with the actions of other members of the group (look for evidence to support this).

6.6 Broadening the search for solutions

While it is not the journalist's job to tell parties how they should be dealing with their conflicts, *we can play a role in helping them to identify possible solutions they may not have thought about.* Our position as observers and our connections with all parties involved in conflict can provide us with insights that parties who are locked into specific ways of viewing conflict may not be able to see or may not be aware of.

How do we offer possible solutions, when we should not be allowing our own feelings to influence our reporting? There are two answers to this question:

- Every newspaper and radio station has a space where people can voice opinions and we can use these spaces to offer insights into possible solutions. However, we need to be absolutely clear that the audience knows that this is space where subjective opinion can be aired. We must distinguish clearly between when we are presenting facts and offering opinions.
- We can ask "What if?" questions. We have spoken about the journalist's role in asking questions on behalf of our audience and by asking "What if?" we are fulfilling that role. There is nothing wrong with a journalist putting a possible solution to a party in conflict and asking them for their comments on it. By using this technique we not only ask questions that will interest our audience, but we can also encourage parties to think about possible peaceful solutions. Even if the hypothetical solutions we present to parties are not regarded as appropriate they may encourage them to consider alternative ways of handling the conflict.

Barbara Among suggests that it can be useful to draw on past examples of conflicts that have been resolved and to consider whether the actual solutions that were arrived at or the processes that were followed could be applicable in the new context. In doing so it can be useful to interview people who were involved in these processes to get a sense of what worked and what did not work as party's tried to manage and resolve the conflict. These people can also be asked how they would advise people involved in the current impasse to act. There is no pressure on the parties to accept the advice, but putting different alternatives on the table can increase the range of options available to parties. It can also give the supporters of belligerent leaders something to think about and equip them with arguments they can use to dissuade members in their own party from using violence. There is always value in demonstrating that violence is a choice and that there will always be alternatives if people are willing to consider these.

6.7 Avoid simple labels

Journalists reporting on conflict will always have to grapple with two fundamental questions, namely: How do we explain the complexity inherent in most conflicts in a way that our audiences will understand? And, how do we manage to squeeze all of this information into the limited amount of time or space that is available to us. The problem we face is that in trying to explain conflicts to audiences who know little about them we often run the risk of oversimplifying the narrative. This can mean failing to discuss the behaviours in relation to the parties' attitudes and the context within which the conflict is taking place. One of the methods for doing so is to come up with convenient

labels for conflicts. It is common for journalists to use simple labels to describe different kinds of conflict based on who is involved or what it is that the parties seem to be fighting over. This kind of approach seeks to capture the issues quickly so that the journalist can get on with his or her description of the latest actuality. Unfortunately using labels as a quick way of explaining conflicts often means journalists provide distorted and de-contextualised accounts of conflict stories. Such labels often focus on just one aspect of the conflict and neglect the fact that most conflicts are the result of a range of different conditions and dynamics. Examples of such labels could include 'black on black violence' a term frequently used in apartheid South Africa, 'the Hutu-Tutsi' conflict in Rwanda, 'Christian-Muslim' wars in Indonesia and so on.

Using a label like 'Christian-Muslim conflict', or 'religious war' creates the impression that conflict between faiths is inevitable. Using labels like this makes it seem like difference is a sufficient cause for conflict and negates the fact that across the globe people of different faiths and different ethnicities live side by side without ever coming into conflict.

For Cris Chinaka the solution is not to use labels, but to take the trouble to describe what is going on. This may take a little longer, but at least it will give the audience enough information to make informed decisions. The other members of the editorial team agreed and suggested that the problem of labels did not end with the naming of conflicts; it also extended to people involved in the conflict.

Barbara Among demonstrated how complex the problem can be by citing the case of youth who were fighting for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda.

When these people were killed in battle then they were described as rebel soldiers, but when they returned home and were reunited with their families they are referred to as abducted children. These are the contradictions the Acholi people have had to live with. On the one hand these are the people who are tormenting us and forcing us to live in poverty, on the other hand these are our children who were taken from us.

Barbara suggests that the only way of addressing this question is to refer to the young people as "LRA combatants, many of whom were abducted as children". She acknowledges that this takes up much more space than simply calling people rebels, but she stresses that it's critical to remind audiences of the context. People should not forget that the LRA is mostly made up of abducted children. Barbara, like Cris, believes that the alternative to labels is providing a description of people's actions and letting the reader and the listener decide for themselves. Barbara explains:

By describing the person's actions we are telling a more thorough story than simply calling someone a tyrant or an extremist. We must show people what the person has done that would warrant the description.

Kioko Kivandi cited a different case in which a group of people have come to be known as outlaws. In this case it's worth making it clear what it means for a group to be known as outlaws within that particular context. Have they been banned and declared illegal by the government? For what reason? Many liberations movements have been described as outlaws in the past and it can be important to situate the group's status in terms of how they came to be known as outlaws.

6.8 Watch your language

The language that we use in our reports will impact on the way in which our audiences will come to understand a conflict, but it will also impact on the way in which they will view our media. If audiences pick up that our use of language is sensational or imprecise there is a fair chance that this will impact on our credibility and on our ability to play a constructive role in conflict. Cris Chinaka makes the point arguing that:

... we have to treat the issue of language very seriously because it comes to the heart and soul of conflict reporting. We must choose our language as carefully as possible, master it if needs be, debate it in the newsroom and have a language guideline which discourages use of hate language, and encourages debate around the use of appropriate language.

We need to be exceptionally careful about the words we use and to think about how they are likely to be perceived by different groups. In describing groups or people we should try to use terms that describe them accurately, but which do not serve to paint them in either an excessively negative or an excessively positive light.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) offer some excellent advice when it comes to your choice of words in reporting on conflict. They suggest that journalists should:

- Avoid adjectives such as 'vicious', 'brutal', 'cruel' and 'barbaric'. These will always place the journalist in a position where he or she is seen to be siding with one party over another. Rather provide the facts that you have at your disposal and let the audience reach their own conclusions
- Avoid labels like 'terrorist', 'extremist' or 'fanatic'. Using these terms places the journalist in a camp and shows bias. All of these terms suggest that the people being referred to are not rational actors and that their views are representative of a fringe minority. This is by no means always the case.
- Avoid victimizing language like 'devastated', 'defenceless' and 'pathetic'. This can be disempowering. Don't just focus on what has been done to people, but also show how people are coping.
- The attribution of statements is another way in which journalists can reveal their bias and discriminate against parties. Each of the following examples describes how you might attribute a quote, but they all suggest very different things about the speaker of what he or she had to say:

- *Mr X admitted...*
- *Mr J confessed...*
- *Mr L alleged...*
- *Mrs B charged...*
- *Mr K revealed...*

In virtually all cases the word “said” can be seen as a neutral and fair a way of describing the act of speaking. It’s generally better to let the speakers’ words speak for themselves rather than using overly dramatic language to describe how they said it. If needs be it would be better to describe the person’s demeanour as he or she spoke if it’s necessary to provide a more detailed impression.

Journalists should also avoid adopting the terminology and jargon of the people they are reporting on. This can be especially important for journalists who spend time with the military and where terms such as “collateral damage” have come to serve as euphemisms for civilians killed in action. Using the jargon of a particular group can make you sound like you sympathise with that group and this can impact on your own and your media organisation’s credibility.

6.9 When your opinion can count

It’s seldom acceptable for journalists to inject their own opinions into stories about conflict, but there are some spaces where it is quite acceptable for them to do so. The editorial pages of a newspaper and the introductory segment to a radio talk-show are prime examples. There are also occasions when journalists themselves become sources in other journalists’ stories and other occasions when the only way to tell a story is to describe how you experienced something. More and more media houses encourage journalists to blog about their work and we are seeing additional opportunities cropping up for journalists to air their views. The following are some suggestions for journalists presenting opinion pieces on conflict.

- **Respect your audience.** Do not take advantage of the platform you have been given to promote your own interests or the interests of your group. It’s vital to consider the concerns of other groups involved in conflict and to use the space you have available to help people understand each others’ positions.
- **Promote a diversity of opinion.** Rather than promoting a single approach or solution to a conflict, show that there might be a range of different options available open to parties. When you do feel the need to present a position, do so in a way that lets audiences know you are contributing to the debate and that you encourage additional opinions.
- **Do your research.** Just because you are not presenting hard news does not suggest that you should not be drawing on solid research. Explain where the information you are relying on comes from. We need to give people credible and reliable background information so that they can fairly assess whether the opinions we are presenting are worth considering.
- **Consider the response.** Be aware of the diversity of your audience. Consider how what you have to say might impact on people in different communities and from different backgrounds. This does not necessarily mean censoring yourself, but it does mean being cautious about unwittingly offending others — particularly members of minority groups. Being provocative for the sake of being provocative may be entertaining, but it is seldom if ever helpful in a conflict situation. Many columnists and talk show hosts try to impress their audiences with clever language and provocative statements, but these can be immensely divisive.
- **Respect yourself.** Be conscious of what your work says about you. Have you used sexist, homophobic, classist, and ethnically divisive language? What you say in your opinion pieces can impact on your audience’s view of your

hard news stories, your credibility and the credibility of the organization you are affiliated with.

- **Draw on your observations.** Find out about people who are making a difference in times of conflict and write about them. Discuss what they have accomplished and suggest how others might make similar contributions. Use the space you have to speculate about possible solutions and encourage people to consider your ideas. You don't need to be right, but you do want to contribute to promoting creative thinking.

Part seven: Reporting tips

While it is hoped that the suggestions made in part Six will provide journalists with a range of different strategies that they can adopt or adapt in covering different conflicts, this penultimate part of the toolbox will concentrate on a range of more practical issues journalists should consider when reporting on conflict. Most of the points made in this section were based on observations made by members of the editorial team as they reflected on their own experiences of covering conflict. These ideas emerged during discussions, with one person's ideas sparking another's. Part Seven begins by capturing a few simple, but very useful points that were made by the group during our discussions. We then explore some ideas about the role and importance of interviewing in conflict reporting, before focusing on the importance of editorial collaboration in the comprehensive coverage of conflict. Part Seven ends by making a few suggestions about how to stay safe when covering conflict.

7.1 Some practical tips for conflict reporting

Members of the editorial team share a wide range of experiences in covering different forms of conflict for different types of media organisations and this collection of brief tips draw directly on their experience. Many of these ideas speak to each other and there are strong links between the different ideas. It's likely that you may already be doing many of these things in your reporting, but if not, they are all worth considering.

Be Proactive

The editorial team agreed that journalists should not sit back and wait for conflicts to erupt. Instead we should be monitoring the communities we work in and looking out for the signs of emerging conflict (see Section 1.3, Stages of Conflict Development). As soon as we observe the signs that a conflict may be moving from a latent to an emerging state we need to start speaking to people on the ground to get as many view points as possible about what is happening. This will ensure that we are well informed when we approach the main stakeholders about the conflict. James Mphande stresses that journalists should avoid being reactive. James says that:

If we wait for the spin doctors to come to us we are limited by the agendas they have planned, but if we are approaching them proactively with carefully crafted questions we can get a proper understanding of what is going on.

Cultivate Sources

Journalists can only be proactive if they have their ears to the ground and are in contact with people who know what is happening in a community. The only way this can happen is if journalists get out of the newsroom and spend time in communities meeting people and making contact with a wide range of organisations. Find out about the local NGOs and CBOs that are working in your area, spend time talking to small business owners and make contact with the local churches, mosques and temples. Take the time to introduce yourself

to people from civil society organisations, social activists and unionists. Make contact with individuals — not just spokespeople — in the police and different departments of local councils and get their contact details. Check in with these people on a regular basis. A weekly or fortnightly phone call costs little, but keeping in touch with a wide range of regular sources often results in great stories. These are often the people who will be able to alert you to the rise of tensions and possible conflicts in communities sometimes well before they break out and at a point where your stories can contribute to preventing conflict before it erupts.

Making contact with a wide variety of people can also be critical during times of highly escalated conflict when certain parts of a community become no-go areas or when you simply do not have the time and capacity to visit many different parts of a community. These contacts can give you tip-offs about what is happening, describe what they are experiencing and help you to verify claims being made by the parties involved, the authorities and other stakeholders.

For radio stations covering violent outbreaks, these sources can also help you keep audiences updated about where violence is taking place and which areas they should be avoiding.

Keep a cheat sheet

Barbara Among recommends that journalists should develop a database which contains all of the important information they are likely to need when reporting on conflict. This could include historical information about previous conflicts, dates and the names and positions of the different stakeholders. It can also include information about key commitments that have been made by different leaders with regard to the conflict. This resource should be continuously updated. Describing her approach Barbara said:

When I was actively covering the northern Uganda conflict I had a small book where I would register the events, put the date and time, what happened and the people involved. I kept the book and it was easy to refer to instances in the past, because I knew exactly when it happened, during what time. When I was going to do stories I had the records, created my own database.

Having a “database” such as this available means that journalists reporting from the field are equipped to provide stories that help to contextualise the conflict. It’s especially useful for broadcast journalists who are providing regular live updates.

Lost in translation

For journalists who are working in multi-lingual societies there is always the danger of translation errors which can distort the essence of what people have to say. It’s clearly important for journalists to be as careful as possible when translating quotes into another language and to double-check everything. However, even when a translation is technically accurate there is always the possibility that the nuance of what the person is trying to say may get lost. Where possible it is often advisable to paraphrase what someone is saying

rather than to quote them directly. Alternatively, journalists can make it clear that the quote is a translation, for example: ‘Speaking in isiZulu, Mr C said: “translated quote”’. This alerts the reader to the possibility that the translation into another language may not be absolutely reflective of what Mr C said. For radio the technique of starting with the original speech before fading this down and bringing up the translation achieves the same effect.

Being explicit about reporting constraints

There are times when journalists may have to rely on others to gain access to conflict arenas and in these circumstances it’s important for reporters to be clear about the restraints they may be experiencing with regard to their reporting. Journalists who accompany military or police patrols into conflict zones are often accompanied by “minders” who ensure they do not speak to certain people or visit certain places. Under these circumstances it’s vital for journalists to be clear about the fact that their reports are unlikely to reflect what is really happening on the ground. The same can be said for situations where journalists accompany aid agencies or ambassadorial delegations into the field. These agencies are often as keen as the military to control what appears in the news media and it’s important for journalists to be upfront about the extent of the support they have received from these groups, or whether or not they have received support.

7.2 Interviewing people affected by conflict

It should be clear from everything that we have discussed so far in this toolbox that interviewing lies at the heart of conflict sensitive reporting. We certainly must describe the behaviours of parties involved in conflict, but it is only through our interactions with people that we can really come to understand their real needs, interests and why these things are important to people. Likewise it’s only through conversations that get beneath the surface that we can come to understand how parties are experiencing conflict, what it is they fear and what it might take to allay those fears.

Conflict sensitive reporting involves speaking to people across the board. We certainly need to engage with the leaders of the different parties involved in conflict, with the heads of influential stakeholder groups and with peace-keepers and peace-makers who are involved in helping to resolve conflict. We also need to be engaging with people on the ground who have little influence over the outcomes of a conflict; the people who have the most to lose and who will generally suffer the most. In this section we draw on the collective wisdom of the editorial team to share some tips for conducting interviews in conflict situations.

Some general tips for conflict sensitive interviewing

- Avoid phrasing questions in terms of winners and losers. When asking questions about goals, objectives and strategies encourage parties to move away from zero-sum game ideas. How we phrase a question will have an impact on how people respond. Asking, “What will it take to satisfy you?” is a very different question to “What will it take for this conflict to be resolved in a way that satisfies everyone?” The first begs a zero-sum response while

the latter asks people to think more broadly. Both are fair questions, but the second is more likely to encourage a constructive response.

- Encourage interviewees to consider the other parties involved. Instead of just asking parties to outline their needs and interests – we should be trying to get beyond positions – we should also be asking them how they understand the needs and interests of others involved in the conflict.
- It's not our job to censure interviewees, but we also do not want to be manipulated by parties who want to use our channels to further provoke conflict and to launch attacks on others. It's often worth following up on insulting and provocative statements with questions that ask the person to take responsibility for his or her statements. For example: What kind of a response are you expecting from the other party in relation to your attack? What are you aiming to achieve by insulting the other party?
- Be firm. Being conflict sensitive does not prevent journalists from being tough on interviewees when necessary. For instance if an interviewee is making claims that seem untrue or exaggerated we need to challenge them on these claims. Similarly if they make demands or promises that seem unrealistic we need to question whether what is being said is feasible.
- Listen carefully and paraphrase people's responses back to them. We cannot afford to misrepresent what people have to say during times of conflict. Lives could depend on our getting a particular quote right. There is never any harm in making sure that you fully understand what a source is telling you. For example, repeat the interviewee's position back to them, saying: "Am I correct in saying your position on this is ABC ...?"
- It's important to do your research in preparation for interviews, but if there are times when you do not know something it's best to admit to that and to get clarity. Make it clear that it's in everyone's interests for you to get the story right and never be afraid to ask for clarification during an interview.
- Ensure that your interviewee has been given the best opportunity to convey their message in the way they want to get it across. Be as sure as you can be that what you say in your report will reflect what the person intended to say. Be aware that if you distort what people are saying you may well be aggravating or prolonging the conflict.
- Don't put words into people's mouths. Avoid the "Would you say XYZ...?" questions that are deliberately intended to get people to say what journalists want them to say. Rather take your time and be patient with speakers. Let them express themselves in their own words.
- Adopt a tone that suggests even-handedness. Don't pretend to be a sympathiser and make it clear that you are interested in what everyone has to say.
- As journalists we often have to speak to people whose views and ideologies we find objectionable and sometimes deeply offensive. In cases like this take the time to think about how your feelings might influence your behaviour in an interview. Be aware that unless you are willing to give the interviewee an opportunity to be heard you will not be able to contribute constructively to mitigating the conflict.

Interviewing people affected by conflict

- Don't pretend to understand what someone who is caught up in a conflict is going through. Take the interview slowly and let the person tell his or her own story. There's no harm in showing that you care, but this does not

mean you sympathise with a particular group. Let people open up slowly and respect the fact that people may have experienced and seen things you may not even be able to imagine.

- Begin the interview gently and do what you can to make the person feel comfortable before you start asking the more difficult questions. Let the person know that they are in control of the interview. They can decide on how much or how little they want to tell you. It can help to ask probing questions, but be sensitive to the interviewee's emotional needs. It can help to be silent for a moment or two to give people the chance to think and to collect themselves if they are feeling emotional.
- Asking open-ended questions encourages people to tell their stories in their own words. Closed-ended questions leading to "Yes" and "No" answers tend to foreground the journalist's thinking instead of the interviewees' explanations.
- It's often better to conduct one-on-one interviews with people who have experienced trauma, but this is not always the case. There may be times when a source will feel more comfortable if they have others there to support them. We need to make allowances for these requests to make interviewees feel as comfortable as possible.
- Be aware that, when conducting group interviews, the unexpected might happen. Interviews conducted in group situations can become challenging if people disagree with each other and begin to fight among themselves.
- Make absolutely sure that people understand how what they have said is likely to be used and whether or not he or she will be identified in the story.
- Be sure you understand what the source is saying. It's often useful to end the interview by highlighting the points that you think you will use in your story, and checking with the source whether your understanding is accurate. It's also worth checking on whether the source feels you are missing anything important.
- Be emotionally prepared. Journalists tend to get hardened over time, but there will often be cases where something about an interview or an interviewee touches us deeply. We need to be alert to that possibility and to think about how we will respond when this happens.
- Never make promises you cannot guarantee. The best we can generally do is to promise to try to tell the person's story accurately and with respect so that others can understand what they have been through and what they need. We cannot promise that our stories will bring about change or attract international aid. Most of us cannot even guarantee our media houses will use the stories. It can be worth explaining that this decision rests with the editor.

7.3 Newsrooms co-operation in conflict coverage

Throughout this toolbox we have been talking about things that the individual journalists can do when it comes to reporting on conflict, but it's also important to recognise that an entire news organisation can commit itself to a conflict sensitive approach to covering conflict. We believe that news organisations that choose to focus on making a constructive difference can significantly enhance the quality of their reporting and produce a product that will be attractive to audiences.

Cris Chinaka recommends that when conflicts start to emerge newsrooms should look at how they can pool their physical and intellectual resources to

ensure that they are able to provide in-depth coverage. He stresses that it's important to recognise how much expertise is contained in a newsroom and the importance of creating opportunities for people to share what they know. Barbara Among agrees, saying:

Journalists know a lot, more than we think ... When you're out with journalists you can just bring up a topic and discuss it, you'll be amazed how much information they have. These are people who report on conflict, and they can share their information with you. They know so much.

Cris recommends that when significant conflicts do begin to emerge everyone in the newsroom should be involved in a planning meeting during which everyone is involved in mapping what is happening, who is involved and how the conflict is likely to develop. Then, based on this analysis, the newsroom should plan how the story can be covered in a way that is both engaging and informative. Rather than reporting on a conflict like a sports match with two opposing sides competing with each other, the newsroom should think of fresh ways of framing the story. These meetings should also concentrate on identifying stories that are often neglected by journalists caught up in providing blow-by-blow accounts of confrontations. These can include human interest stories that touch people emotionally and help them to develop a deeper understanding of what is happening around them.

By drawing on the conceptual tools discussed in Parts One and Four, newsroom meetings can discuss how the conflict is unfolding as a process and how it is likely to develop. Journalists can then work together to evaluate what is likely to happen and what the consequences might be of a conflict following a particular course. Having made this assessment journalists will be well placed to research stories that may help to raise awareness of what might happen if conflicts are allowed to escalate unchecked.

Cris believes that newsrooms do not spend enough time planning their conflict coverage and argues that:

People still don't work to a plan and for me that shows in the stories. If you work to a plan there will be several stories to it because you have mapped it out; you know exactly where you are, where it's going, who is involved. I think it's a major weakness.

Agreeing with Cris on the importance of planning, Barbara also stresses the importance of continuing to work as a team in covering conflict. She suggests that journalists tend to forget about conflicts as soon as they appear to be resolved and stresses that it is important to plan follow-up stories. If parties have agreed to do certain things by certain dates journalists must note these agreements and plan their follow-up stories in accordance with these dates. Barbara also notes that it's important to follow up on the costs of a conflict and impact of the fighting so that the impact of confrontational approaches to conflict is highlighted. Instead of reporting costs in bland figures that are largely incomprehensible, use examples that show the real value of money. How many homes could be bought for a million dollars, how many children could be fed for a year on that amount?

Cris recognises that even within newsrooms journalists can be competitive, but he believes that the advantages of sharing ideas and information about conflicts will be to everyone's benefit. He says journalists should not treat reporting like a zero-sum game in which some will gain and others will lose. Instead he argues that the planning process will help everyone produce better and more effective stories and that the joint approach will ultimately help to build everyone's careers. Being part of a successful newsroom reflects on you and on the potential quality of your work.

Many journalists will argue that they don't have time to organise planning meetings of this kind between the normal demands of covering the news. Our editorial team suggests that these meetings can actually save time. They give journalists a focus, help them identify contacts and provide opportunities for people to give each other suggestions that can help them overcome a wide range of potential obstacles. The team also argued that it's essential for newsrooms to take the time to evaluate their performance not just from edition to edition but also over time.

The editorial team also recommended that media houses should continually be updating the knowledge of their staff when it comes to reporting on conflict. They recommended that newsrooms should hold regular meetings where someone with specialised knowledge is invited to speak to reporters about things such as the conflict resolution process, how mediation works, the impact of public health on conflict, etc. These kinds of discussions could serve to stimulate debate and help newsrooms identify potential conflicts that might be latent now, but that could become volatile overnight.

7.4 Personal security

This toolbox acknowledges the enormous contribution of those journalists who place their lives on the line day after day reporting on international and civil wars and violent confrontations in deeply divided countries. These journalists have a vital contribution to make in bearing witness to the horrors of violence and can play a critical role in holding armies (both regular and irregular), political movements and governments accountable for their actions. These journalists are often trained to survive in violent situations and are equipped with the technology and body armour they need to stay alive under fire. The majority of journalists, however, do not spend their time following wars, ducking bullets and navigating their way between hostile groups. They have not undergone training on how to survive in combat situations or operate the necessary safety equipment, and yet all too often they find themselves in situations where their lives are in danger.

Journalists looking for more extensive advice should consult the references suggested in 2.5 of this toolbox and spend time talking to other journalists with experience of covering wars and highly escalated violent conflicts. The following list of points for increasing your safety in volatile situations is intended to provide you with some ideas about how to prepare yourself for covering violent conflict, but bear in mind that it's by no means definitive:

- It's your choice. No editor or employer has the right to force you to go into an area where you feel your life may be endangered. In this regard the Reporters Without Borders' Charter for the Safety of Journalists Working in War Zones

or Dangerous Areas²⁵ states that journalists should: “have the right to refuse ... an assignment without explanation and without there being any finding of unprofessional conduct”. The journalist will almost always be the best placed person to evaluate the situation and it should be up to him or her to make the final decision.

- If you are going into a volatile situation let your newsdesk know where you are going and when you plan to be back. Keep the desk updated if you change your plans. This is important because your colleagues may be able to organise help for you if you fail to check in at appointed times. However, their ability to do anything for you will be greatly hampered if you do not keep them updated about your movements. Things can move very fast when violence breaks out and you can find that you've moved a long way in a short time while tracking violent confrontations.
- Be conscious of how people are responding to the news media. In some instances journalists are made to feel welcome, often because people feel authorities may act with more restraint if the media is present. In other situations people may be very antagonistic towards journalists. Read the signs. Be very careful if there is an overwhelming sense of negativity towards the media. People acting in crowds will often commit acts they would never contemplate by themselves. Carry accreditation with you, but use your judgement about whether to display it or not.
- If you do run into trouble it can be helpful to be able to say that you know the leaders of parties involved in a confrontation. Having their numbers on your mobile phone and being able to call these people can often get you out of a threatening situation. You will also want to have the contact numbers for police and military officers from units operating in the area in case you run into trouble with government agencies.
- Familiarise yourself with the terrain and plan how, if things get too volatile, you will make your escape. Establish at least one backup escape route in case your first option is blocked. Update your escape options as you move from one spot to the next and be conscious of how the situation may be changing around you.
- Stay with other journalists. Many reporters have talked about how they have run into trouble when they have gone off on their own. You may not want to stick with the pack, but it is generally safer to do so.
- Dress appropriately. Avoid wearing colours that might be associated with the different parties. Do not wear political t-shirts and avoid wearing clothes that could be mistaken for police and military uniforms. All of these outfits could set you up as a target. Wear shoes that you can run in – running shoes, cross trainers or light hiking boots are best. Clothes made from natural fibres are less flammable and safer to wear.
- Pack a small backpack that includes:
 - Your equipment
 - Spare batteries
 - A small first aid kit that includes bandages, antiseptic and plasters
 - Water and energy bars
 - A torch
- A clear head is your most important survival tool. Rather withdraw too early than too late. Control your temper at all times and never react violently to verbal or physical provocation.

²⁵ Reporters without Borders. March, 2002. Charter for the Safety of Journalists Working in War Zones or Dangerous Area. Available: <http://www.rsf.org/IMG/doc-1288.pdf> [accessed 20 March 2012].

Useful resources for journalists

This toolbox has only been able to touch on many of the critical issues journalists should be considering when it comes to understanding and reporting on conflict. Those wanting to take this forward will find many useful resources online. Here are some of the sites we would recommend that you visit.

Conflict Sensitive Reporting: A Handbook by Ross Howard

This is an excellent resource for journalists which explores many of the points made in this toolbox in some depth and provides good examples of conflict sensitive reporting approaches.

http://www.i-m-s.dk/files/publications/IMS_CSJ_Handbook.pdf

ACCORD

The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is a South African-based civil society organisation working throughout Africa to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent. The site contains many interesting links to online seminars on UN legislation, online publications, occasional papers concerning peace-keeping and peace-making, magazines on conflict trends across Africa, latest reports about climate change and conflict, natural resources, the environment and conflict, mediating land conflict and policy and practice briefs.

<http://www.accord.org.za>

Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation,

The site of the Berghof Foundation's key publication, the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, the handbook features the state-of-the-art research and practice in conflict transformation which has three primary aims including to foster critical discussion among and between academics and practitioners, bridging the gap between theory and practice in the field of conflict transformation and including a wide range of voices and perspectives from different regions throughout the world, as well as from multiple disciplines and faculties. Website content includes commissioned articles by leading experts and a Dialogue Series on key issues in conflict transformation.

<http://www.berghof-handbook.net>

The Wip

A broad ranging current affairs site, The Wip has an array of columns and essays dedicated to Arts and Culture, Economy, Education, Politics, Science, Technology and Universal. This is a great site for picking up a broad range of eclectic and informed opinion pieces from some established journalists and writers including Arundhati Roy.

<http://www.thewip.net>

Conciliation Resources

Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and encourage peace-building. This site has an array of commentaries and opinion pieces on contemporary political issues and is home to the organisations respected publication series, Accord. Accord projects examine specific global conflicts and common peacebuilding themes, presenting case studies of experiences and insights of local and international practitioners and experts, and people affected by conflict. The analyses also include policy conclusions and recommendations for best practice.

<http://www.c-r.org>

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

The Dart Center's site offers an array of resources for journalists involved in reporting on conflict. The comprehensive site has a features page which includes contributions by established journalists offering insights into how they report in certain situations and suggesting tips that have helped them in their careers. You can sign up to contribute to a blog or observe the various hard-hitting documentaries about contemporary natural disasters and conflict zones. This is a great site for journalists looking to refine their approach to emotional preparation and debriefing, as the site offers a broad range of manuals written by journalists who are experienced in reporting on conflict. There are tips and tools for how to report on disaster, children and trauma, domestic violence, sexual violence, suicide and tragic anniversaries, as well as interviewing self-care tips for journalists.

<http://www.dartcenter.org>

The Peace and Collaborative Development

The Peace and Collaborative Development website is a free professional networking site, with over 24 300 members from around the world, aimed at fostering dialogue and sharing of resources in international development, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming, human rights, social entrepreneurship and related fields. After registering you can create your own profile, contribute to a discussion topic, start a blog, chat about conflict related topics, invite friends to join, view videos and watch interviews with leading practitioners.

<http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org>

Media for Peacebuilding

Dedicated to utilising the potential of the media in contributing to peace, Media for Peacebuilding provides information about how this is possible from theories of peacebuilding all the way through to journalistic practices. The site is theoretically positioned by a section on the foundational theory that drives the practice of media for peacebuilding, including introductions to Peace and Conflict theory, the Peace Journalism model, and the Peace Media framework. You can also sign up for short courses in peace journalism training which are available online. The site offers an extensive range of news by topic essays,

documentaries and interviews covering topics ranging from community development and gender and peacebuilding to rebel music and urban farming. This is an informative site offering a wide range of information and opinions about pertinent issues.

<http://mediaforpeacebuilding.com>

Models of Unity

In an era characterised by too much attention to rising conflict, division, and “us vs. them” paradigms, Models of Unity aims to bring awareness to the initiatives that are working to bring people together across divides of race, ethnicity, and religion in ways that benefit the spiritual, social, and/or economic life of their communities. The site features explanations of such models that have brought people together from diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups, over a sustained period of time, and with clear outcomes for communities. You can learn more about models from Africa, East Asia, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and North America. You will also find an inspiring selection of videos on the theme of common humanity.

<http://www.modelsofunity.net>
