

Radio Talkshows for Peacebuilding

a guide

Ross Howard and Francis Rolt



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How to use this Guidebook

This is a guidebook, not a workshop or conference report. It has been written for radio broadcasters who produce or present radio talkshows¹ in countries or regions where there is conflict. It focuses mainly on conflicts between groups, peoples or countries which either are or risk becoming violent. Some broadcasters may be familiar with some of the ideas, but we hope that it also contains a lot of new and useful material.

Everyone would like to live in a peaceful society, one not driven by hatred and violence, but the question is how to get there? This guidebook is packed with a wealth of examples and tools to help team discussions about how talkshows can be made in ways which contribute to peace. Each chapter begins with a short summary of the main ideas and concepts it contains, but overall the guidebook includes:

- A how-to guide to analysing conflict
- Tools and examples of how you as a radio professional can help build a peaceful society
- Descriptions and definitions of the different types of talkshows and their various strengths and weaknesses

You'll also find quotations and examples in boxes, while some important ideas which could be used for discussion are highlighted in the Tables.

Most of the examples are drawn from African countries, and the guide is written with that continent in mind. But the issues, discussion and skills are relevant to a much wider spectrum of countries.

Radio Talkshows for Peacebuilding - a guide is one of a series² of guidebooks developed for radio producers and others involved in making positive radio in Africa - radio which makes a difference. It has been produced by the Radio for Peacebuilding, Africa project³, which is a project of Search for Common Ground. It can be read straight through, or you may simply use the Tables as a reference, but whatever you do your comments, ideas and experiences will help improve it so please send feedback to radiopeaceafrica@sfcg.be

¹ A radio talkshow is a discussion programme, usually broadcast live, which may include phone-ins, and will probably involve at least two studio guests and a presenter/host

² The others are; Youth Radio for Peacebuilding - a guide, and Radio Soap Operas for Peacebuilding - a guide

³ The Radio for Peacebuilding, Africa project (www.radiopeaceafrica.org), was set up and is run by the conflict transformation NGO Search for Common Ground (www.sfcg.org). The project is entirely funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID).

Conflict is a primary subject in the media. It dominates news reports and fills up radio talkshows. In fact, radio talkshows feed on conflict. Presenters and producers who are hungry for listeners often seek guests of wildly opposing views to shout at each other on the air.

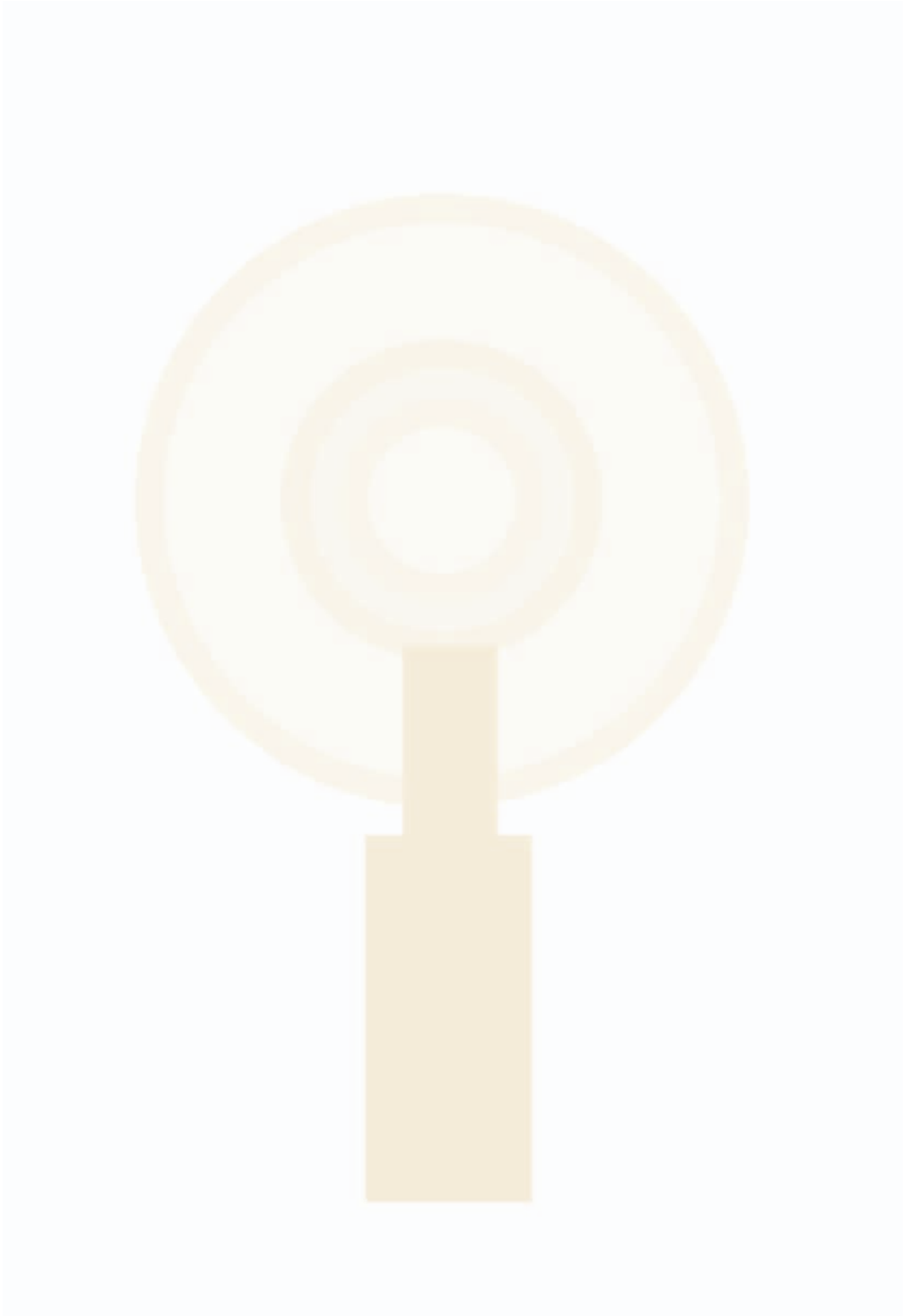
These voices may attract an audience, but do such programmes achieve anything else? As talkshow presenters should we be using conflicts and disagreements as a way of attracting listeners? Do we risk doing more harm than good by intensifying the conflict under discussion? Rather than informing and/or entertaining listeners do we leave them angry or fearful, or with the sense that the conflict will go on forever? Do we risk making violent or destructive conflict seem the inevitable response to all disagreements, and so destabilise whole communities?

Or should we be trying to have a positive impact on our listeners, which will contribute to a process that will eventually result in peace rather than violent conflict?

Good talkshows require diversity, spontaneity and flexibility, so there are no absolute rules about how to discuss conflict in a more constructive manner. Certainly it is a challenge to talk about conflict in a way which is interesting and informative, which offers positive alternatives, and which holds an audience. But as radio presenters we cannot just ignore conflict and assume it will go away. There are reliable techniques and some new skills which can help us, as journalists and presenters, to deal with conflict effectively on air.

The problem is that few radio talkshow presenters are specifically trained for their influential work. Most would agree that they need additional knowledge to help avoid the more dangerous pitfalls and worst negative practices. With nothing more than journalism training it is possible to present a fast-moving, audience-attracting radio talkshow. Unfortunately many such programmes contain a lot of talk but very little content. And there are presenters who go a step further, who exaggerate differences and encourage conflict. Sometimes this is inadvertent, but it can also be intentional. This is just as true for commercial as for private, state-controlled or truly public radio broadcasters, even if the pressures are slightly different.

Clearly, as presenters and producers we need to be more aware of our role and the content of our shows, and need new skills to help us improve our talkshows. This guidebook represents a step towards building that additional knowledge and practising some of those skills.



1. Conflicts

Summary: This chapter takes a look at both theoretical and practical approaches to conflict. Conflict itself is neither positive nor negative, only violent conflict is negative. What's important is how conflict is managed, so as to ensure that it doesn't develop into violence. Conflict runs along a continuum from, at one end, interpersonal conflict at work with a colleague (unlikely to lead to violence) to violent armed conflict between militia groups at the other end.

1.1 Understanding Conflict

For a radio professional to have a positive impact on violent conflict s/he has to understand it properly first.

Diplomats, negotiators and social scientists have developed a sophisticated understanding of conflict but few journalists and presenters know much about it. Journalists make news reports on violent conflict as it happens, and presenters talk about it on the air, often without an appreciation of the root causes, knowledge of the different kinds of conflict, or awareness of how it can end. As conflict analyst John Galtung observes, that is like describing an illness without reporting on what causes it and without reporting on the medicines that can cure it¹.

What is conflict?

A widely accepted definition of 'Conflict':

Conflict is the relationship between at least two parties (individuals or groups) who have, or who think they have, incompatible objectives, needs and interests.

Conflict is a widespread phenomenon, and there are many different types (political, social, economic, religious etc.) all of which may or may not result in violence. They can also be categorised according to the groups or individuals involved (generations, castes, ethnicities, nationalities, etc.). Equally, some specialists describe conflicts according to different phases, distinguishing, for example, 'pre-conflict', 'confrontation', 'crisis', 'resolution' and 'post-conflict'².

These categories can be useful because they allow us to analyse a situation, but we mustn't forget that conflicts evolve; conflicts aren't static, they transform and even superimpose themselves one on top of another, altering over time and depending on events.

¹ For details on causes of conflict, forms of violence and ending conflict, see: J. Galtung, *Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means*, 2000. Available at www.transcend.org

² S. Fisher (ed.), *Working with conflicts : Skills and Strategies for Action*, Zed Books, 2000

Conflicts are often caused by more than one of these factors. Indeed it is important for broadcasters to remember and to recognise that conflicts are usually the result of a combination of impulses, desires, needs, beliefs and perceptions. In violent conflicts there are often multiple perceptions of causes; they are almost never simple tugs-of-war between two groups. Most violent conflicts result from a whole collection of sometimes widely differing and even incompatible views, ideas, ideals and perceptions.

Conflicts can also result from the clash of beliefs with facts. Female circumcision or female genital mutilation is one such example – even the different ways of describing the practice demonstrate that it is a conflict issue. In this case the clash is between cultural traditions (values), and the physical consequences of the practice (facts). Presenting practitioners with the facts of its physical impact has convinced many that the practice needs to be changed, and/or eradicated.

Most lasting changes in a society are brought about by questioning and debate on the merits of the changes. In short, this disagreement or conflict is an integral part of everyone's lives. If conflict is well managed the parties will develop a common approach about the speed and dimension of the changes they want. If it's badly managed, then the conflict will probably become violent.

Violence

Violence, 'consists of actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems which create physical, psychological, social or environmental prejudice, and/or which prevent people from achieving their full human potential'³.

Physical violence: (or visible violence) is the best known. It's often the only type of violence mentioned in the media. Visible violence aims to 'intimidate, constrain, wound or even to kill people'⁴.

But there is also 'invisible' violence. This is just as dangerous because it prevents individuals from realising their potential, and is liable to turn violent.

Generally two main categories of invisible violence are recognised: cultural violence and structural violence.

Cultural violence describes cultural products which justify or glorify violence. It includes hate speech, religious justification for war, the use of myths and legends about war heroes, etc⁵.

Hate speech, where one group speaks of another group as unequal and unworthy of respect, or blames it for current problems and suggests violence to eliminate that group.

Hate speech may be used by one country against another country, or another social group (ethnicity, religion, class, etc.)

A second form of cultural violence is extreme religious intolerance of others' faith and practices. A third form is gender discrimination, which allows or endorses practices against the best interests of women.

³ S. Fisher (ed.), op. cit.

⁴ L. Reyhler, T. Paffenholz, *Peacebuilding : A Field Guide*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000

⁵ J. Lynch, A. McGoldrick, *Peace Journalism*, Hawthorn Press, 2005



Talkshow hosts can contribute to conflict by showing their own preferences and prejudices

Structural violence occurs when the laws and traditional rules of a society permit or encourage harm against one group. It includes, notably, slavery, colonialism, racial segregation, etc. And even corruption, when it's organised and systematic, is a form of structural violence.

It includes political or legal systems (such as the former system of apartheid in South Africa) which don't treat everyone as equal, but also societal norms and values which prevent some individuals from reaching their potential.

Clearly, ending physical conflict isn't enough to bring long term peace in such cases. The conflict will erupt again if these other forms of violence are ignored.

How conflict becomes violent

Circumstances in which conflicts are likely to turn violent are the same almost everywhere in the world:

- Little or no communication between two or more sides who disagree
- False ideas and beliefs about each other held by the different sides
- Historical, long-time grievances between the different sides
- Uneven distribution of power, and/or resources (such as food, housing, jobs and land)

With reference to this last, the inequitable distribution of resources, it's important to remember that people involved in violent conflict are very unlikely to accept as an 'outcome' any arrangement which leaves their basic human needs unmet – not only secure supplies of food, water, shelter and basic medicine, but also identity and recognition.

This is particularly important for radio professionals to understand as it means that people whose needs are unmet should not necessarily be seen as 'unreasonable' if they keep up their struggle, even if it seems hopeless or self-defeating. What it means is that some form of structural change has to be on the agenda, to allow those human needs to be met. If there is no agreement on changing these conditions, violent conflict is almost inevitable.

Ending conflict

So how does conflict end? Firstly, there are many traditional conflict resolution techniques which are still in use in many parts of Africa, but they still fall into one or more of the categories outlined below.

Conflict analysts say that conflict between protagonists, whether they are a man and woman, or a number of villages, militias or countries, can end in at least four different ways;

One side wins (or one-party dominance): Because it is physically stronger, or is financially more powerful, or is supported by some authority such as the courts, one side wins and the other loses. The loser is likely to be unsatisfied, and may suffer violence and harm. The 1967-70 war against the secessionist movement for an independent Biafra in Nigeria ended in a total victory for the central government, but some Igbo remain unsatisfied and still talk about independence.

Withdrawal is another way of ending a conflict, at least temporarily. One or both sides back away, although neither side is really satisfied. At the end of May 2000, exhausted by an expensive and bloody border war both Ethiopia and Eritrea temporarily withdrew their forces (Ethiopia claimed a victory). But the underlying problems were not resolved and continued to create serious tensions.

Compromise is the beginning of a solution to the conflict. The two sides agree on at least a small change, such as sharing the resource about which they quarreled. The share may be unequal but it is temporarily satisfying enough to both groups. The 1996 agreement between the government of Mali and northern Touareg groups is an example. The government decentralised local authority and economic development to the north; the Touareg abandoned their weapons and efforts to achieve outright independence.

Real common ground (or Transcendence), involves both sides achieving a new understanding of their real needs, and finding a new way to share the benefits of cooperation. They respect their differences and recognise their common problems. They work together for their common good. Violent conflict becomes a less desirable way of resolving their differences. This is the most likely way to achieve lasting peace. The 1992 peace accord to end the long civil war in Mozambique is an example. In a 10-year process, both sides agreed that rebuilding the agricultural economy, tolerating regional self-governance and moving to free elections were the best ways to improve everyone's lives.

1.2 How to Transform Conflicts

Peace building techniques have existed for a long time. These are actions which help prevent conflicts from becoming violent.

Traditional techniques include facilitation and mediation between political actors (official and unofficial diplomacy), the creation of local organisations to resolve individual conflicts, judicial mediation, etc.

More recently new techniques have been successfully developed and used. These include the use of sport, or other cultural activities in order to build relationships between social groups or between political actors. And among the more important new tools is the media - particularly radio.

Radio and Conflict

Of all the audiovisual media, radio is the most direct and reaches the most people. This makes it an essential element in peace building, particularly in the South.

Radio contributes, significantly or not, to either exacerbating tensions, or to reinforcing a culture of dialogue and tolerance. Every radio station plays a role in the way its audience, and therefore society, perceives different groups and the conflicts which bring them into opposition.

It's not only the famous hate radios and propaganda media which have a negative influence on the evolution of a conflict. For example, working in an unprofessional way can be enough to reinforce stereotypes and tensions. In fact, a large number of radio professionals have a negative impact without meaning to. By using imprecise and sensationalist words many journalists and presenters contribute to increasing tensions and to making dialogue difficult.

Less well known are the radio initiatives which have had a constructive influence, those which emphasise dialogue and which encourage mutual understanding between ethnic, religious, linguistic or other groups. Here are a few examples of positive roles which a radio can take on.

It can:

- be a form of communication between protagonists,
- correct misperceptions by inviting guests and experts to explain themselves clearly
- make one side more human to the other.
- personalize an ideology or a myth, by giving them names and voices and airing real stories
- give protagonists and listeners an emotional outlet, or a new way to see the problem, or an opportunity to hear about solutions and/or positive changes achieved elsewhere.

These are precisely some of the essential roles played by professional conflict negotiators, dispute counselors, and diplomats in trying to resolve conflict. But these are also the everyday roles of professional radio broadcasters. When they do these things, radio professionals mediate conflict.



Talkshow hosts often use conflicts in order to attract a larger audience

Conflict transformation techniques for the media

The way in which a conflict is presented is decisive because it encourages or discourages resolution between those involved. Journalists and producers tend to think of a conflict as being a 'zero sum game', or a battle between two parties for whom there is either victory or defeat. If I win, you lose, and vice versa. But the only way of coming out of a conflict is to find a solution in which everyone is a winner (the 'win-win' approach). The way in which we describe or see the conflict is therefore fundamental. At this level, the men and women who work in the media play an essential role.

The tools presented below (conflict map, positions/interests, and facts/values) helps us to see conflict in a different way.

Conflict mapping

This exercise helps us to understand a conflict more deeply as well as the different factors which are involved. It helps us as radio professionals to think of questions which we may not have thought of before, and should give us a better understanding of the situation.

Conflicts are complex and it's difficult to summarise them, so remember that the objective of the conflict map isn't to simplify things. Creating a conflict map simply allows us to see the situation with more clarity. And this may lead towards resolution.

There are many ways of creating a conflict map. Writing the results of the discussion outlined below on a flip chart will help 'visualise' the conflict.

Identifying the actors

This means identifying:

- the main protagonists/key actors in the conflict
- the other parties implicated or associated with the conflict in one way or another (including marginalised groups or external players)

Replying to the following question will help in the identification process: *Who has an interest in being involved in the conflict?*

It's equally useful to imagine and to visualize the relationships between the parties in the conflict (alliances, breakdowns in communication, confrontations, broken contacts etc.).

Identifying the issue

This means:

- identifying the positions of each of the parties (see the next section). List the positions of all the parties (their needs and declared objectives)
- defining the problem. This isn't easy because it means describing what the conflict is about. And often there is no single definition. Write them all down, this exercise helps to demonstrate the complexity of conflict.

Equally, it's good to identify the fears and the needs of the actors, because at the end of the day, there won't be a satisfying and durable solution to the conflict if the fundamental needs of the actors haven't been met. It's also important to accept the subjective nature of fears and needs. The objective of this exercise isn't to decide what's reasonable and unreasonable, but to explore different perceptions of the reality of a conflict.

Positions and interests

An important skill for radio professionals discussing conflict is the ability to identify the positions and the interests of the opposing sides.

A position is often where people first focus their attention in a conflict. A position is a statement or action taken to support a claim, or a point of view. It can be a belief about how to get or defend what one side thinks it needs. People can cling to a position, or change their position as they seek new ways to advance their claim.

An interest represents a more fundamental need, and is the real reason for taking a position. An interest may often go unstated but it is real. There is at least one interest behind every position. Sometimes two sides may have positions which appear totally opposed but the interests underneath may have similarities, or even share common ground.

A conflict may be irresolvable as long as the debate focuses only on the positions, without examining each side's interests. Positions separate the sides whereas interests hold the possibility of bringing them together. However, the different participants, on all sides, to a violent conflict may hold many different positions - and this is partly what makes violent conflicts so difficult to unravel.

Facts and values

A fact is a truth about the world. It is information which can be observed or calculated, such as cows eat grass, or the height of Mt. Kilimanjaro. A fact does not change, regardless of who presents it. Eventually, perhaps with independent verification, facts become accepted.

A value is different. It can be a deeply held personal belief or a widely-shared viewpoint, such as: killing is wrong except in self-defence. But values are not verified by fact. They are subjective. A belief that one political party has better policies for farmers than another party is a value. As another example, it is a fact that smoking causes cancer. But the right to smoke in public is a widely-held value. Even if they are not verifiable, values may be very resistant to change.

For example, a conflict between two leaders over how many rebel soldiers have been demobilised is a fact-based conflict. The number can be verified, by independent sources if necessary.

But disagreements over allowing or banning polygamy, homosexuality, or abortion are value-based conflicts.

The essential skills for first turning a talkshow towards conflict resolution is to listen for, identify and then act upon facts.

The point here is to turn the discussion from being about value-laden perceived causes of the conflict to being about verified facts and a search for solutions to other facts.

Value-based conflicts are more difficult to resolve. People do not usually give up their values easily. But it may be possible to use agreed-upon facts as a starting point to encourage tolerance for different values. It may also be possible to search for other values which both sides share.

For example, in a number of African countries health and education campaigners have worked with communities to end female genital mutilation. They encourage communities to retain a special initiation rite (a value) to signify womanhood, but now the ceremony involves sacrifice of a goat or cow instead of physical harm to a young woman.

Sorting out facts from values is an essential first step to positive discussion of a conflict. Well-supported facts can be powerful points of first agreement between the protagonists.

Finding common ground

Identifying facts, recognising values, and establishing the real interests behind positions are tools for directing those involved in the conflict away from angry disagreement towards the exploration of common ground. Such techniques can attract listeners precisely because they deal with real conflicts but move the conflicts towards resolution, rather than exploiting them and creating more problems in the process.

This kind of radio requires research and work in advance. It requires applying a basic conflict analysis to identify the sources and forms of conflict. It requires preparing questions in advance to help identify and separate facts from values. It requires careful interview techniques to point the antagonists past their opposing positions towards possible shared interests and common ground.

Summary: Radio Talkshows are different to ordinary news journalism, and are extremely popular. This type of radio programme can have a positive impact on conflicts, and this chapter explores how radio broadcasters can be better prepared to resolve some of the issues which come up regularly.

2.1 What is a talkshow?

Talkshows are unique. They are not like daily news journalism which pursues facts and balances statements against each other, seeking a clear record of events. A talkshow can consist of invited guests insisting on their facts and their positions, and arguing about the truth. Or it can consist of the presenter encouraging random callers to express themselves on what they have heard on the programme, or on a particular issue. Often talkshows are a mixture of both formats.

Unlike news reports, talkshows are dynamic, evolving through the programme as viewpoints are expressed and values debated. On talkshows, people talk, they express their opinions, they are in conflict with each other. But it is the impact of the programme on the listeners which matters most, not the status of the guests or the personality of the presenter. What is important is how the listeners are affected by what they hear.

If listeners are engaged, and become interested and even excited by what they hear, that is one measure of success. Better still if they gained new information, perhaps new understanding and possibly new confidence in the potential for a positive outcome to the conflict being discussed. A negative result for a talkshow is listeners who feel confused, or angry or depressed at the end.

2.2 Can talkshows help or hinder the transformation of conflicts?

Presenters and producers should recognise that they cannot single-handedly achieve THE solution to a conflict. But they can open up and widen the debate, and that is one of many essential steps in resolving a violent conflict. Talkshows are a part of the process. Successful talkshows can demonstrate that conflict can be managed, at least between protagonists on the programme.

In the short term no single radio programme can resolve a war, or even a low-level conflict, or make protagonists do what they are not already half-convinced to do. But in the long term, over months and years, a good talkshow can help change the atmosphere within which a conflict occurs. It can subtly alter the thinking of a large number of people so that they are less likely to support or engage in violent acts. It can make them more likely to recognise and appreciate common interests and more likely to trust each other. By enabling its audience to counter the ideas of the war-mongers, a good talkshow will help its audience to imagine ways in which peace is possible.

2.3 Acknowledging the problems of talkshows

Talkshows are not easy to do well. They are a complex, almost frantic exercise in juggling technical challenges plus intellectual issues like differing perceptions of the truth, and unpredictable human emotions which motivate guests and callers. And then all of this complexity has to be presented to an audience, in an easily-understood way, in a short space of time. And surrounding this whole juggling act are external factors such as the political climate which may or may not favour your efforts to inform the public. As one talkshow host put it, *In Africa our governments and media [say they] practice but don't really practice democracy.* This can cause a lot of confusion.

In addition to politics programme makers may face commercial pressures against dealing with seri-

Political climates: The BBC World Service's Africa talkshow Africa Live recently debated whether phone-in radio programmes should be banned. Ghana's National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) sparked the debate with its fears that such programmes cannot prevent defamatory or careless utterances which could breed violence. The NCCE wanted to impose a ban until the general elections were over. Meanwhile in Uganda authorities imposed a \$1,000 fine and a public apology on Radio Simba for hosting homosexuals in a live talkshow. Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda.*

*Africa Live, BBC World Service, 27/10/04

ous issues. Advertisers may insist nothing conflictual should be heard close to their soft drinks or cigarette advertisement. Alternatively, some of us face issues of whether the radio station serves the public or exclusively serves the owner's commercial and/or political interests. Presenters must also acknowledge their own personal baggage - their personal upbringing, experiences, values and emotions - which influences how they perceive an issue or speak with a guest or caller.

As talkshow hosts, how do we deal with all these questions? One way to respond, is first to recognise that there are issues and challenges which are common to almost all talkshows. And the participants noted the techniques and attitudes many presenters have developed for responding to these problems.

Problems and possible solutions for talkshows

| PROBLEM | DESCRIPTION | POSSIBLE SOLUTION |
|------------------------|--|---|
| 1. STRUCTURAL | These are some of the common challenges that many talkshows have confronted. | These are only some of the ways of resolving common talkshow problems, so please let us know your experiences and ideas. |
| Logistical | | |
| Phones and phone-lines | Bad phone lines mean that callers are often difficult to hear, or go silent just as the discussion gets interesting. | Don't depend just on callers. Hear ordinary citizen voices by inviting some of them into the studio to take part in the discussion too. |
| Working alone | No assistance. Being the researcher, producer and even technician as well as presenter makes it difficult to do the job well. It makes it particularly difficult to screen calls for abusive or off-topic callers. | Plan your show carefully, and lobby your boss for an assistant, or at least someone such as a journalism student to screen callers. Remind the boss that unscreened callers leaves the show open to abuse and possible danger from highly politically motivated or malicious callers. |
| Finances | No petty cash for taxis and phone cards, or for travel and | Talk with your boss, explain how the programme and the |

| | | |
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| | media subscriptions, hurts the programme. It limits the diversity of guests to invite, it prevents sufficient research into the right questions to ask. | station can become more popular by investing a little money in better research and a greater diversity of guests. |
| Poor facilities | Studio equipment may operate poorly; the facilities for guests may be inadequate. Sometimes it is necessary to have a calming place and a cup of tea to put guests at ease before they go on air to discuss traumatic experiences, or to explore common ground with opponents or to face angry callers. | Try to meet the guests before the show in a place where they can relax and get to know you a little, where you can put them at their ease and explore some of the areas you want to discuss on the show. But keep it light - don't interview them. Save it for the on-air show. |
| Political | Often the most difficult problems are those caused by the political context. | |
| Censorship | Whether by Sedition, Official Secrets or National Emergency laws, or by illegal threat of violence, governments, military forces and powerful figures sometimes believe they have unlimited rights to control what is aired. This is censorship and can result in false information, unbalanced journalism and propaganda. Censorship destroys the credibility and faith in the media. Censorship is the enemy of a free press and is a denial of democracy. | Keep pushing back. Don't let censors assume you will stay frightened. Imposing real censorship takes time, money and personnel. Constantly test the limits of safely challenging them. Make sure that you and the other radio stations have plans for responding when a journalist or presenter is arrested. Ensure international support from organizations such as IFEX, IFJ, Reporters Without Borders and Article 19, to respond quickly if anything happens to you or other journalists. |
| Impunity | A culture of no accountability for foolish or illegal actions means that elected officials and bureaucrats and other primary sources may refuse to speak on air. They often think that they can stop topics being covered in talkshows by refusing to comment. | If a topic needs to be covered we should do it, and state that invited officials refused to show up or respond. Keep a record of who was invited, and of their response, or lack of it. And keep inviting them. |
| Corruption | A culture of buying influence may make officials demand cash for comment. Or bribes may be offered to presenters or to their bosses to ensure that only certain opinions are aired. | It's a fundamental principle of journalism that we don't pay for comment. If someone wants to be paid they have failed to recognise the value of having their opinions or ideas aired. Professionals do not take bribes. Journalism is not for sale. |

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Self-censorship | Past experiences or fear of powerful interests may force officials, sources and journalists to say less than they want. Journalists also censor themselves to avoid losing access to important figures. Self-censorship buries the other side of issues, and silences difficult questions. It can also arise because presenters don't know how to raise subjects which caused violence in the past. Self-censorship can start from a bad experience and become a bad habit that destroys professional journalism. | The professional journalistic obligations of accuracy, fair balance and responsibility should overcome the first instinct to hold back, to self-censor. An accurate and properly balanced story or programme is a good defence against criticism from either side. |
| Business culture | | |
| Control | Private owners, including NGOs, the UN and individual commercial owners, often think that because they own the radio station they can dictate the type of coverage and the content. | All radio stations broadcast on the public airwaves and therefore have a public responsibility not to abuse freedom of expression, which is a fundamental right. Fight back carefully against owners' interference. Resisting the pressure is part of the job of a responsible presenter. |
| Intimidation | Some owners and managers fear harassment or the disfavour of government. They discourage talkshows from presenting controversial subjects. Advertisers may also oppose any controversy in programmes on which they advertise, and threaten to withdraw advertising. And there can be intimidation by managers or co-workers who want to avoid all controversy to please special interests. They may withhold support, resources and advancement from a responsible presenter or producer. | Resisting intimidation can be achieved in small steps, by presenting difficult or controversial subjects a bit at a time, over several shows separated by days or weeks. Also, the station should seek other advertisers more in tune with the objectives of the talkshow. Resist intimidation in the workplace by encouraging professional standards among colleagues and emphasising fair balance in talkshow content. |
| Commercialism | Advertising can be a good thing but too much of it constantly interrupting a talkshow dealing with serious issues can be a problem. | Popular programmes attract advertisers but the integrity and coherence of the programme deserves respect. Explain to managers that too many commercials can make a show unintelligible and risk sudden unpopularity which displeases advertisers. Urge managers to use fewer but higher-paying advertisers. |

| 2. CULTURAL | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Taboo subjects | Some subjects such as sexual issues, women's rights, or child labour, are not openly discussed, and in some countries even religion or ethnicity are taboo. People can be embarrassed or react angrily to discussing taboos on radio talkshows. | Take things slowly. Be sensitive. Explain to listeners why the issue is important. Use real people's experiences or suffering to demonstrate the human implications of taboos. Discuss how old taboos disappeared. |
| Trauma | Individuals or groups who have suffered from violence such as rape, assault, or attempted murder, or who have escaped genocide may be almost incapable of speaking about it coherently. They fear hostile perceptions, or being blamed as victims by presenters or callers. | Again, sensitivity is important. Meet the guests before the show to learn what they can discuss. Remember that they are victims of illegal violence, and make sure that your attitude is sympathetic. Don't allow other guests or callers to blame them for the violence they have suffered. Allow trauma victims to be accompanied by a friend. |
| Cultural restrictions | Traditional limitations on people's freedom to speak openly because of their race, caste, gender, religion or other distinctions can make it difficult to discuss the conflict caused by these limitations. | Bring victims of discrimination onto the show to relate their experiences as people, not as members of any caste or group. But it is unacceptable to bring anyone onto a talkshow to entertain listeners with their uneducated accent or unusual opinions. Treat everyone with the same respect. A talkshow should always be a place of equal rights. |
| Poverty | Listeners who lack access to a radio or a telephone because of poverty are excluded from talkshows. This can make talkshows very unrepresentative of a large part of a community. | Take the talkshow to the community: record it in a remote village with everyone gathered around. Allow villagers to use the microphone. Or send a reporter out into the streets or the rural areas with a mobile phone, so people without phones can use it to call in to the talkshow. |
| 3. PERSONAL | | |
| Own beliefs and values | Our personal values shaped by our family and neighbourhood role models and our life experiences, are the most powerful influences on how we first react to guests and callers. A caller or a guest may offend our values | Journalism training can help presenters overcome their beliefs and provide a more balanced approach. We need to recognise inevitable prejudices and preferences affecting our own choice of words, and our |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| | with their ideas or attitudes. Controlling our own anger can be a challenge. | responses to callers and guests. We need to think before responding, and try to get at the positions and the interests of our guests and callers rather than allowing our own opinions, prejudices and ideas to dominate. An angry presenter rarely makes a useful contribution to understanding an issue. |
| Family and clan | Our own families or clans may disagree with an even-handed approach. They may feel that we should take one side in a conflict, or the other. | Our primary responsibilities are as journalists, not advocates for family or tribe. Who we are and what we believe in private shouldn't intrude far into the public awareness when we are on the air. |
| Personal experiences | Our own experiences are significant to us, and we may want to bring them into the discussion. | Talkshows exist first to inform the audience. We select guests with something significant to contribute, and we urge callers to speak freely. Our role is a facilitator, guiding the information flow and ensuring free expression. We stop being a facilitator if we start relating our own experiences. And audiences may focus on our experiences and opinions instead of learning guests' and callers' opinions, and seeing possible common ground. A good talk-show presenter never needs to use the word 'I'. |



Some radio talkshows are produced in very difficult circumstances

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Many presenters say the ultimate challenge is handling talkshow callers. Callers' remarks can be inflammatory, off-topic, incoherent or terribly long-winded. As one radio presenter said, 'It is hard to be quick. It takes many Africans at least 40 seconds to begin to say what they want to talk about'. It can also be tempting to let a caller talk on and on because there is no-one else waiting to speak. But long-winded callers will bore the listeners, which is the worst affliction of a talkshow. Listeners will turn to another station or turn off the radio if the host does not turn off the long-winded caller.

2.4 Preparation and planning

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, talkshows are exceptionally challenging work. Many of the typical problems we've just described, and the sometimes delicate, sometimes brave and always personally disciplined responses of presenters demonstrate some of those challenges.

However, even before exploring the deeper specific issue of dealing with conflict, the Burundi workshop participants agreed there are two basic parts to almost all talkshows. The first is being well-prepared to go into the studio. The second is presenting the programme well enough to come out of the studio with pride. The second part depends very heavily upon the presenter's skills alone. But all presenters can at least go into the studio well-prepared and confident that the technical requirements have been met. This provides a certain comfort in the actual work of presenting the programme.

A check-list of programme planning and production requirements looks like this:

Planning Check-list for a talkshow

- A theme or pattern for the programme
- An immediate fresh idea, based on current events/issues
- A purpose for the programme. A focus. An intention
- A brainstorm session with colleagues, newsroom, experts
- A draft outline of the show
- Research material: media, archives, libraries, Web, academics and experts
- Background knowledge on the guests' views, values, positions and interests
- Understanding of how listeners will perceive the guests
- Prepared questions
- A pre-programme interview with guests
- A prepared written introduction to focus the programme for listeners and callers
- Stand-by guests for cancellations or guests who don't show up
- A post-programme review

Peace/War Talkshows⁶

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>I. COMMON GROUND ORIENTED</p> <p>Sets up opposing parties to find common ground on air</p> <p>Listens for 'Yes' (statements which affirm the 'other side')</p> <p>Debates <i>interests</i>, brings out the values motivating each side</p> <p>Separates out disagreements about facts, values and opinion</p> | <p>I. WAR/VIOLENCE ORIENTED</p> <p>Sets up opposing parties to fight, or to express extreme opinions on air</p> <p>Emphasises disagreement</p> <p>Debates <i>positions</i> not <i>interests</i></p> <p>Confuses disagreements about facts, values and opinions</p> |
| <p>II. RESEARCH-ORIENTED</p> <p>Encourages pro-active analysis from both sides</p> | <p>II. OUTCOME/CONCLUSION-ORIENTED</p> <p>One-sided</p> |
| <p>III. PEOPLE-ORIENTED</p> <p>Invites participants to talk about how they have been caricatured and/or stereotyped</p> <p>Humanises the individual participants, helps viewers/listeners to know them as people</p> <p>Promotes dignity, reframes issues in respectful, non-judgemental language</p> | <p>III. ELITE ORIENTED</p> <p>Allows caricature and/or stereotyping of one side</p> <p>Focusses on officials (political, administrative or military/militia) and official statements only</p> <p>Promotes the power and the dignity of officialdom</p> |
| <p>IV. SOLUTION ORIENTED</p> <p>Encourages flexibility, and examines uncertainties</p> <p>Invites participants to express hopes and dreams, to describe visions for the future</p> | <p>IV. CONFLICT ORIENTED</p> <p>Encourages fixed positions, and focusses on 'facts'</p> <p>Encourages discussion about the present, not about visions for the future</p> |

⁶ Based in part on original table by Professor Johan Galtung, of Transcend, a Peace and Development Network, (www.transcend.org/)

3. Radio talkshow formats

Presenters' job requirements

Summary: There are a number of radio talkshow formats which can all be used for peacebuilding. This chapter examines the strengths and weaknesses of these different formats. It also contains a list of some creative ideas about how to surprise and interest your audience without exploiting and exacerbating the violence and a list of the presenters' job requirements.

3.1 The challenge

The previous chapter described some of the structural, cultural and personal challenges which almost all talkshow presenters deal with. Fortunately, good planning and production make it easier for a presenter. As one talkshow host noted, *Advanced research and planning enables us to seize opportunities to steer the programme in a better direction, instead of just following wherever the guests go.*

Part of the planning process is to identify the best format for the issue to be discussed. One format may be more suited than another to a particular subject or a particular conflict to be discussed. Sometimes formats can be blended, or new ones attempted. Another part of planning is to take stock of our skills or job requirements as presenters, and to refresh them. Dealing with conflict issues requires additional skills.

Live or pre-recorded talkshows are an intellectual and mechanical challenge for the presenter and producer. Format and content are crucial to holding an audience's attention for one, two or even three hours. The topic must be carefully chosen. It must be relevant to the audience. It should have substance but not be dull, and the discussion must be vigorous but controlled. The programme must be orderly so listeners can follow the conversation and arguments but it must sound spontaneous.

At its best, a talkshow attracts the audience to listen but also stimulates the audience to discuss what it is hearing on the radio. The best audiences are those who are talking about what they hear, and want to talk back.

Many talkshows provide that opportunity for stimulated listeners to talk back by phoning in. That is the real value and power of talkshows – making them interactive. Talkshows can be a conversation between the presenter and guests and listeners. Information and viewpoints can be exchanged and expanded and perceptions changed. This is especially valuable when the talk is all about conflict. Interactive radio really is, 'taking talk to the people and the people talking back.'

3.2 The common formats

The most common formats for radio talkshow programmes are roundtable, phone-in, and face-to-face. Sometimes these formats blend together on the same show, in a question-guest answer-listener feedback process, or in separate segments, or in other forms. Sometimes the logistical or political or commercial pressures described in the previous chapter also influence the choice of format.

The different talkshow formats have great ability to inform and to engage audiences. But they also

have some weaknesses, and can present challenges for talkshow presenters and producers who want to create programmes which leave the listeners with positive rather than negative feelings.

Roundtables or panels are straightforward. The presenter assembles guests in the studio or on the telephone to discuss a specific issue. The conversation takes place between the presenter and the guests, and the audience listens passively. The guests can be independent experts such as academics, or political party, civil society or tribal leaders, or ordinary citizens with different points of view. Or they can be a mixture of all of these.

Roundtable Strengths and Weaknesses

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|
| Opportunity to assemble previously isolated or unheard antagonists and marginalised other voices | Difficulty in finding right guests to make articulate, representative panel |
| Greater opportunity to obtain clarity, seek follow-up questions | Risk of unbalanced dominance by one guest or another |
| Allows for serious in-depth discussion | Risk of dull, rehearsed conversation |
| Easier to assemble various perspectives, reveal multiple perspectives on same issue | Risk of guests being unknown to public, lacking credibility |
| Easier to ensure a balance of viewpoints | Lack of public voice in comment, reaction, perspective |
| Creates safe neutral space for two antagonists to meet | Risk of antagonists taking hard positions, refusing to explore solutions |
| Can lower tension by revealing antagonists talking to each other | Can reveal and emphasise disagreements |
| Can turn participants to joint problem-solving | Best used when antagonists have similarity of interests |

The roundtable format itself can be adapted. It can be taken out of the studio into a community, such as a displaced persons camp where community members, leaders and visiting officials are gathered together to discuss hot topics on the programme. Getting roundtables out of the studio and onto the streets can add enormous spontaneity and credibility to a programme.

Face-to-face programmes are a more confined version of roundtables, involving the presenter and only one or two guests. Face-to-face programmes can probe deeply one guest's viewpoints and positions. Or a face-to-face programme can invite two protagonists such as political or community leaders to discuss the issue which divides them. The presenter, serving as mediator, asks tough questions, but also looks for similar answers which suggest shared interests and the potential for common ground.

Phone-in programmes share the power of talkshows with the public. The presenter gives the listeners a brief voice on the radio, although it not always easily controlled or relevant. Phone-in programmes can be a dialogue between the presenter and the listeners, or they can generate a debate between guests in the studio and the listeners. They can open up new issues or reveal unresolved

questions. The callers can be directed to comment on a specific subject, or they can be given freedom to express themselves freely. Phone-in programmes are an opportunity for presenters to frame or phrase questions differently, to ask callers to think differently, to answer different kinds of questions and to express their hopes.

Phone-in Programmes: Strengths and Weaknesses

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| A safe anonymity for frightened callers | Dangerous anonymity of callers. High risk of vengeance-seeking accusations, slander, and misinformation |
| Democratises debate. Engages the general public without restriction | Callers unfocussed, irrelevant, mischievous, unless pre-screened |
| Provides a wide diversity of public views, perspectives | Callers can provoke, inflame tensions with outrageous remarks |
| Element of surprise, spontaneity | Risk of technical disruptions such as bad phone lines, background noise |
| Interactive: Callers, presenter and guests can exchange views | Difficult to manage time, control calls |
| Provides instant reaction, feed-back | Risk of becoming 'trial by radio' for guest |
| Humanises issues. Ordinary people speak | Reduced time for in-depth exploration of issues |
| Gauges public opinion (unreliable) | Risk of unrepresentative flood of calls organised by one viewpoint |
| Provides public access to experts, authorities, leaders | Unrepresentative of public lacking phones and phone-cards. |
| Allows venting or cooling of public emotion | Difficult to summarise views |
| Public pleas can influence antagonists' positions | Callers take over the programme, attacking each other |

Blended programmes can involve previously recorded or live roundtable talk and then a live phone-in for listeners to comment on what they've heard. Previously recorded street interviews and readings from letters and emails can represent other views and can stimulate reaction. Or callers can be directed to put questions to specific studio guests in a kind of face-to-face format. The presenter decides how many callers to accept before moving on to another topic and other guests. In this case the presenter should often remind callers of the topic as the conversation rolls on.



Taking live, on air calls can be an extremely difficult task

3.3 Other ideas for talkshow formats and content

Roundtables and phone-in programme formats are reliable and enduring, but there is always space for innovation and adaptation. These are some ideas and examples collected by Search for Common Ground:

Listen to Only Them. Create a programme or a segment where only one viewpoint is invited to speak. This allows a marginalised group, or a group facing public criticism, or which has been victimised by cultural violence, to express itself without fear of immediate harsh reaction. It enables listeners to hear deeper explanations and human feelings. It may reveal some common interests. It requires the presenter to explain repeatedly the purpose of the programme and to control the calls. It must be made clear there is no bias on the part of the presenter. Reflections by a neutral guest panel member can be added.

Common ground found. Bring together individuals or groups who unexpectedly reached agreement on an issue in the past. Explore how they did it. Invite callers to provide other similar examples from their own experiences.

Explore how it works.

- Present a well-known divisive issue and ask expert guests to discuss how conflict resolution techniques could be applied to it.
- Invite callers to speculate on why it is so hard for the opposing sides to hear each other and to cooperate.
- Invite callers to describe an example of conflict resolution or a new agreement which they have experienced in their family or community. Ask why it was or wasn't a success.

In 2004 Studio Ijambo, SFCG's radio production studio in Burundi, brought together Burundians who during that country's darkest hours risked their own lives to save people of a different ethnic group. The Heroes Summit, based on four years of similar radio programming by Studio Ijambo, demonstrated a different, more human face of Burundi to the country and to the world. The Summit gave a voice on country-wide radio and television to these heroes, and celebrated them as potential leaders and role models.

Heroes and success stories. Present programmes that feature finding the common ground on major issues. Interview the key mediators who helped both sides. The examples can be from the community or from other countries.

On-air facilitation. Invite guests from opposing sides to describe something they agree on. Invite callers to suggest a statement both sides can agree on. Give a prize for the best statement, or the most important agreement reached.

Look forward. Invite opposing guests to talk about the future they would like to see, regardless of whether they think it is realistic. Often this will reveal surprising agreement, and the discussion can then move to how to reach that common vision for the future.

Democratise the phone-in show. Phone-in programmes enable an important range of ordinary citizens to join in the debate but are limited to those who have access to telephones. To widen the debate to those who cannot afford the telephone or have no telephone service, take the programme to them. Conduct the programme there, live or recorded on the streets or in a rural village. Invite the local people to use the microphone or a mobile phone as if it were their telephone. Invite other callers to telephone to the programme at the new community location. Create a new dialogue involving previously isolated communities.

3.4 The presenter's basic job requirements

Regardless of the programme format, there are skills and personal characteristics which are essential for anyone doing a talkshow. Some of these abilities are almost innate or automatic, while others are acquired through education, training, and experience. To cope with the job, a talkshow presenter who is dealing with conflict issues and who wants to have a positive impact should be able to:

- seek clarification, to re-ask essential questions
- focus a debate, to highlight a central issue
- recognise and emphasise facts
- encourage reflection
- identify, synthesise and articulate public opinion
- rephrase and reframe an issue, approaching it from another angle. This may even include playing 'devil's advocate' and expressing the views of another side the way they would
- direct discussion towards positive aspects instead of just highlighting the negatives
- calm fierce emotions, including his/her own, especially through humour

As one talkshow host described it: In a conflict situation, there are sides, and the two sides will each have a way they think the problem could be solved, their solution. What's most important is the question, 'Why do you want the problem to be solved that way?' The answer to that question tells you what their interest is, what it is they are after.

- mediate between opponents
- identify positions and move antagonists towards discussing shared interests
- be broad-minded, unbiased, and self-controlled
- be articulate, confident, and a team player
- enliven a serious debate, always remembering: the public is listening
- find out and be aware of what ordinary people and regular listeners are talking about
- listen patiently to find key information in complicated answers and facts

4. Issues and Practices

Summary: What makes a good peacebuilding talkshow? The answers are not always easy, but this chapter seeks to clarify some of the main issues, discussions and practices. It also provides some ideas about how to deal with trauma and anger in your programme, as well as other, more technical tips.

What makes a good peacebuilding talkshow? Firstly it must go beyond the bare essentials of a typical talkshow. Those essentials include diversity of opinions, clearly defined issues, balanced and courteous conversation, human interest and relevance to public opinion, attractive presentation and clear synthesis of what has been said, and more. But dealing with conflict requires additional skills and knowledge. If there is no conflict analysis, no distinguishing between values, facts, positions and interests, and no search for common ground, any talkshow can exaggerate differences and inflame conflict.

4.1 Difficult questions

Seeking common ground in radio talkshows can be an important contribution to conflict resolution in Africa and in other conflict-stressed regions. But this is an emerging skill, something most of us as talkshow presenters and producers must learn. Being conflict sensitive in talkshows raises new and sometimes difficult questions. Should we deal with unsettling, inflammatory information and accusations? Can a talkshow be responsible without losing its competitive edge and audience? What to do about taboo subjects? What do we do about hate speech? The list of challenges is lengthy.

The answers are not always simple or easy to apply. That's why this is a guidebook rather than a list of rules; we hope that you will use it to develop your own approaches (and we hope you'll tell us about them). However, there are some issues for peacebuilding talkshows which can be addressed, and there are some effective practices for presenters to follow.

Professional issues

Is a radio talkshow a form of journalism?

Yes, it should be. Presenters should adhere to the professional standards of accuracy and impartiality and avoid libel and slander. If we do not exercise professional responsibility, we risk only giving our listeners empty entertainment, with very little informational or educational value. The content should be intended to serve and advance the public interest, which in conflict situations will almost always tend towards peacebuilding.

Does a presenter always have to consciously take the side of peace?

The presenter's role is not to insist on finding a solution to the conflict, but to open up and widen the debate. Conflict resolution is a process and not an instant happening. Usually a conflict-sensitive presenter is only part of a long process which cannot be rushed.

Is there anything a talkshow should not discuss?

In most cases, the answer is no. Almost no issue should be ignored if it is based on confirmed factual information. Suppressing it will not make it go away. Suppressing it will make people

turn elsewhere, perhaps to misinformation or rumours. Certainly we should consider carefully the appropriate time to introduce a difficult or taboo issue. But the most important step is to analyse the conflict and determine how to discuss what needs to be discussed in a way which doesn't feed the conflict.

One way to discuss taboo subjects is to humanise them – discuss them as they affect real people. Let those affected by taboo subjects describe their experiences. Listeners may be angry when you discuss taboo subjects. It's important to take your listeners with you: tell them why you are tackling these subjects and what you hope will come of it. Humanise the issue, and ask them if they have had similar unpleasant experiences of taboos. Ask them how they would want to be treated.

How to reconcile presenting facts and opinions with censorship imposed by patriotism, security laws or personal safety concerns?

As members of the media our professional obligation to present true information has priority over our patriotic or cultural or family preferences. And censorship needs to be resisted because it forces the media to report half-truths or to avoid issues which are important to the community. It destroys the media's credibility. However, presenters and radio stations must exercise caution and determine what they can say with safety.

One strategy to deal with hot or politically sensitive issues which pose risks of pre-censorship or retaliation is to introduce them gradually, in small portions over several programmes. This will allow presenters and producers to test the reactions.

Should a presenter always provide the right of reply?

Concerning factual matters, yes. If misinformation has been presented, an opportunity should be provided to correct it without debate.

Should a presenter offer an opinion?

The difficulty for a presenter who states his/her opinion is that listeners will perceive that as taking sides. Audiences will begin forming opinions in reaction to the presenter, instead of considering and reacting to the guests and callers. The true test of a professional presenter is being tough and fair to all sides – even the ones they agree with.

What to do about hate speech?

Hate speech, of all kinds, must be challenged. It is any form of words directly contemptuous of others and/or which advocates their destruction. If the person uttering hate speech is important enough their words may have to be reported. But critical reaction from others should be sought immediately. Hate speech should be put in the proper context – as offensive, dangerous and a potential crime against humanity.

But individuals often use metaphors and proverbs to avoid directly stating what they really mean – even though everyone understands the hidden message. Hate speech concealed in this way is an attempt to escape responsibility for inflaming a conflict.

In Zimbabwe some people speak of 'harvesting the weeds', and in Rwanda before the genocide they said 'kill all the cockroaches'. These are not just cultural expressions. They are code words for encouraging violent, even genocidal conflict. Other hate speakers often use the insect analogy to suggest that some people should not be respected as human. In Nigeria they say termites, they say jiggers in Uganda, or dogs in Burundi. In Somalia the speakers use old proverbs to hide their message of hate. In Uganda army officials will talk about 'a very fruitful Christmas' when they mean that they killed a large number of rebel soldiers. All these kinds of metaphors containing hidden hate speech are unacceptable.

Journalists and presenters must deal with such metaphors and proverbs immediately, rather than simply repeating them. Offensive or evasive speech hidden in metaphors and proverbs should be challenged by asking the speaker for clarity. Journalists and presenters who recognise hidden hate speech should immediately ask the speaker to explain what they mean in straightforward terms. Use phrases like ‘tell us what you mean by that,’ or ‘what is a simpler meaning?’ or ‘what are you referring to?’

Journalists and presenters should be willing to seem ignorant if necessary to expose hate speech by demanding clarity. This forces the speakers onto the defensive, and makes them bear responsibility for what they’re saying.

How to deal with extremely sensitive issues such as genocide, rape, and torture?

Social and cultural pressures often silence survivors of traumatic violence, especially gender violence. The facts about brutal violence cannot be ignored and the community needs to know they occurred. But victims/survivors have rights too. Presenters have to make sure the discussions do not become gratuitous or voyeuristic. It is painful for any trauma survivor to relive their experiences. We have to make sure we do not re-victimise those who suffered. Presenters must be aware of and respect how the affected persons refer to themselves – do they call themselves a ‘victim’ or a ‘survivor’.

Most survivors of traumatic violence feel more comfortable discussing their experience or views when accompanied by someone they trust. Trauma affects memory, so presenters must be patient and empathetic in seeking information. Be prepared to bring in someone trusted to assist victims and survivors on the air. But most trauma survivors do not need pity; describing their experience and opinions is part of the healing process. Presenters must avoid offering overly sympathetic remarks which make the victim feel powerless again. Presenters, by assisting victims to put their experience into words, are helping them reconnect to their community and to humanity.

For more understanding of how to deal with trauma, conflict and tragedy, and the consequences of such difficult subjects for those in the media, see the global network of research and discussion at The Dart Center at www.dartcentre.org.

Anger

Every presenter has had the experience of guests who use angry, threatening language, or callers who use the radio as a personal megaphone for their opinions. There are also guests and callers who argue and interrupt all other conversation. What to do?

- Remind guests who talk simultaneously that nobody can understand what they’re saying.
- Have commercials, pre-recorded service messages or theme music ready to play as interludes while the hot emotions cool down.
- Have letters and emails ready to read as a diversion from hot talk, or as a way of introducing new angles of discussion.
- Have pre-recorded messages ready to play which remind listeners and guests of the topic and the rules for discussion on the programme.
- For phone-in programmes, if possible, screen the callers. A producer or other staff should first receive the phone call, briefly screen or ask callers what their question or statement is, and exclude malicious or incoherent callers. Invite journalism students to be screeners. And you can always cut off an abusive caller.
- Do not take negative calls personally. Be interested in why they are upset, without encouraging their anger.
- Be ready to interrupt and remind guests or callers when they become disrespectful or stray off the topic.

- Presenters must distance the station from any threats that guests or callers make on-air.
- Inject specific facts into a tense dialogue to direct a guest or caller to calm down. Have facts prepared in advance.
- When guests are angry with each other, gently take them back to their last point of agreement.
- Remember that humour is a great calming device.



Used well, humour can bring opponents together

The peace perspective

When leaders are exploiting a long-standing conflict, don't focus every programme on them. Instead seek individuals and groups who are cooperating and who are finding common ground.

And when a conflict ends, when the protagonists have discovered common ground, the story is not over. Presenters and producers should revisit the issue and the individuals, and see what progress has emerged from peace. It is likely there are lessons which can be applied to other conflicts. Or peace may have prompted new tensions or issues for the protagonists to explore in search of common ground.

Conflict is not just about war. There are a lot of conflicts in Burundi right now; conflicts over good governance; disarmament; the repatriation of displaced people; land tenure; justice; women's issues. We need to have a dialogue on all these issues. There is plenty more work for us to do.

Adrien Sindayigaya, Director, Studio Ijambo, Burundi. Quoted in New Internationalist #381, August 2005

4.2 Practices, solutions and tips

Technical tips

Avoid large panels of guests for roundtable format programmes. Panels of more than four guests take too long for each guest to speak or reply. Listeners forget who said what. It is difficult to synthesise such a diversity of viewpoints.

Plan and research your programme. Presenters need to be well-informed about what the guests have previously said. Analyse the conflict before the programme, to identify structural and cultural violence and to prepare questions about facts and positions and values and interests.

Have a specific **focus** before you begin the programme because you cannot talk about everything. For example, 'human rights and the election' is too big a topic for a talkshow. Make the topic more precise: 'What is the most neglected human rights issue in this election?'

Listening skills

For peacebuilding presenters, the **four magic words** are listen, clarify, synthesise and reframe.

For a talkshow presenter the ability to listen well is as important as the ability to talk. Listening well is how we learn to ask questions which produce revealing answers. Listening well will help you separate facts from values, and will indicate when to direct the conversation towards common interests.

Skilled presenters also listen carefully to the words of guests and callers to make sure the meanings are clear. Presenters should constantly seek clarification. Mixed messages, incoherent statements and incomplete thoughts should not pass unchallenged.

The test of clarity is the presenter's ability to summarise briefly the key points which guests or callers have made. If we cannot understand it well enough to synthesise it, then our listeners will not understand it either.

Once synthesised, information can be reframed, or discussed from other angles, which may reveal something new such as facts which can be agreed-upon, or the route to discovering some common ground.

Questioning skills

Effective questions which help manage conflict depend upon good **techniques and content**. Many of the techniques are basic to journalism, such as do not ask two questions at once, and always use questions beginning with the words why, what and how because they require full answers. And every experienced presenter should know how to get expanded answers, by using phrases such as: 'that is interesting; tell me more' or 'what was going through your mind when this happened.'⁷

Using language carefully

As presenters, the **precise words** we use determine whether our questions help build understanding or reinforce myths and fears.

Conflict-sensitive presenters use carefully words such as 'massacre', 'assassination' or 'genocide' which can inflame more than inform. We avoid words such as 'devastated' or 'destitute' or 'terrorised' because those words take the side of those who see themselves as victims. We try not to use labels such as 'extremist', 'terrorist', 'fanatic' or 'fundamentalist' which demonise one group.

⁷ For a discussion of talkshow skills for effective interviews, take a look at the following website: www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=9572

We identify people or groups by the name they call themselves. For further examples of using words carefully, see the handbook on Conflict Sensitive Journalism in Resources at the end of this guidebook

4.3 Key Points

What makes a talkshow conflict-sensitive? A presenter who remembers to:

- Listen critically
- Detect interests beneath positions (synthesise and reframe)
- Seek common ground



In 2004 Search for Common Ground's project Radio for Peacebuilding, Africa conducted a major survey of African radio professionals about the use of peacebuilding techniques in radio. Almost 90 per cent strongly agreed that peacebuilding techniques on radio are an excellent idea, and that it is high time that radio stations use those techniques. Almost two-thirds of the several hundred radio professionals who answered the survey also said that conflict resolution is a part of journalistic responsibility.

These are powerful and very encouraging indications of sensitivity to conflict resolution, and the feeling of responsibility which exists among radio professionals in Africa and much of the world.

But most of the radio professionals indicated that what they have been doing for peacebuilding on air is not very effective. Perhaps in some cases this is because they are not permitted to use peacebuilding skills very much. In many cases, however, the radio professionals said they didn't know enough, and they very much wanted more information and training about how to use radio for peacebuilding. And they said they believed radio for peacebuilding will become more effective.

A few of those professionals also participated in the Burundi workshop which gathered together radio talkshow presenters – possibly the most influential media workers in Africa today – to examine and compare their regular skills and to explore new ones for conflict resolution. That workshop led to this guidebook.

This guidebook is a response to that desire among radio professionals to know more about the best skills for radio talkshows, and to know how to deal with conflict on talkshows more effectively. It is also a tribute to the optimism of radio professionals and to their belief that radio for peacebuilding will become more effective. We hope their optimism truly will be more quickly realised with the ideas and skills explored in this guidebook.

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Resources

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- International Federation of Journalists www.ifj.org
- Radio for Peacebuilding, Africa www.radiopeaceafrica.org
- Reporters sans frontières www.rsf.org
- Reporting the World www.reportingtheworld.org
- Réseau Panos www.panosparis.org; www.panos.org.uk; www.panos.org.zm; www.panos-ao.org; www.panoseasternafrika.org.ug
- Search for Common Ground www.sfcg.org
- Transcend www.transcend.org
- TRRAACE (Resources for African radio stations) www.mediafrica.net



THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF COMMON GROUND TALK

Powerful Tools for Radio Talk

Listen Well

Be alert to the unexpected. Listen for areas of agreement.

Be Pro-active

Suggest areas of common ground. Invite guests to do the same.

Question Assumptions

What are your guests' basic assumptions about the views of the 'other side'? Allow other side to respond.

Humanise/Build Trust

Get to know the people behind the opinions. What in your guests' lives made them feel so strongly about this issue?

Counter Stereotypes

How have your guests personally experienced being stereotyped, misunderstood by the other side in this conflict?

Promote Dignity

Reframe issues in respectful, non-judgmental language.

Encourage Flexibility

Identify potential gray areas and explore them with guests. Invite guests to examine pockets of uncertainty.

Encourage vision

Invite guests to express hopes and dreams. What in your guests' view is the best that could come out of finding common ground?

Radio Talkshows

are a tool with great power to influence conflict in a positive or negative manner.

They have to be used with care, if they are not to exacerbate conflict.

Talkshows can bring people together across dividing lines, and open up debate on difficult issues.

This guidebook has been written with talkshow producers and presenters in mind. It is designed to help them design and produce successful and entertaining programmes which help construct a peaceful future, without leaving audiences with the feeling that things will never change.

