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MEDIA AND CONFLICT IN MYANMAR

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEDIA TO ADVANCE PEACE

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United States Institute of Peace

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About the Report

This report is based on a methodology, created by USIP, that can help donors, NGOs, policymakers, and local stakeholders in Myanmar determine which media initiatives can effectively be used to assist in mitigating conflict and building peace. The research offers a systematic process for integrating conflict and media assessments by considering media and nonmedia factors in the design of locally led initiatives to bring about social change. The authors would like to thank Than Lwin Htun for his key role on the assessment team, Lyndal Barry and Alison Campbell for their advice and editorial assistance, and more than one hundred interviewees in Myanmar for making the recommended media initiatives both purposeful and possible.

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Cover photo: AFP

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

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Peaceworks No. 92. First published 2014.

ISBN: 978-1-60127-208-9

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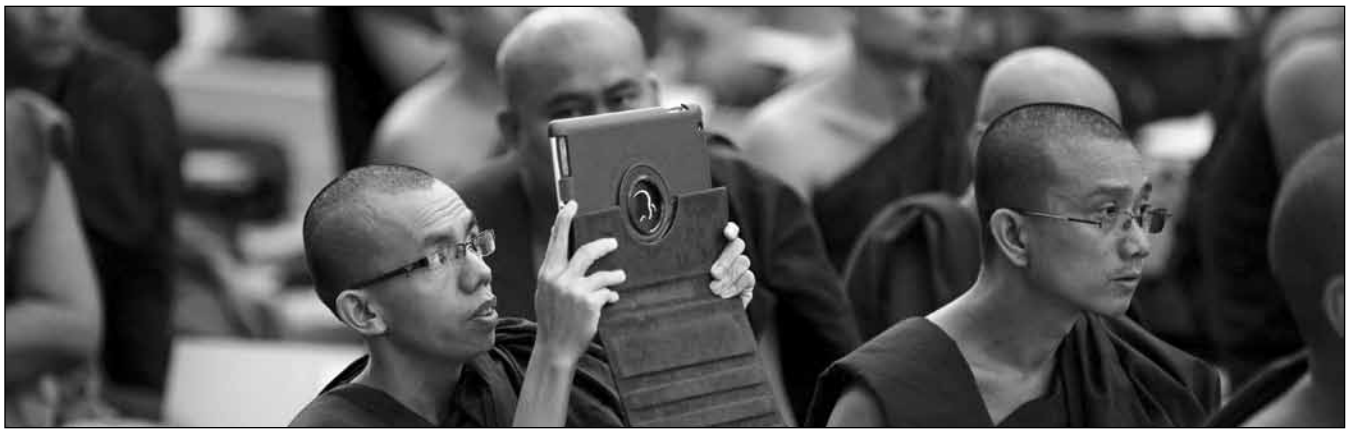

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[Despite deeply entrenched beliefs regarding ethnicity, many interviewees acknowledged the need to bridge the divide between Burmese and other ethnic communities through media.]

Summary

- Myanmar's democratic reform, economic development, and peacemaking progress have been rapid since 2010, though significant hurdles threaten to derail the advances.
- This study is based on the Intended Outcomes Needs Assessment (IONA) methodology and assesses the changing relationships between media and conflict in Myanmar.
- Findings reveal a deeply rooted, intractable, and dynamic conflict landscape. Analysis focuses on three key conflicts: citizen-state, ethnic, and intercommunal.
- The developing media environment has been a central feature of the transition. The range of outlets for information sharing and the diversity and reach of content are expanding rapidly.
- Radio has a significant influence in ethnic and conflict-affected areas. Television does as well, especially in urban areas.
- New media freedoms are supporting peaceful transition but are also causing harm.
- Certain initiatives are needed to monitor and counter hate speech online and leverage social media and online mechanisms to advance social norms that support peaceful coexistence and tolerance.
- A Peace Technology Innovation Workshop to shape information and communications technology (ICT) initiatives that address issues such as land-grabbing, rumor, and corruption would be productive.
- Training for journalists, particularly in conflict-sensitive reporting, is a priority.
- Public relations for government officials and ethnic nationality leaders is recommended to increase awareness and foster accountability between citizens and state and to raise awareness on ethnic identity and peacemaking issues.
- Across all formats, training for ethnic nationality and Bamar journalists is encouraged to tackle ethnic identity and language issues in reporting.
- Additionally, the regulatory environment must be further reformed to support a progressive press law, new legislation for access to information and telecommunications, and education among local stakeholders on how to implement such laws.
- These initiatives, among others recommended by the study, would support, not replace, nonmedia statebuilding efforts.

Introduction

Myanmar's transition has been remarkable in pace and scope. Government and civil society actors have taken extraordinary steps to foster democratic change, institutional reform, economic growth, and peaceful transition. The process, however, is far from complete. The 2008 constitution reserves 25 percent of seats in parliament for the military and blocks those with a foreign national in their immediate family from running for president (a clear attempt to bar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from office). Following the 2010 elections, considered flawed by many in the international community, a new government was sworn in. Although technically civilian, it includes many senior military officers who resigned their military posts to take up public office. In addition, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) holds more than half of the seats in parliament. Perhaps not surprisingly, as a result of these quotas and dynamics, the reform process was viewed with skepticism when it began to emerge in 2010.

Advances in the reform process since 2010, however, have led many to temper their skepticism. Various barometers attest to the astonishing pace and scope of Myanmar's transition. Laws that denied freedoms of speech, association, and movement have been repealed en masse. The vast majority of political prisoners have been released and political exiles welcomed home, swelling the ranks of an already vibrant civil society. As of August 2013, fourteen cease-fire agreements have been signed with armed groups representing non-Bamar nationalities since the government launched its peace initiative in 2011. An agreement to halt hostilities in the last active civil war between the government and the Kachin Independence Organization and Army was achieved in late 2013. This agreement raises the possibility that a nationwide cease-fire might soon be in place for the first time since independence. The international community has responded to the country's efforts by lifting sanctions, reestablishing diplomatic ties, welcoming the country's leaders to their capitals, wiping out most of the country's debt and pledging billions in aid, and gearing up for large-scale private investment. Flanked by 40 percent of the world's population and two rising powers in China and India, Myanmar's political, social, and economic transformation is no longer a boutique issue in international politics.

Hosting the 2013 South East Asian games, implementing its 2014 census, and chairing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2014 provide politically important milestones for Myanmar's leaders. The eyes of the world will be watching. These will be important benchmarks on the path to the 2015 elections, which will be a critical point in determining how genuine and comprehensive the reform process is. If 2015 is the goalpost, then constitutional change, free and fair elections, and some form of political guarantee for armed groups for a post-2015 political process are the goals. This ideal scenario is possible but far from guaranteed.

Although the transition has been rapid, it has not been smooth on all fronts. The international community has largely applauded Myanmar's progress, but several ugly episodes of communal violence and the continued military offensive in Kachin State have tarnished the country's improving image. Business commentators have talked up the potential of Myanmar as the last frontier or the next Asian tiger, but increasing investment flows have been accompanied by reports of land grabbing, corrupt business practices, and public protest. Myanmar's leaders have stayed the course, but the inevitable frictions among leaders vying for top positions in the run-up to 2015 are emerging. International partners have had difficulty calibrating engagement. As one interviewee noted, "The international community went from complete sanctions to full engagement, both of which are too extreme. You can engage and be critical at the same time. There needs to be accountability for the negative and positive changes."

The international community has largely applauded Myanmar's progress, but several ugly episodes of communal violence and the continued military offensive in Kachin State have tarnished the country's improving image.

One area of positive change is the lifted media restrictions, which has led to an explosion in the availability of information across multiple media formats. People have new access to information that can, for example, hold wrongdoers accountable, promote transparent governance, and increase understanding and exchange between previously competing ethnic and religious groups. This opening should be supported. However, increasing access to information also carries conflict risks. Fed for decades on a restricted diet of state-sponsored half-truths, the population at large has little media literacy and a tendency to attach as much validity to rumor as to reported fact. Most notably in relation to the communal violence between Buddhist and Muslim communities across the country that has marred the transition period, media (particularly social media) have been used as vehicles for hate speech and tools to mobilize antigroup (particularly anti-Muslim) sentiment and action. Antigroup attitudes, suppressed under the military regime, are surfacing in the new climate of openness and, according to some interviewees, are being mobilized by certain elites—particularly those resisting the reform efforts—for political gain.

Antigroup attitudes, suppressed under the military regime, are surfacing in the new climate of openness.

Media opening in Myanmar creates both benefits and risks. This study recommends initiatives to capitalize on opportunities for media to support peacebuilding and guard against the potential for the newly opened media environment to cause harm.

IONA Methodology

Building on the work of the United States Institute of Peace's (USIP) Center for Media, Conflict, and Peacebuilding in multiple conflict-affected countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, this study uses an IONA methodology that blends conflict analysis with an assessment of Myanmar's rapidly evolving media landscape.[1] The project team comprised senior Myanmar media experts, in-country conflict advisers, and key staff from USIP. The project was guided by an advisory group of Myanmar media professionals and conflict experts who offered their input at two stages in the process. Before the interviews in Myanmar, the advisers helped revise the preliminary conflict assessment and afterwards assisted in refining the proposed media interventions. Data collection included extensive desk research; field research included two workshops, individual and group interviews, and follow-up meetings with more than one hundred participants. The participants included local peace and conflict experts, legislators, technologists, state and nonstate representatives, creative professionals, non-Bamar ethnic leaders, civil society representatives, and media professionals.

The analytical framework can be distinguished from traditional conflict assessments by its focus on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (KAB) change. This framework is designed specifically to examine how access to and consumption of information influences peace and conflict:

- *Knowledge* is what people know to be true based on their experience and access to information.
- *Attitudes* are what a people in the target society believe. These attitudes are formed on the basis of what people know and influence why people engage in certain behaviors.
- *Behaviors* are what people do. Behavior is knowledge and attitudes made manifest in context, though not always deliberately.

The framework relies heavily on substantial local input to characterize the culturally unique knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the target populations. The investigation necessarily con-

siders the diversity in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among groups within the population, realizing that these differences themselves are often associated with conflict behaviors.

The intended outcomes or goals of media initiatives are similarly defined as specific knowledge, attitudes, and behavior outcomes that respondents argued will best support conflict management and peacebuilding. These outcomes are defined as a desired state with respect to the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of target communities in relation to specific conflicts. For example, Myanmar's Bamar ethnic majority is often not aware of or misunderstands the aspirations of the country's non-Bamar ethnic groups, which can drive attitudes and behaviors that sustain conflict or make collaboration for peacebuilding difficult. Thus, an intended outcome of media interventions is for Bamar populations to gain widespread awareness of non-Bamar ethnic history, language, and culture and perceive these communities' aspirations as legitimate.

Myanmar's Bamar ethnic majority is often not aware of or misunderstands the aspirations of the country's non-Bamar ethnic groups, which can drive attitudes and behaviors that sustain conflict.

Of course, media initiatives are far from the only activities that support positive knowledge, attitude, and behavior change in societies. Much work is being done in education, for example, to promote understanding of other ethnic groups, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Various local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been working for decades in areas such as human rights documentation, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives to increase awareness and foster attitudinal change on peace-related issues. The proposed initiatives in this report are intended to complement these activities, taking advantage of new media freedoms within the country. In a similar vein, media initiatives are intended to support rather than replace structural changes necessary for a peaceful transition. Media initiatives can promote transparency and accountability of government, for example, but must be accompanied by comprehensive structural reforms, more effective service provisioning, and relationship-building between citizens and the state that combined will create the foundation for sustainable peace.

This study considers three primary conflicts—or sets of issues that generate violent conflict—in Myanmar and details the knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral elements that compose them. These three conflicts are characterized for the purpose of this report as state-society, ethno-political, and intercommunal. The proposed media initiatives detailed later are designed to transform peoples' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in order to build peace.

Conflict Landscape in Myanmar

State-Society Conflict

Conflict between the regime and the people came to symbolize Myanmar's struggle, particularly for international audiences. Arising out of decades of authoritarian rule, Myanmar is marked by low levels of trust and moments of open and violent conflict between the government and its people. Many civilians have sought more equal distribution of power, which those in power have sometimes feared would bring disunity or disintegration of the Union. This counterpoint has led to several cycles of civilian protest and violent backlash since independence. Perhaps the most notorious was the pro-democracy uprising of 1988 and the military regime's violent crackdown, which brought the state to the brink of collapse and forced much of Myanmar's civil society and democratic opposition underground. In 2007, this conflict was again made visible when Buddhist monks and nuns led a movement known as the Saffron Revolution, demanding economic and political changes from the government. In these various moments of citizen mobilization, the demands have been for democracy, fairer distribution of resources and services, economic opportunity, accountability under the law, and freedom to ex-

press their identities. The post-2008 reform processes are making impressive progress on these fronts, but there remains much to do.

In the transition period, citizen protest has manifested in demonstrations for peace in Kachin State in September 2012; reactions to unpopular development projects, such as the Myitsone Dam; and demonstrations at the Leptadaung copper mine in 2013 (which sparked an aggressive response from police). Although the security forces are working hard to professionalize and recalibrate their responses to meet the requirements of a modern, civilian police service, the potential for public discontent to turn violent remains high.

Corruption in government, military, and business activities remains problematic, although the new press freedoms are already appearing to limit some corrupt behavior.

In many cases, Myanmar's citizens still lack any institutionalized means of holding political or business leaders accountable. Although the legislature has made impressive progress in the transition period,[2] the judiciary is not entirely independent, and the capacity of the legal system is limited. As a result, many people do not have reliable access to justice, and the value of any new legislation remains limited by the capacity of the institutions required to implement and uphold it. Corruption in government, military, and business activities remains problematic, although the new press freedoms are already appearing to limit some corrupt behavior. The promise of the governance and institution-building work conducted thus far by the government of Myanmar is laudable, but it will be some time before Myanmar's citizens trust institutions and believe they can rely on them for justice, accountability, or a fair deal.

The Myanmar Police Force and the military (*Tatmadaw*) are tasked with ensuring national security and unity but are also not trusted by sections of the population. For citizens living in non-Bamar ethnic or conflict-affected areas, as well as for those who have experienced crackdowns firsthand, the Tatmadaw is associated with repression and abuses. At times, nonstate armed groups (NSAGs) have also preyed on the communities they claim to protect, extracting taxes and punishing those deemed disloyal to their causes. Rather than feeling safe in the presence of security forces and NSAGs, many still fear them. Several interviewees suggested that fear also exists among those who control Myanmar's security forces, in terms of the potential loss of power, resources, sovereignty, and national unity.

Interviewees in urban areas expressed renewed confidence in democratic institutions and rule of law to protect them, though this perspective was usually not shared by rural and non-Bamar participants. Many citizens remain unconvinced that the peace process or the ballot box will deliver on their aspirations. Exacerbating this outlook is that few mechanisms for meaningful engagement between civil society and government have developed since 2010. Because of the lack of means to relay concerns and engage with government authorities to help resolve community needs, citizens resort to agitator activities—including mass protests—against the government.

Referring back to the KAB framework that formed the methodological basis of this study, it is encouraging that Myanmar's leaders have already taken important steps to transform what people know, the attitudes they hold, and the way they behave in relation to state-society conflict. Indeed, the resolution of state-society tensions in Myanmar is perhaps the most advanced among the three conflicts explored. Flaws in governance are understood by leaders, the democratization and governance reform process is advancing, and nascent efforts to improve rule of law are under way. New freedoms are already enabling the media to play its part in holding the government and security forces accountable. As one media group owner noted, "We all feel that we have a responsibility to the society to be the fourth estate." Unpopular development projects and policies, such as the Printers and Publishers Regulation Bill or the flawed Vacant Land and Fallow Land Act, have been widely criticized. Human rights abuses by state security

Table 1. State-Society Conflict: Problems and Outcomes

	Existing Problem	Desired Outcome
Knowledge	Elite awareness that democracy has been destabilizing in the past	Elite understanding that their interests are not necessarily threatened by democracy, power sharing, and transparent practices
	Elite perception that empowering citizens may threaten elite interests	
	Public awareness that previous state, military, and business abuses have not been held accountable	Public confidence that there will be justice for past abuses
	Elite stance that civil and human rights norms do not need to be respected	Elite knowledge that they are more accountable to human rights norms
Attitude	Military and state belief that power and resource sharing threatens national stability	Leader confidence in inclusive governance
	Belief in divide and rule policy (for democratic and ethnic opposition)	
	Lack of public confidence in state institutions	Citizen trust in state and business structures
	State and business belief that they will not be held accountable for wrongdoing	
Behavior	Conflict over usurped natural resources, particularly in non-Bamar ethnic areas	Equitable natural resources development in non-Bamar ethnic areas
	State limitations on civil rights and political space for civil society	Human and political rights through political process and state institutions
	Cycles of citizen protest and violent government response	
	Violent insurgency to achieve political goals	
	Human rights abuses against citizens by state and military	Perpetrators of corruption or rights abuses held accountable by state institutions or nonstate processes
	Corruption by central and local state institutions, businesses, and the military	

forces have been publicized, as have controversial reports such as the land commission's findings that primarily blame the military for historical cases of land-grabbing.

The media initiatives set forth in relation to state-society conflict should thus be seen as bolstering these efforts. The proposed media initiatives intend to promote transparency, accountability, and equitable resource sharing in business and politics and build trust and confidence in (and the use of) the political process as a means of sharing power and resources and advancing mutual interests. As one local NGO director put it, "Political elites don't always represent their constituents. Media links two sides. Media makes the process transparent." Outcomes are detailed further in the media initiatives section in relation to specific activities. The knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors associated with state-society conflict are summarized in table 1, along with the intended outcomes that the proposed media initiatives will target.

Ethno-Political Conflict

Identity differences mark Myanmar's ethno-political conflicts. The country officially recognizes 135 ethnic groups in eight major clusters, each with distinct languages and cultures and a history of governing separately administered kingdoms before colonization. Under the 1947 Panglong Agreement, several (but not all) of Myanmar's ethnic nationalities were guaranteed protections of rights, equality, and some degree of financial and administrative autonomy. From

the perspective of ethnic nationalities interviewed for this study, these guarantees were never fulfilled, invoking a series of armed independence movements that are some of the longest running insurgencies in modern history. Wary of disintegration of the Union, Myanmar's leadership has at times sought to galvanize national solidarity by a policy of Burmanization, whereby Bamar language and culture and Buddhist religion have been promoted to the exclusion of other ethnic identities. For ethnic nationality interviewees, this policy has been part of a Bamar tendency toward paternalism over the country's ethnic nationalities. For their part, non-Bamar ethnic groups and their associated armed groups have found unity in ethno-nationalist identities with distinct languages, cultures, and versions of history. Both sets of identities are highly militarized. Ethnic nationalities reject the notion of a Bamar-Buddhist national identity and have a tendency to see the peace overtures of the present government as a continuation of the Bamar imperialism of the past. A remark from a member of a nonstate armed group was typical of this sentiment: "Bamar people don't try to understand ethnic people. They know there are ethnic people and they don't want separation, but they don't want solutions."

Ethnic nationalities have long desired a political dialogue process in which their historical grievances can be aired and root causes of conflict with the state resolved.

Political exclusion is a second pillar of ethno-political conflict, according to interviewees. Although some ethnic political parties have been established and hold seats in parliament, many ethnic representatives (including members of NSAGs) have been unable to represent their communities in politics. Ethnic nationalities have long desired a political dialogue process in which their historical grievances can be aired and root causes of conflict with the state resolved. The cease-fires of the 1990s ended violence in parts of the country but did not create peace precisely because the political dialogue in relation to fundamental autonomy and identity issues never materialized. The same risk is true of the current cease-fire process initiated by the Thein Sein government in 2011. Without a political process to address root causes, cease-fires will address symptoms but never the causes of ethno-political conflict. Signs in late 2013 that a roadmap for political dialogue might soon be agreed on as part of a nationwide cease-fire agreement are encouraging.

Control of resources is a third pillar and increasingly significant. One interviewee described this problem as the "orientation of access to resources around ethnic identity." The parts of the country populated by Myanmar's non-Bamar ethnic groups are rich in natural resources but relatively poor in terms of average income and quality of life. This reality is a source of grievance for the non-Bamar ethnic representatives interviewed. For some NSAGs natural resources have historically also provided a source of income to maintain the insurgency against the military government. Some groups, particularly in Shan State, have weak political objectives at best and can be more accurately described as armed criminal networks that profit from legal or illegal trade. In the current cease-fire process, as in the 1990s, natural resources are fueling conflict by opening opportunity for military and business investors to profit from land and natural resource projects, causing land grabbing, displacement, environmental degradation, and erosion of confidence in the peace process. Development projects such as Shwe gas pipeline and the Myitsone Dam have become rallying points for affected communities. Resource sharing and land reform will be another important element of safeguarding Myanmar's peace process.

According to interviewees, peoples' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to ethno-political conflict are an outcome of lived experience and government control of the information system. Promotion of Bamar majority, language and culture was formerly a state policy, as reflected in the education system and state institutions, including the state-run media. On the other hand, and according to some participants, the military government was conditioned to fear and protect against ethnic secession from the Union. In the words of a local

NGO worker, "Burmans got brainwashed that federalism equals disunity [and that] we should crush Kachins as a result." According to interviewees, widespread misunderstanding remains among the Bamar majority regarding the aspirations of non-Bamar groups. One interviewee joked, "On the day the media can spell my name correctly, that's when we have ethnic equality." Non-Bamar ethnic groups, on the other hand, especially in rebel-held areas, often harbor negative stereotypes of Bamar people and may not distinguish between the people who have occupied their lands militarily (who may or may not be Bamar), those who govern the country, and the Bamar ethnic group as a whole. One interviewee mentioned that the only Bamar he had ever met were carrying guns. In short, negative stereotypes abound on both sides and are often reinforced by media.

After decades of fighting and broken promises, mistrust is high, especially from ethnic nationalities toward the government and, in some instances, the Bamar majority. Human rights abuses, displacement, and trauma associated with long cycles of war have deepened the sense of injustice felt by some non-Bamar communities. Confidence in the cease-fire process has been further weakened by ongoing clashes in parts of the country technically under cease-fire, particularly in Kachin and northern Shan states. Meanwhile, Tatmadaw units have yet to withdraw from outlying states and in some cases have increased their presence during the cease-fire process. Many interviewees on all sides of the ethnic divide suggested that the government is saying one thing about the reforms and the military is doing another. The political process has not delivered a viable solution to this problem in six decades, so despite the strong desire for peace on both sides, violence remains for some a more viable means of fulfilling aspirations. "We have a culture of arms," said one government interviewee. "It's easier because you can put all of your feelings and emotions into violence, but politics is much more difficult." It will be a long time before Myanmar's ethnic communities on all sides have the trust and confidence to truly reconcile and address past injustices and resolve the fundamental causes of ethno-political conflict.

Cease-fires are only the first step in an extended process to resolve the country's ethno-political disputes. To achieve peace, the country will have to go even further. Comprehensive political agreements will need to be reached that fundamentally alter the country's political and governance structures and redistribute political and economic power more equitably among ethno-political groups. In addition to structural alterations, deep-rooted attitudinal changes will be needed. Comprehensive transformation will take generations, not years.

The proposed media initiatives seek to raise awareness and change attitudes in support of peacebuilding and reconciliation between ethnic groups by promoting better understanding of the language, history, and aspirations of other ethnic groups; a national identity based on unity in diversity rather than unity via assimilation; and trust in the political process to deliver the rights, resources, and political aspirations of all people. As one youth activist said, "We can promote our unique cultures, but we live in the same house." The knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors associated with ethno-political conflict are summarized in table 2 along with the intended outcomes that the proposed media initiatives will target. Outcomes are discussed further in the media initiatives section.

Intercommunal Violence

The opening of the information space has had important implications for conflict, notably in the contribution of information as a driver of communal violence in 2012 and 2013 that broke out between Buddhist and Muslim groups across the country, particularly affecting Muslim communities who were the overwhelming victims. This phenomenon is not new—tensions be-

Table 2. Ethno-Political Conflict: Problems and Outcomes

	Existing Problem	Desired Outcome
Knowledge	Non-Bamar ethnic cultures, histories, and grievances misunderstood	Genuine understanding of other ethnic cultures, histories, and grievances
	Contrasting understandings of history between ethnic groups (particularly as related to conflict)	Better appreciation of the unique histories of different ethnic groups
	Non-Bamar collective memory of abuse and broken promises	Non-Bamar trust in both government and Bamar majority and awareness that means to rectify injustices are available
Attitude	Bamar paternalism	Bamar respect for other ethnic groups' right to self-determination
	Bamar and military belief in unity via assimilation	
	Conflicting aspirations (national unity versus ethnic autonomy)	Other groups seen as equal partners in Myanmar transition
		Myanmar belief in unity in diversity
		Unified vision for Myanmar's future based on federalism and both resource and power sharing
	Bamar negative stereotypes of other ethnic groups	Positive stereotypes of all ethnic groups
	Non-Bamar ethnic group negative Bamar stereotypes	
	Non-Bamar victim mentality	Non-Bamar trust in government and Bamar majority and means to rectify injustices
	Mistrust	
	Culture of violence	Trust in political process
Behavior	State discrimination against non-Bamar ethnicities	Discrimination not tolerated
	Violent suppression of non-Bamar ethnicities	Peaceful political participation to achieve goals
	Ethnic-based separatist insurgency	

tween Buddhist and Muslim communities have surfaced before—but its modern incarnation appears more virulent. Before the current transition process, reporting on communal violence occurred only through the state media, which did not allow the same scope and spread of information as the current online and legacy media space. Beginning in Rakhine State in July 2012, after a picture of a Buddhist woman who had allegedly been raped was circulated by local media, incidents of physical violence between Buddhist and Muslim communities have occurred in Okkan, Meiktila, Lashio, Thaton, and elsewhere.[3] Hundreds have been killed and more than 150,000 displaced in this violence.[4]

International commentary often presents the violence as the result of interreligious tensions between an aggressive Buddhist majority and a persecuted Muslim minority. Religion is a convenient oversimplification to discuss the conflict but tends to obscure the separate and interconnected social, economic, and political causes—each with discernible knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral elements.

According to multiple expert interviewees, an important root cause of the conflict is the perceived threat to Buddhist identity and power posed by the gradual permeation of Muslim people, culture, and religious practices in both Myanmar and Asia as a whole. The Buddhist faith has historically been a central pillar of nationalist policy. According to Buddhist and Muslim interviewees, modern-day Buddhists sometimes perceive Islamic values as antithetical to their own and fear that the proliferation of this identity will distort the culture and values of Myanmar society. In the words of one interviewee, "Buddhism needs protection from outside influence. Other countries are losing Buddhist influence, and we don't want that here."

One strand of the perceived threat relates to concerns about population takeover. The belief that Buddhist women who marry Muslim men will be unwittingly converted to Islam is widespread. This feeling is fed in part by Islamic disapproval of interfaith marriages and practices that deny non-Muslim wives the right to marital property in the event of death or divorce. Concerns over this issue led to a call in mid-2013 for a law to prevent Buddhist women from marrying Muslim men. Combined with the perception (real or otherwise) that Muslim families have more children (in Rakhine State at least), there is a fear that followers of the Islamic faith will come to outnumber Buddhists. This fear is also evident in official recommendations made in April 2013 in response to the Rakhine conflict that called for "reproductive education," which in the Myanmar context is a euphemism for limitation of Muslim population growth.

Culturally and religiously, Myanmar's citizens often perceive Muslims as less willing to integrate into Myanmar society than previously. According to interviewees, citizens sense an increase in symbols of Islam, such as mosques, women in hijabs and burqas, and men with *kurtis* (long shirts), beards, and prayer caps. The fear of Islamification is not helped by the fact that Islamic communities, including mosques and madrasas, remain relatively closed to outsiders, rousing suspicion about the attitudes and practices of Muslim communities. "The Muslim population has been isolated within Yangon for so long, so we need to get them involved, to practice citizenship and take part," one youth activist said.

Fear of Islamification in Myanmar also manifests in economic competition. Since colonial times, South Asian migrants, sometimes Muslim and sometimes not, have grown in influence in Myanmar's merchant economy. In modern times, Islamic mercantilism is often numerically symbolized in signs displaying 786, which refers to halal produce in accordance with the Quran. Numerology being influential in Myanmar Buddhist consciousness, many Buddhists are quick to assume that 786 has hidden meanings. They have also come to believe that it is a marker that leads Muslims to buy exclusively from Islamic businesses. The reaction to this phenomenon is evident in the 969 movement, which invokes the Buddhist principles (the three precious gems) of the *Buddha,* the *Dhamma* (teachings), and the *Sangha* (monkhood) and calls on the faithful to boycott Muslim businesses in favor of "buying Buddhist." The economic dimension of these anti-Islamic attitudes have manifested in the looting of Islamic businesses during communal violence.

Polarized reporting by domestic and international media has often reinforced the divisions between these communities. According to interviewed experts, domestic journalists and opinion leaders are more likely to report negatively on Muslims than on Buddhists. Western journalists, on the other hand, have tended to report Buddhist-Muslim violence through a normative, rights-based framework that victimizes Muslims and blames Buddhists. This reporting circulates back into Myanmar, reinforcing anxiety about threats to Buddhist identity that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. One expert commentator argued that for Buddhists, this anxiety leads to calls to "defend the *Sasana*," invoking a deeply rooted duty to protect the Buddhist tradition, considered the moral spine of Myanmar nationhood. This dynamic was evident for example in *Time* magazine's reporting on Buddhist nationalist monk U Wirathu as "the face of Buddhist terror"—perceived as highly disrespectful and inflammatory for Myanmar Buddhists. Censorship of this publication may have stifled debate on a highly important topic, but it was done so by authorities to prevent violence.

International Islamic commentary has had a similar effect on root causes. Here communal violence is framed as part of an international tendency to persecute Muslims as part of the global war on terror. These accounts link to powerful global advocacy networks, Islamic institu-

Table 3. Intercommunal Violence: Problems and Outcomes

	Existing Problem	Desired Outcome
Knowledge	Conflation of economic, population, and religious conflict drivers (*religionification* of the conflict)	Better understanding of each other's religions and appreciation of peaceful elements
		Improved understanding of different conflict drivers
	False information about Islamic values, traditions, history, culture, and intentions	Credibility of information sources valued
	Global war on terror narrative permeated into public consciousness	Belief that jihadists operate in Myanmar exposed as false
	False belief that received information is credible	Awareness that some information cannot be trusted
Attitude	Buddhist belief in anti-Islamic stereotypes	Greater mutual Buddhist and Muslim tolerance
	Belief in superiority and centrality of Buddhism in Myanmar identity	Broad acceptance of Myanmar as a multifaith country
	Fear of Islamification	
	Culture of violence	Greater mutual Buddhist and Muslim tolerance
Behavior	Buddhist boycotting of Muslim businesses	Boycotting ceases
	Viral spreading of anti-Islamic information	Hate speech monitored, not tolerated, and shut down
	Attacking and looting of Muslim businesses, places of worship, people, and Muslim retaliatory attacks	Stronger police enforcement
	Buddhist nationalist sermonizing and rumormongering	Stronger monitoring

The war on terror or clash of civilizations narrative has permeated the community, arousing fears of terrorism and the spread of values inconsistent with Buddhism.

tions, and financiers that have taken interest in the cause, conducting visits, establishing offices and programs, and offering political and financial support to Myanmar's embattled Muslim communities. Similarly, the perceived persecution and abject situation of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State has for some time pulled disproportionate international support in their direction, fueling Buddhist Rakhine grievance and threat perception. These responses to the Buddhist-Muslim conflict, though justifiable, add to Buddhist fears of Islamification and so-called jihadist agendas. In this way, what started as a largely ungrounded fear has the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby the defensive actions of Buddhist nationalists against perceived Islamification generates the threats that motivated their actions in the first place.

The knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors associated with communal violence are summarized in table 3, as are the intended outcomes that the proposed media initiatives will target. Myanmar's Buddhists are aware that other countries in the region, most notably Indonesia and Malaysia, have transitioned from majority Buddhist or Hindu to majority Muslim in the last century. The war on terror or clash of civilizations narrative has permeated the community, arousing fears of terrorism and the spread of values inconsistent with Buddhism. Islamic beliefs can encourage behaviors that close off Muslim communities from other citizens, sometimes inviting suspicion. Experience of scripture has taught both Buddhists and Muslims to defend the faith as a religious imperative. Furthermore, many citizens have long been conditioned to associate Buddhism with national solidarity and fear of disintegration. Negative stereotypes about Muslims are prevalent, and there is a high degree of misunderstanding of Islamic values and practices. Buddhist sermons, which are distributed en masse, feed attitudes about other groups, even if the recordings have been distorted postproduction to confer Buddhist nationalist or anti-Islamic sentiment. It is widely seen as blasphemous to criticize publically these sermons or the monks who offer them.

Myanmar faces significant challenges in responding to intercommunal violence. Unlike governance reform and the peace processes, no large-scale mechanism or widespread popular or political support addresses the root causes of this conflict. Politicians, clergy, opinion leaders, and international actors alike risk losing credibility and support by going against the tide of public opinion, creating an environment in which radical rather than moderate voices can flourish. The media initiatives recommended by this study thus urgently seek to raise awareness and shift attitudes while guarding against the potential for media to fan violence in the short to medium term. Such initiatives aim to generate better interreligious understanding in Myanmar, promote tolerant and nondiscriminatory interreligious attitudes and practices, counter misinformed or anti-Islamic messaging, enable hate speech to be monitored and shut down, promote media literacy, and support the vision of Myanmar as a diverse, multifaith country. International support should be low key because overtly international efforts are likely to lack credibility and risk tarnishing the reputation (and effectiveness) of local actors. In the short term, initiatives should support the creation of an environment in which more moderate voices have the confidence (and cover) to speak out. Outcomes are detailed further in the media initiatives section.

Media Landscape

How can media be harnessed to bring about desired outcomes related to the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of citizens in Myanmar? Proposed media initiatives are intended to be both purposeful and possible. 'Purposeful' means that the initiatives address specific problems that people in Myanmar have prioritized and seek to change. 'Possible' indicates that interviewees believe that media can be an effective tool for resolving problems and achieving societal change. Recognizing that media initiatives alone cannot address all of the broad outcomes outlined in the previous section on conflict, only transformations specifically related to media activities are examined here.

Understanding the current media landscape in Myanmar is critical in determining how realistic a media intervention might be. We therefore first describe, by no means completely, the capacity and potential of the media sector in Myanmar. Although the media landscape continues to shift according to the pace of transition, this information is intended to provide a contextual lens through which the proposed media interventions are viewed.

The recommended media initiatives, initially developed at the end of the interview process with a panel of local advisers, are divided into two types. In some, media are the tools of the intervention, whereas in others they are the target. More specifically, when outcomes are achieved using existing media capacity, media is the tool, and when outcomes require transforming the media or media environment, media is the target.

Additional factors about the proposed media initiatives need to be considered:

- Initiatives are designed to be carried out by local stakeholders, often but not always in collaboration with international actors.
- Initiatives are national in scope but can be customized for local needs with input from local communities and implemented by local media.
- Depending on the capacity of the media, proposed initiatives will be conducted according to varying time frames, and the effects of social change may also be apparent on different timelines.

Print

The real turning point for media in Myanmar arrived in June 2011, when the government of Thein Sein announced the gradual withdrawal of prepress censorship. Although this withdrawal began with entertainment media, the process came full circle in August 2012, when censorship of all news media officially ended.[5] This step forward needs to be qualified, however. Even as journalists were allowed to write about Aung San Suu Kyi, to avoid potential repercussions, they continued to practice self-censorship when it came to political news. Additionally, a de facto post-press censorship still exists in that the Ministry of Information (MoI) continues to control registration and therefore can levy penalties or revoke registration in response to printed material it might take issue with. In another promising step, daily publications were approved, and four gained initial licenses to begin operations on April 1, 2013. A total of sixteen were expected to enter the market, and many weekly journals are planning to transition to the daily format.

Myanmar features a vibrant print media landscape with more than three hundred newspapers; roughly one-third of these newspapers are based in Yangon.

Currently, Myanmar features a vibrant print media landscape with more than three hundred newspapers; roughly one-third of these newspapers are based in Yangon.[6] The literacy rate in Myanmar, though subject to debate, is estimated to be as high as 89.9 percent.[7] It is unquestionably lower in rural areas. Nevertheless, levels of readership across the country are high, and rent-a-book shops are popular fixtures in many areas. At such venues, several newspapers are combined into one take-home volume. Many local communities have their own tea shop culture that includes sharing newspapers and discussing the news of the day.

One general problem is the lack of local-language print media that truly represent the communities. In fact, community media are scant, though this is beginning to change.

The availability of print media is widespread for monthlies and weeklies but will be more difficult for dailies as they begin to enter the market. The infrastructure simply does not support easy transport of papers, and only a few newspapers have their own printing facilities. As a result, the largest printing houses have significant influence.

Overall, trust in the government-run newspapers is scant, especially after decades of top-down control of the entire media environment. In comparison, some trust lies with the private media, but according to interviewees, the level depends largely on who is running the particular outlet. Most weeklies run the same content, so readers are especially appreciative of special reports—these distinguish one weekly from the next. There is a certain level of distrust in international media coverage of ethnic and religious issues. Some Bamar think that such coverage unfairly weights the concerns of non-Bamar ethnicities and also demonstrates a superficial level of knowledge about conflict issues in Myanmar.

Broadcast

Before 2011, broadcast media were completely controlled by the state, and the transition since 2011 has brought far less freedom to it than to the print sector. Whereas five dailies continue to be operated by the state—either the MoI or the military—two state television channels—MRTV (Myanmar Radio and Television) and Myawaddy—remain under government control. Meanwhile, several new privately owned FM channels and a handful of private television stations have emerged, but most are owned by government-aligned cronies.[8] The founding of other broadcast outlets has likely been hampered by high start-up costs, particularly relative to print media.

Outside city centers, radio is still the media of choice, especially for listening to international broadcasters, such as Voice of America (VOA) and BBC. However, according to a radio

coverage map,[9] radio coverage by the nine main FM stations is concentrated in the central (and most populated) areas. Media consumers in cities and towns in ethnic areas also have radio coverage, such as Pyinsawaddy in Sittwe, but far less choice.[10]

According to interviewees, the new FM stations are mandated to carry centralized Burmese news. They are oriented toward entertainment programming and do not carry nonstate news. As with the print media, ethnic radios are still heavily influenced by ethnic military groups, and almost no community radio stations truly represent the interests of their communities. In Karen State, for example, no local media were allowed until very recently.[11]

Ethnic radios are still heavily influenced by ethnic military groups, and almost no community radio stations truly represent the interests of their communities.

International broadcasters have ethnic language radio programming, but it is somewhat limited. VOA features a weekly program called "News from Ethnic Frontiers." Although it is in the Burmese language, the program presents stories on ethnic issues by ethnic reporters. Radio Free Asia (RFA) does produce weekly television and radio programs in seven ethnic languages—about ten minutes for each language. Of the Burmese stations, only the state-run radio channel—MRTV, the ethnic language service—broadcasts in ethnic languages.

Meanwhile, television is beginning to outpace radio in terms of appealing to urban audiences.[12] According to Gallup data, almost half of Burmese tune in to television news at least weekly (44.7 percent). Television viewership is far more common in urban areas (41.6 percent watching news daily and 67.8 percent at least weekly). The vast majority of urban households (84 percent) have a working television set. Yet only 10 percent of Burmese television owners indicate their sets receive satellite signals.

By virtue of the concentration of television in urban areas, generally the more affluent members of society are television watchers. Due to the lack of local broadcasting in ethnic languages, television viewers are also largely Burmese speakers. However, state-run Myanmar International TV does air in English, and Myanmar National TV also offers some English programming. MRTV recently announced plans to launch an ethnic language channel that would include programs in eight ethnic languages. International broadcasters offer ethnic-language programming (such as the programming by RFA) in addition to Burmese-language news and information, but ethnic-language television content is extremely limited overall.

Although state channels such as MRTV are still operated by the MoI, the ministry announced plans to transition it to a public broadcasting service. Additionally, since 2011, a new trend has begun in which channels have been forming joint ventures. For example, two channels, MRTV-4 and Channel 7, are nominally public-private partnerships between the MoI and the Forever Group. Meanwhile, according to interviewees, SkyNet is a privately run channel operated by a wealthy businessman aligned with the government. Television content is heavily balanced toward entertainment, and any television news programming largely toes the government line.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that according to Gallup research, few viewers trust any television channel "a great deal," though a high percentage of viewers trust "somewhat." The international broadcasters have marginally higher trust levels than state television does. These data stand somewhat in contrast to the perceptions of many interviewees, including one highly popular entertainer who simply said, "There is no news that ordinary Burmese can trust."

Internet

Mainly well-off, urban people have Internet access, although with the awarding of mobile licenses to international companies Telenor and Ooredoo, the cost of mobile use will drop, allowing more people to purchase Internet-enabled phones. According to Gallup data, only 1.4

percent of the people of Myanmar have used the Internet in the last week.[13] This number rises to just 4.1 percent for citizens in urban areas.[14]

Internet access is largely available in urban areas and much less available in rural (and ethnic) areas. However, overall penetration rates could be misleading based on the availability of Internet in urban cafes that enable multiple users at one access point. Also, people are increasingly able to access Internet on mobile devices. Despite the virtual lack of Web-based infrastructure for mobile phones, mobile access might even be faster than computer-based Internet (according to Gallup).

Internet costs $300 or more for installation, and subscription rates vary based on download and connection speed ($75 to $100 per month). Cost for mobile Internet access is estimated at 15 to 30 cents per minute.

Internet is the primary medium for ethnic communities based outside the country, with formerly exile outlets, such as Mizzima, Irrawady, and Democratic Voice of Burma, providing much of the online news content.

One interviewee, himself a Buddhist monk in Yangon, indicated that he was so well connected by social media that he saw no reason to verify the information he was receiving and disseminating in support of Rakhine Buddhists.

Despite the low Internet penetration rates and relative dearth of users, social media such as Facebook have become extremely popular. It is estimated that there are roughly eight hundred thousand Facebook accounts in Myanmar,[15] though half of them could be using fake identities.[16] Interviewees point to many positive instances in which social media have been used to rally for peacebuilding and other social causes,[17] but social media have also exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions and helped spread misinformation and rumor. Hate speech has proliferated online, including reinforcing negative stereotypes about both Muslims and Buddhists. Much of the inflammatory content has been directed at the Muslim population in Rakhine State in particular, which has sparked violence and reprisal attacks. One interviewee, himself a Buddhist monk in Yangon, indicated that he was so well connected by social media that he saw no reason to verify the information he was receiving and disseminating in support of Rakhine Buddhists. One media executive stated simply that "social media is not accountable." In fact, the ability of activists in Myanmar to act instantaneously on the Internet has trumped discussion of controversial issues in the mainstream media, a potentially dangerous trend that has many worried about how to rein in inflammatory online content yet maintain some level of free expression.

Mobile

According to 2011 data, 1.244 million people in Myanmar have mobile phones.[18] According to Gallup, 16.6 percent of Burmese have a working mobile phone in the household. Mobile phone ownership has risen sharply in urban areas, from 13 percent in 2010–11 to 35.2 percent in 2012. In Yangon and Mandalay, almost half of the residents (45.7 percent) have mobiles. Short message service (SMS) usage is quite low, however: Only 4.3 percent of urban mobile users text at least once per week.

This overall use of mobiles is expected to surge when new licenses are issued to international mobile companies. At the end of June 2013, Norway's Telenor and Qatar's Ooredoo won a highly competitive tender process from among eleven other short-listed carriers. However, the awarding of the licenses will be delayed until the parliament has passed a new telecommunications law that governs the industry. Once the licenses are issued and network build-out can begin, service will expand rapidly. The government goal is 80 percent coverage by 2016. Other factors are contributing to attaining this ambitious target. First, mobile devices are available everywhere, especially cheap Chinese models, and most are Internet enabled.[19]

Also, the basic costs for mobile SIM cards could drop from roughly $2,000 several years ago to well below April 2013 rates of $200 to $250 per card. These costs are still fairly prohibitive, and Gallup data indicate that the vast majority of Burmese (79.4 percent) cannot afford to buy more than the basic necessities. Among those who are better off, 44.7 percent say they have mobile phones.

Interviewees from the technology sector indicated that though they see the potential for eleven million new mobile users in the next six months, obstacles to further expansion remain. For example, rural connectivity is a potential problem as not much information is available about how networks will be built out in areas with little infrastructure. Also unclear is the role of the state operator Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) and how it will function alongside international competitors. Currently, interviewees noted that MPT cares little about service, international roaming is not available, and SMS messaging is not reliable.

Not surprisingly, rural and ethnic areas have far less mobile access from the MPT network. However, ethnic communities are accessing Chinese and Thai networks, depending on their location. Interviewees indicate that mobile information is trusted but is mainly used by youth for sports news.

Media Training

One dubious legacy of the former military regime and its complete control of the flow of information is the lack of media professionals trained to conduct high quality, ethical news reporting. Across interviews with government officials, civil society, and media of all types, training is almost always the first area of need identified, especially because training of media was not allowed by the former regime.[20] Consequently, most journalists in Myanmar are relatively young and inexperienced (an informal poll by the Press Council indicated that the average age of an editor is twenty-seven), and turnover within media outlets is high. The capacity gap is further exacerbated by the top-down mentality left over from the era of state-controlled media. When interviewees noted the need for training, it appeared they did so with different motivating factors in mind. Journalists and media managers largely understood they were thrown into an increasingly fluid and competitive news environment that would seriously challenge their skills. Government officials expressed concern about the pace of media reform and the capacity of news media to report accurately to better protect public order. Meanwhile, citizens were suddenly exposed to new information sources that they craved but still harbored a deep distrust of news. So journalism training for them meant reestablishing the credibility of news media in the eyes of the public.

Another area of need identified by interviewees is the professional reporting on conflict. Although part of this problem stems from the lack of access to conflict-affected areas controlled by either the Tatmadaw or NSAG, part of the issue lies in a high degree of self-censorship that has effectively replaced the previous censorship regime. One media executive interviewed noted, "Even the big outlets like *Weekly 11* don't go against public opinion. Their reporting on conflict is not really professional. Reporters seek to avoid conflict, and they don't criticize. Buddhist monk Wirathu led the 969 movement, but local Burmese journalists are scared to criticize him."

Local and international organizations are actively taking steps to address these gaps in capacity. Although only one university—National Management College in Yangon—has a journalism program, UNESCO is working with the school to develop and institute a new

curriculum. The three main media associations—the Myanmar Journalist Association, Myanmar Journalists Union, and Myanmar Journalists Network—offer ad hoc instruction, and the Press Council developed a resource center for media and an ethical code of conduct. In terms of broadcast training, Deutsche Welle has partnered with the Myanmar Media Development Center, which is associated with MRTV-4, to train broadcast journalists. One of the longest-running training programs has been conducted by Internews, which has instructed ethnic media along the border with Thailand since 2001 and journalists in Yangon since 2003. Internews has also done significant conflict-sensitive reporting training, including developing a manual in the Burmese language. Recently returned from exile, Mizzima is offering conflict-sensitive journalism training using a curriculum developed by Danish NGO International Media Support.

One consistent theme that has emerged in discussions about journalism training is that the many local-international partnerships to advance media professionalism are relatively ad hoc and uncoordinated. Despite a great deal goodwill on the part of the media community in Myanmar to receive assistance, international organizations are practically tripping over themselves to get involved, which risks fragmenting efforts. A coordinating body such as the Media Development Thematic Working Group—organized by UNESCO in February 2013 and representing the MoI—national and ethnic media, and international development partners should help mitigate this scenario, if competing agendas can be put aside.

Business Environment

Overall, the opportunity for media in print and broadcast should be trending upward due to dailies coming on the market in April 2013, new television joint ventures, and more FM radio stations.

As with many other industries experiencing transition in Myanmar, the economic underpinnings of the media sector are characterized by serious challenges and significant opportunities. Although the economic infrastructure is still limited and corruption and crony capitalism are major problems, the lifting of economic sanctions, the passage of new legislation on foreign direct investment, and the corresponding entry of major international firms to the Burmese market all signal a monumental shift in the media ad space. Estimated by interviewees to generate $200 million in 2011—two-thirds going to television and the rest to print media—Internews presents a figure of $525 million for the total ad market in 2013.[21] A boom in tourism and investment from the World Bank should further open the space for ad growth. Myanmar has 172 ad agencies, but only five are of international quality.[22] The ad market, however, is largely free from crony control due to the volatility of the marketplace so far. Overall, the opportunity for media in print and broadcast should be trending upward due to dailies coming on the market in April 2013, new television joint ventures, and more FM radio stations. The previously mentioned award of mobile licenses to Telenor and Ooredoo also infuses the market with new revenue streams.

In terms of the sustainability of local media outlets, it would be difficult for all sixteen newspapers that received or are receiving daily licenses to survive in the current marketplace. In the broadcast arena, cronies still maintain control over public-private joint ventures, such as MRTV-4 and private satellite channel SkyNet. Private media in both print and broadcast will also be challenged by competition from the MoI, which has plans to turn state-run MRTV into public service media and has similar plans for the state-run dailies. Meanwhile, exile media outlets such as Mizzima and Irrawaddy that have returned to the country will have to compete in a very different marketplace where aid from international donors might not be as forthcoming.

Regulation

In addition to the broad consensus on the need for professional training for journalists and managers in Myanmar, there is similar motivation to revise the fairly restrictive media laws left on the books from the previous regime. Such legislation includes the 1962 Printers and Publishers Act and the 2004 Electronic Transaction Act. The former law reinforces the registration of all media outlets as well as prepress censorship practices. The latter includes vaguely worded statements prohibiting journalists from "distributing any information relating to secrets of the security of the state."[23] Both laws have been heavily criticized by media in Myanmar as tools to imprison journalists and restrict freedom of speech.

In the broadcast arena, still largely under state control, the MoI has taken a leading role in drafting new pieces of legislation, including a new broadcast law, a public service media law, and bills governing the film industry and libraries. Separately, and much more controversially, a presidential order in 2012 created the interim Press Council, an industry body formed with a yearlong mandate to draft the new press law. All three existing media associations—the Myanmar Journalists Association, Myanmar Journalists Union, and Myanmar Journalists Network—are represented on the Press Council.

However, the Press Council began inauspiciously. Problems were related to oversight of the body—the government initially wanted the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division to manage the council—and the composition of the membership—ultimately only ten of the thirty members were approved as government appointments. These issues were finally resolved in September 2012, and the drafting process began. Yet even as the Press Council was consulting with local and international partners on the content of the press law, the MoI was preparing its own competing bill, ironically called the Printers and Publishers Regulation Bill. The Press Council quickly condemned the MoI's draft, noting that it ignored recommendations made by the Press Council and included restrictions in the form of licensing and registration for all print media (essentially amounting to post-press censorship). The MoI interviewee, however, indicated that the ministry was limiting its oversight to printing and publishing and leaving the professional aspects of the law to the industry leaders. In early July 2013, the lower house of parliament passed the MoI's version of the bill, leading to calls by the Press Council to disband. More recently, both bills were under consideration by parliament, and the MoI draft was approved by both houses. Meanwhile, the upper house signed off on the Press Council's version, paving the way for a final legislative showdown over the status of the press law. How the law balances the interests of the MoI and the media industry remains to be seen.

Additionally, interviewees noted the importance of a Freedom of Information (FOI) Law. One observed, "Access to data will lead to good governance." Others question both the current capacity of national and local officials to implement an FOI law and the perceived threat such legislation would have on the power base of certain politicians.

Ethnic Voices

As noted, the challenges for producing balanced and accurate news in non-Bamar ethnic areas are formidable. Although some Yangon-based newspapers have stringers in several ethnic states, reliable coverage is still limited, particularly in conflict-affected areas. In these areas, the military tends to control information about actions conducted against NSAGs, and the NSAGs can pressure their local media to support their own cause. The interviewee from the Kachin News Group (KNG) stated that the media outlet does attempt to be independent

but has more access to the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) than other media, so it is perceived to be pro-KIO. In a separate interview, however, a representative from the KIO noted that the KNG was not truly representative of the Kachin people. Nevertheless, the KNG interviewee acknowledged that many people in Kachin have a negative view of the government and an independent journal in the state would go a long way to changing the mindset of the local communities.

Some interviewees considered many non-Bamar ethnic states to be simply "media dark," in that no local media exist to represent their community's interests. Yet this situation has recently begun to change. A handful of ethnic media are now emerging, including in Mon State, where the Independent Mon News Agency (based on the Thai-Burma border) started printing *The Guiding Star* in the Mon language in April 2013. Despite its political affiliations, this outlet could be viewed as an example for other ethnic media as they seek to establish their voices. Similarly, Karen News recently received a license to print a local newspaper, and discussions are under way to begin a local radio station. Licenses are also being sought in Chin and Shan states for additional radio stations.

State governments are now responsible for making decisions on registering local media, and the Ministry of Communications, rather than the military, currently controls frequency allocation.

According to interviewees, state governments are now responsible for making decisions on registering local media, and the Ministry of Communications, rather than the military, currently controls frequency allocation. Both steps offer hope that community media, ultimately including community radio, can be established to inform local people and share credible information with mainstream Yangon-based outlets. Community radio is deemed especially critical by interviewees, and recent signs point to an accelerated timetable for the emergence of these radios. One interviewee suggested another way that community radio could emerge relatively quickly. The KIO, for example, has its own FM station that might, under the right conditions, be transitioned to a community outlet. Such a model could be followed in other ethnic states.

Meanwhile, non-Bamar ethnic media are attempting to find their collective voice as well. Burma News International (BNI) is a group of small ethnic media outlets, many of which are based in Thailand. With the support of international donors, BNI brought together one hundred media outlets in April 2013 in Mawlamyaing for one of the first ethnic media conferences in the country. Although symbolic, the event underscored the difficulties such outlets are facing in returning to Myanmar. Even though a handful of outlets, such as Mizzima, have returned, others—such as the Kaladan Press, KNG, and the Shan Herald Agency for News—remain on the outside looking in. The reason is an environment they still deem to be unsupportive of ethnic media, which includes hacking of media websites and charges of false reporting by the military.[24]

Despite deeply entrenched beliefs regarding ethnicity, many interviewees acknowledged the need to bridge the divide between Burmese and other ethnic communities through media. Such efforts include mainstreaming non-Bamar ethnic voices in the (Yangon-based) Burmese media and strengthening non-Bamar ethnic media as credible voices of their communities. Both could be accomplished by creating a forum for joint reporting projects between ethnic and Burmese journalists, offering ethnic journalists internships at Yangon-based outlets, and producing broadcast content that raises awareness about both Bamar and non-Bamar communities.

Media Interventions

Media as Tool

1. Peacebuilding Television Drama

Interviewees indicated that the existing stereotypes and misunderstandings between Bamar and the varied ethnic communities could be broken down through a compelling serialized television drama based on an educational curriculum.[25] It would feature a diverse group of characters from across the ethnic spectrum interacting in ways that would foster mutual respect and trust-building. Similarly, the television production team would be composed of cast and crew from different ethnic groups to ensure that the program resonates with a wide range of viewers.

Technical elements	
Target audience	General public audience but especially a cross-section of Bamar and other ethnic communities
Format	Serialized television drama, likely at first via international broadcasters
Broadcast component	Weekly thirty-minute episodes in Burmese and ethnic languages
Outreach components	Customizable for radio production
	Used as a learning tool for civil society organizations (CSOs) to promote interethnic dialogue; integrated into the education system by providing DVDs and the curriculum to schoolteachers
	Local celebrities (such as Zaganar) who have expressed strong interest in peacebuilding efforts in guest appearances on the program
	Moderated online forum on Facebook to facilitate further dialogue based on the curriculum as well as enabling interaction with the actors on the show
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Better understanding among ethnic groups of the experiences and day-to-day lives of each other
	Awareness among ethnic groups about the consequences of negative stereotypes of "the other"
	Knowledge of both similarities and differences among groups, including different histories, cultures, and grievances
Attitude	Expansion among individuals, groups, and communities within Myanmar of interethnic trust
	Sense among non-Bamar ethnic communities of less marginalization and among Bamar majority of other ethnic groups as equal partners
	Heightened respect among ethnic groups for other groups and surrender of the us-versus-them mentality toward the Bamar majority
	Belief among citizens that unity and diversity will carry the nation forward
Behavior	Acceptance among citizens of ideas from other ethnic groups
	Citizens demonstrating new ways of showing tolerance and respect for other ethnic groups
	All citizens practicing new forms of problem solving in relation to other ethnic groups

2. Investigative Reporting Radio/Television Program

"Heroes of Myanmar." Interviewees emphasized the heightened level of tension among religious groups in Myanmar in addition to the existing ethnic divisions. Bridging these divides and mitigating negative stereotypes among diverse groups can be addressed through a series of investigative reports highlighting heroes of Myanmar. Short reports would reveal how common people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds have done small acts of heroism to help others solve problems, assist in their communities, or prevent violence. For example, the Buddhist monk who provided a safe haven for four hundred Muslims in his community after a spate of religious violence broke out in Meikhtila.

Technical elements	
Target audience	General population of Myanmar
Format	Short investigative reports for radio or television
Broadcast component	TV: weekly thirty-minute program with several short reports; radio: twice weekly fifteen-minute programs
Outreach components	A program tip line to accept new stories of heroes across the country; information also collected through social media and letter writing in rural areas
	Audience feedback built into each program (via call-ins) to facilitate discussion about solutions to ethnic-religious issues
	Documentaries on the most popular and compelling issues produced for public service broadcasting
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Better understanding among citizens of the peaceful aspects of each other's religion
	Awareness of shared problems and possible problem-solving options with people from different ethnicities and religious orientations
	Understanding that some sources of information about other faiths and ethnicities are more trustworthy than others
Attitude	Acceptance of Myanmar as a multifaith, multiethnic country
	Tolerance for people from other ethnic and religious groups, and less willingness to fall back on negative stereotypes
	Confidence in the capacity to solve problems
Behavior	Applying lessons learned from heroes to solve problems in communities
	Interethnic and interreligious dialogue opened; hate speech and discrimination not tolerated

3. Participatory Radio-Television Talk Show

"Local Issues, National Debate." Interviewees emphasized the deep mistrust between citizens and the government, which still manifests itself in an us-versus-them mentality at the local and national levels. With state administrations run by officials appointed by the national government, Bamar and other ethnic communities struggle to have their voices heard. A political talk show radio program that highlights local issues, based on audience input, that are also relevant at the national level, such as natural resource allocation and corruption, and would involve moderated audience participation and interaction with a varied slate of guests from differing ethnic backgrounds and government branches. The radio program could also be adapted for television production and broadcast.

Technical elements	
Target audience	General population, local and national decision makers
Format	Weekly radio talk show with moderated listener call-in and live interviews
Broadcast component	Brief news report on issues of local and national importance
	Interview of guest or guests by program host
	Call-in questions to guest or guests from listening audience
	Discussion of responses to listener comments
Outreach components	Assistance from listening public in determining program topic and guests
	Audience call-ins posing questions to the guest
	Guests from state and national government determining action to respond to identified issue
	Citizens given a call in number or SMS short code to chart progress of officials in dealing with the problem
	Successes and failures digitally mapped to enable follow-up activities as well as provide accountability
	Problem revisited in subsequent episodes to explore lessons learned and share solutions
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Citizen understanding that they can communicate their needs and demand accountability from officials
	Citizen confidence that they can express themselves on issues of local and national importance using media
	Knowledge that the same problems (and potential solutions) affect everyone in the country
	Government official and elite understanding that their interests are not necessarily threatened by power sharing and transparent governance
Attitude	Trust among citizens that government can solve problems and deliver services
	Increased citizen belief that involvement and action can help ensure accountability
	Trust in the political process as a means of sharing power and resources
Behavior	Increased citizen demand—often through the media—for accountability from government officials
	More information sought about how other communities solve problems and resolve conflict
	New ways pursued to include citizens in governance and in resource allocation

4. Countering Rumor Radio Satire Program

"Around the Well." Many interviewees indicated the prevalence of rumor in shaping opinions and potentially fomenting violence, especially in rural and ethnic communities. Rumors are particularly dangerous when people have the tendency to accept information about interethnic and interreligious conflict without verifying the information. This radio satire program will feature characters considering the latest rumors while talking around a well, a popular venue for sharing information in rural communities.

Technical elements	
Target audience	Rural population, leaders, and decision makers
Format	Radio drama and live call-in program
Broadcast component	Weekly fifteen-minute episodes in Burmese and ethnic languages; brief follow-up discussion program to present counternarratives
Outreach components	Humorous storylines generated by actual rumors found on social media websites and in local communities; storylines focus on more trivial rumors to avoid sparking misunderstanding among listeners
	Moderated discussion program includes an invited guest, such as a community elder; more dangerous rumors also discussed
	Cartoons in print media and online to illustrate the danger of certain rumors
	Counternarratives presented during the radio discussion to dispel rumors also posted online
	Social media monitoring to track how dangerous rumors are spread and the effect the radio program and online forum has on presenting an effective counternarrative
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Citizen understanding of the power of rumors and the negative consequences of believing them
	Citizen understanding of the importance of verifying information and considering different sources
	Citizen understanding that by dispelling rumors, they can gain a better understanding of people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds
Attitude	Belief in capacity to filter information to solve problems
	Trust built in other individuals and groups with separate and unique histories, cultures, and grievances.
Behavior	Information verified before being acted on.
	Reliable sources of information sought out, and false information countered
	Information that denigrates others rejected, and new lexicon of tolerance and mutual respect built

5. Multimedia Conflict-Sensitive Reporting

Although training of journalists is the most commonly identified area of need, improving the quantity and quality of reporting related to ongoing conflict in Myanmar is also important. Identifying and training reporting teams (one Bamar journalist and one non-Bamar journalist) to collaborate on conflict-sensitive coverage of issues such as human rights violations, land disputes, and patronage systems could help inform the public on the root causes and potential solutions related to key conflict issues. This initiative would begin by using print and online media but could later be customized for radio and television.

Technical elements	
Target audience	General population of Myanmar, including ethnic communities
Format	Weekly investigative reports in print and online media
Broadcast components	Brief news report on issues of local and national importance
	Interview of guest or guests by program host
	Call-in questions to guest or guests from listening audience
	Discussion of responses to listener comments
Outreach components	Jointly reported stories produced weekly in Burmese and other ethnic languages; online versions to ensure broader distribution to ethnic communities in border areas
	Bamar and non-Bamar ethnic journalists interviewed on radio and television as part of coverage to share experiences of joint reporting
	Top stories developed as documentaries by local peacebuilding organizations to encourage conflict resolution
	Conflict-sensitive reporting prizes awarded to the top reporting team
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Increased practical conflict-sensitive reporting skills among journalists and increased awareness about problems and solutions relevant to other ethnic groups
	Greater citizen understanding about conflict and ethnic violence in Myanmar
	Citizen awareness of the unique histories and common problems that all ethnic communities in Myanmar face
Attitude	Citizen trust that the information they receive about conflict is credible
	Belief among all ethnic groups that they are equal partners in Myanmar's transition, including conflict resolution
	Confidence among journalists that they can present accurate information about conflict that will resonate in Myanmar
	Decreased sense of threat among government officials for quality conflict-sensitive reporting
Behavior	More balanced reporting on conflict issues media-wide
	Less citizen tolerance of discrimination and increased consideration of interethnic solutions to problems
	Government peacebuilding groups use conflict-sensitive reporting to further conflict resolution goals

Media as Target

1. Develop Ethnic Language Community Media and Increase Ethnic Language Content

Because most of the violent armed conflict is taking place in the ethnic states of Myanmar, many non-Bamar ethnic communities need a voice of their own, both in community media (print and radio) and in access to more ethnic language media content. *The Guiding Star* and Karen News are some of the few community media outlets and could serve as models for encouraging the proliferation of ethnic language content trusted by local communities. Such content could also be translated and shared with Burmese-language outlets to foster intercultural understanding.

Requirements	
	Non-Bamar ethnic media receive licenses from state governments
	Ministry of Communications allocates frequencies for community radio
	Training of non-Bamar ethnic language journalists is continued and expanded
	Commitments from the military put in place to protect journalists working in conflict-affected ethnic states
	International donors, NGOs, and media continue to fund, produce, and support development of local language content
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Understanding among non-Bamar ethnic communities that they have access to credible news and information produced by journalists from their own ethnic groups
	Awareness among non-Bamar ethnic communities that they have a broader choice of information than what armed groups provide
	Awareness among Yangon-based mainstream media that non-Bamar ethnic media content can also be used to inform Bamar audiences, broadening the understanding of non-Bamar ethnic culture, history, and grievances
Attitude	Sense among non-Bamar ethnic groups that they have a voice in a national context and are less victimized
	Public trust in media slowly restored through access to more ethnic language content
	Bamar audiences more open to non-Bamar views with more access to coverage of various ethnic groups by various ethnic groups
Behavior	New local media outlets producing more higher-quality local language content
	New content about and by various ethnic groups spurs debate between these groups and the Bamar majority about conflict resolution

2. Improving the Media Regulatory Framework

During the interview period, much debate took place regarding the drafting of a new press law and the competing bills prepared by the MoI and the Press Council. Even as parliament considers both drafts, advocacy should continue to amend certain provisions that still limit media freedoms and promote additional legislation related to access to information and telecommunications. This process also includes repealing anachronistic laws that have been used to repress press freedoms such as the 1962 Printers and Publishers Act and the 2004 Electronic Transactions Act.

Requirements	
	Media voice in advocating for change to the regulatory framework
	Dialogue among local media, government, and international organizations to ensure more progressive laws are put in place and properly implemented
	Public awareness campaign to inform citizens about the benefits of new legislation
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Awareness among journalists, government, and civil society about what the new press law allows and does not allow
	Understanding among the media that legal advocacy for free speech and press freedom are long-term processes
	Understanding among citizens and political leaders that passing new media legislation is a step toward more transparent governance and power sharing
Attitude	Confidence among Myanmar journalists in their freedom to report on certain issues
	Citizen trust in media and belief that they can receive credible information from local media
Behavior	Press law enacted and implemented that enables more freedom for journalists and editors
	Journalists practice their craft without harassment
	Citizens able to make decisions to participate in the political process and resolve conflict based on credible information from the media

3. Multistakeholder Media Training

Interviewees overwhelmingly supported additional training for media in Myanmar, but they also called for parallel training for government and civil society. For government officials, this means understanding the role of the media as the fourth estate, how to interact with the media, and the protection of journalists. For civil society, media literacy training is needed to help citizens understand the danger of rumor, the information choices available to them, and how they can use media to interact with elected officials. Including representatives from media, government, and civil society as part of the same training program (starting with small interventions) could also help raise awareness and improve interactions among the three stakeholder groups. Such trainings could be replicated at the local and state level for the most impact.

Requirements	
	Continued funding for journalism training by international organizations, including practical in-house training at print and broadcast outlets
	Commitment from the government to educate officials at the state and national level on public relations and media affairs
	Outreach by civil society, private-sector media, and government to improve media literacy of the public
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Journalists gain knowledge in professional and ethical reporting
	Government officials know how to interact with journalists without treating the media as adversaries
	Public awareness about the variety of available information sources available to them, including from the government
Attitude	Citizen trust in information provided by the media as well as media's role as an oversight body
	Citizen belief that good governance includes transparency
	Belief among media outlets and their reporters and managers that they can provide coverage on a wide range of issues
	Government officials feeling more open in dealing with the media and in providing information about services offered to the public
Behavior	Citizens make more informed choices and improve their involvement in governance
	Media continue to improve quality of their reporting and increasingly serve as public watchdog
	Local and national officials provide more reliable information through the media, including that related to governance and conflict

4. Peace Technology Innovation Workshop

Interview respondents in the technology sector as well as civil society peace advocates were generally bullish about the potential for new technologies to address specific drivers of conflict in Myanmar. Yet they also noted that the uncertain pace of technology growth could hinder or outstrip nascent peacebuilding efforts if not carefully managed. A Peace Technology Innovation Workshop would connect civil society organizations working on peacebuilding issues with access and understanding to these technologies. Together with local and international technologists, civil society peacebuilding organizations would learn practical skills and approaches for applying low-cost, easy-to-use technologies to meet current challenges—such as land-grabbing, corruption and human rights abuses. The goal would be to create a set of solutions to implement over the following six months. The initial workshop would be the beginning of a longer-term engagement to develop the projects that emerge, ultimately yielding tangible benefits for building peace in Myanmar. Additional workshops could be undertaken to help cement the relationship of local technologists with local civil society and relevant government officials, which would build a more lasting technology for social good environment.

Requirements	
	Media and ICT specialists convene from across the country to meet with peacebuilding organizations, relevant government officials, and selected international technologists as needed
	International companies and ICT specialists engaged to promote collaborative and long-term partnerships when investing in the technology sector in Myanmar
	Follow-up sessions held to keep local and international participants engaged
	Event publicized to raise public awareness about the potential of ICT for peacebuilding.
	Funding sources identified to support some of the best projects that emerge from the workshop
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Understanding among ICT experts in Myanmar of how they can develop technologies for conflict prevention and resolution
	Greater public awareness that media and technology can be used to build peace
	Better understanding among government officials of their role in promoting ICT development
Attitude	Citizens more empowered to seek out solutions to problems through ICT
	ICT expert belief that they can contribute to peace in Myanmar while still earning money
	Greater incentive among government officials to support technology innovation if they are involved in the process
Behavior	New innovative thinking drives development of new technologies for peacebuilding
	Greater citizen participation in governance and problem solving through access to ICTs

5. Develop Mobile Technologies as Early Warning and Crisis Response Tool

The vast potential for mobile telecommunications is just waiting to be tapped, pending the passage of a new telecommunications law to regulate the sector. When the international carriers enter the market and prices drop to levels that most citizens can afford, people will demand more news and information, including through their 3G-enabled devices. Interviewees also indicated that mobile technology can be a useful tool for crisis prevention and response. For example, SMS early warning systems can be developed in advance of key events with potential for conflict, such as the national census in 2014 and the national elections in 2015. Such systems can also be used in tandem with digital conflict mapping to facilitate effective disaster response.

Requirements	
	Citizens and CSOs mobilized to report by SMS on instances of potential or actual conflict
	CSO editors trained in conflict sensitive journalism to assist in verifying information and to provide accurate coverage of conflict online and by SMS updates
	Digital mapping technologies used to chart high risk locations and areas where emergency response is required
	Communications with government bodies and mainstream media outlets established to ensure data generates broad response and increases public awareness
	CSOs use a database of mobile users to conduct public surveys and prepare strategy to mitigate subsequent conflict scenarios
	Partnerships with mobile providers established to design incentive mechanisms (such as mobile credit) and free short code numbers for text messaging
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Awareness among citizens that they can access credible information about conflict
	Understanding among government officials they are responsible for addressing conflict
	Understanding among journalists that information from the public and CSOs can enhance their coverage of conflict
Attitude	Citizen belief that they can contribute to preventing conflict in their communities using mobile telecommunications
	Less sense of isolation among marginalized groups in the reporting and mapping of conflict
	Greater sense of accountability among government officials for preventing, managing, and resolving conflict
Behavior	Increased citizen use of mobile technologies in mitigating conflict and responding to crisis
	Journalist monitoring of social media and CSO activity to inform their coverage of conflict and to hold the government accountable for action
	Government design of emergency response protocols based on interaction with and data provided by civil society

6. Preventing Online Hate Speech

Despite the relatively low levels of Internet penetration in Myanmar, respondents expressed concern not only with the speed at which hate speech is disseminated online but also the virulence of some of the inflammatory messages. Also of concern was the way in which online narratives of hate were threatening to trump news coverage by mainstream media, especially regarding intercommunal conflict. Through an initial analysis of online content, potentially through natural language processing, inflammatory terms appearing on Facebook and other online media can be identified and monitored. Content analysis methods and systems can then be integrated into training programs for civil society, media, and government officials in order for these groups to better understand, and more effectively respond to, online content that could incite violence.

Requirements	
	Consensus among a wide range of stakeholders on what constitutes inflammatory content; lexicon of terms that might incite violence published and widely distributed
	Automated social media monitoring to analyze inflammatory content and its potential effects on mainstream media and the public
	Training program established for bloggers, citizen journalists, mainstream media professionals, government officials, and civil society watchdogs to understand dangers of hate speech, how to monitor such content, and how to use self-regulatory tools to prevent the spread of such speech online
	Early online warning systems developed in advance of contentious events, such as a national census and electoral periods
	Content analysis data and self-regulatory tools related to hate speech integrated into interfaith dialogues and peacebuilding workshops
	Interfaith Facebook campaigns initiated to promote tolerance and mutual respect
	Civic-state dialogue on Internet regulation that limits inflammatory content while protecting freedom of speech
	Social media providers engaged to develop policies for shutting down offensive user accounts and pages
Desired outcomes	
Knowledge	Understanding among citizens about the dangers of hate speech and the risks of obtaining information through social media
	Heightened awareness among journalists for using social media as a credible source in reporting on conflict
	Understanding among government officials about what constitutes hate speech and how to react to it appropriately
Attitude	Citizen acceptance of Myanmar as a multifaith country
	Tolerance and mutual respect between different faiths
Behavior	Hate speech monitored, not tolerated, and ultimately shut down

Conclusion

The USIP's IONA methodology enables donors, NGOs, policymakers, and local stakeholders in conflict-affected environments to determine which media initiatives can effectively be used to help mitigate conflict and build peace. The IONA methodology offers a systematic process for integrating conflict and media assessments by considering media and nonmedia factors in the design of locally led initiatives that can help to bring about social change.

In Myanmar, this hybrid approach is intended to provide a unique perspective. Although many conflict assessments have been conducted in Myanmar since 2011, as well as analyses of the media environment, few, if any, blend the two approaches. Studies focused on media or conflict can still be extremely useful, and the IONA approach complements such research in that it connects what people in Myanmar know and believe and how they act to a well-defined set of social change outcomes. The media initiatives that can be implemented by local stakeholders with the support of international donors and NGOs are then designed to specifically address these outcomes to mitigate conflict.

To build trust and reduce fear between citizen and state, respondents tended to prioritize media interventions, such as a participatory radio or television talk show that features state and national officials interacting with citizens.

In the first conflict described, the government of Myanmar has taken significant steps in resolving tensions between citizens and the state. The democratic process has resulted in unprecedented opposition voices in parliament, and a raft of new laws has been enacted. Nascent efforts to establish rule of law and a stronger judiciary have also emerged. Nevertheless, significant mistrust remains between the government and the people after years of control by the military, the unequal distribution of resources, and the lack of overall accountability. The resulting fear that has emerged—citizens' fear of being marginalized and fear of those in power losing their control—is still pervasive. To build trust and reduce fear between citizen and state, interview respondents tended to prioritize media interventions, such as a participatory radio or television talk show that features state and national officials interacting with citizens who call in to the program. This media-as-tool intervention can be coupled with media trainings for government officials, media, and civil society in which they engage with each other to gain awareness about each group's role. A combination of these initiatives (and other nonmedia projects) could continue to erode the negative attitudes and aggressive actions between citizens and the government.

In the last two years, substantial progress has been made in addressing interethnic conflict in Myanmar. Steps have been made toward formal reconciliation and more than a dozen ceasefire agreements have been signed. However, the roots of conflict among ethnic groups are deep. State policies of Burmanization, unequal natural resource allocation, and political exclusion of non-Bamar ethnic groups have sowed negative stereotypes on all sides and significant mistrust among Bamar and other ethnic communities alike. To counter these stereotypes and reestablish trust, interviewees emphasized a peacebuilding television drama that could entertain and educate about "The Other." Paired with support for community radio in non-Bamar ethnic areas and additional non-Bamar ethnic media content featured in mainstream Burmese-language media, real social change could be fostered.

The conflict between Buddhists and Muslims that has taken place in Myanmar also has historical roots, but recent manifestations of intercommunal violence are especially worrying. Furthermore, the government seems poorly equipped to deal with these tensions, given that deeply entrenched beliefs about Buddhist nationalism and fears of the Islamification of Myanmar are powerful forces that bring potentially disastrous political consequences. To assist in alleviating these fears, respondents prioritized initiatives, such as the Heroes of Myanmar

program and the countering rumor radio satire, that could promote tolerance, sensitize citizens to the notion of a multifaith country, and provide counternarratives to dangerous misinformation propagated by social media and local rumor mills.

When USIP interviewed various stakeholders in Myanmar about media and conflict, most had sophisticated analyses of the underlying problems and their desires for social change. Although many had just begun to think about specific ways in which media could be used as a peacebuilding tool, they were able to connect the dots between other ongoing interventions that could resolve conflict (such as formal peace negotiations and rule of law reforms) and media-based solutions. Given the pace of transition in Myanmar, it is possible to overlook certain avenues for building peace, but to effect real change requires careful consideration of what can ultimately shape the attitudes and behaviors of those leading reform efforts. Clearly media can play a vital part.

Notes

1. Andrew Robertson, Eran Fraenkel, Emrys Schoemaker, and Sheldon Himelfarb, "Media in Fragile Environments," U.S. Institute of Peace, www.usip.org/publications/media-in-fragile-environments.
2. Fifty-eight laws were passed in the thirty months ending in August 2013 (Soe Than Lynn, "Thura U Shwe Mann takes Hluttaw Reins," *Myanmar Times,* August 4, 2013).
3. Communal Buddhist-Islamic violence in Rakhine differs from Islamic-Buddhist violence in the rest of Myanmar in that as Rakhine state has distinct immigration, citizenship, ethnic identity, and political and economic exclusion factors, which are not detailed in this report.
4. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Rakhine Response Plan (Myanmar) July 2013–December 2013," ReliefWeb, August 12, 2013, http://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/rakhine-response-plan-myanmar-july-2012-%E2%80%93-december-2013.
5. At this time, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division was also disbanded.
6. Reporters Without Borders, "Burmese Media Spring," December 2012, http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_birmanie-gb-bd_2_.pdf.
7. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Fact Book: Burma*, November 2013, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html.
8. Cronies are generally described as part of the economic elite who have deep ties to military officials.
9. Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), "Coverage of Myanmar Local Radio Media," February 2013, www.themimu.info/docs/SectorMap_Govern_Radio_MediaCoverage_MIMU965v01_1February20_A3.pdf; MIMU, "Coverage of Myanmar Free-to-air Television Media," February 2013, http://www.themimu.info/download.php?file=docs/SectorMap_Govern_Television_MediaCoverage_MIMU965v01_1February20_A3.pdf
10. According to Gallup polling, 62.2 percent say they use radio as a news source at least once per week. In small towns and rural areas, people are twice as likely to use radio (67.4 percent) for news on a weekly basis than television (34.8 percent). International Audience Research Project (IARP), "Analytical Report for Burma Media Use Survey," Gallup Broadcasting Board of Governors, September 2012, p. 6.
11. Karen News very recently obtained a license for print media, and discussions have begun regarding a local radio license.
12. In urban areas, television has outpaced radio (67.8 percent to 50.2 percent for radio).
13. Gallup's national survey was conducted between December 2010 and January 2011 (IARP, "Analytical Report," p. 29).
14. According to the CIA's *World Factbook*, there are 1,055 Internet hosts (2012) worldwide, which puts Myanmar at 172 in a global ranking. Data from 2009 suggest that of the country's fifty-five million people, 110,000 are Internet users.
15. https://twitter.com/AmaraDigital/status/329872633699110912.
16. Deputy Minister of Information U Ye Htut, speaking at the event "Preventing Hate Speech in Myanmar: Divergent Voices in a New Democracy," Rangoon (June 28, 2013), http://www.dvb.no/dvb-video/freedom-from-hate/29074.
17. One civil society organization used Facebook to arrange a peace march on International Day of Peace in 2012. Although not sanctioned by the police, they marched through ten townships in Yangon in what could have been the largest march since the Saffron Revolution.
18. CIA, *World Factbook*.
19. Interviewees estimate costs of $12 for an Internet connection, plus 5 cents per minute for data.
20. Such training either had to be held covertly within Myanmar or outside the country.
21. Michelle Foster, "The Business of Media in Myanmar, 2013," Internews, February 2013, https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_Business_of_Media_in_Myanmar_2013.pdf.
22. Ibid.
23. Reporters Without Borders, "Burmese Media Spring."
24. Radio Free Asia, "Exile Ethnic Myanmar Media Groups Wary of Returning," July 13, 2013, www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/media-07122013190654.html.
25. This format is an entertaining drama that seeks to change the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the target audience through a carefully designed curriculum.

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Since its 2010 elections, Myanmar's political transition from military junta to democratic rule has been remarkable. The process, though, is far from complete. In the context of a deeply rooted, intractable, and dynamic conflict landscape, this report addresses the role of Myanmar's national media in the country's political, social, and economic transition. Analysis focuses on three key conflicts: citizen-state, ethnic, and intercommunal. The report is based on a methodology developed by the United States Institute of Peace that is designed to help donors, local stakeholders, NGOs, and policymakers determine effective media initiatives to help mitigate conflict, build peace, and support nonmedia state-building efforts in Myanmar.

Related Links

- *Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries* by Amelia Arsenault, Sheldon Himelfarb, and Susan Abbott (Peaceworks, October 2011)
- *Afghanistan Media Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges for Peacebuilding* by Eran Fraenkel, Emrys Schoemaker, and Sheldon Himelfarb (Peaceworks, December 2010)
- *Media in Fragile Environments* by Andrew Robertson, Eran Fraenkel, Emrys Schoemaker, and Sheldon Himelfarb (USIP Press, 2011)
- *Social Media Reporting and the Syrian Civil War* by Anand Varghese (Peace Brief, June 2013)
- *Mitigating Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq: A Locally Driven Approach* by Maureen Taylor and Theo Dolan (Special Report, March 2013)
- *Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring* by Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, and Deen Freelon (Peaceworks, July 2012)
- *Salam Shabab: Views and Voices of Iraqi Youth* by Theo Dolan and Alexis Toriello (Peace Brief, January 2011)
- *Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics* by Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, John Kelly, and Ethan Zuckerman (Peaceworks, September 2010)
- *Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq* by Theo Dolan (Peace Brief, April 2010)
- *Media and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan* by Sheldon Himelfarb (Peace Brief, March 2010)