

## Synthesis

### KOFF Roundtable: Inclusive Communication in Peacebuilding



In June 2025, the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF hosted the virtual roundtable “Inclusive Communication in Peacebuilding” to explore the role of communication in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. The speakers shared practical approaches in fostering inclusive narratives and designing inclusive communication tools and strategies to strengthen social cohesion and promote peaceful societies. Participants engaged in sharing their experiences and reflecting on how to increase inclusive communication in their work.

#### Speakers:

- **María Prada**, former permanent Advisor to the President of the Colombian Truth Commission
- **Caroline Vuillemin**, General Director, Fondation Hirondelle
- **Sabra Ayres**, Editorial Coach, based in Kyiv, Ukraine, Fondation Hirondelle

#### Moderation:

- **Sanjally Jobarteh**, Communications Officer, KOFF/swisspeace

#### Organization:

- **Cornelia Tobler**, Coordinator of the KOFF platform, KOFF/swisspeace
- **Sanjally Jobarteh**, Communication Officer, KOFF/swisspeace
- **Chatrina Schumacher**, Associate Program Officer, KOFF/swisspeace

## Summary

Communication is a powerful tool in peacebuilding with the capacity to shape perceptions, influence narratives, and either open or close spaces for dialogue. Narratives can negatively affect conflict dynamics but also serve to support reconciliation and peacebuilding processes. Especially in contexts of polarization and mis- and disinformation, fact-based reporting that includes diverse perspectives is key. There are various tools and means that can be used to foster social cohesion and peace, which can be leveraged according to the context, objective and target audience. Collaborating with local media should go beyond simply communicating one's own activities. Local media and journalists can play a key role in promoting social cohesion and peaceful societies, and should thus be recognized as independent actors in peacebuilding.

## Key points

### **Reshaping inclusive narratives for reconciliation**

The Colombian Truth Commission (CTC) arose from the Final Peace Agreement signed by the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) in November 2016. The extremely narrow rejection of the Final Peace Agreement in the popular referendum and a social outburst in the years after made the implementation of the CTC's mandate challenging. Namely, the CTC, established through the Peace Agreement as a public institution, had to fulfil its mandate in a political climate where the government was opposed to the Peace Agreement. In addition, with the COVID-19 pandemic, many activities of the CTC had to be carried out digitally.

To implement its truth-seeking mandate, the CTC was committed to reach diverse audiences, including victims, ex-combatants, women, children, indigenous peoples, Roma people, peasant communities, LGBTQ\* population, and people with disabilities. Committing to inclusive communication was a political and ethical decision with methodological and administrative, including financial, consequences. They applied their commitment to inclusive communication in three dimensions:

- Internal: The CTC conducted a strategic analysis on how to strengthen inclusion to ensure they include diverse groups of audiences as well as under-researched themes and sensitive topics. They hired diverse staff members who were recognized as bridge-builders. They also invested in capacity building such as psychosocial training, and developed guidelines and protocols to practice meaningful listening, namely genuinely listening to the interviewees beyond the defined questionnaires. They also made sure to not only focus on facts but integrate artistic and cultural approaches.
- External: In parallel to the listening to the population and preparing the report, the CTC recognized the importance of preparing the society to listen and engage given the widespread polarization and presence of hate. The CTC developed and implemented inclusive decentralized national and regional communication strategies. They used a broad range of means, including public events, digital tools, radio, TV, and audiovisual strategies, massive campaigns in public spaces such as airports or bus stations, maintaining of media relationships, editorial projects, and public and participatory accountability sessions.
- Beyond the mandate: With the end of the CTC's mandate, a legacy strategy was developed for the continuous dissemination of the CTC's report, the collected

testimonies on lived experiences, and lessons learned by allies and a Follow-up Committee and Integral System for Peace through a museum and integral archives and the so-called “Transmedia”. The latter is a digital platform ([www.comisiondelaverdad.co](http://www.comisiondelaverdad.co)), collecting, curating, and making available the largest memory archive in Colombia. It brings together a plurality of voices and experiences through a graphic narrative promoting “one country”. The platform allows users to access, listen to, and use the public information and testimonies gathered by the CTC during its mandate to ensure their longevity and accessibility.

Through these inclusive communication activities, the CTC contributed to changing narratives and fostering reconciliation. Since the conflict has not ended and violence continues, these activities cannot be seen as part of a transitional justice context. Though, over the ten years since the 2016 Peace Agreement, a general progressive shift in public perception can be observed: the view of the FARC as the only problem, or the belief that the FARC would never lay down their arms, has gradually given way to a broader recognition of the deeper-rooted causes of the conflict, such as inequality and poverty, and the continued presence of various armed groups. This shift in perception has also been supported by the CTC’s efforts to foster public dialogue and alternative narratives.

## **The power of local media and journalists**

Complementary to peace journalism, local media<sup>1</sup> and journalists should be recognized as valuable actors in peacebuilding. By promoting factual reporting and creating space for dialogue, local media can enable diverse voices to be heard and give a basis for people’s independent decision-making. Inclusion is hence at the core of the peacebuilding role of local media. By definition, media act as intermediaries by connecting different groups of society and contributing to inclusion and social cohesion, both in vertical and horizontal dimensions. Vertically, they can break up hierarchy, connecting decision-makers with the wider population and strengthen the bottom-up inclusion of perspectives. Horizontally, media can support dialogue between different groups of society, namely also with marginalized groups. For instance, media should strive to not only include women’s perspectives from the elite but also from rural areas in an intersectional manner.

Several elements need to be considered when designing inclusive local media programs:

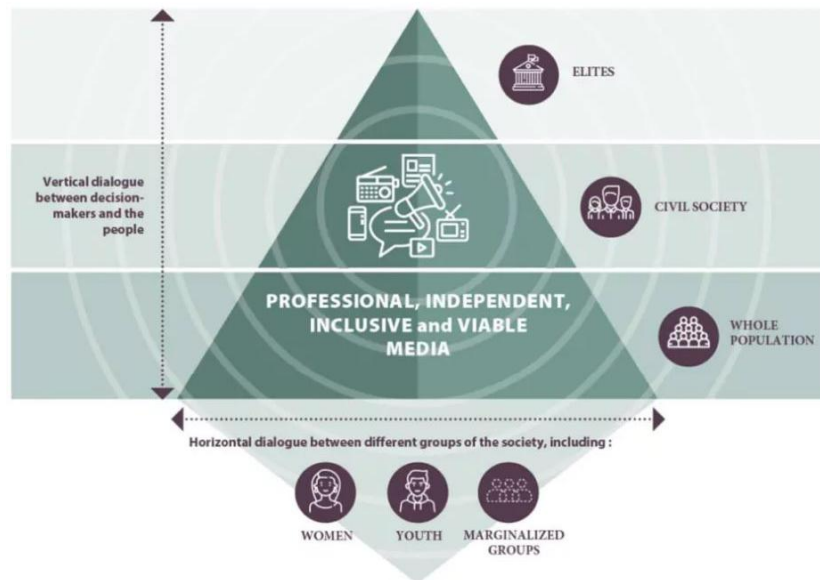
- Be aware of how and which types of media are consumed by the people you want to reach. This includes accounting for internet connectivity gaps and varying digital literacy levels. Namely, in many Sub-Saharan contexts, radio remains the mass media.
- It’s important to cooperate with local media and use local languages to reach a broader audience, especially considering that information on official peace processes is often not produced or disseminated in local languages.
- Internally, the inclusion of journalists with diverse backgrounds is also important since they shape what is being reported on, how it is framed, to whom media reaches out and what channels are being used.
- Adopt a holistic view of the information ecosystem in which local media and journalists operate. Socio-cultural, political, legal, technological, and economic conditions may

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<sup>1</sup> Local media refers to media anchored in the country/society they are serving, which can include - based on the media’s definition of its audience and reach – community media (approx. 2 km radius), local or regional media, and national media.

create a polarized or fragile environment not conducive to peace while collaboration with local media may still be impactful.

## MEDIA AND PEACE PROCESSES



Picture 1: *Media and Peace Processes*, Fondation Hironnelle

### An example of local media's peacebuilding role in Ukraine

An illustrative example of working with local media to strengthen social cohesion comes from a project in Ukraine. The initiative began with a study across 23 communities to identify issues that could create social cohesion at horizontal and vertical levels. The goal was to support local media in understanding and connecting better with their local audiences, and that way enhance the relevance of their reporting and its dissemination to strengthen trust with local communities. The study found that important unifying factors in the Ukrainian society are community pride, a long tradition of civil society engagement demonstrated by a large wave of volunteerism bringing people together in support for each other during the armed conflict, as well as sharing of stories of fallen heroes. On the other side, there are socio-economic disparities creating horizontal divisions, especially between those who fled the full-scale invasion and have returned to communities who have stayed and survived the occupation. The study also revealed that currently, different political views are sidelined by the dominant narrative of unity against a common enemy to defeat. While social cohesion and trust in the central government on domestic issues is low, local governments enjoy higher levels of trust. In the context of Ukraine's recent de-centralization, local media can play a key role in opening channels and fostering dialogue between local authorities and the population in view of strengthening social cohesion.

### Take aways

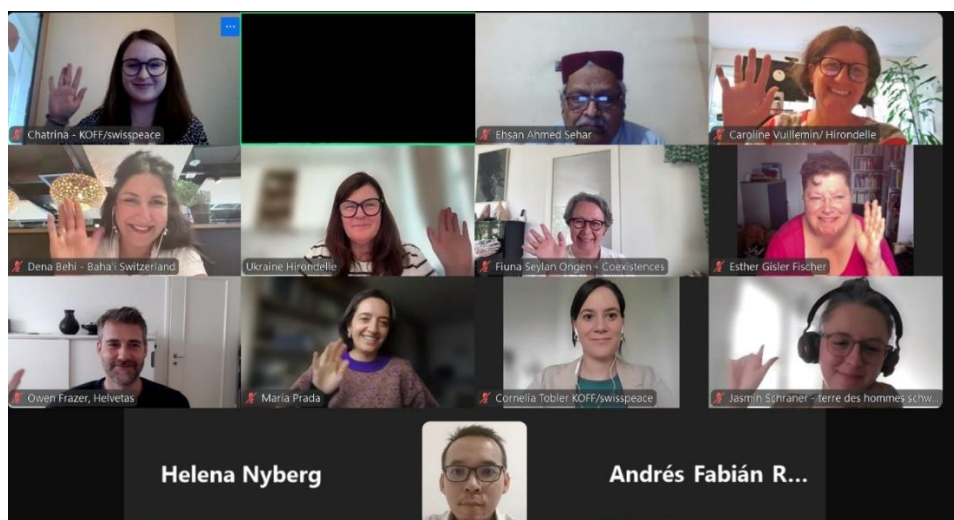
The participants jointly reflected on the main take aways from the roundtable and how they can inform or inspire their own work.

## What are your key takeaways from this roundtable?



Picture 2: Participants' Mentimeter answers

- Important to note the difference between strategic communication and media work. Journalism and local media themselves can be actors of peacebuilding beyond contributing to peace journalism by peacebuilding organizations.
- Positive and constructive stories are powerful and can be a tool for shifting public narratives giving a sense of hope and being more conducive to peace.
- Communication takes place all the time, even when one chooses to be silent on an issue. It therefore needs to be considered continuously and efforts in reshaping narratives and seeking the truth need to take place systematically and ongoing.
- Especially in the current context of shrinking space for civil society, increasing authoritarian tendencies, and rising polarization and disinformation, promoting inclusive narratives and strengthening social cohesion are vital. However, repression against journalists is increasing, putting them at risk for their reporting. Safety and security of local journalists are key concerns and at risk both in digital spaces (e.g. online harassment) as offline (through political and elite pressures, threats, intimidation and other forms of repression).



Picture 3: Participants of the online KOFF roundtable on Inclusive Communication in Peacebuilding