Input for the Report on Freedom of Expression and Sustainable Development

Submission from Fondation Hirondelle

[Fondation Hirondelle](#) is a Swiss non-profit organization founded in 1995, which provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering them in their daily lives and as citizens. Its mission is fully in line with SDG 16.10: it trains and supervises teams of journalists in the countries where it intervenes and supports local media networks to enable them to fulfill their mission of informing and creating spaces for dialogue for the population.

Our efforts are based on the strong belief that an independent, professional, inclusive and viable media sector has a crucial role to play in achieving the SDGs.

This statement aims at illustrating the role of media and journalist in the achievement of SDGs by providing concrete examples drawn from Fondation Hirondelle's operations in fragile such as :
- the Sahel, where we created the Studio Tamani program in Mali, Studio Kalangou in Niger, and Studio Yafa in Burkina Faso
- or the Central African Republic, where Fondation Hirondelle created and has supported for more than 20 years Radio Ndeke Luka, the country's leading media.
- and Madagascar where we support Studio Sifaka, a radio and web content production studio for young Madagascans.
- We also run activities in Ukraine, especially around transitional justice through its media project JusticeInfo, and in Tunisia around media, governance and decentralization. The full list of projects can be found [here](#).[i]

When it comes to the contribution of media in helping to achieve SDGs, there is a major challenge in properly assessing media impact. The role played by media and journalists in the promotion of human rights and SDGs is generally acknowledged, but there is still a serious gap in robust evidences.[ii] **The present statement aims at providing a modest contribution in addressing this gap by linking to recent academic studies providing robust evidence on the impact of media in realizing SDGs.**

New benchmark studies:

We here refer to recent studies – some still unpublished – conducted by independent academic researchers in collaboration with Fondation Hirondelle.

> A first study (later referred as "the study on the impact of RNL in CAR") looked at the impact of exposure to Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) our media outlet in the Central African Republic. We took advantage of the launch of RNL's 24-hour broadcast with a new FM transmitter in the Beloko area (in the far west, near the border with Cameroon) to conduct pre- and post-transmitter installation surveys between November 2021 and March 2022. Interviewers, drawn from IMMAR Research & Consultancy's local network, followed a protocol developed by Dr. Jeff Conroy Krutz, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University, to ensure random selection of participants, all of whom were of legal age, and to ensure a balance of men and women. A total of 568 people were interviewed before the transmitters were installed and 558 after.
> **The results of this study reveal a concrete impact of reliable media on the attitude of the listeners towards disinformation (see below on target 16.1); their political behavior and engagement for democratic and inclusive principles (see below on target 16.7)**

The study in not yet published but a summary can be found <u>here.</u>

Another study, (later referred as "the study on the impact of Sifaka in Madagascar") also conducted by Dr. Jeff Conroy Krutz, looked at the effect of Studio Sifaka that was created by Fondation Hirondelle and the United Nations in Madagascar to provide non-partisan information and engage Malagasy youth. Youth constitute majorities of the population in many countries in the global South, yet many remain disengaged from, cynical about, and uninformed regarding political issues and civic life. Studio Sifaka was designed to increase youth political engagement, efficacy, knowledge, support for democratic norms, and tolerance of salient out-groups. A centerpiece of Studio Sifaka's efforts is Débat des Jeunes, a dialogue program that bring together political leaders, CSO representatives, and other community members to discuss important political and civic issues. This evaluation was conducted by encouraging a random subset of study participants to listen to *Débat des Jeunes* (i.e. the treatment) during a specified period, while using similar incentives to encourage another subset to listen to a placebo program. The placebo program in this case was Sifaka's public health-focused *Santé Nakà*. We used Viamo's 3-2-1, a phone-based informational service partnering with Sifaka, to recruit participants and administer treatments. Randomized invitations were sent, via automated phone calls, to 3-2-1's pool of over 800,000 registered Malagasy phone numbers. More than 7000 consented to participate to the study. Among them, half of the participants were randomly invited to listen to *Débat des Jeunes* (i.e. the treatment) (*n*=3523), while half were invited to *Santé Nakà* (i.e. the placebo) (*n*=3534). At the end of the six-week period, participants were invited to complete an endline survey, which was identical to baseline. The study took place between November 2020 and June 2021. **The key findings demonstrate the effect of inclusive dialogue radio programs on youth political engagement and support to democratic norms** (see below on target 16.7). The study will soon be made public.

A third study looked at the impact of Studio Tamani and the contribution of its radio programs to understanding and dealing with violent conflict in Mali (later referred as "the study on the impact of studio Tamani in Mali"). It was published by Christoph Spurk & Dr. Guido Keel, Institute of Applied Media Studies, Zurich University of Applied Science, in 2016. **This study shows the contribution of inclusive radio programs in promoting dialogue as peaceful means to resolve conflicts** (see below on target 16.1).

Those studies contribute to demonstrating the role of professional, independent and inclusive media in achieving SDGs, in particular SDG 16 and the following specific targets:

16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

Professional and independent media can contribute to this target in particular by:

– filling the information vacuum that is one of the main factors enabling the spread of disinformation and hate speech that might lead to violence.

While misinformation in the Global North often grows out of the confusion resulting from too much information, in sub-Saharan Africa it more often grows out of an information vacuum.[iii] Especially in conflict-affected areas, many people have little access to news media.[iv] At the same time, it is all the more important for people in these areas to obtain information about security threats and humanitarian assistance.[v] As a result, many turn to untrustworthy sources. In the eastern DRC, for example, one study found that people continued listening to radio stations even when they did not

trust them because they were looking for "orientation in the context of uncertainty related to the conflict."[vi]

To illustrate the potential of reliable and trusted media in addressing disinformation, the recent study conducted by Dr. Jeff Conroy Krutz on the impact of RNL in CAR (see description supra) showed that RNL contributed to :
- An increased perception of the dangers of misinformation, with the percentage of people stating that it was harmful to CAR increasing from 28% to 39% (+11%)
- Increased confidence in people's ability to discern truth from falsehood, thereby reducing epistemic uncertainty that is also a key factor facilitating the spread of disinformation.
- The proportion of people who said they would try to verify the truth of the information increased from 33% to 59% (+26%). Similarly, the proportion of people who said they would share information immediately went from 22% to 10% (-12%).

Media can also contribute to the target 16.1 by:

- providing conflict-sensitive reporting, informing on root-causes of conflicts and peaceful solutions.
- offering a platform for dialogue and, contributing to a more inclusive and deliberative public sphere, thereby enabling the identification of shared interests and identities within a society and the search for consensual solutions to conflicts.

To back this assumption with robust evidence, the study on the impact of studio Tamani in Mali (see description supra) demonstrated that:

- Studio Tamani dialogue programmes showed to their audiences that dialogue is possible.
- Listeners of Studio Tamani talk more about the conflict within their family
- And listeners of Studio Tamani favor the solution of entering in a dialog between government and former rebels, much more than control group.

Another important role for media is to provide gender-sensitive reporting on issues such as violence against women.

> For example, researchers showed how radio programs in Mali can "create an empowering environment by giving voice to disenfranchised women directly, thus allowing other women in similar situations to identify with them."[vii] Another study lead by Dr. Emma Heywood illustrates how, "as an empowering knowledge resource, radio actively contributes to the supporting processes which increase women's ability and capacity to make choices through collective engagement" [viii] which also relates to SDG 5.

16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

Independent media, including investigative journalism has been closely associated with corruption control across countries in various ways at different levels of development.

> In 2015, Prof. Mungiu-Pippidi published the results of a major analysis of the data available on corruption. The role of a free media had among the greatest effects in limiting corruption. Mungiu-Pippidi concluded: "We found evidence that a society can constrain those who have better opportunities to spoil public resources if free media, civil society and critical citizens are strong enough."[ix]

Media can also facilitate efforts to mobilize citizens around anticorruption agendas and help citizens voice their concerns.[x]

16.7: Ensure responsiveness, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Inclusive media can contribute to this target by promoting dialogue – both vertically between citizens and decision makers, and horizontally between the different parts of the society – and by promoting the political participation of citizens.

A particularly robust impact study – based on a large scale random control trial with symmetric encouragement design - conducted by Dr. Jeff Conroy Krutz to assess the impact of Sifaka in Madagascar showed strong evidence that the radio dialogue program *Débat des Jeunes* was effective at meeting many of its stated goals. Specifically, those who listened more to *Débat des Jeunes* (in comparison to a placebo program) were :

- – More likely to report discussing politics
- – More likely to report attending community meetings
- – More likely to support inclusive dialogue to solve problems
- – More likely to support decision-making based on group discussion
- – More likely to say that they felt empowered to change politics (i.e. internal efficacy)
- – More likely to say that leaders would listen to people like them (i.e. external efficacy)
- – More likely to reject cheating in elections as a political strategy

Those findings were corroborated by another study conducted by Dr. Jeff Conroy Krutz on the impact of RNL in CAR (see description supra). This study showed that the introduction of RNL contributed to a significant increase in support for democratic institutions and principles with the following measured effects:

- – Citizen engagement in elections increased.
- – an increase in participation in local community meetings.
- – Rejection of one-party and military rule as an alternative to democracy increased significantly.
- – Increased willingness to abide by certain democratic principles, such as respect for results, even if it means letting political opponents rule.
- – Significant increase in opposition to undemocratic practices by candidates to win elections (vote buying; hate speech; ballot box stuffing; voter intimidation; use of violence). Thus, the proportion rejecting violence as an electoral tactic increased from 48% to 57% (+9%).
- – The proportion saying violence was justified in a range of scenarios decreased significantly (e.g., "protecting your land from theft").

16.10 : Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

The achievement of this target 16.10 presupposes free media capable of carrying out their functions and reporting to the population, in an independent and professional manner, on matters of public interest. Therefore, beyond the indicators 16.10.1 and 2, additional indicators should be used to consider the existence and the viability of such media.

When they do exist and fulfil their function, such media also contribute to other specific targets identified under the SDG16+ framework defined by Pathfinders, such as:
- Culture of peace and non-violence (4.7)
- Education on human rights and gender equality (4.7)
- Discrimination against women and girls (5.1)
- Women's participation and leadership (5.5)
- Political, social and economic inclusion (10.2)

Recommendations

Our recommendations therefore are :
- To consider the New Deal for Journalism[xi], including the key recommendation that for the next ten years, rights-respecting governments globally should commit 0.1% of GDP annually to ensure journalism's survival and transition in the digital era; and to make Big Tech pay for the news they use.[xii]
- Not to forget that in many developing contexts there is still a large gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who don't. The digital divide deepens already existing inequalities – for example, between rural and urban areas, between rich and poor families, between educated and uneducated people, between younger and older generations, and between men and women. The digital space cannot be considered in isolation. Policy makers and donors should consider hybrid approaches that bridge the online and offline spaces. Another specific concern regarding the role of Big Tech is the accessibility of data and tools to monitor mis- and disinformation trends. We are concerned that if the rumor is confirmed[xiii] and META closes CrowdTangle – the main tool used to monitor Facebook – it will make the efforts to keep misinformation in check even more difficult.
- To adopt a holistic approach to media assistance. In order to fulfil their role in the achievement of SDGs, the media need an enabling environment that is composed of economic, legal, technical, socio-cultural and political conditions. Particularly in the most fragile and challenging environments, a holistic approach to media assistance implies a combination/coordination with other elements of democracy building, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance, in line with the triple nexus approach.[xiv]

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[i] https://www.hirondelle.org/en/our-work#where-we-work

[ii] See e.g. Shoemaker, E. & Stremlau, N. (2014) Media and conflict: An assessment of the evidence. Progress in Development Studies. 14:2. 181-195

[iii] Araba Sey et al., "Sub-Saharan Africa," in "Meeting the Challenges of Information Disorder in the Global South," Herman Wasserman, ed., University of Cape Town, Research ICT Africa, InternetLab, LIRNEasia, and Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, 2022.

[iv] In Mali, for example, one 2018 survey found that 63 percent of women and 56 percent of men in Mopti in central Mali had no access to any media; the same was true of only 16 percent of women and 7 percent of men in Bamako. Institut national de la statistique, "Enquête démographique et de santé 2018," August 2019.

[v] UN General Assembly, *Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression during Armed Conflicts—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, UN Doc. A/77/288, August 12, 2022.

[vi] Marie-Soleil Frère and Anke Fielder, "Balancing Plausible Lies and False Truths: Perception and Evaluation of the Local and Global News Coverage of Conflicts in the DRC," in *Media in War and Armed Conflict: The Dynamics of Conflict News Production and Dissemination*, Romy Fröhlich, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 280.

[vii] Emma Heywood & Beatrice Ivey (2021): Radio as an empowering environment: how does radio broadcasting in Mali represent women's "web of relations"?, Feminist Media Studies, p. 13

[viii] Emma Heywood (2020): Radio Journalism and Women's Empowerment in Niger, Journalism Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2020.1745668, p.15

[ix] Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2015) The Quest for Good Governance: How Societies Develop Control of Corruption. Cambridge University Press, p.56

[x] On the variety of ways media can play a role in addressing corruption, we refer notably to Wasil Schauseil, Media and anti-corruption, U4 Helpdesk Answer 2019:3

[xi] Forum on Information & Democracy. (2021). A New Deal for Journalism, here: https://informationdemocracy.org/working-groups/sustainability-of-journalism/

[xii] See Courtney C. Radsch, Making Big Tech Pay for the News They Use, July 2022, CIMA. Here: https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/making-big-tech-pay-for-the-news-they-use/

[xiii] See e.g. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-23/meta-pulls-support-for-tool-used-to-keep-misinformation-in-check?leadSource=uverify%20wall

[xiv] For further recommendations on how to implement such a holistic approach to media assistance, see e.g. the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) Guidelines for media assistance, here: https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/Media%20Assistance%20EN%20200312%20web.pdf