

PROVIDING UNBIASED INFORMATION AND CREATING  
SPACES FOR DIALOGUE  
DURING ELECTORAL CYCLES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

An **electoral cycle** is a crucial moment for a country, a region, a society. This is especially the case in fragile and conflict zones, where elections are oftentimes key triggers in outbreaks of violence or conflict. Electoral processes are, however, an alternative to violence and should serve as a peaceful way of transferring power. Anticipating triggers can be valuable as elections represent decisive moments at which conflict dynamics could escalate or de-escalate.<sup>1</sup>

The **role of media** in electoral processes is key. Indeed, for an election to qualify as free and fair, not only must there be a real choice between several contenders or parties, the candidates must be free to campaign on issues of their choice, and the electoral process must be organized transparently, but voters must also be well informed.<sup>2</sup>

Elections, both in the way they are conceived and perceived, test the democratic practices of parties and rulers as well as reveal journalist's professionalism when much is expected from the media. These are periods when journalists face intense political pressure, and the task is even greater when a country is **emerging from conflict** or instability.<sup>3</sup>

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1 USAID Conflict Assessment Framework, June 2012 : Page 32

2 Ross Howard, "Media + Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook," 2004: 5

3 Marie-Soleil Frère, Elections and the Media in Post-Conflict Africa, 2011: 1.



## THEORY OF CHANGE

If media in fragile and post-conflict settings play their role of **informing the population** on electoral processes and **provide non-partisan**, independent, and trustworthy coverage, then elections will be viewed as more credible and citizens will have the knowledge and tools needed to **make informed decisions**. If citizens have the information they need to make informed decisions and if elections are seen as credible, then incitements to violence around electoral cycles will be less effective in mobilizing citizens.

The underlying assumptions of this TOC are:

- Improved media coverage of elections will lead to greater **credibility** of the electoral process;
- If citizens have increased information and understanding of electoral processes, they will be more likely to **participate** in them;
- Candidates and parties have the ability to clearly **explain** their platforms and policy proposals;
- Increased fact-based, non-partisan and trustworthy information and **dialogue** programs decrease the risks of violence because they can dispel rumors and increase support for **non-violent** resolutions to conflict and disputes.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

- The populations concerned **understand** the conduct of the electoral processes and their challenges, owing to the broadcast of factual and verified information
- Political and civil society leaders take the concerns of the population into account, thanks to media that make the **voice of the public** heard
- A **culture of dialogue** is strengthened between political actors, institutions, and civil society to foster an **inclusive** and **peaceful** democratic process.

## MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE ELECTORAL CYCLE



## RELEVANCE TO AGENDA 2030

Providing unbiased information and creating media platforms for dialogue during electoral cycles in fragile contexts contributes to **SDG 16** “Promote **peaceful and inclusive** societies (...) and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. It helps reaching **target 16.6** “Develop effective, **accountable and transparent** institutions at all levels”, targets 16.7 “Ensure responsive, **inclusive, participatory and representative** decision-making at all levels “, and targets 16.10 “Ensure **public access to information** and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements “.

## OUR APPROACH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fondation Hironnelle is a non-profit organization founded in 1995, which **provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering** them in their daily lives and as citizens. Since its creation Fondation Hironnelle, based in Lausanne, Switzerland, has worked in 18 countries on 3 continents. Through our work, millions of people in war-affected countries, post-conflict areas, and societies in democratic transition have access to media that speak to them and give them a voice.

Our journalistic and professional **principles** are based on more than 20 years of experience in fragile contexts, with multiple and successful coverage of electoral cycles. They are based on :

- **verification** of information, **diversity** of sources, strict distinction between facts and comments
- media platforms and debate programs that bring together all political and social components of society, with **equal** speaking time for everyone
- programs easily accessible to the population, in national and local **languages**
- **partnerships** with local CSO's and electoral bodies, which allow us to anchor our action within local communities
- transfer of skills and sustainable development strategies