

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.¹

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.²

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.³

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

O 1 PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD

04 PERIOD between ELECTIONS

Strengthen the credibility of the electoral process

Sustainable professionalization of the media sector

Voter Education and Awareness Raising
Co-produce and broadcast civic education spots adapted to different audiences, especially youth and women to explain the electoral process and encourage participation

Media literacy in partnership with relevant

Sustainably build a culture of dialogue and peaceful public debate

A CORNERSTONE OF SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

Evaluate the pertinence,

Follow commitments of MPs

A KEY ACTOR IN TRANSPARENT AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

Monitor and evaluate the impact

of media in the democratic system, in cooperation with other actors

A KEY ACTOR IN EDUCATING, INFORMING AND CREATING A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE THE INTERACTIVE LINK BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS,

CIVIL SOCIETY AND POPULATIONS

Provide information for citizens

to understand the issues at stake

03 POST ELECTORAL

Strengthen media and journalists' associations and

coordinate media actors

Deline mission and legal status of professional associations and foster constructive
dialogue and cooperation between organizations representing public, private, independent
and community media

Provide unbiased information during the campaign, election day and at the announcement of results

Stimulate dialogue and a culture of peaceful public debate

Ensure interaction and the participation of the population and civil so Ensure equal participation of political parties and actors in the media

Support the restructuring and reform of the media sector Define the legal framework, and the regulatory tools and bodies Define the policies and texts that govern the media sector

Strengthen the capacity of local media

wide editorial responses relevant to the needs diverse audiences, particularly youth and women Strengthen professional codes, charters, policies and tools for self-regulation, transparency & monitoring Strengthen production and broadcasting

Media literacy and education on media's role in democracy



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 Hirondelle 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 Hirondelle, 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