

MEDIATION



Biannual
publication
of Fondation
Hirondelle

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH INFORMATION AND DIALOGUE



A woman listening to radio in Niger, in April 2020. © Ollivier Girard / Fondation Hirondelle

Rebuilding trust in the media

The coronavirus crisis is a new experience for part of the world's population: the fear of going out, the uncertainty of tomorrow, life under a state of emergency. For others, particularly in the most fragile countries, it is unfortunately just another scourge that adds to the difficulties of an already very precarious daily life. But for everyone, access to reliable information becomes a major concern when it comes to protecting oneself and one's loved ones. Countering rumours, checking facts, allowing a diversity of points of view, this responsibility of the news media becomes a necessity in times of crisis. In order to respond effectively to this need, the media must maintain a relationship of trust with their public. Building this trust takes time. It requires rigour, professionalism and a sense of the general interest. It is this long-term approach that Fondation Hirondelle has been implementing for 25 years. Day after day, broadcast after broadcast, with our teams and partners, we strive to build a relationship of trust with the populations to whom we provide information, so as to enable them to make informed decisions on how to act in their daily lives, in time of crisis and beyond.

Caroline Vuillemin
General Director

THE VITAL ROLE OF JOURNALISM IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The Covid-19 pandemic highlights the basic need for reliable, credible information in a major crisis. In this context, the social role of journalism is more crucial than ever, but practising this profession is even more difficult.

One of the basic needs in the face of the global spread of the Covid-19 disease is access by as many people as possible to reliable, credible, unbiased and understandable information on all aspects of such a crisis. The first need is for public service, medical and health information on the virus and how to protect oneself from it. It is a question of informing, but also of countering the disinformation that is spreading faster than the virus. At the same time, there is also a need to understand the social, political and economic consequences of the pandemic. For journalists, this means being able to question the authorities about their choices and the implementation of their decisions.

Can the journalist continue to "dip the pen in the wound" in times of crisis? How can the right balance be struck between emergency information, public service information, "constructive" information and uncompromising investigations into the responses of the governments and administrations concerned? This mission of journalism is always valid. But

it is even more necessary, and all the more difficult to implement in times of crisis. In the first half of 2020, for example, press freedom was under attack in many parts of the world under the guise of a health emergency, even in democracies that were thought to be firmly committed to their principles (see boxes on page 3).

The pandemic poses a threat to the health of each and every one of us, but also to our resources and our ability to live together harmoniously. Such global and local issues and concerns may explain why the demand for information has never been greater worldwide (see figures on page 4). This essential need to be informed is a daily need felt by populations facing local or global crises with which Fondation Hirondelle has been working for a quarter of a century now. As Fondation Hirondelle celebrated its 25th anniversary in March, we present in this issue our reflections, together with those of leading media like The Guardian, on the vital role of journalism in times of crisis. ■

Interview



JOURNALISM AT ITS BEST CAN HELP SOCIETIES SELF-CORRECT



Since February 2018, The Upside series in British daily **The Guardian** “comprises journalism that focuses on our capacity to act together to make positive change”. Its editor **Mark Rice-Oxley** explains how this is useful in various contexts of crisis.

For the last few years, The Guardian has developed a vision of a journalism aware of its role in society (we will “help improve the world, not just critique it”, wrote your editor-in-chief Katharine Viner in 2017). Is The Upside section an attempt to fulfil this mission?

Mark Rice-Oxley: In short, yes. The Guardian is acutely aware that it doesn't just report on the world, it helps shape it too. The Upside is a stream of journalism that seeks to balance the overwhelming negativity of news and show people that there are powerful, positive, optimistic movements and innovations out there - in fact, in our view there is a far greater

Offices of The Guardian newspaper in London. © Andrew Cowie / AFP

tendency for good than bad in the world, and we need to reflect that.

We also know that if we can report on solutions, potential and innovation - in a rigorous, investigative way - then we can help best practice spread around the world. That is another example of how our journalism can have real world impact.

Too often people are left helpless and hopeless by the tide of headlines that they are confronted with in the digital world. Upside journalism seeks to elicit a very different response - a sense that people have agency, potential, and can make a difference.

Let's take a vivid example: Covid-19 is a world crisis with tremendous implications in all countries, including the UK of course. How have you been covering this crisis?

Covid-19 has turbo-charged our newsroom, galvanizing both a will to find out the worst and a will to report on the best. First and foremost our responsibility is to give people the information to make better decisions about their lives - and that means facts, evidence, developments, and holding government to account. But beyond that we also feel duty bound to explore solutions, answers, positive responses. We've looked at best practice set by the likes of South Korea, New Zealand and Germany; we've followed the science of vaccines and treatments like remdesivir antiviral; we've reported on a daily basis on

the newfound neighbourliness and powerful community responses that seem to have knitted our society more closely together than ever. And we've reported on the surprising environmental consequences of the pandemic, from the rebound in wildlife to the drastic drop-off in air pollution and carbon emissions. The aspiration is to encourage people to hope - and act - for the best, not to become mired in despondency about the worst.

Upside journalism seeks to elicit a sense that people have agency, potential, and can make a difference

In societies undergoing different kinds of crises (pandemic, war, natural disaster, extreme poverty), what is the role of journalism? According to you, how can journalism be useful to these societies?

It's a different response for each of these examples, but broadly you could say that journalism has a public service duty that at its best can help society self-correct. So if it is war (and for me this is not necessarily the best place to deploy Upside journalism), journalism needs to act as a witness to document atrocity, illegality, crimes against humanity to both deter would-be culprits and rally global public opinion in favour of the innocents. In natural disaster, self-correction is attained

© DR

by investigating any manmade negligence or error so as to avoid recurrence in future, such as poorly built structures, corruption that conspires against the natural world, failures that open the door to exaggerated outcomes. With extreme poverty, I believe there is a greater place for Upside journalism: to show people what can be done through relatively simple interventions can inspire a new generation of activists, donors and engaged individuals who realize that through small means they can bring about great salvation. ■

Our responsibility is to give people the information to make better decisions about their lives

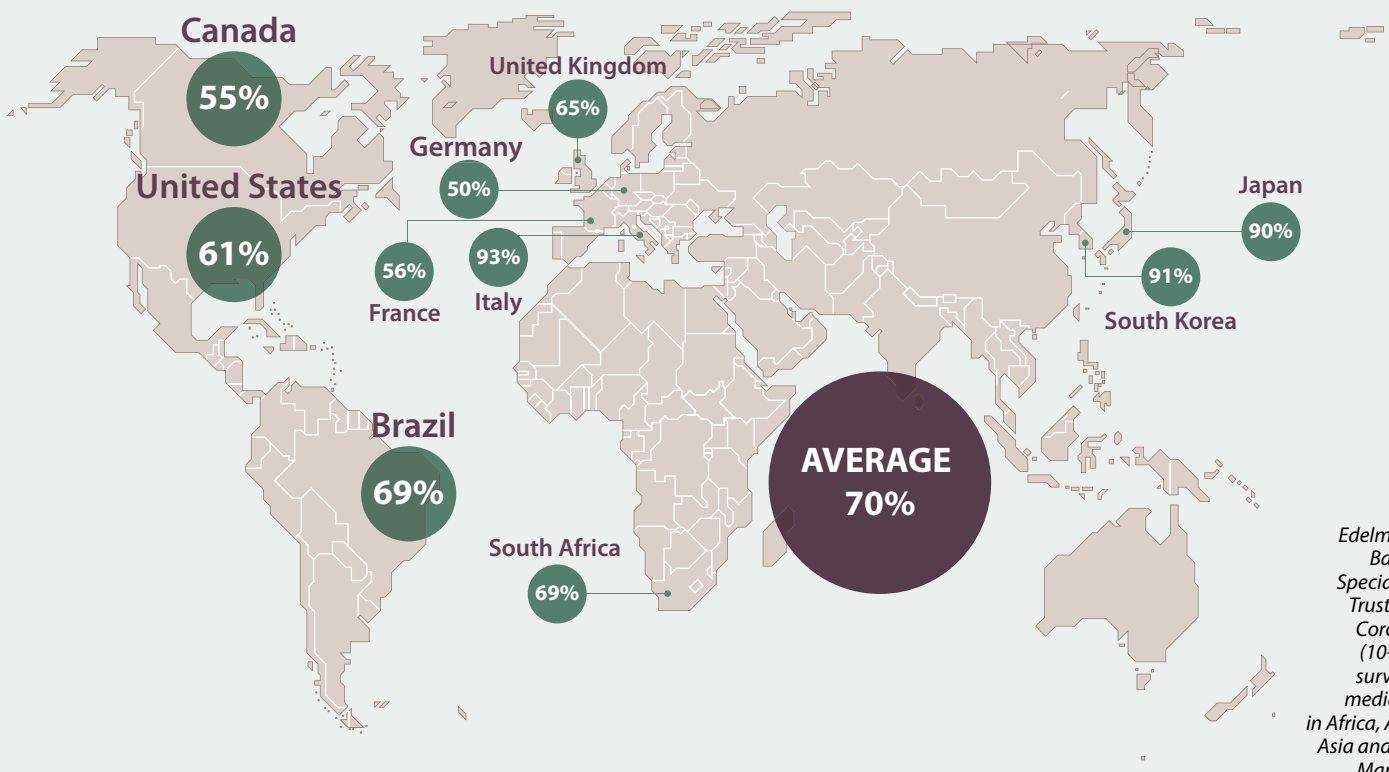
Trustworthy media to improve society

How can the media improve society? This is the question to which some 104,000 people responded in a citizens' consultation launched in July 2019 by several major French media¹. Among the proposals deemed to be priorities were: giving priority to processing information less fast and more in-depth (16%); offering more expertise and education (11%); fighting more effectively against fake news (11%); strengthening the financial independence of the media (11%); and teaching citizens to be better informed (10%). At the heart of these proposals is the notion of trust.

This need for trust in the media is particularly important in the context of crisis or conflict, explain Marie-Soleil Frère and Anke Fiedler in their study "Perception and Evaluation of the Local and Global News Coverage of Conflicts in the DRC"². Based on statements from inhabitants of Goma in North Kivu, a region particularly scarred by the long conflicts in the DR Congo, they note that the credibility of information, the presentation of facts, pluralism, independence from the government and the powerful, are the main elements that build public trust in the media. To rebuild this trust, journalistic initiatives are emerging in both the North and the South. One of the most international of these is the Journalism Trust Initiative, launched in 2018 by Reporters Without Borders. It aims to define measurable indicators of journalistic quality and independence in a participatory process that includes representatives of international, national and local news organisations, consumer organisations, technology companies, regulatory bodies and NGOs.

1. Consultation by Make.org et Reporters d'espoirs from 8 July to 20 September 2019, in partnership with several national and regional French media, including franceinfo, L'Obs, L'Express, La Croix and La Voix du Nord. / 2. In "Media in War and Armed Conflict", ed. Romy Fröhlich (Routledge, 2018).

Proportion of the population that daily consulted information on Covid-19 in March 2020

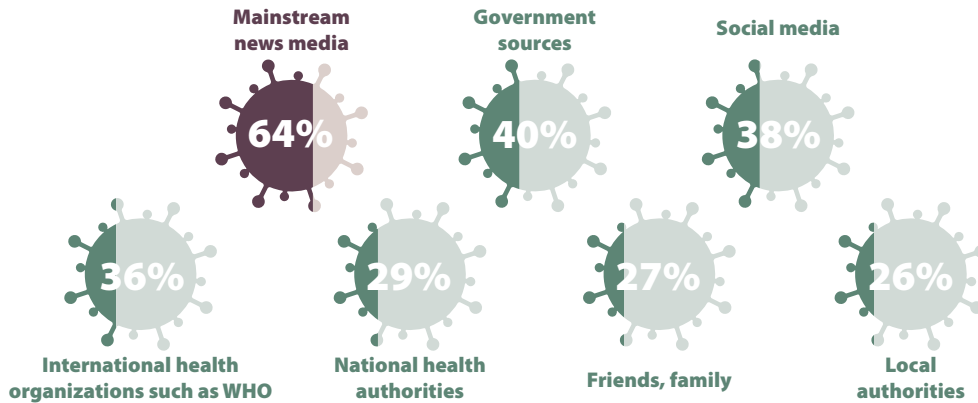


Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus (10-country survey of the media market in Africa, America, Asia and Europe, March 2020)

Big Data

The media, first source of information on the crisis

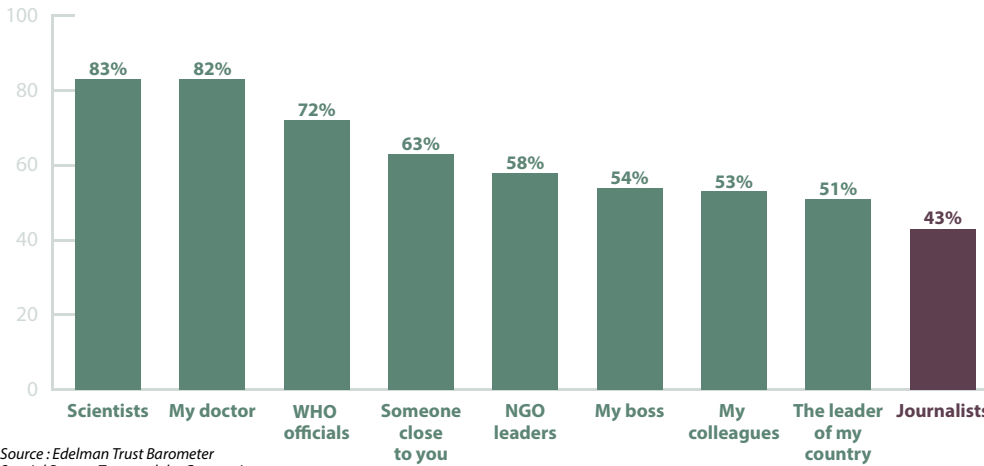
Main sources of information consulted on Covid-19



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus

But journalists are the least trusted source

Level of trust in different sources of information on the virus



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus

Covid-19: Global crisis and crisis of information

Across the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen numerous examples of attacks on the media. In the Philippines journalists have been threatened with imprisonment for spreading false rumours about the virus, while in Tanzania media group Mwananchia's licence has been suspended for six months after it published a photo of President John Magufuli surrounded by several people, in a country where social distancing is the rule. In the United States there are several examples of journalists being banned from talking to doctors or attending the deliberations of municipal councils. And even in Switzerland, which is nevertheless one of the best ranked countries in Reporters Without Borders annual press freedom rankings, journalists have recently warned against "pandemic-mode journalism that is

embedded and compliant", following attempts by the authorities to limit access to information sources. This difficulty in producing quality information leaves room for the circulation of a lot of unverified information. The "Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus" (March 2020) stresses that 74% of those polled worldwide fear the circulation of much fake news about the virus. In France, the government created its own platform to fight disinformation linked to the pandemic but then abandoned the project after it was strongly criticized by the media for sowing confusion between journalism and government PR. In this country, another initiative has emerged. Launched by a collective of journalists in March 2020, Journalistes Solidaires proposes a collaborative fact-checking editorial team involving journalists, experts and citizens. This is another way of reconnecting with society in a period of health crisis where confidence in the media is particularly fragile.

Covid-19 pandemic sparked hunger for news

+111%

Increase in visits to the 20 leading news websites and applications in France during the week of 13 April 2020, the fifth week of confinement, as compared with the expected norm for January/February 2020

+57%

Increase in visits to the 20 leading news websites and applications in France during the week of 13 April 2020, the fifth week of confinement, as compared with the expected norm for January/February 2020

Source: Alliance pour les Chiffres de la Presse et des Médias

+122%

Increase in subscriptions to news sites in Europe in March/April compared with January/February 2020

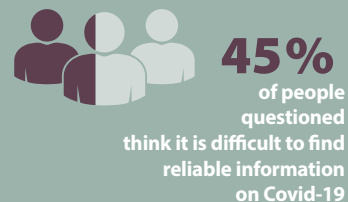
Source: société de logiciels pour médias Piano.io

+46%

Increase in time spent consulting news on Internet in the United States between 17 February and 15 March 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.

Source: New York Times

But the crisis boosts worries about the quality of information



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus

74% of people questioned fear the spread of much "fake news" on Covid-19



Our experience



IMPLEMENTING THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA

© DR



Since its creation 25 years ago, **Fondation Hironnelle** has developed 23 media or information programmes in 22 countries facing major crises, including the DR Congo, Central African Republic, Mali, Myanmar and Madagascar. CEO **Caroline Vuillemin** looks back on this history and talks about the current Coronavirus crisis.

What impact has the Covid-19 crisis had on Fondation Hironnelle's activity?

Caroline Vuillemin: With regard to Covid-19, as in all other crises, our recommendations to our editors were first of all to speak only of the facts, and to go to the sources: are there cases recorded in this or that country? What are the WHO and the health authorities in the countries concerned saying? Then, from mid-March, strict compliance with preventive measures was ensured in our studio productions as well as in the field: distance, regular hand washing, wearing masks when possible, washing of microphone covers and so on.

A journalist from the radio programme "Ngoma Wa Kasai" created by Fondation Hironnelle in the DRC. © Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / Fondation Hironnelle

Advice to this effect was given to our media partners. Finally, we have developed specific programmes to fight against disinformation and rumours about the pandemic, but also public service programmes such as radio lessons in arithmetic and reading for children confined to their homes in the CAR.

What do you consider to be the main principles of journalism in a crisis context?

Fondation Hironnelle tries to adhere to three principles: transparency, trust and inclusion. With regard to transparency, we do good journalism. In other words, we work using journalistic techniques and ethics that put forward facts rather than opinions and that verify sources.

Transparency, trust, inclusion: three principles that guide our action

We are also transparent about who we are, how we are funded, what our editorial vision is. With regard to trust, we build the trust that is essential to the credibility of a media outlet, and therefore to its impact over time, by being useful to our audiences on a daily basis. In CAR for example, listeners tell us: "Every morning at 8 o'clock, I turn on my radio, you are there. Despite the war I can count on you". Our media outlet Radio Ndeke Luka, which has just celebrated its 20th anniversary, has been steadfastly enabling the Central African population to follow and understand what is happening in their country. With regard to inclu-

sion, in fragile societies, sometimes emerging from political or ethnic conflict, we want to give everyone the ability to talk to each other again and to listen to each other again. This starts with the editorial team, which must be representative of society as a whole. In Niger, where more than 50% of the population is under 30 years old but where young people are very little represented among decision-makers, our media outlet Studio Kalangou is developing a programme produced by young people and for young people so that they can exist socially. Another example is in DR Congo, where our editorial staff of Studio Hironnelle DRC has produced a series of reports with testimonies of very young women who have had to undergo early marriages, a taboo subject in that country. Daring to talk about it, to make a programme on the subject, to have it broadcast by more than a hundred partner media, this is the social role of the media that we are implementing.

Fondation Hironnelle has been doing crisis journalism since 1995. What in this experience echoes the current global crisis?

The vital need for information, for populations deprived in the face of major crises, has been the "credo" of Fondation Hironnelle since its creation. Information is a basic necessity. We defend this conviction on a daily basis with our journalists and partners in the field, just as many media around the world defend it. The Coronavirus crisis underlines the social function of journalism, which we are striving to implement over the long term. ■

Eyewitness

INFORMATION AS A HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

After forty years of a career spent in journalism, communication and international humanitarian crisis management, **Tony Burgener**, the new Chairman of Fondation Hironnelle's Board, stresses the vital role of information for affected populations.



You have worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in several crisis countries, as a journalist for a daily newspaper in canton Valais and director of Swiss Solidarity, Switzerland's main humanitarian foundation. What continuity do you see with your new function as Chairman of the Fondation Hironnelle Board?

Tony Burgener: When I was an ICRC delegate in countries undergoing serious crises such as Zaire (formerly the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Uganda and Iraq, I realized that information was just as important to the affected population as other humanitarian services like water, food, health care and education. In contexts where life is particularly at risk, people are looking for concrete and reliable information in order simply to survive. In coup-affected Uganda in 1986, for example, I saw how people were turning away from the state media, which they did not trust, to the international media and international NGOs, which gave them access to essential services that had become scarce. In a crisis context, information is vital because people need to know how to access these services. In this regard, the action of the media is often complementary to that of NGOs.

How do you think media like those supported by Fondation Hironnelle can be useful to populations facing crises?

To be most useful, information must reach crisis-affected populations locally and in their languages. This is precisely Fondation Hironnelle's way of work-



A journalist from Studio Kalangou, Fondation Hironnelle's radio programme in Niger, reporting in Niamey in April 2020.
© Ollivier Girard / Fondation Hironnelle

ing. I saw this when I went to Bangladesh in 2019 when I was still managing Swiss Solidarity. There, the audio programmes produced under the aegis of the Fondation by Rohingya refugees and members of the host community in the camps of Cox's Bazaar seemed exemplary to me. In a context where the Bangladeshi state produces information that serves its own policy, these programmes provided information of primary necessity and usefulness to the populations affected by the crisis, often also breaking taboos. By making the population aware of these problems, they helped to protect them physically. This is also currently the case with programmes produced by Fondation Hironnelle media on the Covid-19 crisis and its consequences in countries as fragile as Mali, the Central African Republic and Madagascar. In these contexts where rumours and disinformation can kill, access to factual, verified, local, useful information is all the more vital. Yet you need a magnifying glass to find references to access to information in some fundamental international texts like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. This fundamental humanitarian dimension of information must, in my view, be reaffirmed more than ever. ■

Information can help physically protect populations affected by crises



Fondation Hironnelle is a Swiss non-profit organization which provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering them in their daily lives and as citizens. Through our work, millions of people in war-affected countries, post-conflict areas, humanitarian crisis and societies in democratic transition have access to media that speak to them and give them a voice.

Impressum

Mediation

Biannual publication of Fondation Hironnelle

Director of publication:
Caroline Vuillemin

Editors:
Nicolas Boissez
Benjamin Bibas / la fabrique documentaire

Graphic design:
Marek Zielinski

Translation:
Julia Crawford

Layout and printing:
Groux arts graphiques SA

Avenue du Temple 19C
1012 Lausanne, Suisse
hironnelle.org
info@hironnelle.org
T. + 41 21 654 20 20

Crédit Suisse AG
IBAN:
CH05 0483 5041 8522 8100 5

ISSN 2624-8840 (Print)
ISSN 2624-8859 (Online)