

You Say You Want a Revolution... Then What?

The Challenges of Media Training in Post-Qaddafi Libya: A First-Person Essay

By Carolyn Robinson

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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world. The Center provides information, builds networks, conducts research, and highlights the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development. The Center was one of the of the main nongovernmental organizers of World Press Freedom Day 2011 in Washington, DC.

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Carolyn Robinson began her journalism career with CNN in Atlanta in 1987, producing live news broadcasts for Headline News before moving to CNN's medical news unit and producing its weekly show for five years. She spent most of the last 20 years in Asia and the Middle East, first as senior producer at a Chinese CNN affiliate in Hong Kong, and then in East Timor, where she was the Internews country director before becoming head of the local television station established by the United Nations. She has received a Jefferson Fellowship, a Freedom Forum Fellowship and four Knight International Journalism Fellowships for work training journalists in East Timor, Indonesia, and Lebanon. After returning to the United States in 2008, she joined al-Jazeera's English service in Washington, producing a daily talk show, serving as copy editor for live news programs, and producing a documentary on the North Dakota oil boom. In 2012, she was the

Libya Program Director for Internews, running two USAID-funded journalism training projects in Tripoli and Benghazi. Most recently, she produced investigative consumer reports for the ABC-TV affiliate in Cleveland. She is based in Wooster, Ohio.



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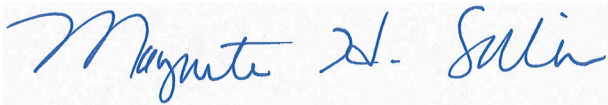
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Preface

Training in post-Qaddafi Libya presented a unique set of problems in addition to the usual ones encountered by media development professionals around the world. This first-person essay by Carolyn Robinson, a veteran journalist and media trainer, outlines some of the unusual obstacles and challenges she faced in managing two USAID/OTI grants in Libya for Internews in the very early days after the revolution, and how her team came up with novel approaches to overcome the special circumstances they faced on the ground.

The usefulness of this report comes not so much from what can and should be done for media development in Libya today, but in how to structure training in chaotic post-conflict environments. CIMA is grateful to the author for her insights on this topic. We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.



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The Assignment

Following the death of Libyan leader Moammar Qaddafi in the revolution of 2011, Internews became one of the first international media development groups to offer assistance in Libya. USAID and its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), along with an implementing partner, moved quickly to make funds available for this project. This speedy start enabled Internews to generate goodwill, strong credibility, and considerable trust with its local partners.

The program sprang out of an Internews media assessment mission in Libya during the height of the conflict in May-June 2011, followed by a second fact-finding mission in October 2011 shortly after Qaddafi's death.

I spent four months as program director for Internews in Libya, from January to May 2012. Our small field team of four, including our two Libyan assistants, our resident journalism adviser from Gaza, and myself, an American, faced a short timeframe, external operational delays, a very turbulent media scene, and a highly uncertain security situation. Despite these challenges, we organized five embedded trainings, nine open workshops, and two content analyses, most of which took place over a two-month span in March and April.

Under the terms of the grant, Internews was tasked to provide embedded trainings with three to four independent media partners in Tripoli, and one or two in Benghazi. Ultimately we embedded a total of five trainers at all three of the independent, locally-based news broadcast stations in the country: Libya Alhurra TV in Benghazi, al-Manara Radio FM in Benghazi and al-Aseema TV in Tripoli.

At the time of the trainings, there were no other private TV or radio news stations with headquarters based within Libya. All the other broadcast outlets were state-run, state-funded, or did not broadcast news programs. It was decided not to focus on embedding trainers in print media due to the chaos in this sector and the large number of constantly changing outlets, few of them with any real chance of sustainability.

Internews was also requested to provide one or two trainings that ran for up to a week and were open to all media in both Benghazi and Tripoli, as well as for journalists from media centers in other areas in the country, including Zintan in the west, Obari in the south and Derna in the east. We ultimately hosted five open trainings in Tripoli and four in Benghazi. In both cities, the training topics included basic journalism skills, media management, TV and radio production, and election coverage, with an additional workshop in Tripoli on social issues reporting.

We created a foundational baseline content analysis of major TV and radio outlets providing news programming in Tripoli and Benghazi. The radio content analysis included Libya FM and Sawt Tarabulus in Tripoli and al-Manara FM, Benghazi FM, and Libya Alhurra AM in Benghazi. The TV content analysis included Libya TV, Libya Wataniya TV, and al-Aseema TV in Tripoli and Libya Alhurra TV in Benghazi. Additionally we were able to include a highly watched Libya satellite TV news station, al-Ahrar, which broadcasts from Qatar.

Obstacles and Challenges

Our four-month project faced a host of challenges: a constantly shifting media landscape, which made training, assessing media needs, and measuring local media content difficult; finding the right local partners; contending with security concerns and ever-changing visa requirements; operating in a cash-only economy; reporting to multiple funders; and trying to coordinate donor efforts.

Shifting Media Landscape

How to train journalists at local outlets in a constantly changing media environment? That was the chief dilemma we faced throughout our projects in Libya. New private radio stations popped up and vanished like quick-blooming flowers. Entrepreneurs pitched many proposals for new TV stations. Print media went on overdrive after the revolution, with dozens of new titles appearing weekly at newsstands, but with costs of publication usually exceeding income, sustainability was always a big question mark.

Before the revolution, all print and broadcast media in Libya were under state control, including the national TV and radio network with branches in several cities. By the time we arrived just a few months after Qaddafi's death, there were hundreds of new print publications along with several private radio and TV stations, mostly centered in Tripoli and Benghazi but also in Misrata, the third-largest city, and smaller towns throughout the country. The state broadcasting system was still operating, but its channels had splintered into several semi-autonomous outlets that were still defining their management structure and mission purpose in the new free Libya.

Just to complicate things, many media outlets had the same or similar names. For example, it was a confusing week or so before we realized there were actually two separate state broadcast networks using the same names, Libya TV or Libya Radio. The words “Libya” or “Alhurra” appeared in the names of an overwhelming number of different media. We often met with other international NGOs to fill in a few more holes of Libya's rapidly evolving media jigsaw puzzle, one of the most turbulent journalistic landscapes I had encountered in a dozen years of media development around the world.

There were problems determining exactly who owned our partner broadcast stations, and what their political affiliations and agendas might be, or what their connections to the Qaddafi regime had been, or where their money came from—not uncommon questions in post-revolutionary Libya. For example, al-Aseema TV had started in Tunisia, and as far as we could tell, the current owners were Libyans who still maintained bases there. Libya Alhurra TV was established in Benghazi by opposition figure Mohamed Nabbous, who was assassinated by government forces a few months later. His family later sold the station to overseas Libyan investors. Al-Manara radio in Benghazi was founded in London by Libyan expatriates working against the Qaddafi regime. Over and over, we heard the mantra, “We have money,” expressed by everyone from station owners to volunteer journalists, but whether this was fact or bravado was difficult to tell sometimes.





Graffiti mocking Moammar Qaddafi, illegal during his regime, covered walls throughout Libya after the revolution. This painting shows Qaddafi being squeezed by a giant hand with the new revolutionary flag on its sleeve. To the left is old Libyan fighter Omar Muchtar, often depicted as a lion. He was killed by the Italians in 1931.

Who was a “volunteer” and who was a professional journalist? This was another difficult issue we had to sort out. “Volunteers” seemed to be in great number at every media organization we visited, until we learned that the definition of “volunteer,” as Libyans used the word, did not necessarily mean the absence of a salary—it merely indicated the absence of a permanent staff contract. This often occurred because the media organization had not yet defined or established its staffing needs, budget, revenue streams, senior management, or program schedule and was reluctant to issue permanent contracts until its situation was clearer. “Volunteers” were mostly what we might term “freelancers,” that is, they joined or left an organization without much commitment to it. These shifting loyalties also contributed to the overall flux in Libya’s media scene, and the resulting high turnover rate made it very hard to measure the impact of our training on any one particular organization.

“Volunteers” had often migrated from other professions during the revolution. Hundreds with no journalism experience had seen what the power of a free media could do and how much it could advance the rebel cause by spreading news about the uprising. Now, post-revolution, with diminished adrenalin for the less exciting assignments of daily journalism, as well as diminished income levels, many “volunteers” were having second thoughts about their newly chosen profession. It was impossible to judge how many of our trainees would still be journalists in a year’s time, making selection of workshop participants difficult.

Training

Where do you start when trainees need to learn everything about journalism in order to fairly and accurately report on a complex election looming on the horizon? There's no perfect solution. We decided to start at the beginning and move on briskly from there, with an emphasis on producing mentored stories under the close guidance and direct supervision of the trainers. Some trainers balked at the idea of giving a brief intro to journalism and immediately doing stories. In theory, I felt they were right, but the post-conflict situation in Libya provided several reasons to override conventional wisdom. These included:

- Many reporters with little or no knowledge of journalism were already working for news outlets.
- The fast-approaching election meant the learning curve was necessarily steep and imperfect for all involved.
- Learning on the job is a practical, useful, and stimulating training method, as opposed to a theoretical discussion of the media.
- The training would provide actual content for editors to publish and broadcast.

We faced many challenges in setting up the trainings. What follows is a brief description of each of them.

Urgent election needs: In March and April, with elections then scheduled for June and rapidly approaching, we decided to give several days of targeted broadcast and print production training on election reporting in both Tripoli and Benghazi and open to all media organizations. This was preceded by two days of discussion on various election topics by Libyan officials and international experts. About 20 journalists participated, which resulted in a variety of local stories on TV, radio, and in print media. We emphasized learning about elections at our embedded trainings as well. For most of April at al-Manara radio in Benghazi, our trainer worked to improve understanding of the main elements of the election process; political parties; interviewing skills; ethics; freedom of choice and expression; the role of media in transparent elections; and different approaches in coverage before, during, and after the elections.

Bias and old habits: Fresh emotional perspectives from recent revolutionary fighting prevented many journalist trainees from saying anything critical about those who had been part of the struggle. For example, there was no appetite for looking into alleged rebel abuses or the fate of thousands of internally displaced families driven from their homes because one of their relatives had supposedly been part of the regime. We found that it was important to focus at least one session at every training on what makes a good story and how to find it. Journalism in the Qaddafi days had meant waiting to be assigned a “story”—however dubious the topic—from the information ministry, and writing it based on party line. There was very little awareness that journalists need to seek out and develop stories on their own as well as having them assigned.

Recruiting trainers quickly: Finding qualified and available trainers was more of a challenge with a short-term project like ours. Internews has a large network of excellent trainers, so often it

was just a matter of determining how fast they could get to Libya, which depended both on their schedules and what kind of visa was needed.

Language choices: Most of our trainers spoke fluent Arabic, but one did not. When faced with choosing between equally qualified trainers, someone who can communicate easily in the local language is always preferable; however, sometimes other factors outweigh this advantage. For example, when we needed a trainer on short notice, we located a former BBC reporter who specializes in election issues. She was able to travel almost immediately from the United Kingdom, a country that presented few visa difficulties in Libya, but she did not speak Arabic. We found a Libyan man who could translate simultaneously, and her trainings received high evaluation marks from participants, some of whom spoke English well and enjoyed the chance to practice it.

State media limitations: We did not attempt in-house training at state broadcasters. First, it was not in our mandate, and official approvals were needed for training at state broadcasters. However, the ministry in charge was in great disarray. There was also an abundance of militia onsite at the stations, and gunfights occurred.

Age spread: Most trainees were in their twenties, which reflected Libya's large youth demographic. Most had less than a year of work as journalists. However, we also wanted to try to retrain selected older staff who had worked in the previous state-run media. Many remained in their positions, although younger journalists usually considered them unredeemable. We held three media management trainings in Tripoli and Benghazi, plus one election training session in Tripoli, that included many from this older target group.

Gender ratios: Our program objectives mandated that we seek an equal number of male and female participants. We invited as close to an equal number of men and women to our open trainings as possible, and approximately one-third of most workshop participants were women. This was significant considering the general conservative nature of Libyan society. Libyan women often remain at home and are not widely encouraged to pursue professional careers. Those who do are not usually favored to receive developmental training opportunities. Managers of news organizations were sometimes puzzled or amused when we insisted on inviting an equal number of women and men. In practice, we considered it a success when the ratio reached one-third female to two-thirds male, as there were nowhere near as many Libyan women as men working as journalists, and fewer still as reporters. For example, at Libya Alhurra TV, all the reporters were male and most producers were female. When our trainer asked why two women who wanted to be reporters had been assigned to producer positions against their wishes, she was told this was because of the traditional nature of Libyan society.

Embedded schedules: Trainers embedded for a month-long assignment in April with Tripoli and Benghazi newsrooms faced questions on how to merge their training into the daily workflow. I suggested that they work with trainees during the morning meetings, followed by a half-hour focused discussion on a given journalism topic, and then accompany a selected journalist in the field daily. Rather than discuss the station's overall output every evening after the newscast bulletin, we felt this could occur weekly in a general session. This arrangement would fill the trainer's day but not require him or her to spend evenings in-house, nor would it require much



additional work for participants. Another plan we discussed was to work with a small team of reporters who were not covering daily news to produce special reports for various programs. The benefit to this approach is that the training also provides the station with new product. In every training, we strived to give back some kind of usable material for the news outlet, rather than just take a valuable staff member out of the daily mix for classroom sessions.

Changing goals: Embedded trainers often struggled to keep up with shifting needs at their media organizations. Al-Aseema TV asked us specifically for management training at the beginning of our work with them in February, but by March was more interested in getting help with technical problems. In April, after we had negotiated the design for a newsroom training program, the management at Libya Alhurra in Benghazi decided it preferred to have our trainer work with new hires for a planned news agency who had no journalism experience at all. Our trainer found a way to weave this project into her day in addition to her ongoing work with the newsroom staff.

Making deals: Each negotiation with station owners and managers who hosted embedded trainers was different. Al-Aseema TV in Tripoli agreed to use our trainers in-house and moved decisively to make this happen right away. Al-Manara Radio in Benghazi also wanted the training to begin immediately, but that meant our resident journalism adviser had to step in to do this before the pre-arranged in-house radio trainer could arrive. Libya Alhurra TV in Benghazi was more skeptical of the value of embedding trainers and vacillated about the station's plans during the trainer's month-long stay. She discovered that management had asked the staff to sign a document stating that if they wanted to be trained, they had to work for the station for one year or pay back 5000 dinars, about US \$4000. This was a princely sum, and some consequently refused training.

Sharing costs: One factor in particular made working with media organizations in Libya a unique experience. Most had access to large amounts of money and rebuffed our offers to provide equipment or defray production costs. Some, in fact, hired trainers directly or through independent contacts and fixers and paid international salaries, although without the safety net of a legally enforceable contract. We consequently decided to ask the larger media organizations to share training costs, both because they could and to get them more involved in the training programs. Otherwise, a manager or editor might agree to have a trainer work with the staff, perhaps out of politeness or nonchalance, but not be truly engaged to make sure the training goes well.

Cultural differences: We often confronted a different cultural norm. During a training in March, we arrived to find out that another workshop had been scheduled at the same venue at the same time, something that should have been obvious days ahead of time. Yet almost no one—participant or organizer—was particularly upset about the ensuing confusion. People milled around while an office was quickly outfitted to become a training room, more coffee was brewed, and voilà—both trainings went ahead more or less as planned. A discussion with the staff about the value of using calendars for event scheduling was saved for later.

Need for flexibility: We often had to adjust training plans at the last minute to suit the situation. For example, the radio training portion of a multi-format workshop in late March did not start off as planned. It wasn't until the participants arrived that we discovered no one had brought

recorders, as requested. They had been using only their mobile phones for recording interviews, so in the end, we did too, regardless of audio quality issues.

Partner capacity: Even though it was not stated in project objectives, we trained more than just journalists. A country that has been devastated by decades of dictatorship and months of brutal civil war has few established institutions to build upon. We also had to develop the capacity of local staff and local partners. This did not mean there was a lack of talent, rather a huge lack of experience. For example, putting together a workshop with our local partner seemed to be a fast process. Their team did not see the need for weeks of advance preparation, a common habit in Libya perhaps intensified by the recent revolution. If our partner invited journalists just a few days in advance, they would agree to attend, whether or not they had other plans. If several confirmed participants didn't show up on the day of the training, the team would simply call again to come right away, and many of them did. We learned to work with the local partner to put more structure into the invitation process, rather than just seeing who would show up.

Selecting participants: Identifying potential trainees was sometimes a challenge as it was difficult to figure out exactly what some of them did, especially when they worked for multiple outlets. Some applicants had no journalistic qualifications whatsoever, including one man who worked in a dental clinic. He was rejected. Another participant invited several people to attend without giving us a chance to screen them. In addition, this occurred long past our application "deadline"—a word that has no direct translation in Arabic, leading to a very weak appreciation of the concept.

Structuring workshops: The length of the training day was also delicate. At first, we were advised to keep sessions short, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m., but this severely limited the amount of material that could be presented, as well as time for participants to produce stories. We expanded training hours from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., including lunch and two short breaks. Most participants liked this. Since time was quite a flexible commodity in Libya, we found that people would show up as much as two hours late, but once there they usually stuck around all day.

Certificates: Above all else, trainings had to end with a certificate. This was sometimes the entire reason trainees attended. Certificate dramas often arose. Does a trainee who showed up for most, but not all, of a workshop qualify to receive a certificate? A colleague from another media development NGO explained to her training group they had to attend the entire four-day workshop in order to get a certificate. One man said he could only come for two days, but he still wanted a certificate. My colleague told him he was welcome to attend and learn but would have to come all four days to get the certificate. The man said he was a very senior journalist and told the trainers, "I don't want to learn, I just want the certificate," and left.

Monitoring and Evaluation: We followed each training with an evaluation survey of our work, usually before trainees left the premises, but rarely achieved a 100 percent participation rate. We strived, especially for the embedded trainings, to get a sample of the journalist's work at the beginning to compare with the results at the end. We also conducted a phone survey to learn why a "confirmed" workshop participant did not show up. This often had the effect of enhancing participation in future trainings, as trainees became aware that we took participation seriously.



Measuring Local Media Content

We conducted a baseline content analysis as requested in the grant, looking at key broadcast outlets in both Tripoli and Benghazi. It was a rare opportunity to measure a free country's media performance at its very beginning. But Libya's newly liberated and ever-shifting media meant measurement was about as easy as nailing a jellyfish to a wall.

We concluded print media was too chaotic to yield good research, with hundreds of new publications of which only a handful had hope of long-term sustainability. Broadcast media wasn't much more stable, but at least it had fewer outlets to track down. Still this wasn't simple. Radio stations started up and shut down weekly. Rumors of overseas investors planning to build new TV channels were frequent. Names of broadcast stations changed unexpectedly. Finding the person in charge at existing media organizations was a challenge, especially considering the

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high staff turnover. More than once we made arrangements with a broadcast manager to collect program material only to find he was no longer there the following week.

TV stations were easier to monitor because their material was viewable by satellite in Jordan, where our coders were based. Their job was to listen to all the content and rate it on a scale for relevancy, accuracy, structure, objectivity, language quality, sound, and either visuals for TV or technical proficiency for radio. Live TV or radio on satellites and websites now allow media

content analyses to be conducted easily from afar, but at the time of our projects, only the TV stations were doing this. Radio material had to be hand-gathered and sent to Jordan as no station had online streaming capabilities, and this required considerable hands-on logistical challenges for our local staff.

We contacted all the news radio stations in Tripoli and Benghazi and made arrangements to record and gather their bulletins. Some radio stations were able to cooperate more than others. This ranged from al-Manara FM providing us with multiple weeks of archived news material, to only two bulletins from Tripoli's Libya FM, forcing us to drop it from the survey as this was not a statistically significant sample. We tried various online methods of sending the radio programs to the coders, but when nothing worked, we sent the audio files on flash drives by express mail to Jordan.

We also considered analyzing more stations, both inside and outside the country, not mentioned in the grant. In particular, we wanted to research TV and radio outlets in Misrata, the third-largest city, a few hours' drive from Tripoli, and Sabha, far to the south, but this would have required more time and human resources than we had. We did include al-Ahrar, a popular Libyan TV channel based outside Libya. We also explored the idea of training and hiring local journalists to assist us in coding the content analysis. When you have grant money to spend, you

want to spend it locally if possible, to benefit local people. But as often happens, the extra costs involved, combined with the shortage of available time, forced us to fall back on experienced coders based in Jordan.

We had hoped to complete the radio and TV assessments at the beginning of the project, and repeat them at the end to ascertain the impact of our embedded training programs. It soon became apparent that this had to be adjusted. Our timeline had slipped due to significant visa delays for trainers, so that the second assessment would occur while we were still in the midst of embedded training at the stations. Additionally, with Libya’s media at a highly fluid stage of development, journalists were moving between organizations and making it difficult to ensure the station content analyzed came from the individuals we had trained. And content analysis was designed to measure station output while the training targeted individual reporters. Since many factors besides a reporter’s skill influence what actually goes on air, including a manager’s editorial preferences, an owner’s political dictates, and real-time technical changes before broadcast, a second content analysis done in the same manner as the first would not have accurately reflected training results.

After discussion with funders, we agreed that standard pre-and-post training surveys would be best for monitoring and evaluation, with funds dedicated to the second assessment earmarked for more training sessions. As program manager, I was grateful that all involved understood the importance of flexibility with the project deliverables, given Libya’s ever-changing environment.

Assessing Media Needs

It seems pretty straightforward: send someone to meet local media owners and find out what they need. In reality, needs assessment missions can encounter many layers of complexity, particularly in a post-conflict country such as Libya.

I was warned on arrival in Tripoli that “assessment fatigue” was beginning to set in. It may not seem like much of an imposition for a media organization to talk with you for an hour to provide critical background information for your report—and by itself, it’s not. But multiply your one visit times 15 or 20 international visitors, and you begin to understand what “needs assessment”



The seventh century Red Castle is near Tripoli’s Martyr’s Square, site of many demonstrations. The castle had been used to defend the Barbary Coast against marauding pirates and later was converted into a museum.

means from a local media owner's point of view. He or she patiently repeats the same answers to mostly the same questions. The meeting often ends with vague assurances from the visitor that his or her group hopes to do something to help this media outlet soon.

But weeks and months may go by without follow-up or contact, and sometimes nothing further happens at all. Meanwhile, problems that were discussed may continue unresolved, and new ones surface. By the time a needs assessment report has been written, discussed at headquarters, and acted upon, it may be irrelevant. Libya's media was so fluid and turbulent that a typical assessment had a reliable shelf life of perhaps only a month after publication. After that, conditions on the ground had often changed so much as to make it useful only as a historical document. In the meantime, local media owners may have become suspicious of the entire grant-making process. This is especially true in countries such as Libya that have been closed off to the world for decades, where most local leaders have no experience or familiarity with the operating procedures of international NGOs.

How does one accurately determine an organization's goals given these circumstances? A serendipitous series of events provided us with a good answer. At our hotel, I met an experienced freelance trainer from Sudan who had just finished working with a local media organization in Benghazi. He was ready, willing, and able to remain in Libya to work with us. Shortly after this encounter, during my first "needs assessment" conversation with the general manager of al-Aseema TV, I mentioned that we could provide a trainer immediately for one week. He slammed his hand on the desk saying, "Let's do it! So many people have come through here to talk, and you're the first one we're going to work with." A few days later, we began a short basic journalism training.

When our trainer submitted his report a week later, we received a thorough, in-depth needs assessment that could only come from spending an extended period inside the station. We also were able to deliver a short but valuable training week. Impressed by both our speed and credibility in delivering on promises, al-Aseema TV agreed to partner with us on future trainings. Rather than spending weeks getting to know the lay of the land before making a move, jumping right in with a short basic training workshop can benefit both giver and receiver.

As soon as we began our program in January, we faced an overwhelming need for media assistance in all areas. Where to begin? How to sort out competing urgent demands and match them with what we were empowered to provide? One of the challenges I encountered was distinguishing between visions of future greatness and pressing present-day needs. For example, the head of Libya Alhurra TV/FM had a long-range vision for his organization's role, and as such, he expressed disappointment with the various offerings of training from the international donor community. At that time most were too short, and in his opinion, did not make the kind of difference he was seeking. He wanted a trainer to first observe the operation and then present a plan for a month-long, in-house training. As we didn't have a trainer available soon, we offered a different approach.

The Danish nonprofit media development group International Media Support (IMS) had a trainer in Libya already working at Alhurra. We convinced Alhurra to let us adapt the IMS trainer's final recommendations for our trainer who would follow on. This suited everyone involved. We had the

benefit of working from a fresh, well-done “needs assessment” without spending time and money in creating a duplicative study our own; we fostered goodwill with another international media development organization by continuing the work it had started; and we showed the media owner we were both fast and trustworthy in carrying out our training promises.

The need for journalism training in Libya was huge. Our grant was small. What did we tell owners and managers whose needs did not match what we could give them? For example, our resident journalism adviser in Benghazi met with Benghazi University’s journalism department. Its students needed practical training, which we could certainly provide, but the results would not last without the students working at the university’s radio studio. It wasn’t operating, and we had no provisions in our grant for the large amount of equipment the studio needed to do upgrade facilities. We decided to include the students in our open training sessions since this might give them some needed skills that could help them find jobs elsewhere. All we could do for the university itself was to alert other media development groups to their significant needs.

Our grant focused on Tripoli and Benghazi, but there is, of course, much more to Libya than its two main cities. Security concerns, transportation difficulties, and limited funds prevented us from exploring opportunities in Misrata on the coast as well as Sabha in the south. The best we could do was to contact media associations in other parts of Libya and invite their members to our open workshops. It is important that international media development groups communicate with each other, both formally and informally, in order to prevent saturation of training in major metropolitan centers, something that is especially common in freshly post-conflict environments.

Finding Partners and Developing Relationships

It takes a community to train journalists, and finding local co-trainers is a big part of the equation. Internews had done extensive research on earlier visits to Libya, including a very thorough report produced months before the fighting stopped, so I had a good stack of local contacts.

The trick becomes matching local needs with your organizational capacities as quickly and creatively as possible. During my first week in Libya, I met two British consultants who were working with local journalists to create a media center in Tripoli. We enjoyed socializing and also wanted to support each other’s work. When I called one of them about dinner plans, he mentioned that their center was hoping to start training sessions in a few days. This conversation took place a few hours after a tenuous commitment for one of our trainers to work with Libya TV had fallen apart when we discovered that the general manager with whom we had been negotiating did not enjoy widespread support within the channel.

Yet I had a trainer on board and enough funds for a week of training before his visa ran out. In a quick conversation, the British consultant and I made plans for what turned out to be a mutually beneficial workshop just a few days later, the very first one at their center. They appreciated that we could move so quickly, and we were delighted to have work for our trainer and a venue with our new partner. This relationship was fruitful for us throughout our entire grant, not just for training needs, but also with operational issues such as handling our visa requests.



However, in a post-revolutionary landscape like Libya, where everything is new or operating under new rules, the question often arises—how much and how far to push local, untried, untested NGO partners to help you carry out project goals? For example, we had an enthusiastic local partner in Tripoli, which consisted mostly of young volunteers who—despite their overall quickness, drive, and big dreams—had never done this kind of work before. We had long meetings discussing plans and assigning responsibilities before every training session, and most of them came out very well in the end, but not always. For example, the staff was supposed to get workshop certificates printed. Just before the ceremony, the certificates were not ready, even though the promise “no problem”—a phrase I came to dread—had been made weeks before. After a strenuous protest, I was handed a stack of newly printed certificates, but it had taken a big fuss to get them quickly. My strategy became brainstorming with expat consultants, who more intuitively understood my concerns and frustrations. We discussed how to address the problem in a culturally appropriate manner and then engage the very capable local director to help resolve the issue with his staff.

It is far easier to form partnerships with both local and foreign NGOs when other international media groups are still getting set up. The downside is that the search for qualified local staff takes on a heightened urgency, since everyone is looking more or less simultaneously through a limited pool of candidates. A high turnover rate can result when local staff begin to realize their skyrocketing value and start shifting jobs in search of the best pay and benefits. We were lucky. Not only were our assistants paid a fair market rate, but we also chose people who were excited to learn more about journalism. They consequently were glad to stick with us throughout the duration of the projects.

Many international media development organizations seek partnerships with state broadcasters. Our grant stipulated that we invite their journalists to our open training workshops but not to embed our trainers at their stations. This was probably a good thing since the new official broadcasters were just beginning to sort themselves out from the ruins of the Qaddafi media empire.

On one hand, throughout much of the world, state TV is often dogmatic, pedantic, and leaden. On the other, Libya was an infant state. I felt if a difference could be made, it would be in these early, formative stages, not after decades of operation, so we reached out to state-run media regularly. But it was still too soon in Libya. Senior staff members were constantly shifting at all the state organizations, and external political decisions often created turbulence or even outright violence at the stations. Sawt Tarabulus, a state-funded radio station housed temporarily in a rundown planetarium, carried on despite the uncertainties. The man in charge depended on a highly unstable revenue stream to keep the station on the air with news from official state sources. It had just one reporter, a “volunteer” who also worked at other stations. At another state radio Libya FM (one of several similarly named outlets), we learned more about the confusion surrounding the two new separate state broadcasters. Apparently the intention was to split the four old channels into separate networks for news, sports, and entertainment programs, but the new government’s own lack of clarity about what state media should be cast a long shadow over our information-gathering process.

In building new partnerships, Western mores and Middle Eastern cultures sometimes clash. Western culture dictates meetings with an on-time arrival and agenda in hand, and sessions that

get right to the point. But these habits can cause friction in navigating the Arab world. Expect, instead, to wait patiently and indefinitely for your appointment, despite a confirmed time, and then plan to spend what might seem to be an inappropriately long time first chatting with your hosts about life, loves, families, disappointments, and difficulties. Still, this type of discourse can nurture the kind of trust and resulting long-lasting relationships that are necessary in creating successful partnerships. For example, we had many slow, meandering meetings like this at al-Aseema TV in Tripoli, but our patience paid off with a long-term media development program that trained dozens of their journalists. Socializing is a key part of keeping good relations with partners. The direct, all-business Western approach is looked upon with a certain amount of distrust.

Security Concerns

The fighting in Libya did not end with the fall of Tripoli and the death of Qaddafi. Many former revolutionaries continue to struggle for power. Heavy weaponry is still displayed proudly and prominently by militia members everywhere. Security concerns naturally had a significant impact on many of our daily activities and project plans.

The lack of a strong government and its inability to come to terms with former revolutionaries has contributed to the problem. For example, in early May, about 200 militia members drove into Tripoli from a nearby town in dozens of pickup trucks armed with anti-aircraft weaponry. They attacked the prime minister's office over demands for pay. The fighting went on for an hour or two, with nearby neighborhood militias joining the fray. Gunfire and explosions went on all afternoon. One security guard was killed, and several others wounded. The government responded the next day by dispatching two fighter jets to zoom over and around metropolitan Tripoli in a show of force for about an hour, whistling across the sky as if they were about to attack. But everyday life went on amid the chaos. While the attack was taking place in one part of town, I watched another noisy group with guns parade down my street. Just as I was ready to alert friends and colleagues about an imminent attack, the group started to sing and clap. It was a wedding celebration.

Militias were not always former revolutionaries. Often they were young, bored, or unemployed men needing money, jobs, and a place in whatever power structure existed. Their fights typically were with other militias and the government. My main security effort was to keep aware of my surroundings and to stay out of their way. As disputes could break out without warning, it was important when walking to scan crowds carefully for signs of trouble.

Weapons were everywhere, and random gunfire and explosions could be heard at all hours of day or night. My problem became trying to determine the seriousness and location of an incident. Without strong and credible news organizations, word-of-mouth reports and second-hand rumors thrived. The U.S. embassy was often a good source of information for the bigger, more significant events, but for neighborhood disturbances, I would often ask the hotel owner to find out what was going on. This was not always easy as many times what sounded like a fight was actually celebratory gunfire from a party or sports event. It was more difficult to know what was going on outside the major metropolitan areas, where at least the major news did get covered. Credible news about events in the south, east, and west was very hard to come by.





The Zintan militia group provided security at the Tripoli International Airport in the early days after the fall of the regime. We encountered them when picking up a trainer at the airport.

The precarious security situation compounded the already sizeable transportation difficulties. Militia checkpoints often appeared unexpectedly. Some international aid groups forbade staff to use local taxis, although I encountered no problems with them. A colleague from another media development organization was stopped by militia at a checkpoint while traveling in western Libya and taken to a nearby police station where armed men not affiliated with the government demanded her passport and questioned her at length before releasing her. Another colleague was caught in an exchange of gunfire one night driving on the road back into Tripoli, although no one seemed to know who was fighting whom or why.

A constant question was who was running the international airports on any given day. For the first several months, the Zintan militia was in charge of security at Tripoli's main airport. This was meant to be a temporary fix to the power vacuum caused by the lack of a national army or functioning police force. But negotiations to hand control of the airport back to the government fell apart in late March. Unfortunately, we were drawn directly into the dispute when we went to pick up a trainer at the airport. Suddenly we found ourselves surrounded by a large convoy of about 50 militia vehicles, loaded with anti-aircraft weaponry, and each packed with four or five armed men. Fortunately, they pulled over to regroup, giving us enough time to run into the airport for our trainer and leave before they stormed it, shooting mostly into the air in a show of force.

Another security concern was the threats to journalists we were training. For example, one afternoon there was heavy gunfire around the state-run Libya TV near our hotel. Apparently someone refused to let the general manager into the compound that morning and fighting had resulted. Another international media development group, Deutsche Welle, had to cancel its short training session. It continued the next day, but questions about working at the station long term remained.

Another incident occurred when an al-Asema TV cameraman covering the start of voter registration was roughed up and his camera seized by protesters upset about political parties not being able to have religious, tribal, or ethnic affiliations. This was a new election rule that was later rescinded. Despite the loss of its camera, al-Asema put the whole story online.

Still, regardless of security issues, the euphoria of the revolution was a positive factor throughout the project period. The general happiness at the overthrow of Qaddafi was infectious and popped up at unexpected moments. I was never treated badly as an unveiled Western woman walking on the street alone, even though all but a tiny fraction of the crowds were Arab men. Another plus, refreshingly, was my status as an American, because of U.S. support for the opposition during the revolution.

Changing Visa Requirements

One of the biggest problems we faced was getting Libyan visas for our trainers. In this post-conflict world, with no coordinated definition of policy, rules changed often. It was hard to know when certain rules were enforced as opposed being just guidelines. The only effective way to find out was by actually going through the process. Colleagues from various NGOs would compare notes to determine what method might be successful.

Visa uncertainties dominated much of March and upset our plans for a training session on radio production at the Free Media Center with our Sudanese trainer. His approved visa letter sat on an absent official's desk for a week, waiting to be signed. No one knew where the official was nor would they proceed without him. The impasse was broken when media center staff tracked down the official, who also worked a second job in another ministry, and took the visa letter there for him to sign. Both of our Sudanese trainers were astonished that they could simply board a plane once the visa had been approved in Libya. In the past, they also had to go to the Libyan embassy in Khartoum to get the visa stamped in the passport, a process that could take another several weeks. We also learned to tell visa seekers to stay away from their local Libyan embassies, since these places were still filled with Qaddafi loyalists who could potentially cause as many problems as solve them.

Palestinian passports were a particular problem for reasons that no one could explain to us. We managed to bring our Palestinian resident journalism adviser to Benghazi, but later had to cancel a planned training on media law when another Palestinian trainer could not get a visa. Towards the end of the project, when time was short, we began seeking trainers only from visa-free or visa-friendly countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan, rather than submit to a long, tortuous, and uncertain process.

A Cash Economy

When I arrived in Libya in January 2012, I put away my credit card and didn't take it out until I left the country four months later. Almost no business in Libya would accept it. The cash-only environment began to change in May at the end of our project as financial institutions strengthened.

A cash-only environment presents challenges. Neither storing cash in a safe with a trusted partner or in a bank was a viable option. A foreign entity has to be formally registered to open a bank account, which is not an easy, clear, or quick process for a four-month program in a post-revolutionary country. We were operating legally in Libya through our sub-grant from an officially registered company, but this was not enough to allow us to open our own separate bank account. We finally decided just to keep a small reserve of cash in my hotel safe and replenish it regularly, as did many other internationals with various foreign organizations facing the same cash predicament.

The next hurdle was replenishing the cash supply. Like other international NGOs, we arranged deliveries through trusted colleagues traveling to Libya.

The only other good option was a bonded cash courier service that worked on a flat fee of \$500 per transaction. This meant we needed to transfer a minimum of \$17,000 each time, which worked out to a fee of approximately 3 percent, roughly equivalent to other services. But in order not to keep large amounts in my hotel safe, I also needed to time cash deliveries to arrive when we had large payments to make to vendors, such as monthly charges for the Benghazi hotel, or fees to trainers who lived in countries that did not enjoy an easy banking relationship with the United States, such as Sudan.

Of course, U.S. dollars need to be changed into local currency, and with large amounts of foreign currency, using the black market becomes far more desirable than official bank rates. This underlined the necessity of working with local contacts we could trust to handle these transactions regularly. Working solely with cash also requires constant counting to make sure amounts tally properly. We logged our cash flow daily and counted our reserves twice a week.

Not only was Libya a cash-only economy when I arrived, it was also a society where receipts were seen not only as unnecessary but almost as a sign of mistrust. It took some lobbying on my part to get my hotel to provide receipts for my meals and other charges. Hotel personnel were keeping track of all my expenditures, and there were no discrepancies, but they did not think it was necessary to give me a record of every transaction. This cultural habit also meant extra pressure on my assistant during busy workshop times when large amounts of cash were changing hands rapidly. Even the local bonded cash courier who brought us thousands of dollars in cash



Libya was a cash-only economy after the revolution. The English-language magazine the *Libyan* says it all with its Arabic headline: "Time is Money."

did not ask for or offer us a receipt, or even request an ID, all of which astonished us. He said our respective head offices handled those things, not him, and that they only worked with people they trusted. However, we insisted that he sign a receipt for us, which he did, somewhat puzzled and grudgingly.

Reporting to Multiple Funders

We had both a funder and an implementer to report to, as well as our own internal bureaucracy, and this created a heavy administrative burden. It became a bit confusing once or twice when one party would be fine with a proposed plan of action, but the other needed more details and documentation. Should the desires of the implementer or the funder take precedence?

We consulted with our headquarters for advice when necessary.

As in any grant project, the budget needed to be updated regularly to account for changing conditions. However, in a four-month grant, this takes on an added intensity. Budget modifications had to begin almost immediately, but even so, the process took so long to approve and finalize among all partners that inevitably there were significant program changes on the ground by the time each update was reviewed.

Adding to the complexity in our case was an artificial bureaucratic split in the grant that created two identical projects, one each in Tripoli and Benghazi, requiring two separate reporting streams. The value of a strong program manager at headquarters to monitor the interests of all parties in a grant is magnified when there are multiple funding partners.

Interactions between media development organizations and agencies helped prevent the echo chamber effect that can occur when Western media partners talk mostly to each other, and it also gave local media figures a chance to express their needs in a relaxed atmosphere.

Donor Coordination Efforts

The need for donor coordination is obvious. When you arrive in a new country and are faced with as many as a dozen or so organizations with similar project objectives, it's natural to want to avoid overlap and duplication of effort. Yet this goal can remain elusive, despite the best intentions of all involved.

In an attempt to mix business with pleasure, the EU representative and I invited several leaders of international media development organizations and agencies, including Deutsche Welle and the Danish embassy, to a lunch meeting at a restaurant in the old city so that media coordination business could take place in a more relaxed, fun environment, which greatly encouraged participation. Among the issues we tackled: the complicated visa situation, our plans for election trainings, and an update on state media developments. Other opportunities were at the Free Media Center's villa in Tripoli, where its staff often hosted brunches or other get-togethers where informal donor coordination talks could happen with a variety of both local and international



partners. These interactions helped prevent the echo chamber effect that can occur when Western media partners talk mostly to each other, and it also gave local media figures a chance to express their needs in a relaxed atmosphere.

Sharing project information and reports is vital. For example, we developed excellent working relationships with IMS, whose openness was tremendously helpful to our project and advanced the larger media development goals for Libya that we all shared.

But naturally, each NGO also has a need for autonomy, since project staff usually arrive with agendas set by their funders. There may be some wiggle room, but deliverables are deliverables. In the case of Libya, everyone had some component of election training on offer, since the first elections were only months away. To avoid overlap, we reached out to local groups that other NGOs were not working with, used different training approaches, and focused on specialized election aspects that others were not covering.

Short Term or Long Term?

With a short grant, there is a greater urgency to achieving goals and a stronger need to hit the ground running, coupled with very little room for delays or glitches, internal or external. When operational indicators started sliding midway through our projects due to visa problems, we had to quickly turn a critical eye on what we were planning to do and weigh that against how much time we had left to accomplish it.

Key differences between short-term and long-term projects:

Urgency: Having small, focused goals was valuable in post-conflict Libya, where the future was decidedly fuzzy, and the urgency of accomplishing the project meant quick action, something our partner media organizations appreciated. So much training was needed, and no individual program, no matter how large, could tackle all of Libya's yawning journalism gaps. It was far easier to focus on the near term than the distant future, with so much political turbulence in play, but there is a tendency with short-term projects to grab at quick solutions because time is so short.

Staff: Training local staff quickly is necessary, but not always feasible in traumatized post-conflict environments. Finding qualified staff is difficult, and moving too quickly can alienate locals who are unfamiliar with the world of aid development. It also means competition with other international NGOs who are sometimes able to pay more for the most experienced ones.

Setbacks: There is almost no time to turn setbacks around. We could not wait for a respected Palestinian media law trainer to get a visa, so we cancelled the workshop. We could not spend more time working with local partners to come up with training plans to meet more involved, longer-term objectives. We could not continue to provide election reporting workshops right up to the vote because our grant finished before then.

Administration: Administration tasks are more burdensome, with required reports coming in quick succession. We could not produce a first quarter report because the final project report was due a month later. The site visit of our key funder halfway through the project helped them realize we had no time for drawn-out budget discussions.

Communication: Communicating with headquarters is more crucial in a short-term project as there is less room for error. A strong program associate at headquarters who can monitor multiple accounting threads and also interpret the impact on project activities is invaluable, especially during the close-out process.

Closeout: This time period—the last two months of a grant—is the most challenging because the money has to be spent well, quickly, and sometimes all at once. This concept does not necessarily

With a short grant, there is a greater urgency to achieving goals and a stronger need to hit the ground running, coupled with very little room for delays or glitches, internal or external.



fit in with prevailing local sensibilities. With local Libyan organizations, if you have money for a project, the goals evolve, and you take as long as you need to achieve them. For international NGOs that insist on meeting timelines, rushing to hit deadlines, and adhering to schedules can be incomprehensible to local partners. The art of international development is to synchronize with local partners so that they work on our projects at the same time that we need to complete them, merging our needs with their needs.

Stress: Burnout is a constant threat in any project, even more so with short-term ones as the need to complete activities is very focused and intense. Work can become endless with Internet connectivity and time zone differences. Somewhat counter-intuitively, boredom is also a big problem when living in an insecure country like Libya. I was safe in my living quarters, but there were no real options for diversions after work besides meeting colleagues at local restaurants in a country where alcohol is forbidden. The Qaddafi regime had discouraged most movie theatres, museums, and cultural events, and they had not yet returned when I arrived. Since there were more disturbances in the streets at night, it was usually better to just stay indoors. Low Internet bandwidth meant that streaming movies was difficult even if they were available for foreign distribution. During the day, I was safe enough walking on the street or sitting in a restaurant by myself, but I stuck out like a sore thumb as an unveiled, unescorted Western woman when 97 percent of people on the street were male, so this was not an enjoyable or relaxing experience, especially since garbage pick-up services had not yet been re-established and trash was piled up everywhere. Gym contracts at the large hotels ran about US\$200 a month and were usually only possible for six months or longer. Out of desperation, I finally negotiated a month-to-month fitness membership for the last half of the project, and despite the cost, it was well worth it as a reliable stress-reliever.

Scope of work: In contrast, a long-term grant is able to develop projects in more depth, with a measured implementation schedule that can withstand delays more easily. There is enough time for a project vision to unfold organically and in accordance with evolving local conditions. Administrative and financial controls are spread out over a longer time frame, making them somewhat easier to handle. But for better or worse, the finish line for a long-term project is also farther off than a short-term one, which can result in a slow start as various options are weighed very carefully, perhaps excessively so at times.

The challenge of a short-term project was getting set up quickly. Delays magnify the urgency of an already tight schedule. With this in mind, Internews started a visa application for me the day the grant was approved on December 22, 2011. The visa process turned out to be nearly a month long—a harbinger of problems to come.

Upon arrival in Tripoli, because of a miscommunication, my “confirmed” hotel turned out not to be, and my driver took me instead to a small, new hotel in the center of town. It was so new, in fact, I was almost the only guest. Although I expected a short stay, I checked out four months later at the end of the project.

As it turned out, al-Batra Hotel was key to getting our project off the ground quickly. The time frame was too short to justify setting up a formal office. At al-Batra, I had a large suite with a sitting area that could be used as a workspace and business meetings. My assistant and I had

wireless Internet as reliable as anywhere in Libya. We could use the hotel scanner and printer for free in the business center, paying only for faxes. Our monthly office expenses usually added up to less than US\$50 total—a huge savings from the overhead of running our own office.

The owner was a young English-speaking Canadian-Libyan entrepreneur with a technology background who wanted to do everything he could to encourage us to stay as long as possible. I was allowed to use the large hotel kitchen to cook and store my own meals. Since credit cards were not in general use, the owner accepted payment through his international bank so that bringing in large amounts of cash to pay our bill was not necessary. The hotel became a media meeting place, and other media NGOs, including the Doha Centre and Deutsche-Welle, soon joined me, much to the delight of the owner.

By contrast, we weren't so lucky with accommodations in Benghazi. The huge, old Tibesti Hotel was the only place in town with a dependable business center and good facilities, which meant it was usually packed. We were offered no long-term rates, and had to pay monthly charges in cash.



Recommendations

In general, a speedy, lean start served us well. Our agenda was manageable and addressed clear needs without being overly ambitious. Our team was small but acted quickly when lucky breaks came our way. The value in this example of media training in Libya comes when considering how to handle other post-revolutionary situations, such as what will someday be the case in Syria. Here are a few useful lessons we gleaned from our experiences in Libya that might apply to other countries as well.

- Use a journalism trainer who can help with assessment missions and also spend a few days giving basic journalism training onsite. This approach serves two goals—one, to provide immediate training, and two, to give the opportunity for a closer, onsite assessment. Doing this builds trust and goodwill and paves the way for future trainings, or serves as a determining point to cut off future assistance, as the case may be. Needs assessment meetings may seem like a harmless interruption in the day of a local media manager, but they can become very annoying and frustrating for those on the receiving end. International NGOs can do better than this. For example, Internews was part of a large, multi-nonprofit assessment mission to Libya in late October 2011, shortly after Qaddafi was killed. This was an extremely effective example of international media coordination and one that should be emulated again and again. The group approach cut down on the repetitive meetings that local media managers endure and showed a strong, positive, coordinated will to assist on the part of the international community.
- Consider asking local media to pay for training programs. Ask appropriate partner stations to share program costs. This can lead to a more serious focus on the training program. Most media organizations will welcome free trainers but may essentially just ignore them once they arrive.
- Reduce the administration burden. Short-term grants need a light administrative load—the simpler the better.
- Simplify monitoring and evaluation. Only very basic M&E can reasonably be accomplished in short-term grants.
- Streamline communications. Instead of back-and-forth e-mail streams to resolve complex questions, which might take days or even weeks as program staff in various time zones respond, consider holding a global Skype meeting with the goal of resolving an issue at the end of it. This can save everyone a lot of time and hassle.
- Designate a specialized in-house manager to navigate the closeout process. A program manager at headquarters who can focus especially on overseeing the grant closeout process is an extremely valuable member of the team.

Summary

Libya is a unique example of a country in transition. I have worked in other post-conflict nations, including Tunisia and East Timor, and each country brings its own fresh, individual challenges. Perhaps the only common denominators are confusion and turbulence.

I thought about this one day in Tripoli as I watched hundreds of swallows zooming around wildly as usual outside my hotel windows. It dawned on me that over several months, I had never seen these birds flock together in any organized fashion. They just flew around separately making fast, random swoops and always seemed excited. The poor creatures were probably shell-shocked from all the constant gunfire and shooting into the air. Whatever the cause, it seemed to be a metaphor for the whole country. If the birds can't even group together post revolution, how much should we expect from a traumatized human population?

The first small steps of training and development in post-conflict environments may not necessarily produce dazzling results on paper, but when these are coupled with speed and flexibility in addressing real needs of local journalists instead of our own predetermined agendas, the reward is a strong relationship between local journalists and international media developers that can pay off handsomely for all in the long run.



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