Media Mapping: Bayelsa & Rivers States for NRSP

ACRONYMS

AIT	African Independent Television
CSOs	Civil Society Organisation(s)
EU	European Union
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
FM	Frequency Modulation
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
NSRP	Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme
NTA	Nigeria Television Authority
PDP	Peoples' Democratic Party
RSTV	Rivers State Television
SfCG	Search for Common Ground
sms	short message service
TV	Television

MEDIA MAPPING Executive Summary

A media mapping exercise was carried out in Bayelsa and Rivers State in late December 2011 and January 2012 as part of preparation for the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Project (NSRP). This report also sought to cover social media usage in both the states and some aspects of national usage of the media.

The report found that electronic media dominated as a source of news both in normal times and in periods of conflict. In urban areas television was the leading source of news (36% of surveyed in Port Harcourt) while the surveys and previous research indicated that radio was increasingly important in rural areas.

In both states journalists and members of civil society reported that conflict and violence – particularly in rural areas – were under-reported. The causes for this included challenges with logistics, pressure from government on media, reluctance of witnesses to come forward, and safety risks associated with reporting.

There was an overwhelming preference expressed in media sources for private media – with government media seen as far less likely to report on news that might portray the government or region in a negative light. Only 13% of respondents in Rivers and 6% in Bayelsa listed government stations as their preferred television media and state owned radio only fared a little better.

In both states all media report a strong growth in public engagement with news and events seen as affecting their lives. This has been expressed in the growth of "phone in" segments that have evolved from a novelty to being a crucial part of almost every segment of electronic media. This relates closely to the strength of news and current affairs – which are seen as an important component for all media including stations that consider their role primarily entertainment.

Following a national trend social media appears to have grown dramatically in Port Harcourt and made some inroads in Bayelsa's state capital Yenagoa. The scale of social media in Nigeria remains very small with Facebook membership less than 1% of Nigeria's estimated population (50% in the United States of America), but growth rates of 6% per month appear close to exponential.

The national fuel strike which occurred as this report was being concluded highlighted both the growth in social media and its use as an organizing tool, channel for creative interventions, and a swift alternate route for news. This was further underlined when social media was at the forefront of reporting incidents in Kano and other northern centres.

With increased public engagement and the advent of effective social media there appears to be significantly greater scope for discussion of social grievances, governance, and conflict issues. This has significant positive potential for addressing problems that are believed to be at the root of violent conflict, while also signalling the importance of reducing the scope for misinformation or the promotion of violent agendas.

1 Introduction

This study is part of the establishment work of Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) which is being implemented by the British Council and its partners. The programme is aimed at supporting Nigerian stakeholders in managing conflict non-violently and reducing the negative impacts of conflict and violence on the most vulnerable populations. To achieve this, a media mapping and media content analysis related to violent conflict and governance in Borno, Yobe, Plateau and Kaduna states in northern Nigeria was carried out, while this study focuses on the Niger Delta states of Rivers and Bayelsa, it also explores the contemporary influence of social media.

The aim of the exercise was to identify potential programme partners amongst the media and understand fully how local grievances related to violent conflict at all levels were being reflected in the media, and gather other information relevant to the mandate of NSRP.

The media mapping studies are complimented by three conflict assessments in the regions that deal with conflict risks in region and the interventions of civil society organizations, government and other actors in more depth than is possible in the media study alone.
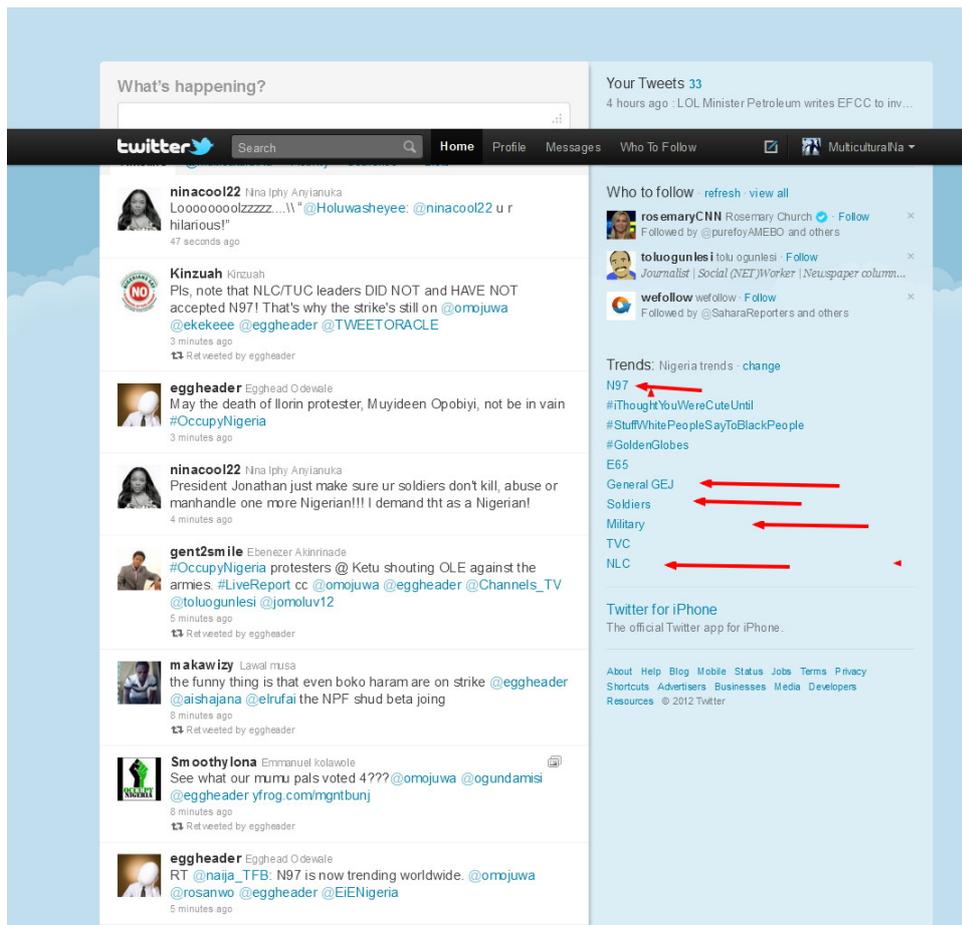
Twitter feed snapshot during week of National Strike Jan 9th-16th

2 Methodology

This report relies on the following main sources:

States
1. In-depth interviews with members of the media
2. Focus group short surveys on news sources with public (including CSOs)
3. Individual interviews with members of CSOs
4. Secondary sources – desktop and previously gathered data

Social Media
1. Online monitoring of the national fuel strike [extended case study]
2. Online reporting and other sources on Nigeria internet usage
3. Interviews with online media actors and service providers

As much raw data as possible has been gathered in the Annexes to this report in addition to standard information
- Compiled covers of both local and national daily newspapers [photo files]
- Sound recordings of key radio news discussion programmes
- Screenshots of social media, online newspaper headlines, and media 'feeds'

Respondents:

Rivers State: A total of 142 persons were engaged in the mapping exercise. Of these 110 were part of small group swift surveys while 32 persons were engaged in longer discussions or in-depth interviews (14 in-depth interviews with media, 6 in depth CSOs, 12 focus group CSOs).

Disaggregation by sex and age can be seen in Annex 1 & 2 – note that there was a bias for in-depth interviews with the media (especially print media) towards male respondents due largely to the makeup of the profession. This was corrected to an extent by the improved presence of women in electronic media.

Bayelsa State: A total of 59 persons were engaged – 43 persons in the short survey exercise and 16 from the media, civil society and the public in extended interviews. Additional data on Bayelsa will be added to Annex II after the initial submission of this report based on a replication of the media survey in rural parts of the state. Interviews in Bayelsa were scaled back in number and focused on more in-depth discussions due to the smaller size of the media presence in the state and the clear preference of audiences on a narrow range of media sources.

Limitations
The interviews with local media actors were not exhaustive and were partly informed by what was initially presumed and known about media usage in the two states. Priority was given to media channels that are known to have a significant or key sector audience.

The survey data has a strong urban bias. Attempts to compensate this were made by interviews with participants from a wide spread of backgrounds but the small sample size means that there will inevitably be potentially significant biases that could be corrected in follow up exercises.

The study is also limited in the sense that it focused on media from the perspective of the researcher as well as the viewpoint of the selected small group of respondents. Thus, there has been limited focus for print media which is still a vital part of the

media.

For readers interested in grassroots media use it would be helpful to review this report in conjunction with the large scale media mapping exercise of Search for Common Ground (SfCG) conducted in rural parts of the Niger Delta in 2009.

3 The Major Sources of Conflict & Grievances

It is important to note that the Niger Delta region has been in varying forms of conflict with government since its inclusion in colonial Nigeria in the 1890s. This background of tensions was overlaid by the economic, social, and environmental disruption that has resulted since the discovery of oil in 1956, with increasing impacts since the 1960s.

A moderate length review of these issues and their current status is found in the conflict mapping exercise conducted for Rivers and Bayelsa states for the NSRP.

 For the purpose of the media mapping, it is important to note that the region has enjoyed a relatively short period of peace following the declaration of an Amnesty for militants in 2009. The crises in the last decade have included:

- **2003 Delta State inter-ethnic crisis:** thousands killed in protracted clashes after the 2003 elections
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- **2004 Rivers Militant Crisis I:** militants led by Asari Dokubo repeatedly defeated government forces and threatened the survival of the state government before a ceasefire
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- **2007 Rivers Crisis II:** Attacks by competing militant groups in state capital, Port Harcourt were eventually suppressed by Joint Military Task Force and a change of state governor

- **2006-9 Evolving Militancy:** waves of militant attacks and kidnapping across the oil producing states eventually peaked in 2008 with oil production reduced to 1.2 million bpd before a military success for government forces was followed swiftly by an amnesty

Although the Amnesty has at least temporarily allowed a large degree of "business as usual" to resume the drivers of grievances and conflict remain. Amongst key issues are:

- Environmental degradation – both from oil pollution and other sources
- Massive unemployment – especially amongst youth and in rural areas
- Continuing economic and social impact from militancy period
- Political patronage and systematic corruption in government

The present Amnesty programme has been sustained for two years but increased levels of piracy in both coastal and creek areas points clearly towards on-going risks. There is a critical area for the media where violence is by almost all accounts under reported due to a mixture of political and logistical reasons.

The risks of further conflict in the region remain substantial, especially as few actors believe there has been any substantive disarmament in the region. Armed groups are believed to have retained significant numbers of weapons after handing in enough to satisfy the publicity needs of the Amnesty programme – as also occurred after the ceasefire in 2004.

The continuing military and police task force presence in the Niger Delta comes at significant cost to local populations, as does the unresolved issues with militant groups and gangs. Ordinary farmers and traders face checkpoints and routine extortion from all sides, while reports of violence against women appear to have

increased markedly.

Finally, although there are obvious divergences, there are obvious common issues between the conflicts in the Niger Delta and how they are now being expressed in Northern Nigeria. The potential of these conflicts to interact both in escalating crisis or reducing tensions should be of urgent concern to all actors interested in the media sector.

4 Findings

The findings on key questions are assessed on a state by state basis but the cross cutting themes of access to media and the interest in participation are explored together because they were expressed so strongly and consistently in both states.

Social media is also examined together in section 4.4 although it is important to reiterate the levels of participation are thought to be significantly lower in Bayelsa State, and that social media appears to be a fast growing but predominantly urban phenomenon at present.

4.1 Access to Media Evolving swiftly in both states

Access to multiple sources of news has improved markedly in nine years since new technologies – both access to the internet and mobile phones gained a firm foothold from 2002 onwards. This also marked the period in which private electronic media began to establish itself in the region.

From a point in 2003 where Rhythm Radio and Raypower were the only private stations there has been a rapid expansion to a point where Rivers State now has nine radio stations and four television (TV) stations (two private and two government), while Bayelsa recently added its third radio station and has since 2003 had private television as a valued competitor to state television. [An earlier survey by Search for Common Ground (2009) found that over 80% of those surveyed from both rural and urban areas had access to television or radio underlining the spread of access to electronic media.]

4.2 Interest in Participating in news and governance

Public Voice

Remarkably all interviewees reported a phenomenon where the desire for public participation "in issues that affect them" has grown dramatically and had a corresponding effect on all forms of electronic media. All of the electronic media except Africa Independent Television (AIT) in Bayelsa – which suspended "phone-ins" recently due to an excessive use of abusive language – reported that they had call in segments for their news and current affairs shows. Several radio stations reported that every program had to have a "phone in" component where listeners could participate.

Several also reported that they used multiple platforms to engage with their listeners; with Facebook clubs and twitter being key points of access to both programs and competitions. The level of participation was routinely reported as high and enthusiastic.

News Aggregators/Disseminators

The data from both this mapping exercise and previous initiatives give a useful guide to public media consumption and issues around how news is generated, especially on issues relating to conflict or its root causes. However, the survey data certainly understates the importance of both formal and informal 'news aggregators' who play key roles in analysing and sharing news with their contemporaries. This is variously described in reports as "word of mouth", friends, text messages etc and even at the level of gross measurements it is significant: with 20% of respondents in Rivers State treating a combination of these sources as their main source of news.

Whether urban or rural the minority who consume media from multiple sources, including social media may prove to be important in how news is interpreted locally, especially in conflict.

As a source in rural areas this report will have under-stated the importance of 'disseminators' due to time limitations. It is also crucial to understand that in rural areas there is a higher percentage of persons who go to agricultural and fishing activities with schedules that curtail their access to routine news bulletins, making them more reliant on evening options which are suited to updates from friends and meetings but where available this also gives television an advantage with its evening bulletins.

4.3.1 Rivers State

"Members of the public are craving for information and a voice on issues affecting them"
Presenter, Love FM commenting on
public demand for phone in participation

Rivers State has a population of 5,185,400 (2006 Census). The number of registered voters is 2,429,241 of which a little over 893,000 are in greater Port Harcourt giving a fair indication of rural–urban split although it is important to note that there is a continuing drift which could lead to 50% of the state's population being in just one urban centre.

Media Sources
Although sample sizes were small (and urban biased) the surveys brought up a consistent and strong preference for television news as a "main source" of news (36%) with radio coming a consistent second (30%). Print media showed up as a distinct minority as a main source (6%) on a par with the internet (6%), with both holding this level as a secondary source. The combined sourcing of friends/phone/sms was 20% as a main source and 18% as a secondary source.

[See Annex 2A for a further breakdown.]

Comments that supported audience choice were:

The importance of "visuals" provided by television
Easy 'access' to television and radio
The uncensored nature of the internet

The dominance of private electronic media was substantial. In television AIT has over 58% of those interviewed while state television Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) and Rivers State Television (RSTV) was only preferred by 13% of those surveyed, behind second preference and private newcomer Silverbird Television (16%). In radio there was a greater spread with relative newcomer Wazobia FM (targeted at 'grassroots' audience broadcasting in Pidgin English) with a strong lead (52%) followed by Rhythm (20%) and in a demonstration of inter-state reach Heartland FM (also 20% and owned by the Imo State Government).

The volatility of radio audiences is demonstrated by the few available earlier surveys – a University of Port Harcourt study put Rhythm Radio in a clear lead in 2009 with 63% of first choice preferences amongst university students.

'Trusted' Media
This was expressed in two different ways. In comments there was a strong expressed preference for private media because it was expected to be less affected by under-reporting. Somewhat predictably, radio strengthened its position when respondents were asked about their preferred source 'in times of crisis' with 34% matching the position of television. Other media and sourcing through messages and friends held their position, although the survey did not discriminate for those who changed their sourcing.

Comment - It is important also to note that the rapid growth in participation in electronic media expresses a growing public confidence in "finding its voice" without excessive fear that it will be suppressed or otherwise attacked. This is a marked

improvement on periods between 2003 and 2007 which were dominated by an atmosphere of fear in public discourse.

Media's Role in conflict and social issues

Media and civil society respondents both stressed that 'human interest' and conflict stories were under reported in both the electronic and print media.

They attributed this to a combination of:
- ⚔ Logistics and cost of journalists reaching rural areas
- ⚔ Pressure from government not to report 'bad news' about the state
- ⚔ Witnesses are reluctant to come forward due to a fear of personal consequences
- ⚔ Risk and safety of reporters

Both in interviews and in previous encounters journalists and civil society organizations reported harassment for reporting news, particularly allegations of bad governance, conflict with the state (whether violent or not), and criminal activity.

Respondents reported "self-censorship" primarily to prevent problems with government authorities rather than risks of inflaming tensions between protagonists [primarily seen as being a risk in inter-community clashes]. This 'censorship' also reflected in discussions with civil society and the public where more active respondents routinely used multiple sources of news to attempt to overcome the problem of under reporting.

The Role of Short Message Service (SMS) and Social Media

In Rivers State, particularly in urban areas the use of mobile phones and sms has become so routine that it is treated as a normal part of basic daily communication. There are still significant parts of rural Rivers state that are on the fringe of this development, either through cost or residing in the limited number of rural areas without coverage.

In discussions with members of civil society and the public it was suggested that SMS was one source of fast breaking news but that also the public were increasingly aware of the possibility of misinformation (ironically awareness has been assisted by the volume of fraudulent scam messages).

It was also apparent (but difficult to measure in time available) that 'word of mouth', text messaging and social media [including messaging], appear to be highly interactive. In other words, information seen on face-book or twitter may be swiftly shared with friends by word of mouth, texted onwards, or shared via calls to friends.

[See Social Media section for an expanded discussion of this topic]

Programs with Potential Role in Peacebuilding

There are few programs on TV or radio that their producers or reporters describe as explicitly geared towards peace-building or conflict resolution. However most radio stations in Rivers described their key interactive news programmes as covering topics that would fit under this remit. So programmes with an editor's roundtable (Love FM and others), Viewpoint (Rhythm), and Bull's-eye (Cool FM) can all credibly lay claim to covering both issues of social exclusion, governance, and conflict whether violent or otherwise.

Rhythm and Wazobia stand out as both progressive and key portals for engagement by the public with news. They also reflect a shared history of establishing radio

journalism in the state that is committed to quality and relatively bold reporting. This began with Rhythm's ground breaking live coverage of the 2003 elections (focusing on poll opening, violence and credibility) and continued through two periods of significant crisis in 2004 and 2007.

Wazobia/Cool FM (shared news team supporting stations targeting different demographics) have recruited a number of ex-Rhythm staff who have championed the value of quality news within the organization. From a starting point where Wazobia was a pure entertainment channel both stations now see news gathering as a crucial part of their work, and a key driver of audience share.

A list of relevant programmes – both TV and radio are listed with short descriptions in Annex 6A. See also Bayelsa State for short description of EU/SfCG community radio initiative.

4.3.2 Bayelsa State Findings

"At the highest levels in government people do not know what is happening in remote communities"

Media practitioner, Bayelsa State

Bayelsa is a significantly smaller state than Rivers and is ethnically a solely Ijaw state. It has a census population of 1,703,358 and 591,870 registered voters. It faces significantly greater geographical challenges with large parts of the state only accessible by boat – coastal areas are a four hour boat ride from the state capital, Yenagoa.

Media Sources

The sample completed in Bayelsa was solely in Yenagoa and significantly smaller than that of Rivers State. However, the trends were very strong and point to similar issues. There is a strong reliance on television for news as a primary source; although marginally less dominant.

Crucial to a more accurate assessment of this state will be a more careful assessment of communities in the creeks of Bayelsa. They face significantly lower incomes but on the positive side their access to electronic media continues to improve; radio broadcasts now routinely reach all of the state and AIT has just boosted its television signal so that it should reach all areas of the state and some neighbouring states.

In Yenagoa, television was reported as the strongest main source of news (46%) with radio in a clear second place (25%) followed by newspapers 13%. Survey data did not support phones/friends/texts as a main or secondary source of news – this goes against other data collected (including SFCG) and may be an effect of both survey limitations and the present political climate in the state which is significantly polarized.

'Trusted Media'
The survey and mapping exercise was conducted at a time of high political tension in Bayelsa State ahead of a State Governor's election where the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) has moved to exclude the sitting Governor, Timipre Sylva, from standing for re-election.

This has cast even more doubt than usual on the neutrality of the two sources of state media (State and Federal) which are seen as having obvious and conflicting interests. Two respondents with a strong interest in current events reported watching AIT for their 'news' and then watching NTA for a direct view of the government line or direction. Only 6% of respondents gave state television as their preferred TV news source with AIT dominating the field.

Two key respondents also described the role of the 'local' newspapers as an obvious problem: where they were far more at risk of being sensationalist and partisan. Often the owners of these newspapers were perceived as having interests associated with local conflicts and would use their own newspaper to further their own interests.

National media were seen as much more sensitive to the need for neutrality and avoiding reporting that could be seen as inflammatory or partisan. All media sources reported a degree of "self-censorship", driven by concerns over both audience and

government reaction.

The Role of the Media in Conflict and Social Issues
Even more strongly that in Rivers, civil society and journalists in Bayelsa related that conflict and rural stories were seriously under-reported in the state. Most respondents made direct links between under reporting and the deterioration of incidents ranging from inter-community clashes through to oil spills and human rights abuses.

Key challenges were listed (in rough priority):
1. Logistics/funds for travel to remote areas
2. Safety: including several respondents citing lack of insurance
3. Witnesses: lack of understanding and trust of media amongst rural communities
4. Threats: specific examples of threats by government and business actors were cited

Like government, oil companies were seen as hostile to criticism or negative news. The refusal of oil companies to respond to inquiries from journalists based in the region left them with a "catch 22" situation – where reports were often criticised for lack of balance by the very companies that had refused comment in the first instance.

The lack of any state government response (and seemingly minimal or no Federal response) to the explosion and on-going fire at the Funiwa oil rig was cited as an example of the lack of engagement by government authorities – despite it being possibly the largest such incident in approximately 20 years[1].

The conditions for reporting on oil spills are described as difficult – where the security presence and oil company hostility to recording means that they will often have to report from a distance or avoid security services so as to get a story that has any meaningful content.

Members of the electronic media reported a strong public interest in interactive participation but this has been somewhat tempered by the tensions in the state – and a degree of hostility which led AIT to suspend its phone in options for news shows (it still accepts text messages and other input).

The role of SMS and Social Media
Both sms and social media presently have a smaller role in Bayelsa than in Rivers State. This is in part due to the lag in penetration of mobile phone services which are a primary platform for both services. In the capital there is less phone reliability and internet connectivity than the major cities in Nigeria and in the rural areas phone coverage is tenuous at best or in many areas still absent.

The trend is towards improvements in both service and reach but there is also a tendency of phone companies to limit investment in rural areas – at least one major provider uses cheaper equipment in 'low traffic' areas which will restrict users to voice and text only.

Although access is more limited, the advent of Nigerian versions of mobile phone banking for low income customers may well have a significant impact on both livelihoods in rural areas and their interaction with phone and associated media. Whether the uptake amongst 'early adaptors' such as youth, students, CSOs will be as intense in Bayelsa as in Rivers remains an open question.

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1   The history of the Funiwa oil field is an unfortunate example of the extent of damage in the region.

<u>Programmes with potential roles in Peace-building/Conflict Issues</u>
With a much smaller media market than Rivers State there are obvious limitations to media opportunities. However with on-going and obvious political conflict in the state, there may also be significant goodwill across government and private media for initiatives that promote peace-building and reconciliation.

Small initiatives under other projects that are just starting – such as the Community Radio initiative in just six pilot communities (two communities each in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta) by Search for Common Ground (SfCG) and partners may set precedents that are important to the goals of NSRP. The project seeks to address the local aspiration for "voice" in determining their own future as well as activities that are a vehicle for reintegration of ex-militants. More details are included in Annex 6a and 6B.

There is goodwill towards peace-building and human interest coverage on electronic media but an assumption that sponsorship should drive such programmes.

4.4 Social Media

"*MOMAN commits to participating in the PSF [subsidy] only on the basis of total transparency and accountability*"

Fuel supply association in an advertisement in the week after the National Strike

Limitations

Work in this area was limited by the lack of access to service providers [in Lagos & Abuja] who are likely to be the best sources of 'hard data' on usage trends and associated issues. Somewhat ironically, plans to use the second week of January for interviews in Abuja were disrupted by the national fuel strike - which became a prolific topic on many social media channels.

Basic Trends

There are difficulties in measuring internet use in Nigeria (and Africa as a whole) because of the intermittent access that many have to computers and the internet. Increasingly membership of social media is being treated as a basic estimate of penetration, especially as the vast majority of users are believed to be gaining their routine access through smart phones.

As at December 2011 Nigeria has around 4.3 million Facebook users and a reported growth trend of 6% per month, and projections that it may overtake South Africa within 2012 as the largest presence in social media.

These figures – and those of Africa – need to be taken within a careful context. The 4.3 million Facebook users represent less than 1% of Nigeria's estimated adult population. This is consistent with a situation within Africa as a whole where the rate of penetration is still tiny but growing at an extraordinary rate.

Figures from Internet World Stats for Africa puts this in perspectives:

Africa Aug 2010   17.6m users
       Jun 2011   30 million users
       Dec 2011   37 million users

The penetration rate of Facebook in Africa is rated at 3.6% of the population compared to 27% in Europe and a staggering 50% in the United States.

Despite the clear evidence that 'always on' internet growth in Nigeria is still in its infancy it deserves special attention for a number of reasons:

- Social media usage amongst media, civil society, and political elites appears to be advancing much faster than the broader population

- Amongst predictable groups in Rivers State – journalists, youth corps members, students, and CSO workers, ownership of smart phones appears to have sky-rocketed over the past two years with penetration anecdotally around 90% (based on sharp reduction in handset cost)

- Broadband internet connections in Nigeria improved markedly in 2011 and are set to continue strengthening as new fibre cables consolidate gains and competition intensifies

- During the 2012 Fuel Strikes video and images for the first time became a frequent and high profile part of social media reporting and activism

- Lagos State – which has led in earlier adoption of technology trends – should be noted for likely trends in Rivers, Bayelsa and northern Nigeria. Presently it seems that growth there continues to be exponential or close to it

Social Media and Conflict

Social media has already demonstrated its influence in the first weeks of 2012 to speed communication and interaction around conflict. This has obvious potential risks and benefits that will inevitably place fresh and intense demands on conflict management.

Pace of Reporting

Incidents from the fuel strikes and from the attacks on Kano were often circulating widely within minutes of events taking place. This has obvious implications for conflict management – both in terms of risks and opportunities.

In positive terms the evolution of social media such as twitter and Facebook make it easier for authorities to see early reporting of problems and respond. Intermediate technologies such as sms can travel swiftly and widely but they are difficult to quantify and monitor without sophisticated or even invasive techniques.

It is also crucial to understand the inter-mingling of technologies - whereby a phone call can swiftly lead to tweeted updates or a social media message can swiftly morph into a sms or 'word of mouth' phenomenon while losing some of its original content and context.

Three case studies are examined briefly in Annex 5:
- Online reports that spread rapidly of Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala threatening to resign during the fuel strike during a meeting; it later transpired that she did not even attend

- Live social media reporting of protests and incidents during the national strike, both from informal sources and newswire services with twitter feeds

- Incident reporting during attacks on Kano and Bauchi in the weekend of 21-22 January

Risks and 'Fact Checking'

There are obvious concerns about the potential for social media to contribute to rumours and inaccurate or inflammatory reports that could contribute to conflict. However these concerns need to be balanced against a phenomenon where leading actors in social media communities clearly take responsibility for checking information as it begins to circulate and move vigorously to debunk false information.

Cases of both misinformation and rumour debunking were noted during the fuel strike- a significant crisis in its own right. There is insufficient data to assess how well "self-righting" mechanisms in social media are in Nigeria. Their presence at this early stage – without any external support - is noteworthy and points towards a potential positive role. While the pace of social media is nerve racking – particularly for state actors- it may provide a crucial platform in which to positively engage with the "word of mouth" and fast moving public opinion of events in Nigeria.

Social Media and Governance

There has been some excitement over both social media and the extent to which protests over the fuel strike focused attention on issues of corruption and management of government budgets. The gains are far from solely due to social media but the extent to which social media became a voice for detailed questions over governance is important [see Annex 6], as are the eventual concrete concessions that were made by government. These gains – in the space of one week- are early pledges of action but their specific nature and focus are the stuff of which any donor project would be rightly proud if it could claim any causal contribution. Included were:

- ⚔ New EFCC investigations into downstream fuel subsidy abuse
- ⚔ At least two working groups to expedite the passage of the Petroleum Industry Bill
- ⚔ A symbolic 25% cut in Federal Government political appointees salaries
- ⚔ A pledge by major fuel marketers that they will only participate in the on-going subsidy regime if it is made fully transparent
- ⚔ Renewed pledges by Minister Finance and President to reduce overall waste in government

Conclusions

Locally based electronic media in both Bayelsa and Rivers states are developing swiftly as a platform where the public can engage on issues that concern them - ranging from the social grievances that afflict the region through to sports and personal development. Growth is clearly dominated by private media with state owned media lagging significantly because of issues with their programming and their perceived reliability as a news source.

This growth in public demand for participation in news and public discourse has a number of positive implications for NSRP and other DfID programmes that seek to support greater public engagement on governance and the root causes of conflict. Existing news and current affairs programmes provide a potentially high value platform for education around conflict, governance and democratisation initiatives.

There are of course limitations which need addressing. The regulatory and political climate has produced a significant degree of "self-censorship" that could easily create a glass ceiling for growing public discourse. There is a need for government to recognise the limits and self-destructive effect of censorship and systematic bias - as so clearly demonstrated by viewer and listener choices showing that they have effectively abandoned state media.

The under reporting of news from rural areas should be of serious concern. If both government and other actors are blind to the real situation in the region they cannot be expected to respond effectively, nor will they anticipate a brewing crisis. There is an urgent need to break down barriers to reporting safely on areas that are either remote or difficult to cover. Challenges facing journalists seem to have obvious similarities with those in Northern Nigeria, with both facing significant conflict risks and resource limitations.

Social media is now officially the new kid on the block, and with growing connectivity it will almost certainly play an increasing role in urban areas within the lifetime of this project. It can be expected to continue to interact with other media-including the print media that has been somewhat neglected in this report due to their limited direct reach. It is also the social media that may play a crucial role in breaking down restrictions on both news and how the public are allowed to engage with it.

Finally, although the data in this report is only indicative it highlights the importance of understanding audience direction in a swiftly changing arena. Private media is evolving rapidly with an independent advertising base but decisions are being made with only rudimentary measures of audience trends. More detailed evaluation of both urban and rural audiences could provide information needed for both sustained business growth and developing improved platforms for public engagement.

List of Annexes

Annex 1A   List Electronic Media in Rivers and Bayelsa States

Annex 1B   List Key Print Media in Rivers and Bayelsa States

Annex 1C   Key Informants for interviews

Annex 2A   Summaries Media Usage Surveys Rivers and Bayelsa (Word Doc & Excel)

Annex 2B   Raw Data Media Usage Surveys Rivers (PDF 2 docs]

Annex 2C   Raw Data Media Usage Surveys Rivers (PDF 1 doc)

Annex 3A   Recorded News bulletins Rivers State (MP3 files)

Annex 3B   Recorded news bulletins Bayelsa Statements (MP3 files)

Annex 3C   Recorded News Magazine and discussion shows (MP3 files)

Annex 4A   Newspaper front Pages Rivers and Bayelsa States (Photos-view as slideshow)

Annex 4B   Newspaper Front Pages Fuel Strike (Photos – sample of coverage)

Annex 5A   Social Media – newspaper and website headlines (screenshots)

Annex 5B   Social Media – Twitter and fast-breaking news sources (screenshots)

Annex 6A   Selected discussion/Interactive programmes with short description – *Rivers*

Annex 6B   Selected discussion/Interactive programmes with short description - *Bayelsa*