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ZIMBABWE BOTTOM-UP PLATFORM

The Role of Media in Supporting and Amplifying Community Dialogue in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Media plays an important role in community dialogue processes in Zimbabwe. Civil society and community-based organisations use radio, social media, messaging platforms, community theatre, and other forms of media to communicate dialogue outcomes, share information, and connect communities with one another and with decision-makers.

Yet media's contribution to dialogue is often understood primarily as communication. This perspective risks underestimating the broader range of functions that media can perform to support participation, widen inclusion, strengthen accountability, and extend the impact of dialogue.

The framework presented in this paper emerged through IFIT's ongoing engagement with civil society and community-based organisations belonging to the **Zimbabwe Bottom-Up Platform** (Z-BUP), as well as through the research undertaken for IFIT's **Promoting Bottom-Up Dialogue: A Study of Community-Level Dialogue Experiences in Zimbabwe**, which examined thirteen community dialogue initiatives across Zimbabwe. Together, these engagements and case studies revealed recurring ways in which media was used to support and amplify dialogue. This paper synthesises those practices into a practical framework that identifies seven distinct media functions in relation to local dialogue processes.

The seven functions presented are not intended to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Instead, they represent the principal ways in which media has demonstrably contributed in Zimbabwe to 1) supporting the design and implementation of dialogue (by creating the conditions for meaningful participation) and 2) amplifying the effects of dialogue (by extending its influence, strengthening relationships and accountability, and preserving learning beyond the dialogue event).

For the purposes of this paper, media is understood broadly as the channels, platforms, and creative forms through which information, ideas, narratives, and dialogue are shared. This includes traditional media such as radio, print, and television; digital and social media platforms; messaging applications such as WhatsApp and SMS; and creative forms such as theatre, storytelling, music, and visual arts.

The paper has three main sections. The first examines media functions that support the design and implementation of dialogue, the second focuses on media functions that amplify the effects of dialogue, and the third analyses the limits of media.

Dialogue-Supporting Functions

Since 2023, the first three functions of media focus on making dialogue possible. They create the conditions that enable meaningful dialogue by helping practitioners understand community priorities, identify and engage the right stakeholders, and create opportunities for participation. Together, they shape the quality, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of the dialogue process from the outset.

1. Listening Tool

Effective community dialogue begins with understanding the priorities, concerns, aspirations, and emerging issues of the communities it seeks to engage. Too often, dialogue agendas are shaped by external influences rather than by what communities themselves identify as important. Media can help address this challenge by providing practitioners with opportunities to listen before, during, and after dialogue processes.

While media is often viewed as a channel for communicating information, it can also provide valuable insights into community priorities, concerns, aspirations, and emerging tensions. By revealing what communities are already discussing and how issues are evolving, media can help practitioners identify dialogue priorities, adapt dialogue processes, and respond to emerging challenges. Media is therefore not only a way to communicate with communities, but also a way to listen to them.

Examples of how media can be used as a listening tool include:

- radio call-in programmes that surface community concerns and priorities;
- community WhatsApp groups that help identify emerging issues and local grievances;
- SMS or mobile phone surveys that gather community perspectives before dialogue begins;
- social media monitoring to understand public sentiment and identify emerging debates; and
- community journalism and citizen reporting that capture local experiences and concerns.

Of course, different media platforms amplify different voices, and not all members of a community have equal access to, or confidence in, using them. For example, online discussions may overrepresent younger, urban, or more digitally connected populations, while marginalised groups may remain underrepresented. As such, practitioners should use media as one source of community insight alongside face-to-face engagement.

Case Study 1: Radio as a Listening Tool on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Women's Prosperity Group (WPG) has used radio as part of its work to advance women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Through engagements with radio platforms including 98.4FM Midlands, WPG sought to raise awareness, provide information, and bring women's experiences and concerns into wider public discussion.

The radio engagements created opportunities for WPG to listen directly to community perspectives. Listeners were invited to call into programmes and share their experiences of accessing sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal care. In this way, radio enabled women and girls to raise concerns about barriers to services and contribute their lived experiences to conversations that might otherwise have remained largely focused on disseminating information.

The approach was particularly valuable because radio could reach women who might face difficulties participating in conventional workshops or community meetings due to unpaid care responsibilities, distance, disability or financial constraints. It therefore expanded the range of community perspectives that could potentially be heard within WPG's engagement on SRHR.

2. Convening and Coordination Tool

Even well-designed dialogue processes can fail if stakeholders are unaware of them, receive incomplete information, or face practical barriers to taking part. Convening a dialogue involves more than simply announcing meetings; it requires identifying and reaching the right people, coordinating participation, and maintaining communication throughout the dialogue process.

Media can play an important role in addressing these challenges. By extending the reach of dialogue invitations, sharing logistical information, and facilitating ongoing communication before, during, and after dialogue activities, media can reduce practical barriers to participation and strengthen coordination. Used effectively, media helps ensure that participants have the information they need to engage meaningfully.

While media can significantly expand the reach of dialogue invitations and improve coordination, wider reach does not automatically translate into more inclusive participation. Access to media platforms is often uneven, shaped by factors such as geography, income, age, gender, literacy, and digital access. Media-enabled mobilisation may therefore broaden participation for some groups while unintentionally reinforcing the exclusion of others. Practitioners should thus consider not only how many people media can reach, but also who may still be left out

and whether different communication channels are needed to ensure broad and equitable participation.

Examples of how media can be used as a convening and coordination tool include:

- community radio announcements in local languages that raise awareness of upcoming dialogue events, particularly in rural or geographically dispersed communities;
- messaging platforms such as WhatsApp that share invitations, coordinate participation, circulate logistical information, and communicate updates before and during dialogue processes;
- community communication networks, working through institutions such as churches, schools, traditional authorities, local associations, and community-based organisations, to disseminate information and encourage participation; and
- traditional communication methods such as posters, flyers, community noticeboards, and word-of-mouth mobilisation, particularly where digital access is limited.

Case Study 2: Strengthening Participation in Zimbabwe Mining Cadastre Reform (2025)

In 2025, Green Governance Zimbabwe (GGZ), in partnership with ZELO and with support from UK Aid, implemented the ZIMACE project, *Strengthening the Computerised Mining Cadastre System*, in response to challenges surrounding the introduction of Zimbabwe's computerised mining cadastre system in Manicaland. Disputes over mining titles had increased, while artisanal and small-scale miners and rural communities faced barriers to understanding and engaging with the reforms, including digital literacy gaps, unresolved disputes, and limited access to information.

GGZ used radio and WhatsApp as complementary tools for mobilising and coordinating participation. Diamond FM broadcasts reached more than 250,000 listeners across Manicaland, raising awareness of the cadastre reforms and prompting follow-up calls from miners, community leaders, and a village headman in Odzi. Radio was particularly important for reaching geographically dispersed communities and providing information that enabled miners and communities in Penhalonga and Odzi to engage more meaningfully in discussions about mining governance.

While radio provided broad outreach, WhatsApp enabled more targeted coordination and continued engagement. A dedicated group of 250 participants was used to circulate invitations to webinars, facilitate pre-dialogue discussions, share logistical information and real-time updates, confirm

participation, and maintain communication before and after dialogue activities. In this way, participants reached through wider radio outreach could remain connected and informed throughout the dialogue process.

The combined approach also helped communities in Penhalonga and Odzi follow cadastre issues more closely and participate as more informed stakeholders in mining governance. GGZ reported active participation by women in Mutasa and Mutare Rural Districts, which was particularly significant within a traditionally male-dominated sector and demonstrated the importance of inclusive facilitation alongside media-based mobilisation.

3. Dialogue Space

Dialogue increasingly takes place beyond the meeting room or village square. Radio programmes, WhatsApp groups, online forums, and creative media all provide opportunities for people to exchange ideas, deliberate on shared concerns, and continue conversations over time. In many contexts, these spaces complement face-to-face dialogue; in others, they may provide the primary venue for dialogue.

The medium through which dialogue takes place also shapes the dialogue itself. Different forms of media influence who participates, how people interact, how trust is built, and how disagreement is expressed and managed. Dialogue conducted through community radio, messaging platforms, social media, or creative arts may therefore produce different forms of participation, listening, and deliberation. Media is not simply a channel through which dialogue is communicated, it can become the space in which dialogue unfolds.

Creating dialogue through media also presents distinct challenges. Virtual and broadcast spaces often require active moderation to encourage respectful participation, manage disagreement, and reduce the risks of misinformation or harmful behaviour. At the same time, mediated dialogue may enable participation by individuals who feel excluded from, or uncomfortable speaking in, public meetings. Practitioners should therefore consider not only whether media creates opportunities for dialogue, but also how different forms of media influence the quality, inclusiveness, safety, and depth of participation.

Examples of how media can be used as a dialogue space include:

- radio call-in programmes that enable community members to discuss issues in real time;
- moderated WhatsApp groups that create ongoing spaces for discussion, reflection, and information exchange;

- community theatre, music, and storytelling that create spaces for dialogue, particularly around sensitive or socially embedded issues; and
- online forums or live social media discussions that enable broader public participation, particularly among younger or digitally connected audiences.

Case Study 3: The IFIT–ZACRAS Community Radio Dialogue Initiative (2026)

Between March and May 2026, the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT), in partnership with the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS), implemented the Community Radio Dialogue Initiative to explore how community radio could function not simply as a channel for communicating dialogue outcomes, but as a space in which dialogue itself could take place. Building on an earlier pilot at Nhimbe FM in Rusape, the initiative was expanded to three community radio stations serving geographically and linguistically distinct communities: Nhimbe FM in Rusape (Shona), Twasumpuka FM in Binga (Tonga), and Avuxeni FM in Chiredzi (Xitsonga). Together, the stations combined live broadcast audiences of more than 400,000 people, with additional social media audiences exceeding 430,000 followers, enabling dialogue to reach communities well beyond those able to participate in face-to-face meetings.

Rather than using radio to broadcast information about dialogue, each station used live radio programmes to create a public space for dialogue. Community representatives, local government officials, education authorities, civil society organisations, and residents participated in structured discussions on issues identified by the communities themselves. Listeners were able to join the conversation through live telephone calls, SMS messages, and WhatsApp, allowing them to question public officials directly, share local experiences, and propose practical solutions. Across the initiative, programmes focused particularly on local government accountability and education governance, including council transparency, service delivery, school fees, School Development Committees, and implementation of the national “no-exclusion” policy for learners. Accountability programmes generated especially high levels of participation, with callers raising specific ward-level concerns about stalled council projects, budget transparency, and access to local decision-making, prompting real-time responses from officials on air.

During the implementation period, the initiative produced 18 dialogue programmes, generated 57 live audience engagements, including 27 women, 15 young people, and 7 persons with disabilities, and recorded 173 social media interactions. Project monitoring found that community radio created an accessible and inclusive dialogue space where community members were not passive listeners but active participants in public deliberation. By combining live discussion with opportunities for real-time audience participation, the broadcasts extended dialogue beyond the meeting room and enabled ongoing interaction between citizens and decision-makers in ways that traditional community meetings often cannot.

Dialogue-Amplifying Functions

4. Tool for Building Understanding and Empathy

Many community challenges cannot be addressed by exchanging information or reaching agreement alone. Where dialogue focuses on sensitive, contested, or deeply rooted issues, participants also need opportunities to understand one another's experiences, perspectives, and motivations. Creative and cultural media can create these opportunities by engaging people emotionally as well as intellectually.

Theatre, storytelling, music, visual arts, photography, and film can encourage participants and wider audiences to see issues from different perspectives, recognise themselves in others' experiences, and reflect on assumptions that might otherwise remain unchallenged. Rather than simply communicating dialogue messages, these forms of media invite reflection, stimulate conversation, and foster empathy in ways that more conventional communication approaches often cannot. Used effectively, creative media helps deepen dialogue by creating shared experiences that strengthen mutual understanding.

Creative media should not be viewed simply as an alternative way of communicating dialogue messages. Its value lies in creating spaces where participants can reflect, take others' perspectives, and engage with difficult issues in ways that feel accessible and culturally meaningful. Practitioners should therefore consider how creative and cultural forms of media can be integrated into dialogue processes not only to communicate ideas, but also to deepen engagement, strengthen relationships, and encourage more meaningful dialogue.

Examples of how media can be used as a tool for building understanding and empathy include:

- community theatre that explores sensitive issues such as disability, gender-based violence, child marriage, or social cohesion through participatory performances;
- storytelling initiatives that share lived experiences and encourage dialogue across different groups and generations;
- music and spoken word that communicate dialogue themes in culturally resonant and accessible ways;
- photography, exhibitions, and visual arts that encourage communities to reflect on shared challenges and aspirations; and
- short films or documentaries that capture community experiences and stimulate discussion among local audiences or decision-makers.

Case Study 4: Berina Community Arts' *Fix This Please* Initiative

Berina Community Arts developed the Fix This Please initiative to strengthen dialogue between residents and local authorities around persistent service delivery challenges in Kadoma, Mhondoro, and Sanyati. In communities where residents had limited opportunities to raise concerns with authorities, the initiative used interactive theatre and other creative approaches to make governance and service delivery issues more accessible and create opportunities for constructive engagement.

Interactive theatre formed a central part of community *indabas*[1] that brought residents together with local authorities and civil society organisations. Performances dramatised everyday experiences of service delivery failures and governance challenges, allowing residents to recognise their own experiences in the situations portrayed and reflect collectively on their causes and consequences. Rather than presenting these issues through formal or technical language, theatre provided a shared and accessible way of exploring problems that directly affected community members.

The performances were designed to lead directly into dialogue. Following each performance, residents reflected on what they had seen, related it to experiences in their own communities, and questioned authorities and other participants about the issues raised. Recommendations emerging from these discussions were then documented and shared with the relevant authorities. Berina found that this approach helped reduce the intimidation associated with engaging public officials and gave residents, particularly those less comfortable speaking in formal governance settings, greater confidence to articulate their experiences and participate in discussion.

Creative approaches were also used beyond the *indabas*. Through street festivals, community members used theatre, music, dance, poetry, painting, and other forms of art to express their experiences of public services and their aspirations for improvement. Community-generated artwork was subsequently presented through a public exhibition attended by local authorities, councillors, and community representatives, providing another way for residents' experiences and perspectives to be seen and discussed.

1. An *indaba* is a term commonly used in Zimbabwe for a community meeting or gathering for discussion, consultation, and collective decision-making.

5. Scaling Tool

Community dialogue often generates valuable knowledge, locally owned solutions, and practical approaches to addressing shared challenges. Too often, however, these insights remain confined to the communities in which they emerge, limiting their potential to inform wider learning, inspire action elsewhere, or influence policy and institutional change. Scaling seeks to ensure that the value created through local dialogue extends beyond its immediate context.

Media can play an important role in enabling this process. By connecting communities facing similar challenges, facilitating the exchange of experiences, and carrying locally generated ideas into wider civic, institutional, and policy spaces, media can support both the horizontal scaling of dialogue across communities and the vertical scaling of dialogue into broader systems of influence (for further discussion of approaches to scaling community dialogue, see *Scaling Community Dialogue in Zimbabwe: Pathways to National Influence*). Used strategically, media helps extend the reach and influence of dialogue while ensuring that local knowledge contributes to wider change.

Scaling, however, is not simply about increasing visibility. As dialogue moves beyond its original context, complex local realities may be simplified, selectively represented, or reframed to fit media narratives, political interests, or public attention cycles. Dialogue outcomes may gain national attention without broadening meaningful participation, creating risks of tokenism, elite capture, or misrepresentation. Practitioners should therefore consider not only how media can help scale dialogue, but also whether increased reach translates into meaningful participation, how community voices are represented, whose perspectives are amplified, and whether dialogue retains its legitimacy and authenticity as it moves across different levels.

Examples of how media can be used as a scaling tool include:

- media platforms that connect communities facing similar challenges and enable the exchange of experiences and lessons across locations;
- press coverage, podcasts, and strategic storytelling that bring local dialogue outcomes into wider public discourse and policy conversations;
- social media campaigns that amplify community concerns and build broader awareness around shared issues;
- digital platforms and online networks that facilitate collaboration between dialogue practitioners, civil society, community-based organisations, community leaders, and other stakeholders; and
- video testimonies, documentaries, and other storytelling platforms that carry community voices and lived experiences into broader civic, institutional, and policy spaces.

Case Study 5: Scaling Community Perspectives on Constitutional Amendment Bill No. 3 (2026)

Following the gazetting of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 3) Bill, 2026 (CAB3), the Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD) and the Alliance of Community-Based Organisations (ACBOs) used community radio, WhatsApp, and community networks to connect locally grounded dialogue on the Bill with wider public debate and national-level advocacy.

IYWD and ACBOs developed a simplified community analysis translating the Bill's complex constitutional provisions into accessible information. The analysis was circulated among 43 ACBO members, who used it to support community awareness and engagement across rural, farming, mining, and peri-urban areas. Community radio further extended this reach. A live programme on Vemuganga FM in Chipinge reached an estimated 45,200 people, while additional programmes delivered in collaboration with Patsaka Trust through Kasambabezi FM reached an estimated 800,000 people. Radio-generated content was also repurposed through *PaChitubu CheVasikana*, a young women-led WhatsApp platform, extending discussion to more than 200 women and young women.

Importantly, these media activities did more than expand the audience for information about the Bill. Community dialogues and radio programmes provided opportunities to gather citizens' concerns and recommendations, which were compiled into a compendium used to engage Parliament. Media-based civic education was also linked to participation in and monitoring of national public consultation hearings, enabling young women and communities to bring locally grounded concerns and experiences into the national legislative process and engage directly with lawmakers.

6. Feedback and Accountability Mechanism

Dialogue does not end when participants leave the room. For dialogue to produce meaningful, lasting change, communities need opportunities to monitor progress, provide feedback, and hold both dialogue participants and decision-makers accountable for the commitments made. Without mechanisms for ongoing communication and follow-up, trust can erode and dialogue outcomes may fail to translate into action.

Media can help sustain dialogue beyond formal engagement by creating ongoing channels through which communities can share feedback, report on progress, raise concerns, and engage with leaders. These channels keep dialogue active after meetings conclude, helping strengthen relationships among communities, dialogue participants, and decision-makers. Used effectively, media supports

continued engagement and reinforces accountability throughout the implementation of dialogue outcomes.

Media alone, however, cannot guarantee accountability. Feedback mechanisms are only effective when institutions, leaders, and dialogue participants are willing and able to respond. In some contexts, unequal access to media, political sensitivities, or limited institutional capacity may constrain meaningful follow-up. Practitioners should therefore view media as one component of broader accountability processes, ensuring that feedback is acknowledged, responses are communicated, and communities can see how their contributions have influenced decisions or actions.

Examples of how media can be used as a feedback and accountability mechanism include:

- WhatsApp groups and SMS platforms that provide participants with updates on dialogue outcomes and implementation progress;
- community radio programmes that report back on commitments made by local leaders and institutions;
- media and communication channels used alongside community scorecards to share findings, gather feedback, and communicate progress; and
- newsletters, podcasts, and social media updates that communicate achievements, challenges, and next steps while inviting continued community engagement.

Case Study 6: Community Scorecards for Accountability on City of Harare Bylaws

Under the Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC) Project, supported by Plan International Zimbabwe, the Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) used community scorecards to strengthen dialogue and accountability between residents and duty bearers around the implementation of City of Harare bylaws. In Epworth, Hatcliffe, and Mbare, where residents were directly affected by bylaw enforcement but had limited structured opportunities to engage local authorities, the scorecard process provided a participatory mechanism for assessing service delivery, raising concerns, and pursuing joint solutions.

Community members identified and scored priority issues related to bylaw implementation and service delivery, documenting gaps between what was expected of residents and what they were experiencing in practice. These findings were then carried into dialogue sessions with relevant duty bearers through a cycle of issue identification, scoring and prioritisation,

engagement, joint problem-solving, commitments, and follow-up. Rather than treating accountability as a one-way process of complaint or information-sharing, the scorecards enabled residents and authorities to examine challenges together and identify possible solutions.

The process also created opportunities for communities to question duty bearers directly about whether bylaws were being applied consistently, whether residents understood what was required of them, and whether adequate services and infrastructure existed to enable compliance. This was particularly important where challenges such as inadequate waste management or limited infrastructure meant that compliance could not be addressed through enforcement alone. By bringing these underlying issues into dialogue with authorities, the scorecard process helped shift the discussion from enforcing bylaws against communities towards jointly considering how compliance and urban governance could be improved.

Importantly, engagement continued beyond the dialogue sessions themselves. Updates on commitments made, actions taken, and progress achieved were shared back with communities, enabling residents to monitor whether agreements were being honoured and to continue providing feedback as implementation progressed. In this way, communication around the scorecard process created an ongoing connection between dialogue, follow-up, and accountability.

7. Documentation and Learning Tool

Every community dialogue process generates valuable knowledge, experiences, and relationships. Unless these are deliberately captured, much of this learning is lost once a dialogue process concludes. Documenting what communities have discussed, agreed, and learned helps preserve institutional memory, inform future dialogue initiatives, and enable practitioners and communities to build on previous experience rather than starting from scratch.

Media plays an important role in preserving dialogue processes and outcomes. Through written reports, photography, audio recordings, video, podcasts, digital storytelling, and other forms of documentation, media can capture community voices, record dialogue outcomes, and make lessons accessible to wider audiences. Used thoughtfully, documentation enables dialogue to continue informing learning, adaptation, and future practice long after formal dialogue activities have ended.

Documenting dialogue, however, requires careful consideration of ethics, ownership, and security. Recording discussions or sharing participants' stories may expose individuals or communities to unintended risks, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. Practitioners should therefore obtain informed consent,

respect confidentiality where appropriate, and ensure that documentation accurately represents participants' perspectives without placing them at risk. Documentation should preserve community voices in ways that respect participants' agency, dignity, and ownership while supporting reflection, learning, and future action.

Examples of how media can be used as a documentation and learning tool include:

- photography and video to document dialogue processes, community initiatives, and participant experiences;
- audio recordings, podcasts, or oral histories that preserve community testimonies and lived experiences;
- written dialogue reports, case studies, and policy briefs that capture key findings, recommendations, and lessons learned;
- digital storytelling initiatives that document personal and community experiences while preserving local narratives; and
- community archives, online repositories, or multimedia platforms that preserve dialogue outcomes, commitments, and good practices for future learning and replication.

Case Study 7: Preserving Youth Voices for Parliamentary Action

Between 2017 and 2023, Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT) systematically documented the experiences and priorities of young people participating in dialogues, civic-education sessions, leadership trainings, and social-accountability forums across Matabeleland South. Through written testimonies, consultation records, video testimonies, reports, and other advocacy materials, CYDT preserved young people's experiences of exclusion from local governance and decision-making processes and their aspirations for greater participation.

Over time, this documentation became more than a record of individual dialogue activities. By revisiting testimonies and dialogue outcomes accumulated across several years, CYDT and participating young people identified a recurring pattern: young people were being given opportunities to participate and express their views, but remained largely excluded from institutions where binding decisions were made. This learning helped sharpen the distinction between participation and representation and informed a shift towards advocating for young people to have a meaningful presence within decision-making institutions.

The accumulated evidence subsequently provided a basis for advocacy at the national level. In August 2020, young people from Gwanda, with technical support from CYDT, petitioned the Parliament of Zimbabwe for

a constitutionally supported youth quota of at least 30 per cent. The petition was subsequently considered through the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation. In 2021, a constitutional amendment introduced ten reserved youth seats in the National Assembly, which were first filled during the 2023 elections. While this outcome cannot be attributed to CYDT alone, the organisation's documentation helped connect locally expressed concerns about youth exclusion with a wider national debate about youth representation.

CYDT continued documenting developments after the constitutional amendment, including through its Mat-South Bulletin, which captured young people's perspectives on the parliamentary recommendations and subsequent reform. This allowed CYDT to compare developments with the priorities expressed by young people, reflect on progress, and adapt its advocacy accordingly. More broadly, years of preserved testimonies, videos, reports, and bulletins provided an institutional memory that could support subsequent campaigns and future youth leadership.

Function	Primary Contribution	Illustrative Media and Approaches
1. Listening Tool	Enable broad, informed, and well-coordinated participation.	WhatsApp, SMS, community radio, posters and flyers, community communication networks.
2. Convening and Coordination Tool	Provide opportunities for sustained dialogue and deliberation.	Community radio, moderated WhatsApp groups, online forums, community theatre, storytelling, live social media discussions.
3. Dialogue Space	Provide opportunities for sustained dialogue and deliberation.	Community radio, moderated WhatsApp groups, online forums, community theatre, storytelling, live social media discussions.
4. Tool for Building Understanding and Empathy	Deepen relationships by encouraging engagement with different perspectives.	Community theatre, storytelling, music, photography, visual arts, film, spoken word.
5. Scaling Tool	Extend the reach and influence of dialogue beyond the local level.	Press coverage, podcasts, social media campaigns, documentaries, online networks, video testimonies.
6. Feedback and Accountability Mechanism	Sustain engagement and strengthen accountability after dialogue concludes.	WhatsApp groups, SMS updates, community radio, community scorecards, hotlines, newsletters.
7. Documentation and Learning Tool	Preserve knowledge and support reflection, learning, and future action.	Photography, video, podcasts, oral histories, written reports, digital storytelling, community archives.

The Limits of Media

As noted in the prior sections, while media can strengthen community dialogue in many ways, it is not inherently inclusive, constructive, or supportive. The same platforms that enable participation, connect communities, and amplify local voices can also reinforce existing inequalities, spread harmful or misleading information, deepen divisions, and privilege some voices and narratives over others. Media can therefore strengthen or undermine the conditions needed for meaningful dialogue, depending on how it is designed, governed, moderated, and used. As such, practitioners should consider several limitations and risks when integrating media into community dialogue:

- **Unequal access and exclusion:** Differences in connectivity, digital access, literacy, language, geography, gender, age, disability, and income can shape who can participate and whose voices remain unheard.
- **Misinformation and disinformation:** Media can rapidly circulate inaccurate or deliberately misleading information, creating confusion about what is credible and undermining the shared factual basis and trust needed for constructive dialogue.
- **Polarisation and simplified narratives:** Media can reduce complex experiences and grievances to simplified and opposing narratives that reinforce divisions, marginalise alternative perspectives, and make constructive engagement across groups more difficult.
- **Unequal representation and amplification:** Decisions about which issues, people, and perspectives receive attention can privilege already powerful or highly visible voices. Both deliberate and unconscious bias can influence how communities, events, and competing perspectives are represented. Political and commercial pressure can also compromise editorial independence.
- **Commercial and algorithmic incentives:** Media environments may reward sensational, emotionally provocative, or divisive content because it attracts attention and engagement. Digital algorithms can further reinforce these dynamics by exposing users to content aligned with their existing views and narrowing the range of perspectives they encounter.
- **Privacy, safety, and consent:** Recording, sharing, or publicising participants' experiences can expose individuals and communities to harassment, surveillance, or other unintended risks, particularly where dialogue concerns sensitive or politically contested issues. The wider media environment can also facilitate targeted intimidation and bullying.

- **Simplification and misrepresentation when scaling:** As community perspectives move from local dialogue into wider media and policy spaces, complex experiences can be selectively represented, simplified, or reframed. This can weaken community ownership and obscure the diversity of perspectives that exists within communities.

These limitations do not diminish the potential value of media in community dialogue. Rather, they underline the importance of using media intentionally and critically. Practitioners should consider not only what function a particular medium can perform, but also who it includes and excludes, which voices and narratives it amplifies, what risks its use may create, and what safeguards are needed. In this way, media can be used to strengthen rather than undermine the trust, inclusion, understanding, and constructive engagement on which meaningful dialogue depends.

Conclusion

Media can play many different roles in community dialogue. As the seven functions explored in this paper demonstrate, media can help practitioners listen to communities, convene participants, create spaces for dialogue, build understanding and empathy, scale locally generated perspectives, strengthen feedback and accountability, and preserve knowledge for future learning and action.

The central implication for practitioners is straightforward: ends over means. Rather than beginning with a particular technology or medium, practitioners should first consider what they need media to achieve within the dialogue process and then select the form (or combination of forms) best suited to that purpose, adjusting iteratively at the different stages of a dialogue process.

Understood in this way, media can become more than a means of communicating information about dialogue. It can be an integral part of how dialogue is designed, conducted, sustained, and amplified—helping community dialogue not only take place, but ultimately impact more.

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