

## **Effect of Media and Communication on Willingness to participate or help**

Media and communication interventions show a moderate effect on willingness to participate or help, influencing reconciliation, tolerance, and intergroup cooperation.

**Geographical Region:** Sub - Saharan Africa

**Effect:** Moderate effect ( $g=0.108$ )

**Confidence in study findings:** Low (4 study with 19 effect sizes)

### **Short Summary**

Media and communication interventions, including radio soap operas, talk shows, and government-led broadcasts, had moderate effects on reconciliation and prosocial behavior. Programs like *Musekeweya* encouraged dialogue and perspective-taking, while other interventions showed inconsistent results on cooperation and donations. The overall impact on willingness to participate or help was moderate, with variability across contexts. Confidence in this cell is low due to inconsistent findings across studies.

### **Long summary**

#### *The intervention*

Interventions in this cell used radio programs (*Musekeweya* radio soap opera, radio talk shows), storytelling, discussions, and strategic messaging to foster empathy, bridge ethnic divides, and promote national unity. These programs aimed to reshape attitudes, encourage cooperation, and strengthen social cohesion in post-conflict settings.

#### *How the intervention is expected to work*

Media interventions operate on social learning principles, where exposure to modeled behaviors can influence beliefs, attitudes, and norms. By presenting relatable characters and emotionally engaging narratives, programs seek to reduce prejudice, foster empathy, and encourage prosocial behaviors. The intervention is expected to enhance willingness to participate or help by shaping social norms around reconciliation and cooperation.

#### *The Evidence base*

The cell contains six studies: two systematic reviews and four impact evaluations. Among four IEs three are from Rwanda, and one is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The reviews are mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and East Asia.

#### *Evidence findings*

Media and communication interventions produced a moderate effect on willingness to participate or help. While some programs increased support for dialogue, inter-ethnic cooperation, and prosocial actions, others had limited or inconsistent behavioral impacts, such as donations. Overall, the interventions influenced attitudes more consistently than behaviors..

#### *The review evidence*

Systematic reviews indicate that media interventions in fragile contexts show variable success. While contact-based programs had small positive effects on participation, media programs produced mixed or negative behavioral outcomes. Self-reported willingness often exceeded observed behavior, highlighting challenges in translating attitudinal changes into action.

*Included studies:* The cell includes four IEs. the detailed summary thus provided as below;

**Paluck (2009)** evaluated *Musekeweya* ("New Dawn"), a radio soap opera designed to promote reconciliation, trust, and empathy while discouraging prejudice and violence in post-genocide Rwanda. Through fictional narratives about two Rwandan communities, it conveyed educational messages on intergroup cooperation, trauma healing, and rejecting violent norms. The study hypothesized that exposure to the program would shift personal beliefs, alter perceptions of social norms, and encourage behaviors like dissent, cooperation, and reconciliation, with emotional engagement and group discussion amplifying its impact. Participants were drawn from general population, genocide survivor, and Twa communities across four regions. From each community, 40 adults were randomly selected, ensuring gender, age, and family balance.

Study findings documented significant effects of the reconciliation program. Participants exposed to the program were 0.26 to 0.29 probits more likely to support open dissent and 0.22 probits more likely to agree that discussing personal trauma is important. The program also increased empathy, with reconciliation listeners scoring significantly higher on an empathy index. In contrast, the health program showed a 0.56 probit effect on agreement that all pregnant women should be tested for AIDS, with a 1% higher likelihood compared to the reconciliation group. Overall, the study presents Low confidence.

**Paluck (2009)** assessed the impact of a radio soap opera, *Musekeweya* ("New Dawn"), on post-genocide Rwandan communities, aiming to challenge harmful political and social norms, particularly those of blind obedience, while promoting reconciliation and intergroup cooperation. The program encouraged behaviors such as dissent, collective problem-solving, and trauma healing, with a focus on fostering mutual trust. In contrast, the control group listened to a separate health-focused soap opera. Grounded in social learning theory, the intervention utilized relatable characters to model desirable behaviors and aimed to shift perceptions of trust, dissent, and community engagement. The study employed a cluster-randomized experimental design involving 14 Rwandan communities, stratified based on demographic factors such as general population, genocide survivors, and prisoners, with a total sample size of 556 participants.

The study documented that the reconciliation program significantly increased participants' support for open dissent, with reconciliation listeners showing a greater likelihood of expressing disagreement ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, there was no significant difference in social distance measures, such as willingness to greet, work with, or marry individuals from other groups, between the reconciliation and control groups. Overall, the study is low confidence.

**Paluck (2010)** examined the impact of a weekly radio talk show in eastern DRC designed to promote tolerance, outgroup engagement, and perspective-taking. The study had three key objectives: assessing mass media's ability to spark interpersonal discussion about community conflict, testing its effects on intergroup contact and perspective-taking in unsupervised conflict settings, and presenting an experimental approach to studying discussion-based interventions. The underlying mechanism of the intervention was that media-driven discussions, through fostering social norms and shared cognition, could shape behaviors by encouraging listeners to engage with various perspectives and understand outgroup members.

Data from 842 participants representing diverse ethnic and linguistic groups revealed that 63% of participants donated salt, but talk show listeners were less likely to donate than baseline listeners (59% vs. 80%). The amount of salt donated was similar between the groups, but talk show listeners were likelier to view their donation as strategic or motivated by negative grievances. Those who believed they were donating to a disliked military group were significantly less likely to donate. Overall, while talk show exposure led to less giving, it influenced participants' motivations, with more negative and strategic reasons cited by talk show listeners. Overall, the study demonstrated high-medium confidence.

**Blouin (2019)** explored the impact of propaganda from Radio Rwanda on inter-ethnic attitudes in post-genocide Rwanda. The intervention leveraged government messaging through radio broadcasts, designed to reduce the salience of ethnic identity and promote reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi groups. Conducted in rural Rwandan villages, the study involved 438 participants who were randomly selected from village lists provided by local representatives. Data collection took place in town halls, where participants engaged in experiments and surveys. The study hypothesized that consistent messaging emphasizing a unified national identity over ethnic differences would foster improved inter-ethnic trust and cooperation, aligning with theories on reconciliation in post-conflict settings. One key outcome was a partner selection task, where participants in villages exposed to Radio Rwanda were 15.6 percentage points (or 0.54 standard deviations) more likely to choose individuals from the other ethnic group for a cooperative interaction. Overall study presented low confidence.

*Confidence assessment*

Overall, the cell is rated low confidence due to inconsistencies in individual effect sizes.

*Link to review summaries*

Sonnenfeld (2021) and Ditzmann Ruth K 2017.

The studies may be accessed via EGM.

**Other outcomes in this studies:**

Social Cohesion/Feelings of trust/acceptance of diversity

Social Cohesion/Willingness to participate or help

Violence or atrocity prevention/Social norms regarding violence or atrocity