Mobile Community Reporting

A Grassroots Perspective on Journalism

Olivier Nyirubugara

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Contents

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Introduction

Mainstream media are still dominant in Africa and elsewhere, but their position has yielded considerable room for emerging alternative media. New information and communication technologies, particularly mobile technologies and the World Wide Web, have made alternative ways of producing media contents more readily available, thereby pushing to reflect upon conventional methods and approaches as opposed to, or rather complemented by, their unconventional counterparts. Within this book, I place the concept of 'community' at the centre of any discussion. I use that concept not in the broader and sometimes vaguer sense, but in a narrower sense that refers to people living in the same geographic space and who share a number of values and worldviews. I further narrow down my use of the notion of 'community' to rural and marginalised urban areas [e.g., slums] in Africa in order to discuss ways in which people at the grassroots level perceive events around them, and how they turn them into news. As it already appears here, the community serves as the cornerstone of the journalistic process and of other communication processes that I briefly discuss at the end of the book. These other communication processes include activism, advocacy and development-project-related communications, which all [should] involve the community, at least to some extent. Community, however, is not easy to define especially in the digital era as 'virtual communities' or 'online communities' have emerged in addition to communities in the physical world.

Within this book I contend that current practices of conventional or mainstream journalism and communication in Africa are mostly top-down and dominated by the elites. My contention stems from the fact that those practices exclude communities in marginalised areas whose members, in many cases, are the object of the communication process. This is of course not a discovery I am making, since others have repeatedly and more powerfully pointed out this issue in the last few decades. What is new here is that besides criticism, I use real-life experiences [which are also experiments] to suggest a new way in which communities in marginalised areas can be associated with the journalistic and other communication processes, to have authentic views and opinions from the almost-always-excluded bottom.

One way to open this discussion, is to begin with a comparison between the conventional, mainstream way of covering community issues on one hand, and the alternative, community-centred approach, on the other. Both approaches place the community at the centre, but the role that the community is invited to play differs drastically: in one case the community appears as the décor of the story, while in the other, it emerges as the story itself.

The Conventional Way vs. the Alternative Way

I start this comparison with a caveat to avoid misunderstanding. When I refer to 'conventional journalism' I do not mean the ideal textbook journalism as taught in schools and colleges, but rather journalism that is practised in real life. Of course

this raises the question of knowing what ideal journalism looks like, which has given rise to heated discussions amongst practitioners, scholars, and experts in the field. Is there anything like perfect, ideal journalism? The short answer is that there is not, simply because there are so many ways of practising journalism that depends on societies, their history, values, beliefs and traditions, amongst other factors.

However, a few common features emerge especially when it comes to the ways in which journalists in Africa, my focus, report the news. The first feature is that the political, economic, and intellectual elites are the main target audience. The second is that most, if not all, sources are so-called authoritative sources, which is another way of referring to the political, economic, and intellectual elites. The third is that the lowest layers in society, those to which I refer as the community or the bottom, serve either as décor, or as objects of journalistic work, but seldom receive a chance to speak. The fourth feature is that journalism is an exclusive realm of those with a degree, disqualifying any other person, regardless of their talent and potential, as non-journalists; amongst other features.

However, I should stress that a few initiatives emerged in the last three decades or so, to place the interests and perspective of the community at the centre of reporting. In Zambia, for instance, community radio stations started mushrooming in the 1990s, although not all communities were lucky to have a station broadcasting in their own language.[1] Francis Kasoma defined community radio as 'a sound broadcasting station that serves a specific section of society known as a community.'[2] For a community media to be called so, however, a few conditions must be fulfilled: the language of the community must be used;[3] the medium must be 'established by and for the community';[4] the community must participate at all levels of decision-making;[5] and its programming must be about the community.[6] *Radio Pag La Yiri* in the town of Zabre in Burkina Faso is one example of a community radio, where not-professionally trained reporters surround a professionally trained journalist.[7] The radio itself was founded in 2009 by a local women association, *Association Pag La Yiri*, with the aim of bringing community news to that marginalised area where no other radio station can be listened to. More interestingly, the eleven villages around Zabre, which constitute the core audience, produce contents during their monthly listeners' club meetings, and those contents are broadcast on the radio.

The example of *Pag La Yiri*, whereby a professional journalist works with non-professional staff and even villagers who constitute their audience is far from mainstream practices observed in most conventional media organisations. Ideally, conventional journalism or quality journalism, should be balanced, i.e., provides an opportunity to all, including community members in marginalised areas, to be part of the public debate. Ideally, journalism should offer news to all layers of society and should allow non-journalists, particularly those rarely heard in the media, the bottom, to be part of the journalistic process. How does it happen in reality when commercial [e.g., who buys the newspaper? Who owns the news outlet? Who is paying for the advertisement? etc.] and other often unethical factors [e.g., who pays gratifications?[8]] overwhelm professional values? In Cameroon, for

instance, private news media do not count on the low-income readership that 'rather than purchasing a newspaper costing 400 francs CFA (US$ 0,8)…prefer[s] to reload their mobile phones for the same price or surf the Internet… .'[9] None of the private newspapers exceeds a print-run of 3,500 copies (in a country with 20 million inhabitants), as revenues essentially come from advertisers who pay around 20 billion [US$ 40,423,000] every year.[10] Moreover, as media scholar Nocola Jones noted, journalists themselves live and work 'in a world of harsh realities,' including those relating to their financial situation.[11] That is what I refer to as the conventional way 'in reality' as opposed to the conventional way 'in principle.'

Consider for instance the September 2010 *BBC World News* TV reports in Niger, West Africa, where unprecedented drought was causing large-scale famine. Journalist Zeinab Badawi made some reports in the capital Niamey, as well as some in provincial towns, and others from remote villages. One report titled 'Niger facing catastrophic hunger crisis'[12] that featured a 'small village in Zinder', showed an old man climbing into his empty wood-and-thatch grain store while saying, through the journalist's translation and paraphrasing, that the grain store had been empty for four months. Then the report showed a woman with two children, with one on her back, all *staring straight at the camera* as they walked. As the three went almost out of sight, another child, around the age of four or five, appeared behind them equally *staring at the camera*. Unlike those before him, he stopped, whilst still *staring at the camera*.

Then Badawi was shown wearing a white hat whilst walking on the main village square in the middle of a crowd of five to six year olds, all looking at her as she proceeded with her story. Whilst walking side by side with one local woman, Badawi said: 'I don't speak Hausa but she's showing me.' The story went on with a scene showing cattle and a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO] official, explaining the adverse impact of the food crisis on people and cattle. Badawi then visited the government feeding centre, with the FAO official standing by and watching, and interviewed a medical doctor.

Towards the end, Badawi met the Governor of Zinder in his office, where a huge UN flag was ostensibly hanging on the wall. The FAO official was still in the background together with people who looked like officials. The Governor, a senior military officer, pleaded for aid in not-so-perfect English: 'As a poor country' he said, 'we always need assistance; always we need assistance; always as a poor country; in short term and in long term… .' The three minute and 45 second report ended with an interview with the Sultan of Zinder, solemnly seated in his traditional palace and reasserting his faith in Allah in times of crisis.

Let's now turn to one example from an alternative, community-centred media organisation. Much less famous than citizen journalism initiatives such as *Indymedia* or *Ohmynews*, UhakiNews [uhakinews.net] is a grassroots journalism project based in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], or more precisely in Goma. Run by the *Collectif des Femmes Journalistes* [The Association of Women Journalists] and supported by the Hague-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting [IWPR], the initiative aims to empower women in media and to advocate for their rights in that war-torn zone, where women often pay the highest price. In one report shot

and edited with a mobile phone in September 2011 in the locality of Minova, near Goma, Magguy Kakule reported about a disease, describing it in French as *le wilt bactérien*, that was ravaging banana plantations in the region, thereby endangering people's livelihoods.[13] Stressing that banana was the main source of income in the area, Kakule interviewed a boy, of about seven or eight years, carrying a bucket full of waffles on his head and who, like many other children, had dropped out of school because his parents had no bananas to sell to pay for his school fees. The boy said that he was selling waffles to raise money for next year. Then Kakule took the viewer to the banana market where the damages of the 'no-pity' disease, as locals called it [*Sina huruma*], were shown: meager, yellowish bananas laid there which no one bought because the prices had rocketed following the scarcity caused by the disease. The two minute and five second report closed with one young peasant appealing to agronomists to bring a more resistant type of banana plant. In the background, children, who most likely could not go to school, were playing.

Understanding the Difference

Comparing a *BBC* report with a grassroots counterpart might appear as nonsense at first sight: they were made for different purposes, following different standards, and for different audiences, amongst many other differences. However, the comparison should make sense mainly because both reports, regardless of their status, ended up on the Web where a simple search can lead from one to the other. My aim in making this comparison is to suggest a way that both conventional and unconventional approaches can and should complement each other. To achieve that, I need to first point out the holes or the gaps and the strengths, and the weaknesses of each.

To anticipate any misunderstanding, I should stress that this comparison is not intended to result in a judgment about which type is absolutely the best. The idea is rather to understand the depth and limits of each when it comes to reporting about issues that affect communities' daily lives in marginalised areas in Africa. There are two key points on which I base my comparison and subsequent analysis of the two reports, both of which dealt with food security and its effects on local communities. The two points are: [1] the reporter and her relationship with the community, and [2] the technology used to make the report.

The Reporter and the Community

Journalists are like anthropologists and sociologists in many ways:[14] they observe society or social/cultural groups and interview relevant sources and informants about given topics with the aim of having an insight into that group, its life and its problems, etc. They generally communicate their findings using the media, to mention but a few similarities. Like the anthropologist, the journalist who is fully integrated into the community, easily receives spontaneous answers and has a chance to go deeper into the subject and capture what anthropologists call the 'insider view'. The insider view implies both close contact with the community and

learning to think, act, and behave like the members of the community.[15] The aim is 'to gather first-hand information about social processes in a "naturally occurring" context… .'[16]

It follows, then, that language becomes crucial in the entire process.[17] The journalist, like the anthropologist, is in an ideal position if he or she can speak the community's language, which breaks most social and cultural barriers and opens most doors into the community's inner world. If there is one feature common to many African societies, it is the distrust towards the stranger. Will a father be able to easily tell a stranger that he is failing to bring bread to the table and send his children to school? Unless he knows and trusts the person to whom he is speaking, he will most likely tell the story the stranger wants to hear, as opposed to the authentic story.

In the above-mentioned *BBC* report, Badawi admitted to being unable to speak Hausa, the language of the community about which she was reporting. For that reason, she could not get the community's views without a translator, perhaps another stranger to the community. She collected the view of the elite, the ones speaking French [the medical doctor] and English [the FAO official and the Governor]. Considered from the perspective of Bourdieu's theory of the economics of linguistic exchange, English and French are 'legitimate' languages and those who lack competence to speak either are both reduced to silence and excluded from the social universe [journalism in this case] where those languages are used.[18] In other words, the food crisis is almost entirely approached from the elites' perspective. Apart from the elderly who, in three seconds or so, said, through the journalist's paraphrasing, that his grain store was empty, the rest of the story was told by the FAO official, the medical doctor at the feeding centre, the Governor, and the Sultan.

The villagers who were adversely affected served as décor for the report [the walk on the village square for instance, and the cattle herders who remained in the background], whilst officials told the story on their behalf. The FAO official explained how pastoralists were affected, but none of the pastoralists ever said anything. The doctor explained about malnutrition amongst children from his expert position, but parents were not given a chance to express themselves from the perspective of their community. In the same vein, the Governor spoke while the governed did not; the FAO spoke about its programme's beneficiaries, but the latter remained invisible. The same applied to the religious leader. Related to the above are the circumstances under which the old man, the doctor, the Governor, and the Sultan were interviewed: the FAO seemed omnipresent. I argue in the next chapter (Section 1.4) that this type of intrusive presence of 'strangers' hinders the process of capturing what the bottom thinks.

The *UhakiNews* report followed a different approach to describe the social insecurity caused by the *Sina huruma* epidemic: the affected community, not its political or traditional leaders, told the story directly. Victimised at least twice [not eating as sufficiently as usual and not going to school], the waffle-selling boy spoke himself, *in Swahili and without a translator*, and told a story that probably

his teacher or school director [local official in this case] would most likely tell differently or simply deny, since primary education is supposed to be free.

Judged using mainstream journalistic conventions, this report would score near to zero: only two similar sources, the peasant and the child, were interviewed; the government official in charge of agriculture was not interviewed; the view of the Governor of North Kivu was missing; the voice of the expert/agronomist was not heard; the school director was not mentioned whilst he could have explained how his school was affected. Whilst all these remarks are pertinent and could have made the report even richer and more powerful, they nonetheless do not 'kill' the essence of the report. The report did not have the ambition to show *all* the sides of the story, but rather to capture the rarely heard voice [one from the bottom], the rarely highlighted local attempt to cope with the crisis [waffle-selling as an alternative source of income], and the forgotten fundamental issue of free primary education which was subtly connected to the food crisis.

Here are a few relevant questions in relation to the *UhakiNews* report: was the aim to know the exact [probably Latin] name of the bacteria [or so] that attacked the banana plantations? I do not think so but this is of course debatable. Was the aim to collect the exact statistics of school absentees? This was not considered the most essential, but could have made the report more complete, as it would have clarified the extent of the crisis in the educational sector. I do think the aim was to alert the national and international opinion about a local food crisis ignored by mainstream media, provincial, national and international. The report achieved that goal, and in doing so it provided an insight into local attempts at solving the crisis, and into what community members needed to be able to help themselves once again.

Generally speaking, 'small' community issues do not attract the attention of mainstream media, because the latter focus more on political matters.[19] It is true that the official and expert voices were not heard, but from a community perspective, that is not so bad because, apart from being difficult to reach, officials often take many factors into account before delivering their views: is it an electoral year as it was the case in the DRC in 2011? If so, the official voice would most likely be politically and ideologically coloured. Is it about children dropping out of school because parents cannot pay? Then chances are that the report would be thwarted because it would expose the payment of fees for primary education when this is supposed to be free.

What appears here is that while the conventional approach has a clear advantage in terms of access to official, *authoritative* sources, it ignores or neglects the voices from the community. The community is viewed through the lenses of the elite. The alternative, community-centred approach emerges as the reverse of the conventional approach, with its own weaknesses and strengths. One weakness, if one could call it so, is the lack of empirical precision in the report: how many people were affected? How many pupils had dropped out? What were the cause and the exact nature of the disease? All these questions remained unanswered and, actually, would not be easy to answer by a community reporter. That is where

mainstream reporters have a clear advantage, as they have access to well-informed and expert sources.

However, the community-centred approach has an undeniable advantage of integrating the insider knowledge and view. Whilst the *BBC* report suggested that Zinder communities, through the Governor's mouth, reportedly had no solution other than always depending on aid for the short and long terms, the *UhakiNews* report chose to highlight locally designed solutions, namely pupils selling waffles to earn money to pay for school fees next year. Moreover, contrary to the 'We will always be poor' solution suggested by the Governor, or the 'Allah will help us' hopes of the Sultan, the Minova young peasant wanted specialists to do what he could not do himself, namely, identify the resistant type of banana plant, so that he and the community could revamp their local economy.

Technology and the Community

While the previous sub-section has suggested that the relationship between the reporter and the community is crucial in terms of whose views are reported, which details are highlighted, and from which perspective, this sub-section takes the comparison further, taking into account the relationship between the reporting technology and the community in marginalised areas. My point in doing this is to explore ways in which technology itself interferes with the reporting process in one way or another.

The *BBC* report illustrated one important thing: the villagers were discovering the 'Big Camera' and were amazed, if not intimidated by it. The mother and the children at the beginning kept staring at it and perhaps at the crew of strangers behind it. Further into the report, a crowd of children surrounded Badawi as she walked across the village square, staring and waving at the curious object. Their facial expressions can even be interpreted as contradicting the acute food crisis the report was highlighting. Kakule's report is different: the children were in the background but seemed not to notice the reporter's mobile phone. My assumption is that they knew it and perhaps had one in their pocket or at home. They kept playing in the banana plantation, allowing the reporter to do her work undisturbed. Moreover, the waffle-selling boy seemed natural and not inhibited by the phone.

The technology that captures us, our attitudes and our words, matters and affects the process that leads to the end product. Philosopher Roland Barthes remarked that whenever he knew that the camera objective was aimed at him and whenever he felt that he was being photographed, he would fabricate another body for himself; he would metamorphose.[20] Critiquing television, another philosopher, Jacques Derrida, made a similar confession with regard to unfamiliar recording devices: 'When the process of recording begins, I am inhibited, paralyzed, arrested, I don't "get anywhere" [*je "fais du sur-place"*] and I don't think, I don't speak in the way I do when I'm not in this situation.'[21]

I am not insinuating that the *BBC* big camera pushed villagers to metamorphose, and that the mobile phone kept them natural. I am suggesting that the more familiar the technology, the more spontaneous and genuine the community's reactions and collaboration. Recent studies have shown that the mobile phone is

now the most widespread communication technology in Africa. It has become part of everyday life: it has replaced the drum as a communication tool;[22] it is replacing the bank-booklet as a banking tool;[23] and it is serving to co-ordinate informal trade in rural areas;[24] amongst many other functions.

This Book and Its Author

Why have I set out to write this book? Answering this question is telling you first about myself because most of this book's content is inspired by my professional experience from the last ten years or so. In the early 2000s I entered the media sector as journalist for international media outlets, first in Central Africa and later in Western Europe. Most of my work has centred on Web articles and radio reports for outlets I am describing here as conventional media organisations, in the sense that the entire news production and publication process followed established rules and conventions. Later on, in 2007, I landed in citizen journalism not as a citizen journalist but as a trainer and coach for the Netherlands-based Voices of Africa Media Foundation [VOAMF].

The VOAMF launched in 2007 the Voices of Africa Mobile Reporting Programme that serves as my case study throughout this book. That training programme included professionally trained journalists and non-professionally trained reporters. Between 2007 and 2013, the programme trained journalists, and those aspiring to embrace citizen journalism, in making audiovisual news reports using mobile phones, all from a community perspective. The training involved an [1] initial workshop in which the basics were dispensed, an [2] online coaching phase during which the trainees received individual feedback on each of their productions, and [3] didactic material both in print and digital formats [DVD].

The programme reached eight African countries [Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe] with more than 100 [citizen] journalists trained and coached, and was awarded a few international prizes.[25] Moreover, the programme drew the attention of scholars[26] and journalism students from various universities (See the Appendix for more information about the VOAMF and its programmes). All those years, I was blessed to be the programme's Senior Trainer and Coach, which I combined with academic research and teaching activities that involve[d] a great deal of alternative media and journalism.

This book is an attempt on my side to make sense of the experience from the six years [2007-2013] of involvement in Mobile Community Reporting [MCR] on one hand, and to extend the reflection to the yet-to-be explored potential of the MCR approach, on the other. I should stress that I did not write this book on behalf of VOAMF, which means that the claims I make here are mine rather than VOAMF's. The MCR philosophy is that communities in marginalised areas should tell their own story from their own perspective using tools familiar to them. The approach has its huge advantages, but also its own weaknesses as the above *UhakiNews* example has shown, and as this book explains more extensively. The training and coaching processes consisted in ensuring that the basics were mastered

in terms of shooting and news-detecting and gathering techniques, image and sound quality, ethics, and so on. The golden rules were that no editor dictated any topic and that whatever topic was identified had to have a community dimension. In this book I make a few comparisons between MCR-inspired journalism and mainstream media in an effort not to praise one whilst slamming the other, but rather to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each and to highlight points of complementarity.

To discuss ways in which the MCR approach helps capture *what the bottom thinks*, I use my experience as trainer and coach and weigh my assumptions and findings with both practices in conventional circles and existing theories about alternative media. In chapter one I discuss the three key concepts of the MCR approach, i.e., the 'Community', the 'Mobile Technology', and 'Reporting'. These concepts are defined, explained and illustrated with examples taken either from the VOAMF Mobile Reporting Programme or, for comparative purposes, from mainstream news media. My hypothesis is that when the three concepts are harmoniously brought together, they help the reporter come closer to what the bottom thinks. I close the first chapter with a psychological discussion about the processes of 'thinking' and 'saying', and the role external factors such as technologies play. In this closing part, I argue that thinking and saying are two separate entities, although closely connected, and that the technology used interferes with the process of translating 'what one thinks' into 'what one says'. The assumption is that when familiar technologies are used to report about community members, chances are higher that the reporter will get something very close to what those members think, especially if the reporter him- or herself is a member of the community.

Whilst chapter one breaks open those concepts, chapter two focuses on journalism and its conceptualisation from a grassroots perspective. Amongst other things I discuss some of the key values of journalism including the notions of news and newsworthiness, whilst attempting to make sense of their applications in a bottom-up news-production process. The main point I make in this respect is that those essential notions are relative, as they depend on who is scrutinising the event or issue under consideration. In other words, I argue that it is up to the members of the community to label events as newsworthy, taking into account their own perceptions, interests, and values. The chapter further explores the additional dimensions that the MCR approach brings to journalism, mainly in terms of choosing a perspective and sources. Whilst existing practices in journalism very often look at community news events from a top-down perspective informed by official and expert sources, MCR-inspired journalism does the reverse to ensure that what the community thinks emerges from the news item. The chapter finally discusses some ethical aspects of the MCR approach and pleads for a contextual consideration of some issues that might appear unethical. Moral values being not universal, I argue that the values of communities should be taken into account whilst examining the ethical aspects of MCR-inspired journalism.

Chapters three through five are dedicated to thematic analyses of mobile community reports made in the framework of the VOAMF Mobile Reporting Programme between 2007 and 2013. Using qualitative content analysis to track

'what the bottom thinks', I start with those reports that covered news relating to governance. In doing that, I point out three main categories under which those reports could be grouped: some presented governance issues as dilemmas, whereby solutions to some issues were perceived as the cause of other issues. Some others explicitly reported governance successes and governance failures, i.e., those cases in which public officials managed or failed to use the power entrusted to them for the benefit of those on behalf of whom they exercised it. Yet other reports highlighted communities taking up those responsibilities that should be carried by public officials.

From governance I move on to the rights of the child, which many reporters placed at the heart of their reporting. Since Africa is my focus, I discuss those rights from an African perspective reflected in the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* adopted in 1990 by the Organisation of African Unity [now called African Union]. Here, too, three categories emerged: the first category consists of reports denouncing violations of the rights of the child. These violations include physical ones and psychological ones. The second category includes reports that framed the right violations from the perspective of the relationships between children and parents, which are still governed by traditions and customs. The last category contains reports that presented ways in which children managed to turn their environment into a place where they can play and otherwise engage in leisure activities.

The last thematic chapter discusses environmental reporting, that is, reports that in one way or another, covered news relating to nature. I first focus on reports that covered both nature-friendly and nature-unfriendly community activities. Paradoxically, whilst those nature-friendly and nature-unfriendly activities appeared to go in opposite directions, they were all done in the name of either tradition or economic livelihood. Then I explore those reports that focused on locally designed waste management and ways in which local communities dealt with pollution. In some cases reporters praised community efforts to summarily turn polluted areas into revenue-generating farms, whilst in others, those efforts were questioned. Finally I consider climate change, which reporters have approached from a variety of perspectives, but always with a clear idea of what it meant to local communities and their livelihood. In this chapter I argue that by insisting on its effects and on locally-designed solutions to cope with it rather than on the science behind it, the MCR approach helps de-bureaucratise the concept of climate change.

In the concluding chapter I present general conclusions and lessons drawn from discussions in this book. They all turn around the idea that MCR-inspired journalism helps fill the gaps left open by conventional journalism whilst, on its turn, it also leaves some gaps open. I then discuss a few challenges that faced the VOAMF Mobile Reporting Programme, so that those tempted to embark on the MCR journey can anticipate them. At the end, I open up discussions to include other areas of communications that I did not cover in this book. In doing so, my intention is to trigger reflections and debates about ways in which 'what the bottom thinks' can be integrated into various communication processes, especially those in which communities are, or should be, involved. Three fields to which the

MCR approach could add some value are advocacy, activism, and development-project communication. Using a few relevant news mobile reports, I suggest that there should be a convergence between the conventional approach to advocacy, activism and development-project communication and the MCR-approach.

As it can be detected from the book's outline, this book is meant for the general reader and is accessible to the lay public. However, whilst writing it, I had one special category in mind, namely that of people interested or involved in media, communication, journalism, activism, advocacy, and in the monitoring and evaluation of development projects. I have done my best to avoid loading this book with too much theory, although some key concepts necessarily need theorising to be fully grasped, so as to keep the practical, field-experience character of the MCR approach itself.

Chapter 1

At the Heart of Community Life

The postman stood his bicycle against the twisted stake of the doorway. Two women were seated on the ground. They returned his greeting with suspicion. They knew him, but because of his job, the man carried with him an unfavourable prejudice.

'Women, is your husband, Ibrahima Dieng, at home?'
Mety, the elder of the two women, and the first wife, looked up inquiringly into the man's face and then at his hands.
'Who, you say?'
'Mety,' interpolated the postman, 'Mety, I live in this quarter myself and I know that Ibrahima Dieng is the master of this house. I am not a toubab.'
'Bah (the postman's name), what have I said?'
…
[Mety] 'You know very well that our man is never at home at this time of the day. Idle, yes. But not wallow all day among our skirts, that no! You ask as if you were a stranger.' [27]
…

[Mety to her husband Ibrahima Dieng] 'Nidiaye, dear, Bah, the postman came. You have a letter'.
'A letter? Who from? What colour is the paper?'
'No, it isn't a paper for the tax?'
'How do you know about it?'
'Bah told us it has come from Paris. The money-order as well.' [28]

I would like to start my discussion of the three concepts central to this book [community, mobile technology, and reporting] alongside these two fragments from Ousmane Sembène's *The Money Order*, a novel which he wrote in the 1960s. The novel could be interpreted in many ways, one of which being: like many other contemporary novelists, Sembène saw society degenerate into a jungle as rampant corruption and arrogant bureaucracy seemed to prevail over age-long community values such as respect of the elderly, mutual help, solidarity, and other values. Like Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are not Yet Born* (1968), *The Money Order* is a disenchantment novel, as independence is portrayed as having brought more harm than good.

So why these two dialogues? I selected the two fragments because they manage to summarise many of my points regarding the community in a marginalised position: Bah, the postman, knew the people he was serving, and they also knew

him very well; he stressed that the situation would be different if his work was done by a stranger or a *toubab*; he also lived in the same neighbourhood. On the other side, as the second dialogue between Ibrahima Dieng and his wife Mety shows, a communication technology, a paper, was presented as a familiar medium to the members of the community who, amongst other things, could easily tell or make some sense of its message just by looking at its colour. The assumption is that if a stranger or a *toubab* had brought the money order paper coloured differently from the usual paper, there would most likely be tensions and distrust. This is exactly what this chapter discusses, placing the three concepts in the perspective of modern-day Africa's marginalised areas, be they rural or urban.

To do so, I first define and then explore the concept of community, which, as already stated, is the cornerstone of the Mobile Community Reporting approach. I then move on to mobile technologies, especially the mobile phone, to contend that, like Ibrahima Dieng and other community members who knew the content of the message by looking at the colour of the piece of paper, most people in Africa are, to a considerable extent, familiar with the mobile phone. After that, I discuss journalistic reporting, suggesting that the familiarity of the medium or technology used should be capitalised if the goal is to capture, or at least get as close as possible to, what the community thinks. At the end, I wrap up the discussion about the three concepts, highlighting ways in which they all have a psychological dimension that interferes with the thinking process, especially when the result of this process has to be spoken out and recorded.

1.1 Community

The concept of community has been used in so many contexts to the extent that it has almost become a mission impossible to define it precisely. In his treatise on ethics, Aristotle used that concept as opposed to one of individual but did not further elaborate upon what he meant precisely.[29] The concept was also at the centre of discussions amongst sociologists,[30] anthropologists,[31] and philosophers[32] during the first half of the 20th century and, starting from the 1950s, amongst development policymakers and scholars in other disciplines.[33]

Baker Brownell's philosophical discussion of the human community back in the 1950s is very helpful in distinguishing some of the main ways in which the concept of community has been used. He identified four of them, namely: [1] the *social* use of the concept according to which 'the community is a group of people, contextually considered, who know one another well,' usually with 'a locus, or a home place, a neighbourhood, a village, or perhaps even an area within a city, but sometimes no fixed place at all;' [2] the *statistical* use, which refers to 'a geographical group denotatively considered, a village or other place designation;' [3] the *biological* use, which focuses on the community as 'a phyletic group,' that is, one in which 'the unity of stock or blood across the years has precedence;' and [4] the *poetic* or *metaphysical* use, according to which, 'The community is a timeless unity of human meanings and in this sense is both concrete and metaphorical.'[34]

For the purpose of this book, I use the *social*[ogical] meaning of community, which, in my view, includes or at least does not exclude some dimensions of other meanings and uses. Community as used in the Mobile Community Reporting [MCR] refers to the 'people who live in some spatial relationships to one another and who share interests and values.'[35] As it appears here, I have placed boundaries around this concept at two levels to make it manageable. In the first instance, my conceptualisation concerns only marginalised areas both in rural and urban settings, where marginality refers to the situation in which one has the belief that life is better elsewhere, that is, in non-marginalised places.[36] Marginality here involves deprivation of basic facilities, lack of access to infrastructure and technology, and the like. This arbitrary limitation implies that the notion of community is applicable in other settings, but that these settings are not relevant for the present book. In the second instance, I chose the social conceptualisation of community, simply because the programme that serves as my case study had the most to deal with communities from that perspective that included both spatial and human-relationship dimensions. This limitation does not in any way exclude a different use of the notion of community and a focus on other dimensions than those on which I focused.

In this section, I want to discuss the following features of the community around which the MCR approach is built: mutual knowledge among the members, face-to-face contact and communication, and the members' sense of belonging to the community. According to the sociological theory of community, these features are the most characteristic of any community.[37]

Mutual and intimate knowledge is a key characteristic of the community and without it, no community would have a strong basis to call itself a community. As anthropologist George Peter Murdock rightly pointed out, 'Every member is ordinarily acquainted more or less intimately with every other member, and has learned through association to adapt his behavior to that of each of his fellows.'[38] This intimate acquaintance obviously goes beyond knowing the names, age, and parents of other members of the community. It implies that each member knows when any other member has moments of joy or sorrow.[39]

However, knowing each other can be possible if the members of the same community see each other and have face-to-face contact and communication. Brownell stressed both the face-to-face contact and the spatial dimension as having some spiritual immediacy only attainable in the community: 'To be face to face with neighbours or kinfolk,' he wrote, 'is to live in a homely presentness of value, a spiritual immediacy that cannot be attained indirectly.'[40] Since the continuous face-to-face association with other members of the community is of 'critical importance in the pattern of living,'[41] it follows that the status of those former members who have left the place where the community resides, or who have no continuous face-to-face presence in the community, have a different status, one of half-stranger, half-community-member. Continuous face-to-face relationships result in the emergence of community interests and values, which those with irregular presence in the community miss or misunderstand.[42]

Whilst face-to-face contact is understood as a physical presence, that is, being there and being seen, face-to-face communication implies the use of verbal and non-verbal language. Brownell further contended that it is within the above-mentioned homely presentness that the community's language, customs, myths, religion, and other proud constructions and spiritual values are created.[43] Being a member of a community is, amongst other things, speaking its language and understanding its worldviews as shaped by its customs, myths, and beliefs. Sociologists consider language as 'a true organ of understanding' within a community, as it is through it that members of the community express their joy, sorrow, pleasure, desires, and other feelings and emotions to one another.[44] As for customs and traditions, they are like the unwritten laws of the community that each member should follow. If you break them, whether knowingly or unknowingly, you are disapproved and the community 'will boycott you, and refuse to enter into social relations with you.'[45]

It is essential here to discuss the notion of 'habit,' which is closely linked to the one of 'custom.' The main difference between the two is that habits are individual whilst customs are social. In other words, 'widespread uniformities of habit,' that is, one that has gained the sanction and the influence, as well as social significance, becomes custom.[46] Therefore,

> *Wherever there is widespread habit there is probably custom as well. Habits create customs and customs create habits. But the two principles, though intricately related, are distinct. Customs could not exist unless the corresponding habits were inculcated into the rising generations, but habits can exist without support of custom.[47]*

The above suggests that considering oneself as a member of a community is knowing that community's customs and acquiring corresponding habits.

The last key characteristic is a sense of belonging which entails solidarity with other members of the community, loyalty to the community and empathy. This sense of group identity and solidarity results from the community of meanings that the community has developed amongst its members.[48] There exists interiorised reflexes within a community that tell the members which reaction corresponds to which action. For instance, if someone dies, specific behaviours are expected from other members of the community. The same is true if a member of the community has a more joyful event. Other terms and expressions such as 'synergism,' 'we-feeling,' and 'esprit de corps,' have been used to exactly refer to the sense of belonging outlined above.[49]

In short, community, as I use it throughout this book, refers to a group of people living in the same limited geographical areas, knowing each other very well and sustaining face-to-face, continuous contact and communication. Community implies a shared language, shared habits and customs, as well as shared interests and values, which result in a sense of belonging, solidarity, and loyalty amongst the members. Whilst the notion could apply to many situations, I have preferred to combine it with the notion of marginality, which corresponds to the settings in which the Mobile Reporting Programme took place. Defined in this way,

community is different from society, which is marked by a plurality of interests and values that lead to conflicts that never end.[50]

The first working hypothesis in this book is: *when reporters are members of the community about which they report, the news and views they capture are like the barometer showing what the community thinks about a given issue or event.*

1.2 Mobile Technology

As I was attending a meeting in April 2013 with a dozen women members of a local sheatnut-collecting and processing association near Koudougou, some 100km south of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso,[51] I witnessed a scene that summarises the extent to which the mobile phone has penetrated into people's consciousness. One woman, aged around 70 years old, holding her grandson aged between three and four, received a call on her mobile phone and left the meeting after putting her grandson on the floor. As Figure 1 shows, the grandmother was speaking on the phone some 20 meters away when the grandson who had followed her, mimicked a phone call, with his back turned to the grandmother. Whilst the right hand was 'holding' the virtual phone, the left hand made sure that no external noise disturbed the conversation through the other ear.

What does this scene tell us? It eloquently tells us that the adoption process of the mobile phone has been completed or at least has reached a very advanced stage in this particular place. Both the older and the youngest generations are familiar

Figure 1: Grandson mimicking phone call as grandmother answers a call (Photo O.N., Koudougou 11 April 2013).

with the device and use it, but each in their own way. It is obvious that the grandson knew about the mobile phone, how it worked, how it was used, and at least one of its functions, namely mediating conversation. It might be assumed that whatever other functions, for instance photography or audio recording, that might be added to the mobile phone would not turn it into a new, unknown, strange technology. In this section, I want to explain the process through which new media, particularly the mobile phone, achieve adoption and domestication, before highlighting the main aspects that make the mobile phone the ideal community reporting tool, namely its ubiquity, and its multifunctional character.

As the example of the grandmother and the grandson shows, the mobile phone is no longer a curious object or a luxury. In the late 1990s and into the early years of the 21st century, the mobile phone in Africa was a sign of high status, as both the device and their use [airtime] were beyond the reach of many.[52] This 'Have-you-seen-me' stage in the adoption of new communication technologies is not peculiar to the mobile phone. The old Ibrahima Dieng – in *The Money Order* – who had accumulated debts at the local shop, used the new communication technology of that time, the paper-based money order, to show off. With the money order in his pocket, Dieng would go to the shop and tell the shopkeeper that he had come to clear his name, by which he meant that with the not-yet-cashed order he was someone else, with a different status.[53] The assumption is that the new technology first impresses before gradually penetrating the consciousness of the larger group of users and achieving domestication and ubiquity.

The adoption of any new media technology goes through a process that includes many successive steps. Explaining the adoption process of new media, Hans van Driel came up with the four step ARIA pattern. The process starts with the [1] *Admiration* or *Amazement* by a small group of enthusiastic, early adopters; whilst those few show enthusiasm and excitement, the larger part of society shows some [2] *Resistance*, preferring established media technologies; the process goes on with the new medium [3] *Imitating* some of the features of the existing media; although the new medium imitates the existing one, it also gradually develops its own [4] *Authenticity*, taking up new original properties that ultimately distinguish it from the existing technologies.[54]

On his part, Rich Ling focused on the mobile phone and a five step adoption cycle that offered a pattern that is slightly different from the one proposed by Van Driel. The cycle starts with [1] *Imagination*, that is, the way a new device enters our consciousness; it proceeds with [2] *Appropriation*, a stage at which the new device progressively moves from the commercial world to enter our everyday life; then comes [3] *Objectification*, whereby the new device starts playing out our values and sense of aesthetic, and shaping our identity through ownership and consumption; after objectification comes [4] *Incorporation*, which implies the use of the new device not solely as indicated in the manuals, but also as invented and assimilated by the users; the adoption process closes with [5] *Conversion*, a stage at which each user hopes to realise the social effect of the new technology, which means that the new device has become 'an element in others' estimation of us.'[55]

The two ways of looking at the adoption of new media technologies are different but could be interpreted as telling the same story in two different ways. For instance, what Van Driel calls *Admiration* or *Amazement* could be viewed as corresponding to Ling's *Imagination*. Anyway, early admirers can be said to be idealists who see the potential of new technologies before it fully unfolds, and thereby contribute to the imagination of the new technology by the larger population. Similarly, *Resistance* could be viewed as the early stage of *Appropriation*, as reflecting the hesitations marking the early adoption of any new technology. *Imitation*, too, is part of the *Appropriation* stage, as the new technology could be viewed as sending out signals that it is not abruptly breaking away from what the users are used to. Finally, *Authenticity* summarises all the novelties and properties that result in the *Objectification, Incorporation,* and *Conversion* stages.[56]

The mobile phone is assumed to have achieved ubiquity in most parts of Africa. It will suffice to look at ownership and use statistics and at the various ways in which it has entered people's routines, to come to the conclusion that the mobile phone is the most widespread new media technology in Africa. The ubiquity of a media technology such as the mobile phone is defined as the 'quality of being always in our presence, always in our possession, and always connected to a larger mediascape.'[57] Since ubiquity turns around the presence, the possession, and the connectedness of the media technology, I would like to briefly explore how these three aspects apply to the mobile phone in Africa.

Is the mobile phone always present to most people in Africa? To answer this question I need to combine both presence and possession, because they are closely inter-related. Statistics in many African countries show that over 90 percent of the population has access to a phone, with countries like Gabon getting closer to a 100 percent mobile phone access rate.[58] However, access should not be confounded with ownership or possession, whose rates are still very low. Projections predicted that by the second decade of the 21st century 'a minority of around 10 per cent will not have their own mobile phone' in Africa.[59] Sharing and public mobile phones make access rates much higher than ownership ones. In this respect, only 4.35 percent of Tanzanians owned mobile phones in 2004, whilst 97 percent had access to it in that same year, thanks, amongst other practices, to sharing.[60] The conclusion here is that the constant presence of the mobile phone is a reality, facilitated to some extent by ownership, but mostly made possible thanks to access via other channels such as sharing and public phones.

What about constant connectedness, the third aspect of ubiquity? Coverage of mobile telephony networks is not yet total in many countries in Africa. Those areas that are not covered by the network, either because the market is very small, or because the economic potential of the region is insignificant, can be said to be marginalised because they are excluded from the emerging mobile network society and all related benefits.[61] In many places, owning or having access to a mobile phone does not directly imply being connected to the network. In the Guera region of Chad, for instance, where the penetration rate was of 47 mobile phones for 1,000 people in 2006, residents were still urging telecommunication

companies and the government to install mobile phone antennas in the area at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century.[62]

Paradoxically, in some countries like Burkina Faso, connectivity becomes an issue following the failure of telecommunication companies to bundle their network coverage efforts. The result is that the three companies, Telmob, Airtel, and Celltel, share the market geographically, which renders communication between two geographical areas impossible if users happen to have a subscription of a company that is absent in one of the areas. Two phenomena emerged from this situation: on one hand, many Burkinabe people, both in urban and rural areas, own two or three mobile phones with different subscriptions. This ensures that one is reachable and one is able to make calls wherever one is. On the other hand, in cities and villages, one often sees two or three telecommunication antennas distant of less than 50 or 100 metres from one another. To these connectivity issues, one should add network saturation, which results from oversubscriptions and prevents optimal connectivity, especially during peak hours.

The issues outlined above should not blind us to the brighter side of almost constant connectivity, which has changed ways people communicate and vacate to their daily activities and businesses. For instance, informal traders and farmers are reported to have taken great advantage of mobile connectivity to make more profits thanks to better business co-ordination.[63] In his study of the uses of mobile phones amongst tomato and potato farmers in Tanzania, Thomas Molony realised that the mobile phone played a crucial role by facilitating communication between farmers and middlemen. The latter purchased farmers' crops, which they sold to wholesalers in the capital Dar es Salaam or elsewhere.[64] Apart from farming, other sectors such as fishing[65] and health,[66] have integrated the mobile phone, contributing to the ubiquity of that technology via its capability to connect to the network. It should also be stressed that novelties such as banking, something previously reserved for senior civil servants and the wealthy, is now open to the unemployed and the poor, thanks to the mobile phone.[67]

This section started with the hypothesis that the mobile phone is at the moment the most ideal media technology for the MCR approach, firstly because of its quick adoption that has resulted in its quasi ubiquity.[68] In the next few paragraphs, I want to suggest that the sole quality of being ubiquitous and thus familiar to users, including those in rural areas, does not immediately qualify the mobile phone as the ideal tool for mobile reporting. Its multifunctional character is crucial in the process, as the mobile phone, at least starting from the third generation [3G], can complete all the tasks required in producing a self-sustained, multimedia report.

The roots of the mobile phone go back to the invention of the telegraph in the United States in the late 19th century when, for the first time in history, a communication technology 'permitted … the effective separation of communication from transportation' and thereby 'altered the spatial and temporal boundaries of human interaction.'[69] The subsequent history of distance voice communication saw the invention of wireless telegraphy by Guglilmo Marconi in 1895[70] and of the telephone around the same time,[71] the early attempts at mobile communication by Swedish electrical engineer Lars Magnus Ericsson,[72] the development of mobile

phones by Motorola between the 1930s and 1960s,[73] and the commercialisation of the first mobile phones in the late 1970s.[74] Dan Steinbock divided the history of mobile phone into four eras: wireless telegraphy [1890s-1920s], the pre-cellular era [1910s-1980s], the cellular era [1980s-2001], and the mobile era [2001-].[75]

From the cellular era onwards [1980s –], the history of the mobile phone was told in terms of Gs or Generations: 1G phones, the first ones, were not only huge in size, but also voice-only devices.[76] 2G phones dominated the 1990s and were characterised by their small size and their use of digitally coded and compressed sounds that were transmitted via radio waves. Besides, they added new functionalities such as the address book, games, sophisticated menus and interfaces, voice messages, time functionalities, amongst others.[77] Like their 1G predecessors, 2G phones only allowed voice communication. 3G devices appeared in the late 1990s and were dominant in the middle of the first decade of the 21th century. These devices 'finally made "picture" phones a commercial reality' and introduced interactive video communications.[78] Unlike their predecessors, 3G phones shifted from voice-only services to data transmission and data-based services.[79] As I lay down these words, 4G phones are making their way into the mainstream, with particular stress on 'smart' connectivity.[80]

This brief history[81] of the mobile phone shows that from 3G onward, mobile phones became 'multimedia centres',[82] as they can both produce and receive/display multimedia contents. As I write, 'so many features have been incorporated into phones that the word "phone" itself feels quaint and outdated.'[83] Other authors simply refer to it as 'device[s] formerly known as cellphone[s],'[84] because mobile phones have become gadgets that combine many other gadgets into one.[85] As multimedia reception and display devices, mobile phones are increasingly being used to watch videos from both websites and from conventional media outlets. It was reported that YouTube received 200 million views per day on mobile devices,[86] and that more and more mainstream TV broadcasters were engaging in mobile television, that is, in making contents 'transmitted, broadcast, abbreviated, customised or specifically conceived for mobile phones.'[87]

My focus on the multifunctional character of the mobile phone is on the production part, rather than on the reception side, even though the latter promises to later be crucial when mobile-internet connectivity has become ubiquitous. Thus, as a production technology, the mobile phone can record and edit to some extent still and moving images as well as sound files, produce textual contents, and edit the whole into a self-contained, multimedia report. Editing here includes functionalities such as cutting and merging fragments, sound settings, image effects, and superimpositions of image, sound, and text tracks. 3G phones have earned the qualification of Do-It-All tools, as no additional technology is needed to complete the basic production process.

However, it should be noted that the 3G phones that mobile reporters used during the 2007-2013 period I am covering, were still far from perfection in certain respects. Whereas image settings provided options ranging from 'Low' to 'TV quality', they failed to offer image stabilisation and light filtering possibilities. This meant that the reporter had to be careful and keep constant control of their

hand movements, and ensure that sources of excessive light did not spoil the clips. From the literature about 3G mobile phones, one gets a feeling that the video function was not initially a 'big thing.' In his study of mobile multimedia, for instance, Ilpo Kalevi Koskinen wrote that 'Mobile multimedia provides people with the technical means to capture and share things they come up with in their lives. In doing so, they may utilize text, talk, sounds, images, and *sometimes* video' [emphasis added].[88]

It is perhaps the aspects relating to sound that were the least developed in most of the 3G phones that were used. They offered only two options to record sound: the first was recording simultaneously with the video, which meant that the video track or background sound, and the reporter's comments or foreground sound, made one. The second was recording a stand-alone audio track that could be used for various purposes, including for radio broadcasting and as a voiceover commentary for a video clip. With this option, the phone allowed reporters to mute the background sound so that the voiceover could be heard.

Compared to the options one was offered to optimise the video recording process [flash, zoom, colour, external lamp and light settings, etc.], 3G phones offered literally nothing to help one optimise the sound. All the user was offered is a button to start and end the recording process. The built-in microphone was not equipped with a noise filter, which was disturbing for the viewers or listeners and irritating for the reporter. Moreover, editing became a hassle, as the sound track could not be edited. This meant that the various fragments had to be recorded with a specific length and without any error, before they were superimposed with images. Once again, from the literature on 3G, one understands that the initial uses of the sound function were limited to short, simple recordings such as greetings, sound
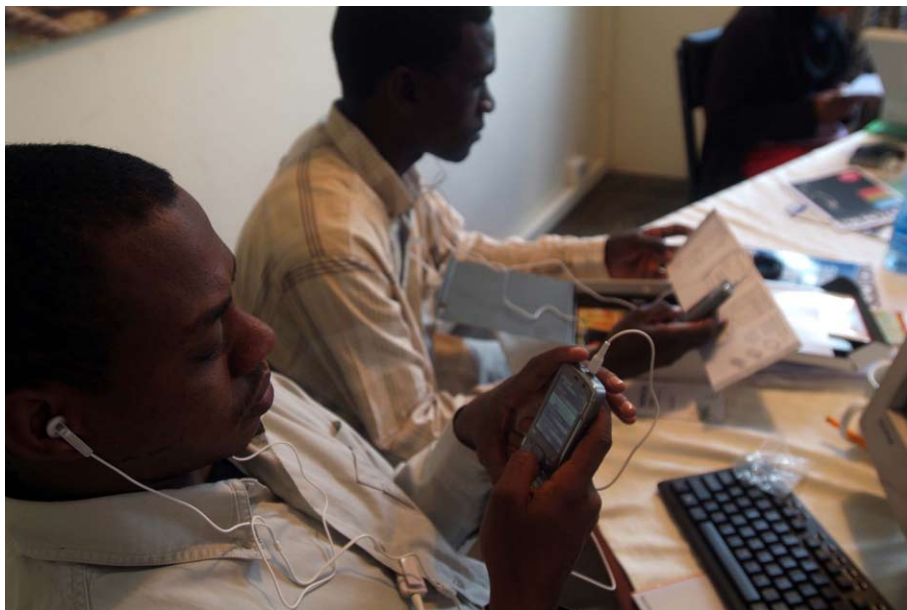

Figure 2: Trainee checking the functionalities of his 3G mobile phone (Photo: Pim de Wit).

samples, imitations of human and animal voices, and the like,[89] which required no complex editing.

All the reports discussed in this book were made with 3G mobile phones and some of them present the imperfections caused by the technological limitations outlined above. The hope is that more advanced 3G phones and 4G phones, when they have achieved ubiquity, will solve most of these issues, as they enable the user to download [semi-]professional software [apps] that offer almost all needed editing functionalities. The current fierce competition between the key players on the smart phone market, namely Samsung and Apple, and the pressure coming from players such as China-based Huawei, are likely to push down the prices of high-end smart phones,[90] making them affordable for many people in Africa. When that time has come, the phone will move from the current status of *Do-It-All* tool to one of *Do-It-All-Perfectly* tool.

The foregoing takes me to the second working hypothesis around which many of this book's points revolve: *If the mobile phone is ubiquitous and already domesticated by local populations, and if the mobile phone has reached the Do-It-All production tool status, it follows that it will capture, better than any other tool, what the community thinks.*

1.3 Reporting

The hypothesis presented at the end of the previous section needs a complement to fully reflect the MCR approach that I am discussing here. The last part of the hypothesis should ultimately be: '*it follows that it will capture, better than any other tool, what the community thinks*, **provided that the reporter is a member of the community.**' I did not provide this complement for the simple reason that it would create some confusion, as the concept of 'reporter' would be used without prior explanation. The concepts of 'Community' and of 'Mobile Technology' have been discussed and placed in the context in which they are used throughout this book, which is not yet the case for the third key concept of [MCR-inspired] reporting. Reporting and all other terms belonging to the same family, report, reporter, reportage, amongst others, have more than one meaning, hence the need to first explain which meaning I am using in this book. This section, therefore, is dedicated to a short definition and discussion of reporting as used in this book. A more elaborate discussion of journalistic reporting is in the next chapter, where news values, sources, and ethics are considered from an MCR perspective.

Reporting is often wrongly equated with journalism, whereas it covers a much larger scope than journalism does. Reporting is the act of gathering data and information not in a random way, but rather following a number of specific demands of the communication field within which one is working.[91] In this way, reporting is a 'central act of journalism,'[92] which is also true for public relations, advocacy, and activist communication, amongst others. Advocacy-centred communication entails other demands than journalism, just like activism-oriented communication requires a different approach in gathering data and information. Since journalism is the main field I am discussing in this book, I focus on that one,

whilst I come back to advocacy, activism and development-project communication in the concluding chapter.

From a journalistic perspective, reporting means collecting data and information that meet journalistic demands. The question then is: what are those journalistic demands or values that the reporter should take into account? The very first, *sine qua non*, demand concerns 'news,' that is, 'some hitherto unknown (new) feature of the actual, social world.'[93] However, all hitherto unknown or new features of the actual, social world are not reported about, which implies that other values or demands make some of hitherto unknown or new features worth reporting about than others. There is no exclusive list of those values, as they all depend on individuals, organisations, and even the values of specific communities and societies. Those I present here are only the most recurrent and common ones.

In this way, reporters or journalists at the reporting stage, weigh events, data or information against attributes such as timeliness, proximity, importance, impact or consequence, interest, conflict or controversy, sensationalism, prominence, novelty, oddity, or the unusual, amongst many others.[94] Since reporters or journalists, like any other category of individuals, have their backgrounds, beliefs, worldviews, ideological convictions, their value judgments are unavoidably different. What appears to be controversial to editor/journalist/reporter A might appear trivial to editor/journalist/reporter B, and what appears interesting to the broad public for editor/journalist/reporter A might appear ordinary and without any interest for editor/journalist/reporter B, simply because it conflicts with their worldviews. It is then safe to say that newsworthiness is relative.[95]

At this level, I can already introduce the concept of journalistic reporting from the MCR perspective. It refers to collecting data and information about new events and happenings within the community and takes into account a set of news attributes from the community perspective. For MCR-minded reporters, 'timeliness' is considered with regard to the time the community became acquainted with the event in question. They view 'proximity', 'importance', 'impact or consequence' of news events vis-à-vis the community or part of it. Moreover, since backgrounds, beliefs, worldviews, ideological convictions and other factors play a central role in weighing events, data, and information against those attributes, it is essential that the reporter's backgrounds, beliefs, worldviews, ideological convictions, are close to those of most members of the community. In other words, the same way mainstream reporters or journalists use 'play and imagination' in their mediation and representation of reality, community reporters, too, use their own creativity, inspired by their own local perspective, to represent and mediate local realities.[96]

Let me give a concrete example: the 9th November 2012 8:00 p.m. news bulletin on *Radiodiffusion télévision du Burkina Faso,* [RTB], a public TV station profiling itself as being 'at the heart of great events,'[97]included many topics of great interest for local communities but covered them from an exclusively elitist, top-down, perspective. One of the items was about the opening of a regional chapter of the *Centre de Formalités des Entreprises* [Business Formality Centre, CEFORE] in cattle-rich Dori, in the heart of the Sahel region, about 300km north of Ouagadougou. Whilst local cattle owners and related local small businesses were

obviously the most important actors [since the CEFORE is opened for them], no single cattle owner or trader were even interviewed. Only Moussa Koné, the manager of all CEFOREs, and Ambroise Balima, adviser to the minister of industry and commerce, were interviewed. Another item was about the visit of the chargé d' affaires of the Luxemburg embassy to a hybrid solar-gasoil multiplatform energy-generating unit in the village of Kone, in the commune of Kindi. The Unit enabled villagers to grind their cereals, process sheanuts, charge their phones, and have electrical power at home, amongst others. Only the chargé d'affaires and the mayor of Kindi were interviewed, whilst the villagers remained in the background as spectators.

In these two items, which are representative of the entire news bulletin, the RTB journalists interpreted values such as 'proximity' and 'importance' in a way that puts no focus on the community perspective. Proximity in the story about the opening of the Business Formality Centre resided in the following way of thinking: millions of meat consumers countrywide are interested in knowing that from now on, business will be done efficiently and smoothly, which might even lead to lower prices. It is a topic that speaks to everyone who buys and eats meat. That thinking actually encapsulates other values such as 'importance' and 'impact' or 'consequence.' From the community perspective, those values would receive a different interpretation: Proximity would not be [exclusively] with millions of meat consumers countrywide, but mainly with [hundreds of] thousands of local cattle owners and traders; 'importance,' would be with regard to what immediate profit local cattle owners and traders [and thus their families] would get out of it; whilst 'impact' and 'consequence' could focus, amongst other things, on an increase in local entrepreneurship. The same is true for the item about the multiplatform energy-generator, where the 'importance' and 'impact' of the event resided in praising bilateral, aid-related relationships between Burkina Faso and Luxemburg, rather than in what the generator represented for the Kone villagers.

It follows from the foregoing that sources are selected depending on the perspective from which the reporters interpret the key news attributes. Sources constitute another *sine qua non* element in reporting and journalism. Considered from the MCR perspective, sources pose a number of challenges to reporters. First, 'good' sources are often understood to be authoritative and reliable, which in most cases eliminate those without official education and titles. Could Kone villagers have been good, authoritative and reliable sources for the item about the multiplatform generator? Could illiterate cattle owners in Dori have been reliable sources since they had no authority to discuss micro-economic issues? From the MCR perspective, these sources are reliable and authoritative as long as the story is being told from their perspective and as long as their interests, values, and worldviews are taken into account during the reporting process (more discussions in section 2.2).

Second, 'good' reporters are supposed to provide 'both sides of the story', which implies that all events, happenings, and issues have two sides. This way, the author of the item about the multiplatform generator provided both sides of the story by interviewing the Luxemburg diplomat, who was the financial partner, and the

mayor of Kindi, representing the other side, the beneficiaries. An MCR reporter would probably be stuck because they would miss both sides, yet they would still have more sides to the story: one sheanut processor could tell the story from one side, whilst a community-appointed generator-manager would tell the story from the other (more discussions in section 2.2).

Third, good reporters are supposed to be independent, and take some critical distance, from their sources. Yet, as explained in the first section of this chapter, the MCR reporter must be a member of the community, which entails, amongst other things, solidarity and loyalty to the community. If sources are members of the community, it follows that there exists a high degree of social proximity between the reporter and the source, which renders the idea of distance absurd. As sociologist Hebert Gans explained, social proximity implies that people with similar backgrounds and interests make easy contact and obstruct those with different backgrounds.[98]

From the MCR perspective, social proximity is more a strength than a weakness in the sense that it enables reporters to capture the innermost, authentic feelings from the community. It supposes trust between the two actors in the communication process, and trust is key to genuine communication. If the daughter of one of the sheanut-processing women had to make a news report, the entire process would be different: her own mother and the latter's colleagues or associates would serve as sources, and the questions that she would ask, the answers she would receive, and the views that would emerge from that process, would reflect the genuine feelings of that particular community in relation to the generator.

Based on the above, my third and final working hypothesis is: *The MCR approach adds considerable value when news at the community level is reported by those whom they affect in the first place, as they bring in their insider knowledge and perspective.*

I would like to return to my three key concepts to discuss them together at once as having a powerful psychological dimension that influences the communication process.

1.4 Bridging Thinking and Saying

All the points made so far converge in suggesting that when some news relevant to the community is approached from the community perspective, by members of the community using technologies familiar to that of the community, chances to capture what the bottom or the community thinks become very high. Formulated in this way, my point contains an explicit message and an implied or implicit message. The explicit message is the one summarised in the first sentence of this section, whereas the implied message brings out the opposite of the three working hypotheses that I have presented so far. In other words, my hypotheses implicitly suggest that reporters who are strangers to the community, ignore its values, its interests, and traditions [opposite hypothesis 1]; who use technologies unknown, unfamiliar, and thus intimidating, to the members of the community [opposite hypothesis 2]; and whose approach and perspective are elite-centred [opposite

hypothesis 3]; most likely capture what the bottom says, which is not always what the bottom thinks. In this section, I use psychological, philosophical, and linguistic theories to suggest that such external factors as unknown reporters, translators, and never-before-seen technologies, amongst others, interfere with the transfer of thoughts into speech.

It makes sense to start this section with the psychology of speech and thought, before moving to the discussion about ways in which the strangeness of the reporter [and his/her crew], and of his/her technologies affects the conversion of thoughts into speech. The relationship between speech or language and thought has been the subject of research in neuroscience, psychophysiology, [psycho]linguistics, [child]psychology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy, amongst other disciplines. Without going deeply into theories, for this is only a parenthesis meant to clarify one of the points I am making in this book, it will suffice to identify what 'thought' and 'speech' mean and entail on one hand, and the relationship between both, on the other. In doing that, I hope to manage to show the stage at which the above-mentioned factors interfere with the transfer of thoughts into speech.

Thought is the content of the psyche or the mind, whilst thinking is the process through which that content is structured and connected to other similar contents. Saying that one saw a black car driving across the village is expressing one thought, which appears as a compact unit, a quality that any mediation of thought fails to achieve.[99] Thought consists of many interrelated concepts [e.g., black, car, driving, village] molded into a compound unit.[100] From a psychoanalytical perspective, the human psychic apparatus has two distinct thought-generating systems, namely the *conscious* system that produces *manifest contents*, and the *unconscious* system that generates *latent contents*. Unconscious or latent thoughts interact with conscious or manifest counterparts, but the process is subject to a complex censorship mechanism that filters out and distorts thoughts that are not agreeable to the conscious system.[101] Even though unconscious thoughts do play a role in the communication process in which I am interested, I do not discuss them, as they would necessitate more space. I would rather proceed with conscious thoughts, those which people are aware of having and can express through speech.

Thinking, then, emerges from the short description above as the process through which a conscious person organises first concepts into units [thoughts] and then those units into larger ones, that one can call ideas. Philosopher Susan Stebbing insightfully described thinking as the 'ability to discern relevant connections, put together what ought to be conjoined and to keep distinct what ought to be separated.'[102] It follows that storing concepts in one's mind does not immediately mean that one is thinking. Thinking begins only when connections are made between those concepts and thoughts [concepts organised into units]. If connections amongst various concepts and thoughts are relevant, then the thinking that is taking place is said to be 'logical.'[103] If connections are irrelevant, then the thinking that takes place is illogical, as conclusions do not follow from the premises on which they are based. This is where the notions of 'thinking' and 'knowledge' intersect, as knowledge mainly consists in making 'ideal links [logical connections]

between fact and fact,' in detecting 'invisible wires behind the scenes,' so to make phenomena intelligible and controllable.[104]

One could conclude that asking what one thinks or knows about something [a news event or an issue, for instance], is asking which connections one makes between that event or issue and other things. The connection-making process is *unavoidably* influenced by many other factors. One of them is personal experiences, which tell each individual which path to follow in the connection-creation process.[105] Another one is the values, beliefs, traditions, and the like, that one has adopted or those prevailing in the environment in which one lives.

All that has been said about thought and thinking takes place in the psyche and, as such, does not have any concrete, palpable form. This is where speech, writing, body language, and other forms of communication enter into play. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's psychology of language and thought is very helpful in understanding the relationship between speech and thought. The central and most relevant point for the purpose of this discussion is the observation that 'Thought has its own structure, and the transition from it to speech is no easy matter.' The reason is that 'every sentence that we say in real life has some kind of subtext, a thought hidden behind it.'[106] I should immediately say here that Vygotsky's reference to speech applies to writing as well because, as he wrote, 'writing is also speech without an interlocutor, addressed to an absent or an imaginary person or to no one in particular.'[107]

Vygotsky explained the difficult transfer from thought to speech by pointing out the fundamental differences between the 'inner speech' [thought] and the 'outer speech': firstly, the grammar and syntax of one are the opposite of the other; secondly, the inner speech is condensed and abbreviated whilst written or oral speech is conveyed to its full extent;[108] thirdly,

> *Thought, unlike speech, does not consist of separate units. When I wish to communicate the thought that today I saw a barefoot boy in a blue shirt running down the street, I do not see every item separately: the boy, the shirt, its blue color, his running, the absence of shoes. I conceive of all this in one thought, but I put it into separate words.[109]*

One important point that Vygotsky made here and which is central to what I am calling 'what the bottom thinks,' is that thought is a unit, i.e., a combination of many concepts at once, and that its transfer into speech means first, splitting the thought into smaller elements, before using grammar and syntax to put the various elements back together either in oral or written speech. It happens this way 'because thought does not have its automatic counterpart in words.'[110] Another crucial point is that the transition from thought to speech unmistakably passes via 'meanings' because it implies the choice of words based on their meanings,[111] which, on their turn, depend on the language users' backgrounds, and the context.

Confirming Vygotsky's point, cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics scholar Kathryn Bock held that sentence or speech production comprises three broad components, namely: [1] the *message component*, which refers to 'the speaker's intended meaning;' [2] the *grammatical component*, which associates the

message and words conveying the intended meaning [functional processing] and structures the sentence and the words depending on their roles in the sentence [positional processing]; and [3] the *phonological component*, which determines the sound structure of chosen words and their combinations into larger units.[112]

To link the above to the MCR approach and its goal to capture 'what the bottom thinks,' I should start by stressing Vygotsky's observation later confirmed by psychologist Aleksandr Nikolaevich Sokolov in his *Inner Speech and Thought* ([1968] 1972),[113] that the transition from thought to speech is complex, dynamic, and labile, even when taking place under natural circumstances. By natural circumstances I mean that those exchanging thoughts do so without any external pressure, share meanings and the language. Yet under those natural circumstances, the travel of thought or message from one mind to the other via meanings and then speech ends only with part, or another version, of the initial thought being delivered because speech, either oral or written, is not a copy of thought.[114]

If that is how thought and speech interact under natural circumstances, how much of the initial, authentic thought is left if the two communication partners do not speak the same language, do not share the same meanings, values, and interests? How much of the initial, authentic thought is left if unknown, unfamiliar technologies invade the environment and inhibit one of the communication partners? How much of the initial, authentic thought is left if the questions are being formulated from a perspective that ignores the realities of one of the communication partners? From this point onward, I invite the reader to keep these questions constantly in mind while reading the remainder of this book because, to repeat myself, they touch upon the core of the MCR approach, one of capturing as much of what the bottom thinks as possible.

Let me consider one January 2011 TV report by Dutch journalist Erik Mouthaan aired on RTL4, a leading commercial TV station in the Netherlands, to highlight in a concrete way the difficulties surrounding the capturing of what the bottom thinks. Shot mainly in a camp of the displaced near Port-au-Prince, the report was showing the difficult recovery of Haiti one year after the January 2010 tragic earthquake.[115] After stating that many homeless Haitians were furious because of their government's slow reconstruction efforts, the journalist visited Jean Porcelin's open-air workshop and showed him carrying and then working on pieces of iron that would be used to repair buses or other transport vehicles. The journalist asked in French why the bus was not painted in white, to hear the following – equally in French, from Porcelin: 'no no no, here it's like that, it's our culture. Many colours … if this vehicle is not really beautiful, one would refuse to board it or to travel with.'[116]

Further in the report, Mouthaan went into the camp and interviewed Rousseline Xavier, a food-item seller whose selling shelves and bed were side by side in a plastic sheeting hut. She said, in French:

> *We don't have a decent life here. We can't find eh eh* [mouth grimace accompanied by hand movement, meaning that words are not coming easily] *we can't find anything here, that's what I want to say.*[117]

Two remarks spring from these two interviews: in the first instance, some basic local assumptions are strange to the reporter. Porcelin's answer as to why he would not paint the bus entirely in white, was that multiple colours meant beauty in his community. An assumption that could be made is that an MCR-minded reporter, who shared the same culture, would have gone more into the significance of colour combinations and the various messages they probably carried in times of mourning as compared with joyful times.

In the second place, Xavier could obviously not fully express her thoughts. When she said 'we can't find eh eh,' the viewer-listener expected a list of basic items and services to which she and other displaced could not have access [e.g.: clean water, drugs, food, sanitation, etc]. But the hesitations [eh, eh] followed by a mouth grimace and a revealing hand gesture and an abrupt 'We can't find anything here', push to think that there was something unusual in her interaction with the journalist. In the small hut there was certainly a big camera and at least two strangers, a cameraman and the journalist, and most likely a translator, as Mouthaan explained in his other reports in Haiti.[118]

Language is another element worth mentioning here. Xavier's few words announced a list but, failing to find the appropriate French names and descriptions of those items and services on the list [that is what her body language suggested], she decided to cut her answer short by providing no list at all. Interpreted from the perspective of language psychology, Xavier's hesitation, which were attributable to the presence of strangers in her makeshift hut, to their unfamiliar technology, and language difficulties, reflected a certain mental failure. According to psychologist James Deese, hesitations can be intentional, when the speaker wants to achieve some rhetorical effects, but in that case, they do not occur at a 'syntactically sensible place' in the sentence,[119] like the 'eh, eh' in Xavier's sentence did. When a hesitation occurs at a crucial place, it is generally due to 'difficulties encountered in saying what one has to say', which obviously was the case for Xavier.[120] It would not be false to say that what Xavier thought, i.e., her intended message, and what she said were very far from each other and that the report could have been richer and more informative if what she thought had been captured.

All the factors enumerated above relating to the strangeness of the reporter and his crew, of the technology, and of the language, created an inhibiting and intimidating environment, which is not favourable for a spontaneous and natural communication process.[121] This brings us back to Barthes' observation that he would fabricate another body for himself or metamorphose once he knew that he was being photographed, and to Derrida's confession that the TV camera would inhibit and paralyse him and prevent him from thinking and speaking the way he normally did.

The reference to 'metamorphosis', 'inhibition', 'paralysis' as a result of the use of unfamiliar media technologies reinforces my second hypothesis that using already domesticated technologies, a mobile phone in the MCR case, maximises the chances of capturing what the bottom thinks. Xavier's attitude in the RTL4 report showed clearly that she was inhibited and paralysed, perhaps simultaneously by the presence of unknown people in her makeshift hut, their technologies, the

use of a language she did not master, amongst others which resulted in her failure to convert her thoughts into oral speech.

Conclusion

The main task of this chapter was to explain the three central concepts around which the Mobile Community Reporting approach revolves, namely 'community', 'mobile technologies' and 'reporting.' I discussed these concepts one by one before considering ways in which they interfere with the communication process. Viewed from its social use, the concept of 'community' refers to a group of people residing in the same, clearly delimited geographical area, knowing each other very well, sharing the same values and interests, and having a strong spirit of belonging. I then presented mobile technologies, more specifically mobile phones, as the most common, widespread communication technologies that almost all members of local communities in Africa know. Being known and familiar makes that technology an ideal tool for reporters, as they do not appear to be intrusive to the community. As for reporting, I have outlined it as consisting in gathering relevant material taking into account certain demands in order to produce a journalistic product.

Underlying the discussions about the three key concepts is the ultimate aim of the MCR approach, notably, capturing the maximum possible of 'what the bottom thinks.' To clarify this goal and understand what it implies, I dived into theories about how the thinking process takes place and its relationship with speech. It appeared that speech was far from being the same as, or a copy of, thought, which it rather mediates. To travel from one mind to the technology that records its mediated form [speech], thought undergoes a process in which meanings for each of its constitutive elements are first found. After that, it goes to the next stage during which those meanings are coded into signs, words. My contention was that bringing in unknown reporters who do not share the same meanings, values and language, and who use unfamiliar technologies, amongst others, is increasing pressure on the members of the community, specifically those in marginalised areas, and tampering with the transfer of their thoughts into speech. The next chapter is an extension of Section 1.3, as it takes the notion of reporting further, discussing in more depth key journalistic values, sources and ethics from a bottom-up perspective.

Chapter 2

The Gates, Sources and Ethics

Speaking about ordinary members of the community doing journalism necessarily touches upon citizen journalism, the alternative form of reporting news by non-professionally trained journalists. In that form of journalism, traditional journalistic conventions are not always respected. In the previous chapter I suggested that the Mobile Community Reporting [MCR] approach involves members of the community as reporters, sources, objects of the report, and eventually as part of the audience. This description does not exclude professionally trained journalists who can also qualify as members of the community about which they report.

In this chapter, I stress the need and necessity to re-define or re-conceptualise the meanings of such expressions as 'reliable' or 'authoritative' sources, on one hand, and to re-think the notion of ethics on the other. In other words, I am suggesting a view of the notions of sources and ethics from a bottom-up perspective, at a community level in marginalised areas, rather than one that is top-down, elite-centred. Using some examples from the VOAMF Mobile Reporting Programme, I discuss ways in which MCR-inspired journalists approached the issue of sources, before considering the ethical aspects. But before all that, it makes some sense to first start by looking at the mechanism that helps journalists check whether all needed ingredients are in place for any stories that are to be published.

2.1 Gatekeeping and Gatewatching

The most common attributes that guide journalists and editors in measuring the newsworthiness of events are timeliness, proximity, importance, impact or consequence, interest, conflict, controversy, sensationalism, prominence, novelty, oddity, and the unusual, amongst many others.[122] Besides these attributes, other values or considerations such as sources and ethics influence the decision about the publication or non-publication of an item. Since journalistic values emerge as a central element in doing journalism, it is worthwhile having a short pause here to understand what the notion of 'value' is about. Sociologist Manuel Castells contended that value and power are closely connected, as 'value is, in fact, an expression of power.' In other words, 'Whoever holds power … decides what is valuable.'[123] This is very important in my discussion of journalistic values, particularly when one remembers the observation that I made above that the intellectual, political, and economic elites have dominated journalism. Those elites who have been producing and consuming news have defined the values that

have been guiding the profession. This section, then, discusses gatekeeping and its function of filtering out everything that does not fulfil pre-determined criteria on one hand, and gatewatching, which offers an alternative option on the other.

The very first observation I want to make is that 'news' is not something that is out there awaiting to be detected and reported. On the contrary, news is the end of a process in which both the public and the newsmen and women play an important role. It is this news-production process that distinguishes conventional journalism from citizen journalism. Established news media, the ones practising conventional journalism, place gatekeeping mechanisms at each stage of the news-production process, so as to ensure that the values pursued and cherished by the media house are respected. In other terms, at each stage, materials pass through a gate or get blocked there. New Media theorist Axel Bruns presented the gatekeeping process as consisting of bottlenecks. The first bottleneck is at 'the input stage, where editors and journalists make a preliminary selection of what current and upcoming news events may be worth covering;' the second is 'at the output stage, where editors pick the final selection of articles or reports to be included in the publication;' and the third is at 'the response stage, where editors again select a small sample of reader or viewer comments to be presented.'[124] This filtering and control process has been the cornerstone of mainstream journalism and is still a key principle of journalism even in the digital era.

The process takes place differently in citizen journalism. Bruns defined citizen journalism as 'a form of journalism where citizens themselves, rather than (or at the very least in addition to) paid journalists claiming to represent the public interest, are directly engaged in covering, debating, and deliberating on the news.'[125] As it appears here, the notions of 'news reporting' and 'public interest' are at the centre of citizen journalists' activities. The sole difference resides fundamentally in the process of evaluating and judging the news that corresponds to public interest. In conventional journalism the process is institutionalised, while it is not in citizen journalism.

Media scholar Chris Atton suggested that citizen journalism implies the 'decapitalisation' and 'deinstitutionalisation' of journalism.[126] This means that there is no established institution behind citizen journalism platforms, and that the reporters are not earning their lives through journalism. Citizen journalism is part of what Castells termed 'horizontal networks of communication,' that emerged around the Internet, and which gave rise to 'mass self-communication,' thereby 'decisively increasing the autonomy of communicating subjects via communication corporations.'[127] The new element that joins the discussion at this point is 'capital,' as it appears to mark the distinction between conventional journalism and citizen journalism. Journalism is primarily a business since the main aim is to make a profit by serving a market and meeting its demands. News, therefore, is a commodity that follows the rules of the market. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu reminded that journalism operates under commercial constraints,[128] which, as a consequence, influences the news evaluation process.[129] Another important point is that news media houses are first of all firms within which journalism operates. Under such circumstances journalism does not come before the firm's interests.[130]

As a form of journalism that pursues news values in a different way, citizen journalism operates presumably free of any commercial or institutional constraints and pressure. I am saying 'presumably' because there is always room for external pressure even in citizen journalism.[131] What is different is that pressure is not institutionalised and part of the trade as it is in mainstream journalism. It follows that the decapitalisation and deinstitutionalisation of journalism imply the removal of a number of bottlenecks, especially most of those at the output and response stages. The one at the input stage, that is, the one at the reporter's level remains, for the reporter still has to make decisions on what to report about and what to ignore.

Bruns coined the term 'gatewatching' to describe what happens at the output and response stages in the digital, Web 2.0 mediascape.[132] With the emergence of the more interactive version of the Web around 2005, more and more people thought the news production process should be democratised. Mainstream journalists and editors were suspected of serving other interests than those of the larger segments of the public. The result was that some events would be considered newsworthy and be covered, whilst others would be filtered out through the gatekeeping process. Gatewatching emerged thus as an alternative to gatekeeping, consisting of those amongst the members of the public deciding which events are worth covering and which ones receive prominence amongst those reported. Unlike gatekeeping, Bruns wrote, 'gatewatching does not concern itself with making comprehensive news selection from all available information in the news flow; it does not claim to present "all the news that's fit to print"… .'[133] Instead, 'Gatewatching … relies exactly on that ability of users to decide for themselves what they find interesting and worth noting and sharing.'[134]

Until this point one can safely assert that the main difference between conventional journalism and citizen journalism resides in the process that leads to the creation of news items. Whilst the conventional process is dotted with gates that open when a set of criteria are met, the citizen journalism process is more open to the public. Said differently, the difference resides in the role the public or citizens are called and expected to play in the process. In the conventional process a very limited number of citizens, those with certain academic and professional qualifications are eligible to produce news and keep the gates that dot the entire news-production process. The public enters into play at the response stage, and even then, the gates still have to be opened or closed.[135] In contrast, in most citizen journalism initiatives, the public is omnipresent at the input, output, and response stages.

Let me close this more or less theoretical section by addressing a confusion that could potentially arise from the previous paragraph, especially where it is observed that the public is omnipresent at all stages in most citizen journalism initiatives. This observation could take one to the misleading conclusion that whatever is published as news is citizen journalism. It is true that news is relative. It is equally true that news is what we as news producers or news consumers decide to call news. Yet one should not lose sight of the news values that makes news 'news.' For instance, is the passing of a final primary school examination by one specific

child in a remote African village news? The answer might be 'no' if that event is the most normal, ordinary thing in that village. The 'yes' answer might have many levels. Yes, because the event is new and of interest at least to the parents, relatives, friends, other villagers [who constitute already a public]. Yes, because that child is blind and had to compete with non-impaired children. Yes, because that child is the very first child from that village or one particular tribe or community, to ever pass that examination. Yes, because that child went to school two days a week and had to work on the farm the remaining three days.

What I am trying to explain here is that news is what we make it, i.e., the connections we create between one particular and recent event and other issues in society. In creating those connections we illustrate how 'important' that news is to a specific section of society, how 'sensational' it is for a visually-impaired child to pass, how 'controversial/conflictual' child labour is, and so on. If the values and interests of one particular segment of the public are not shared by the gatekeepers, then the selection process will deem events relevant to that segment, not newsworthy. This obstacle seems to be addressed by the gatewatching alternative, which provides a possibility to segments of the public to generate and promote news items that are relevant and interesting to them. Whilst this section focused on the process that leads to the production of news items, the next examines closely the uses of sources from the Mobile Community Reporting perspective.

2.2 MCR and Its Sources

News is like clay to which the artist can give any shape depending on his or her talents and intentions. In other words, the same news event can be reported in many ways, and none of them can claim to be better than the other, unless other issues arise in between. In this section, then, I want to once again stress that the aim of an MCR-minded journalist is to capture, or at least to get as close as possible to, *what the bottom thinks*. To achieve that, the reporter needs to hear more from the people at the bottom, which brings up the notion of sources that is central to journalism. The questions I explore here are: how do MCR-minded reporters go about with their sources? Which sources do they use and why? However, I need to first elaborate about *what the bottom thinks*, because that is the one that dictates the sources that the reporter needs to use and interview.

Media scholar Michael Schudson nicely suggested that news is like bread or sausage, something that people make.[136] This is a very helpful metaphor as it implies that there are essential elements needed to bake bread [e.g.: flour], and others that depend on the baker or their clients' tastes. Doing journalism from an MCR perspective, then, is interpreting a recent event of public interest in a way that places the community at the centre of the entire process. One event taking place in a marginalised area may be covered, but, as the *BBC* report discussed in the introduction has shown, may only reflect *what the elite thinks*. As section 1.4 argued, the giving of the floor does not automatically result in *what the bottom thinks*, because the strangeness/familiarity of the reporter, the technology and the language play a crucial role.

What the bottom thinks is intimately related to the notion of 'community' that I discussed in chapter one. Being a member of the community and thus knowing the values and interests of that community as well as its issues, allows the reporter to voice the community's perspective, highlight its solutions, and establish links between whatever is being reported with the community's life, values, and interests. This is applicable both to mainstream journalists and to citizen journalists.

A counter-argument might emerge at this point: is there anything like 'community thought'? In other words, does the community think collectively? There is no doubt that members of the community think individually and come out with subjective thoughts about, and interpretations of, phenomena taking place in their environment. However, as social anthropologist Anthony Cohen suggested in *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), those subjective interpretations are not random but are rather made within the terms characteristic of a given community.[137] *What the bottom thinks*, then, is more the larger framework that inspires the various and sometimes contradictory individual interpretations, than any unitary collective thought.

Let me give some examples to illustrate my point. On 9th March 2010, Beryl Omunya, a journalist at a community radio in the slum of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, filed a mobile report titled 'Nairobi: Safe water thanks to solar disinfection.'[138] The news in this report was that the reporter's neighbourhood in the slum of Kibera had embraced a solar disinfection system, consisting in exposing water in transparent plastic bottles to solar radiation for a full day. The project officer, Joshua Otieno working for the Kenya Water for Health Organisation [Kwaho], explained in English how the method worked and gave a brief history of the project, before the reporter's neighbour, named Grace, explained in Swahili why she had embraced this method. Amongst other things, she could save on the cost of firewood and paraffin oil thanks to this method. However, she wondered how the method would work during bad weather, as a clear sky and bright sun were essential to the method. This is an MCR-inspired piece of journalism that provides many clues about w*hat the bottom thinks*. The reporter covered an issue of interest to her community, using tools that did not inhibit the members of that community, speaking in their language, and voicing [part of] their views and concerns.

Covering a closely related subject from the Kisenyi-Mengo slum in Kampala, Uganda, Ismael Asiimwe Mustapha, a graduate in chemistry, filed on 22nd June 2011 a mobile report titled 'Kampala: Prices go down following slum recycling.'[139] The story was about a recent phenomenon whereby some young slum residents fished out plastic bottles from the Nakivugo River in Kampala, and sold them to juice and water vendors. On their turn, the latter sold juice and water for very little money, with for instance water costing 200 Ugandan shillings [US$ 0.07], which was 500 shillings [US$ 0.19] cheaper than industrial mineral water. Whilst narrating, Mustapha showed the fishing point, where a water pipe blocked the bottles, zoomed in on the bottles and their caps being washed, as well as clients at a roadside restaurant enjoying locally packaged water. He ended with the following reflection: 'by taking such drinks, you are saving, but also bear in mind that cheap

things are sometimes expensive. You can develop very serious diseases in the long run… .'

This is an instance of the MCR approach applied to citizen journalism. The report contains some news that connects to real concerns within the community and highlights views and interests from within. It can be assumed that Mustapha's work, especially the shooting phase, was made easier by the fact that he was a member of that particular community using a tool that other members, too, had in their pocket. Moreover, his intentions could be anticipated. The situation could most probably have been different if the work had been done by a crew of 'strangers,' whose intentions were not easy to decipher or anticipate. The report shows subjective interpretations of the bottle-recycling business by implying that some members of the community were rather taking advantage of the recycling business on one hand, and by concluding with a pessimistic note, on the other. Although contradicting each other, these interpretations give an insight into *what the bottom thinks* about both their economic and health situations.

As the two examples show, sources are crucial in providing clues about what the bottom thinks. Unlike the Kenyan water solar disinfection report by a mainstream journalist, the Kampala bottle-fishing and recycling story had no single interview or source that was explicitly identified as such.[140] As already noted in section 1.3, there is no journalism without sources.[141] However, in journalism, like in other intellectual endeavours, sources pose a number of problems. Are the sources that one used enough? Are they appropriate? Are they reliable and credible? Are they well informed? Are they relevant? Are they reflecting the various sides of the subject? These, and many other questions are not easy to answer. The initial question should be: what is a source? Sources are

> the actors whom journalists observe or interview, including interviewees who appear on the air or who are quoted in magazine articles, and those who only supply background information or story suggestions.[142]

Sources fall under three categories: [1] *personal* sources, that is, people the journalist interviews; [2] *observational* sources, for instance events and places that the journalist observes; and [3] *stored* sources, i.e., books, reports, libraries, etc.[143] For the purpose of my discussion about the MCR approach, I want to stress *observation* and *interview* as two important ways of obtaining information from a source. A community reporter lives in the community and observes most of the movements and doings within that community, which observational sources are all about. In the Kampala bottle-fishing and recycling story, it is obvious that Mustapha carefully observed the main actors, namely the 'bottle fishermen,' the bottle cleaners, and the consumers. Otherwise, how could he have located the bottle-blocking pipe? How could he have spotted the house in which the bottles were being washed? How could he have distinguished the locally-bottled water from the industrial one? How could he have provided the exact prices? He clearly had enough background information coming partly from informants he did not explicitly name, and partly from observing the actors and their actions.

The next thorny question is one of knowing which sources are relevant and which ones are not. Doing journalism is choosing a perspective, but also selecting sources. The Kenyan water disinfection report has two main sources: the official source, and the unofficial one, to which, one could add the reporter's observation of the actors [residents]. Are these sources relevant? Most observers would agree that they are. Are there other sources that could have been relevant? Definitely. An official from a public health institution could have been relevant. A seller of industrially packaged mineral water could have been a relevant source. A slum paraffin oil/charcoal/firewood seller whose business was in jeopardy could have been a relevant source. An environmentalist who had been advocating for less use of charcoal and firewood could have been a source.

As it is impossible to list all possible relevant sources, it will suffice to say that once the perspective and frame have been chosen, relevant sources follow. A medical perspective will most likely necessitate a medical source; an environmentalist perspective will most probably call for an environmentalist source; and so on. What the MCR approach advocates both in citizen journalism and mainstream journalism is that the community-based sources should receive primacy, since the ultimate aim is to report the news in a way that reflects what the community thinks. While the Kampala bottle-fishing and recycling story granted absolute and exclusive primacy to community sources, the Kenyan water solar disinfection report balanced them with an official source coming from outside the community.

The final point I want to discuss with regards to sources is the often-cited observation that the sources should reflect 'both sides' of the story or the issue. Citizen journalism and other types of alternative media have been criticised for failing to observe this professional principle. Yet, once seriously questioned, the notion of 'both sides' fails to provide a clear answer about what it means. Do stories have just two sides? As noted above, depending on what one wants to highlight, the Kenya water solar disinfection report could have had a local *economic livelihood* side, focusing on the lot of paraffin oil and charcoal vendors; an *environmentalist* side, focusing on the slowing down of deforestation; a *health* side, focusing on waterborne diseases; a *bottle-recycling* side, focusing on the new bottle-collecting and selling business; etc. Is it suggested that one should choose two of the many sides? From the MCR perspective, the journalist is expected to make his or her own judgment and come out with one or more sides that have more significance to the community.[144]

For instance, the Kampala bottle-fishing and recycling story seems to have highlighted the economic side, as the central point appears to be the motive of the entire informal business, i.e., bringing water and juice prices down and to some extent the health side. Given the much greater emphasis on the economic side, one could conclude that that side had more weight for the community than the health side at the time of reporting. Many more sides including governance and environment, to mention but a few, could have been added, but their significance to the community appeared small to the reporter.[145]

In short, the authoritativeness, reliability and relevance of sources from the MCR perspective depend on the significance [to the community] of the issue that is being covered, and the closeness of the persons who inform the reporter. Closeness in this sense encapsulates such notions as authoritative, reliability and relevance, as it includes a great deal of expertise in what one does [e.g., preparing the bottle for solar disinfection; fishing out and cleaning bottles, etc]. However, this does not mean that *all* expertise needed to inform the reporter is present in the reports. The boys fishing out bottles and selling them are qualified, authoritative sources when it comes to knowing how they fish out bottles and getting them ready for sale. They lack authoritativeness as sources when it comes to pasteurising those bottles to avoid spreading waterborne diseases. In the next section I want to focus on another central concept in journalism, namely ethics, to consider some ethical aspects of MCR-inspired journalism.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

Journalism needs some rules to guide the work of those involved in it. Like lawyers and medical doctors, journalists have an ethical code of conduct they have to follow. However, ethical issues in medicine or legal practices seem less challenging than in journalism in the sense that not any one can claim the title of medical doctor or lawyer, whilst that is increasingly the case for the title of journalist. In addition to that, the MCR approach necessitates a closer scrutiny, as it advocates a new type of relationship with sources and audiences, which often gives rise to new ethical issues. Being a member of the community and using familiar technologies to gather information about one's own community opens many doors and hearts, which brings the risk of exposing strictly private matters or unconsciously causing trouble to the community or some of its members.

For instance, in the bottle-fishing and recycling report mentioned in the previous section, it would be an ethical problem to show the faces and shops of the sellers of repackaged juice and water, if that practice had been legally banned. Showing them would mean the beginning of trouble for the sellers and their supply chain, which was not the initial intention of the reporter. In this section, I first briefly outline the concept of journalistic ethics before pinpointing some of the most important ethical aspects of the MCR approach.

The concept of ethics emanated from Philosophy, where it refers to 'the study of the distinctions between right and wrong, virtuous and vicious, and beneficial or harmful.'[146] In his *Nicomachean Ethics* [350 B.C.], Aristotle explained ethics as consisting of rules that tell 'what men are to do, and from what to abstain.'[147] Discussing it from a sociological perspective, Emile Durkheim, too, used the notion of 'rules,' explaining moral [thus, ethical] facts as 'rules of conduct that have sanction.'[148] Those rules, he wrote, 'determine the duties that men owe to their fellows.'[149] Durkheim insisted on the notion of 'sanction,' which is the consequence of an act that results from a confrontation between that act and 'the rule[s] of conduct already laid down.'[150]

Ethics as rules of conduct were adopted in many professions [lawyers, physicians, priests, to mention a few] to determine the duties of those exercising those professions, and to ensure that no harm is done to the people they are supposed to serve. From this perspective, journalistic ethics defines the duties, responsibilities and obligations that journalists have in relation to their sources and audiences. Communication scholar Francis Kasoma provided a very helpful insight into ethics stating that 'journalism ethics is concerned with making sound moral decisions in journalistic performance, and [it] assumes the presence of societal morality.' Morality, as Kasoma explained, 'has to do with actions guided by generally acceptable human values and responsibilities.' In this respect, 'Ethics begins when elements within a moral system conflict.'[151]

Keeping in mind that moral values defer from country to country, and from culture to culture, it follows that journalism ethics differs depending on the country one is reporting from. To use Durkheim's notion of sanction once again, 'the sanction depends absolutely on the relation that exists between [a given] act and a regulation governing its toleration or prohibition.'[152] Factors such as religion, local traditions, culture, and others, can play an important role in shaping local journalism ethics. In the Netherlands, for instance, it is ethically incorrect to name a criminal suspect even after his or her condemnation, unless the suspect is a high-profile figure whose name is already public knowledge. One can find cultural reasons here that justify this convention in the real world. One of them is that last names are transmitted from a father or mother to a son or daugther, which means that many people in the same family share the same name. Publishing the name of the suspect means, amongst other things, that the children bearing the same name would be affected at school and other places whereas they are innocent.

In Rwanda, where another value system prevails, not only are the names of suspects fully mentioned, but also their pictures are published without blurring or barring the face or otherwise making them unrecognisable.[153] Similarly, newspapers in Burkina Faso publish full names and other personal details of the suspects and publish their pictures with faces made more or less unrecognisable.[154] I am not suggesting here that one practice is more ethical than the other. Rather, I am trying to explain that each culture has its own values that might appear unethical if viewed from a different value system.

Despite these specificities relating to local culture and traditions, there are some universal ethical principles that have emerged. These revolve around two pillars, namely, *truth seeking* and *harm minimisation*. In other words, reporting is expected to be a truth-seeking and reporting endeavour that does little or no harm to the audience and to the sources. Those principles can be summarised in four points:[155]

Firstly, journalists seek and report truth and, to achieve that, must test the accuracy of information, give the opportunity to accused subjects to respond to allegations of wrong doing, identify their sources and their reliability to the public, question the motives of those requiring anonymity, keep promises, avoid mis-representation and oversimplification, avoid undercover methods of gathering information [except when traditional methods are not helpful or possible], never

plagiarise, avoid stereotyping and distinguish between advocacy and news, amongst others.

Secondly, in seeking and reporting truth, journalists must minimise harm, show compassion for those who might be affected by any news coverage, be sensitive in dealing with children and inexperienced sources, make sure inappropriate content is not made available to children, avoid promoting violence, be sensitive when using pictures of the victims of a tragedy, avoid arrogance and inappropriate language, be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects and be judicious in naming criminal suspects, amongst others.

Thirdly, in seeking and reporting truth, journalists must act independently, that is, avoid conflicts of interest, remain free of activities that may compromise their integrity, refuse gratifications, gifts and other favours, disclose unavoidable conflicts, be vigilant about holding those with power accountable and be wary of sources offering information for favours or money, amongst others.

Fourthly, in seeking and reporting truth, journalists must be accountable to their readers, listeners and viewers. They must invite dialogue with the public about journalistic conduct, encourage the public to voice their grievances against the news media, and admit mistakes and correct them promptly.

This summary contains a number of key values that could be called universal, even though they appear under various forms in different cultures. Truthful reporting is one of those values, even though we know that many versions of the truth can, and do often, emerge from one event. Special protection for children and other weak categories in society is another key value that is universal, though differently perceived and interpreted. Honesty, integrity, independence, and the like, as well as acceptance of a two-way communication with the audience, are other values that are universally praised, whilst leaving room for multiple interpretations. The same principles are to be seen in the 'Bloggers' Code of Ethics' written by Jonathan Dube, a former journalist who has embraced alternative journalism.[156]

Being generally a set of conventions subject to multiple interpretations, codes of ethics are not like written laws that journalists *must* follow to the letter. There are two levels at which the broad ethical principles are subjected to interpretation: firstly, at the organisational level, whereby an outlet comes out with its in-house code of conduct or code of ethics, generally with an ombudsman as a neutral person who ensures that the code is respected. Secondly, ethical principles are interpreted at a personal level, that is, at the journalist's level during the gathering of information and during the writing up or post-production phase.

Let me now explore the meaning and implications of the above from the MCR perspective. I have emphasised that MCR-inspired journalism takes into account the values of the community that is the object and subject of the report. Since ethics depends on the moral values cherished by a given culture, which can be narrowed down to community, it should follow that each community has its own perception of ethics. One example should suffice to illustrate my point. That example relates to the ethical principle that the journalist should avoid stereotyping and oversimplification.

On 29th March 2011, Okello Fathil, a mobile reporter in the slum of Kisenyi in the Ugandan capital Kampala, made a report titled 'Kampala: Co-wives fight, public watches.'[157] In this report, Fathil showed a fight between two co-wives from the Karamajong tribe and informed [through narration] that the two women wanted to check who was the best mother amongst them. The torso of the two women was entirely naked and covered with blood as a result of the fight. As they fought, the public that included children watched and seemed to enjoy the spectacle [the mimicking of the fight attests to this]. Three men attempted to separate the women, but obviously made little effort to effectively separate them. Interviewed on the scene and in the local language, one man said [through Fathil's voice in English]:

> … they are Karamajong and nobody here understands their language. But they fight everyday against one another. I don't know, but they must be using drugs. What if you find yourself killing the other? Nobody helps you around. And they fight daily, not [just] women, but also men, young girls and young boys. I think the local authorities should come around and help us with these people.
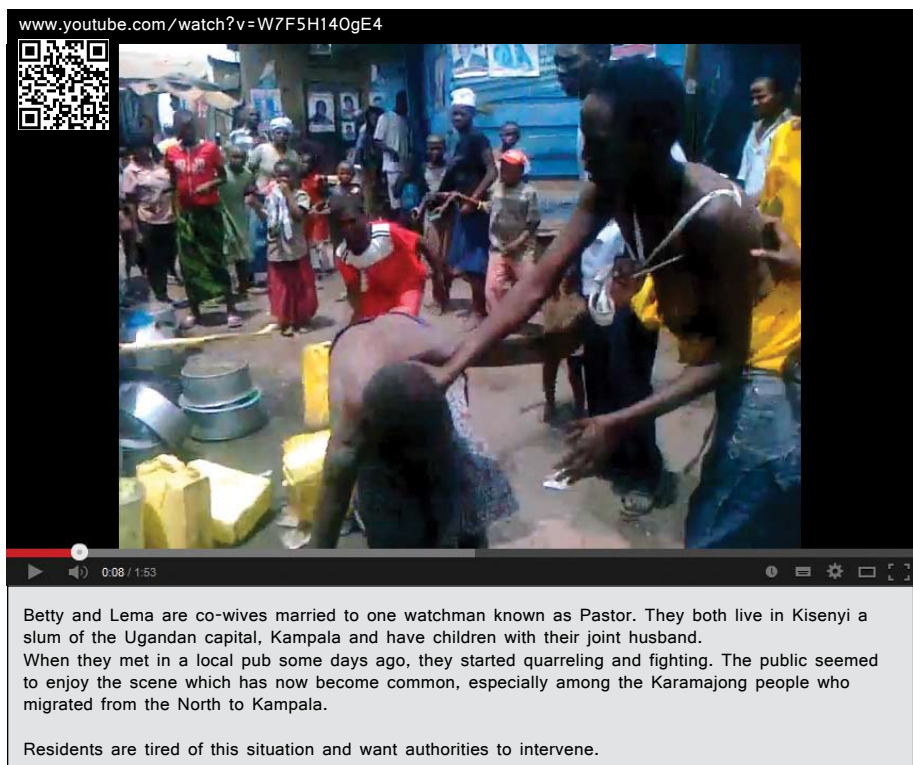

Figure 3: Two Karamajong co-wives fighting in Kisenyi slum in Kampala, Uganda.

Fathil ended his report with some background information that Karamajong are cattle-herders from northeastern Uganda who migrated to the capital to make a living. 'Here in Kisenyi' he concluded, 'they spend most of their valuable time consuming alcohol… .'

From an ethical point of view, this report raises some points that could be interpreted in many ways. Apparently, the half-nakedness of the two mothers seemed to be a usual thing in Kisenyi, whilst it could appear shocking in other places. Given that the scene did not shock the local community, it would follow that the reporter would not find it unethical to capture it. The most important aspect for the sake of this discussion is stereotyping. Both the interviewee and the reporter made statements that the Karamajong were 'like that,' fighting each other as they pleased, consuming drugs and alcohol. It is clear here that the two were reproducing a stereotype prevailing in their community about the Karamajong. Moreover, the reason of the fight, finding who was a better mother, could be considered an oversimplification in some places, whilst it is presented as having a particular meaning among the Karamajong in Kisenyi.

The question then is: has the reporter avoided stereotypes? Obviously the answer is no. Would it follow that he has been unethical in his reporting? I would say 'no,' because in this respect, avoiding stereotypes would mean avoiding to capture what the community thought about that particular happening. The report rather has the merit of showing how one particular community in a marginalised area [the slum] was perceived by another community in which it was imbedded. It brought to the surface at least three major issues facing that particular community and those presented as Karamajong immigrants living in it. The first issue was explicitly pointed out by the reporter, namely, brutal violence among Karamajong women. In this respect, the half-nakedness of the women was part of the story, as it showed brutality in its *naked* form. The second issue appeared in an implicit way and touched upon the acceptance and enjoyment of that brutal violence by part of the community. This issue was implicit because the reporter did not even mention it in his comment. It is an observation resulting from the viewer's interpretation.

The last issue also came out implicitly and relates to stereotyping. By explaining what [part of] the community thought of the fight, the reporter showed how the local community had negatively stereotyped the Karamajong as excessive alcohol consumers who used brutality to prove certain qualities. Stereotyping in this case, then, was like a signal sent to authorities and community-based non-governmental organisations for them to take appropriate steps to address the issues leading to, or resulting from, stereotyping. Handling stereotypes has equally proven a delicate exercise amongst literary critics, who are caught up in a serious dilemma: ethnic stereotypes, as dangerous and poisonous as they are, owe their survival primarily to their power of repeatability. Yet, one cannot study them without repeating them, and thus, without contributing to their spread and survival. However, refusing to, or abstaining to repeat them [for reporting purposes or literary criticism] does not prevent them from circulating.[158]

It is also important to note that the Karamajong voice was missing in this story, whilst they were the subject of the story. The interviewee clearly depicted them as not being part of the community and as speaking a language that nobody else understood. He even went further to say that no one would help if one of the fighters killed the other. This could be interpreted as meaning that failing to understand and speak someone's language is failing to grasp that person's worldview and, as a consequence, having no sentiment of solidarity towards that person. The reporter has definitely covered the fight from the perspective of his own community, which he knew and could better understand. Another imaginable MCR approach to this story could have been one from the Karamajong perspective. Said differently, the report reflected what the community thought of the Karamajong, rather than how the Karamajong community perceived itself.

What the above shows is that the ethical aspects of MCR-inspired reports are better understood from the local community perspective rather than from the perspective of another value system that reflects other worldviews and perceptions. A number of African journalism and communication scholars have engaged in a discussion about developing a typically African indigenous journalism ethics or 'Afriethics.' Prominent amongst the proponents of Afriethics is Francis Kasoma from Zambia, who maintained that 'Black Africans do have their own conceptions of what constitutes right or wrong, and good or bad in human actions.' In their thinking, he wrote, 'a good action is one that is performed for the benefit or service of other persons [family, clan or tribe], either individually or collectively' whilst 'a bad or wrong action is one that arises from purely selfish motives.'[159]

For Kasoma, Afriethics should not systematically reject the Western value system. It should be based on 'typically African principles and values' and adopt and/or adapt those from the West that converge with African perception.[160] This theory of Afriethics contains inspiring elements for the MCR approach that I am outlining here but also calls for some criticism. In the first place, it depicts the entire African continent as being one community that shares all moral values and traditions whilst that is far from demonstrated. Generalisations such as 'The world of *an African* consists of …' or 'Africans believe the spirits of the dead have bodies'[161] tend to ignore that there are multiple philosophies of life and death in various African societies.

On the shores of the Oubangui River [Republic of Congo] for instance, local communities believe humans metamorphose into crocodiles and hippopotamuses to assault humans, before transforming back into humans. For them, no animal can decide on its own to assault a human being. This belief is far from shared in all African societies. Moreover the key foundation of Afriethics according to which 'the need for common good for the community overshadows all acts in African society,'[162] ignores the fact that societies are composed of many individuals with different ways of perceiving and interpreting 'the common good.' This perception can also be influenced by religion, including traditional ones, or lifestyles amongst various categories of people [pastoralist communities, fishing communities, etc.].

From an MCR approach, it would be hard to imagine an umbrella code of ethics that could be valid in each and every imaginable community or society in Africa. It makes much more sense to maintain the value system of the self-reporting community at the centre of all ethical preoccupations. Whether the reporter is interpreting the common good in the same way as the rest of the community do, is another discussion. In later chapters, we will find that the reporter's tone and approach show some disapprobation if their interpretation defers from that of the members of the community which they are reporting about, and vice versa.

Conclusion

The foregoing has shown that citizen journalism, unlike mainstream journalism, involves a kind of gatekeeping at one level, that is, at the input level whereby an individual reporter has to make selection decisions. At other levels, it is gatewatching that applies and determines which items receive prominence. Gatewatching supposes a greater role on the part of members of the audience, who ultimately contribute to the selection process. As members of the audience, some of whom are often citizen journalists, have diverging interests and cherish diverging values, the newsworthiness of events becomes more complex.

The notion of sources that is central to journalism has also proven to be central to the MCR approach. However, sources in MCR-inspired journalism play a different role, one of providing clues and insights about what the bottom thinks. In the context of this book, what the bottom thinks does not refer to the collective thought of a given community in a marginalised area, but rather to those individual interpretations and the larger insight they provide into a given issue. In this respect, notions such as source relevance and authoritativeness received another interpretation to mean closeness with, and practical expertise in, an issue or phenomenon.

This chapter has finally discussed ethics as depending on societies and cultures in which they are considered. What is wrong and unacceptable in one place, society, or culture, might entirely be ordinary and even good in other places, societies, and cultures. In stressing this point, I wanted to call for caution in a globalised world where content made in one cultural context is viewed and judged in another context with a different value system. There are of course some broad universal principles, but the way in which these are locally interpreted depends largely on local traditions, values, and worldviews.

Let me close this chapter with a short methodological introduction to the next three chapters dedicated to more in-depth discussions on a thematic basis. Those discussions are centred on the MCR approach as it appeared in the more than 1,000 mobile reports made between 2007 and 2013. I find it important to let the reader know at this level, the points on which I focus and the method I use to detect and then elaborate upon them.

In my thematic analysis in the next three chapters I use qualitative content analysis to point out and discuss ways in which *what the bottom thinks* appeared in various mobile reports. In other words, I sift through the reports in search of various ways in which the voices, thoughts and interpretations from the community were given shape and integrated into the final report, sometimes alongside voices, thoughts and interpretations from outside the community. My approach is mainly descriptive, but also analytical, especially when I have to pause and handle one or many key journalistic concepts discussed above, namely, newsworthiness, sources, and ethics. In some cases, I engage into comparisons between mobile reports, to emphasise that MCR-inspired journalism does not lead to uniformity.

Chapter 3

Reporting Governance

In mid-September 2011, Nigel Mabiza, a mobile reporter in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, made a report about the City Council's decision and move to maintain hygiene in the city, especially in places that illegally served as street markets selling fruit and vegetables. Titled 'Bulawayo: Street vendors unhappy about City Council's move',[163] the report depicted a three-sided situation: [1] it was built on unemployment that had pushed many people to turn to street markets in areas that were not designed to be markets, thereby generating a public health hazard due to [2] a lack of appropriate hygiene; realising that hazard, [3] the City Council decided to remove the vendors and destroyed their goods. One lady wondered how she would be able to pay for her children's school, as her 20 pieces of cabbage had been thrown away. She was furious that the City Council had done that without even warning or telling the vendors what hygiene standards they were expected to meet. This is a very good example of how MCR-inspired journalism helps bring out issues relating to governance at various levels.

Governance is defined as 'the act or process of imparting authoritative direction and co-ordination to organisations in an environment,'[164] or simply 'as the exercise of political authority and use of resources to manage society's problems and affairs.'[165] Governance is good when those who exercise power meets the expectations of those on whom they exercise that power, and when the former grant power to the latter and verify their own performance.[166] The concept of governance applies to all types and forms of organisations where some people manage affairs on behalf of others. We can thus speak of governance in reference to the City Council's management, but also to a development project, a business company, or a local religious congregation.

Michael Bratton distinguished three types of governance, each of which comprised of three dimensions: The [1] *administrative* type of governance comprises aspects relating to *legality* [is the rule of law observed?], to *transparency* [are procedures open to all?], and to *honesty* [are officials free of corruption?]. The [2] *economic* type covers *effectiveness* [are stated goals being (likely to be) met?], *efficiency* [are public goods delivered on a cost-effective basis?], and *equity* [do citizens have equal access to public goods?]. The [3] *political* type of governance includes the *responsiveness* dimension [are officials acting according to popular priorities?], the *accountability* dimension [are unresponsive officials disciplined?]; and the *legitimacy* dimension [do citizens willingly obey commands?].[167] In this chapter, I describe ways in which mobile reporters approached issues that related to governance at their respective communities' level. I first discuss what I call

the 'dilemma approach' to governance-related news. Then I explore how reporters approached governance failures and successes, before closing the chapter with a discussion of reports about local communities substituting public officials.

3.1 Governance Dilemmas

Good governance as briefly explained in the introduction aims to ensure that public good is attained and maintained to the benefit of all. However, as this section shows, it is not in all situations that one can come out and say: 'this is the path to public good.' In many cases, public good is multilayered, having more than just one dimension. In this section, I try to show ways in which the MCR-minded reporters managed to present governance issues as constituting dilemmas. The dilemma technique, if one could call it that way, consists in outlining an issue in a way that presents several dimensions of that issue and pushes the audience to realise that there is no one simple solution. Solving issues relating to one dimension aggravates issues relating to one or many other dimensions, and vice versa.

The Bulawayo street vendors report falls under the category I would call governance-dilemma reports, in the sense that attempting to solve one problem aggravated the same problems that vendors intended to solve. The report presented at least three dimensions: the socio-economic dimension [high unemployment rates], self-initiated livelihood alternative [street vending], and public health [poor hygiene]. Governance entered into play when the City Council came in to solve the public health issue by removing and destroying vendors' fruits and vegetables. Yet, those fruits and vegetables constituted the livelihood of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of well-intentioned vendors. It was a dilemma because solving the public health issue aggravated the livelihood issue.

However, what the MCR approach helped to detect was the solution that the 'bottom' suggested. The lady who lost her cabbages said in tears that she would have complied to the City Council's hygiene standards if she had been given a chance to know what those standards were. This lack of communication between the top and the bottom leads to the conclusion that this should not have been a dilemma at all. Vendors could have solved the hygiene issue, or at least attempted to do so, if they had known what they were supposed to do.

More complicated is the situation described in Dominique Bela's report titled 'Douala: people want killer factory relocation.'[168] Toxic powders from a chocolate factory in Cameroon's business metropolis, Douala, had been causing respiratory diseases amongst residents, and had even claimed lives, especially amongst children and the elderly. 32 percent of the children at the local pediatric hospital were reported to be suffering from respiratory diseases caused by the toxic particles. One resident said on camera that the doctors had confirmed that her grandmother's death had been caused by a substance she had inhaled. Despite all this, the factory employed thousands of residents and paid taxes to the city and the municipality. Relocating it as activists suggested in the report, would mean unemployment to many residents or a long-distance walk to work. It would also mean relocating taxes to another place, which the City Council would not wholeheartedly support.

The result of this was the status quo: the factory kept throwing its toxic dust into surrounding neighbourhoods whilst enabling residents to put bread on their tables.[169]

The MCR dilemma technique can be criticised especially because of its focus on the bottom. In the Bulawayo street vendors report, one vendor and one passing customer were interviewed. The journalist, whose background is not in conventional journalism, did not include the voice from the City Hall, thereby rendering himself 'guilty' of incomplete and one-sided reporting. This criticism is inspired by conventional journalism practices [remember the discussion about conventional journalism in principle vs. in reality in the introduction] which generally begin [and often end] with the voice of the authorities. The reality in Zimbabwe and many other African countries is that citizen journalists are not always welcome in official or government circles. In other words, official sources are not accessible to them. When they find it relevant and possible, reporters use other sources at their disposal [newspapers, radio, TV], which often adds expert and official voices to the report. The Bulawayo street vendors report, for instance, detailed the official position probably based on what the reporter had read in newspapers.

Unlike the Bulawayo street vendors report, the Douala toxic powder story included interviews with two residents and two activists, as well as statistics from the local pediatric hospital. In an e-mail exchange, the reporter, a mainstream journalist, explained that the factory's leadership had refused to grant him an interview. The rest of information, that thousands of residents worked at the factory for instance, emanated from his observation as he was a member of that community.

The two reports showed two types of the dilemma technique within MCR-inspired journalism. The first type applies generally to citizen journalism and stresses first and foremost, and often exclusively, the community's voice. In other words, it shows what the bottom thinks about the issue at hand, and when possible, what the top thinks, too. The second type applies principally to MCR-minded professional journalists, as it involves quantified data from official sources alongside the community's voice. What they both have in common is that the stress is both on what the bottom thinks and on its confrontation with what public officials do or [are reported to] think.

I should stress that the dilemma technique might take various forms depending on situations and issues. For instance, the 12th February 2013 story titled '*Bukavu: Les femmes des militaires au marché de Nyawera*'[170] [Bukavu: soldiers' wives at Nyawera market] by Lucie Bindu, implicitly showed a dilemma facing local municipal authorities in Bukavu, in South Kivu [DR Congo]. On one hand, the spouses of the members of the government military claimed that local women had chased them from the market, leaving them with no choice but to sell their foodstuffs along the streets near the market. On the other hand, Nyawera market women accused the soldiers' wives of having 'a big mouth' when they were allowed into the market. On his side, a municipal official suggested that selling outside the market hall was a deliberate choice, as the soldiers' wives wanted to avoid taxes.

The municipal official did not explain the steps the municipality had taken or was planning to take, thereby betraying an implicit dilemma behind the story. The general context is that eastern Congo was heavily militarised due to repeated rebellions in the area. This meant two things: firstly that the military power was above the political, civil power and secondly, that the number of women from other provinces and with other worldviews and culture had increased in Bukavu, including within the market hall. The statement by the seller inside the market that those women had 'a big mouth' might be interpreted as showing the sentiment of the market sellers in relation to the soldiers' wives, who allegedly wanted to transpose their husbands' power into the market hall.

Municipal authorities had to deal with this governance dilemma: helping soldiers' wives into the Nyawera market would lead to increased tensions between them and local sellers, who needed to protect their source of income. Chasing them away from the street in front of the market hall would most likely infuriate the military, whose families' livelihood, too, depended on the mothers' income. The municipal official's admission that he had failed to levy taxes betrayed the inability of authorities to make the soldiers' women pay taxes, which, anyway, could also be done from the street.

In short, the governance dilemma technique places the voices of the local community at the centre of an issue, alongside those of the official sources where possible. It might take many forms, but in any case, it approaches the issue in a way that pushes the viewer to further reflect upon the difficulties facing both the members of the community and those who exercise power on their behalf. Governance dilemma might emerge from issues involving members of the community and public officials; those involving third party actors and the community or those opposing sections of the same community, whereby public officials are expected to stand in between and find solutions. Whilst this section has focused on governance dilemmas, the next explores ways in which governance failures and successes were covered from an MCR perspective.

3.2 Failures and Successes

One of the most important functions of journalism is keeping a vigilant eye on people in public office and pointing out their wrongdoing whenever they occur. This *watchdog* function supposes prior investigation and aims to foster governance by pointing a finger at failures or shortcomings of public officials or other people in position of power. As Kovach and Rosenstiel rightly pointed out, 'The watchdog principle means more than simply monitoring government, and extends to all the powerful institutions in society.'[171] From the MCR perspective, the watchdog function implies that while reporting about itself, the community monitors the role public officials and others in powerful positions play. In doing so, they highlight failures and successes, sometimes in an explicit way, and other times in an indirect way. In this section, thus, I explore some of the ways in which MCR-minded reporters have played the watchdog role.

Two mobile reporters in Goma, eastern DR Congo, showed some particular interest in health governance issues within their city and, independently from each other, undertook to report on them. Both Esther Nsapu and Gloria Ramazani stressed the fundamental right to medical care, and ways in which those who were in an authoritative position managed poor patients. In her 29th June 2011 report titled '*Goma: Les patients payent par le travail*'[172] [Goma: patients pay with labour], Nsapu described the situation that prevailed at the medical centre of the *Association pour la Meilleure Santé* [AMESA], where patients were obliged to work for the hospital to pay for their bills. One young man, 23 years of age, said on camera that he had worked for one month as mason whilst he was still recovering. A mother holding a baby told the reporter that after a caesarian cut she stayed in the maternity ward for three months, during which she had to clean the hospital. Another mother said she had spent one month in the maternity ward at the time the report was being made. She added that she was receiving no drugs and that she was being ill-treated because she had not [yet] paid her bill. She and two other mothers in a similar situation as well as their three newborns slept in one bed.

According to the reporter, a normal delivery costs about US$ 400. The head of the hospital told the reporter that he needed money to pay his staff: 'That's why we retain them so that they can work for the hospital,' he said. The reporter quoted him as saying that many of the patients pretended that they had no money whilst they did. Two weeks later, Gloria Ramazani made a similar report about the maternity of the Reference Hospital in Goma. Titled '*Goma: Entre la facture et l'accouchement*'[173] [Goma: Between bill and birth-giving], the report suggested that many mothers were like hostages or prisoners in the maternity ward, where they were forced to stay for weeks or months until they could pay their bill. Interviewed from her hospital bed, Nehema said she had spent three weeks in the hospital after a caesarian and had no idea when she could leave. Like the 'labour-as-pay' story, the 'between-bill-and-birth' story showed that the hospital's leadership distrusted patients. One of the people responsible for the hospital said: 'We retain them, because they often declare that they have no money, whilst the contrary is true. We put pressure on patients to try and get some money from their pocket.'

These two reports clearly showed governance failures at least at three levels: in the first instance, the State and its local representatives seemed to have failed to accomplish one of their important missions of ensuring that *all* citizens had access to affordable health care. At the end of each of the two reports, patients called for the government to wake up and help them out, which implied that the population, too, knew that public officials were failing them. In the second instance, there was no trust between patients and those whose main task was to help them recover their health. Patients complained about intentional ill-treatment by those from whom they expected relief. On their side, the medical personnel did not trust the patients, a situation that pushed them to unethical behaviour such as pressurising patients, and forcing them to work for the hospital whilst they were not yet fit.

The third level takes into account the war situation and numerous short-term humanitarian interventions that had taken place in that area. It has been claimed that Western Non-Governmental Organisations [NGOs] had introduced a 'free

services' culture in the name of humanitarian emergency. On one hand, poor populations received free medical care, whilst on the other, medical personnel received relatively high salaries. One report titled '*Goma: MSF donne des soins gratuits aux déplacés de guerre*'[174] [Goma: MSF starts free medical care for the displaced], showed exactly an emergency situation to which Doctors Without Borders-Belgium responded by providing free medical assistance to thousands of displaced. One mother said two of her children had died because she had no money to take them to regular health facilities. For complicated cases requiring hospitalisation, MSF sent patients to regular facilities and paid their bills.

The issue here is that once the NGOs withdraw, it becomes impossible to move from the 'free services' and 'high salaries' culture to a culture in which patients contribute to the functioning of the health system, and medical personnel put the interests of the patients before everything else. What these reports managed to capture in the simplest way possible is the failure of health governance in Goma. The simple enquiries that resulted in the reports were prompted by complaints within the community to which the reporters belonged.

Other stories that reported governance-related failures showed efforts made by public officials, whilst pointing out their ineffectiveness. For instance, Magguy Kakule reported on 12th November 2012 the news that the mayor of Goma had shut dozens of restaurants, accusing them of causing sanitation problems.[175] According to the mayor, the restaurant owners used to pay little money to street children who would then take waste to the street, posing a public health hazard. Despite this administrative measure, the waste kept piling up, pushing residents to think that the solution was ineffective. A young local resident said the appropriate solution would be twofold: showing people where they should take the waste to, and by sending a waste-evacuation truck. In other words, the resident was telling the mayor that curative solutions would better work than repressive ones.

The cases described in previous paragraphs are all about concrete issues that public officials failed to solve or solved in a dissatisfactory way, or those on which they turned a blind eye. Situations that could be called governance successes, rather than failures, also drew the attention of mobile reporters. By governance success I mean that public officials manage to find appropriate and satisfactory solutions to issues confronting ordinary citizens. The category of governance success reports comprises two sub-categories, namely those that pointed out the issues that needed solving and were followed by action, and those that reported actions aimed at solving issues.

The 14th August 2008 report about hawkers who turned wardens in Accra[176] by Daniel Nana, a Ghanaian journalist, falls under the first sub-category. The scene of the report is the major crossroads in front of the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra, where traffic lights had not been functioning for three months at the time the report was made. Instead of policemen or other official traffic wardens, hawkers, most of whom were teenagers, had taken up the task to manage traffic at that dangerous crossroad. One hawker told the reporter that passing-by policemen would chase them away but would not fix the problem. Another said that he had not been able to prevent an accident in which people were slightly injured that

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NGewbIz590

2:17 / 2:20

For many months, most traffic lights in Ghana are not functioning and notable among them are the ones in Accra the capital.
This has gone on for quite too long and seems the authority in charge has turned blind eye on that making vehicular movement very difficult for motorists. Indeed, many of the accidents caused at the principal streets are due to lack of traffic regulations, and inefficient functioning of traffic lights making motorists and pedestrians forcing their way to their destinations.

Figure 4: Accra hawkers managing traffic.

morning. The hawkers earned some money from those amongst the passengers who appreciated their work. Once this report was published on the Web and reposted on a few Ghanaian websites, authorities in charge of traffic regulations fixed the traffic lights.

This report itself did not highlight a governance success. It rather prompted action that led to it, in that it pushed public officials to do their duty. Njeri Meresa, a Kenyan journalist living Ugunja made an almost similar story titled 'Ugunja: Motorcycle accidents increase.'[177] The story focused on one road accident that the reporter had witnessed and in which a motorbike had knocked down a schoolboy on his way from school. The car in which the reporter sat took the injured boy to the hospital, which gave the reporter the opportunity to follow up the case. She showed the victims of other road accidents whom she found at the hospital and gathered statistical data from the doctor on duty. According to the latter, 70 percent of the patients reporting to the hospital were victims of road accidents. At the end, an old man interviewed in one Ugunja street said there was only one solution: posting speed limit boards along the streets. Following a wide diffusion of this report particularly by one local NGO, public officials took action and marked the streets with speed limit boards.

The second sub-category of reports comprises reports about good governance in action. In general, this type of reports about things that function the way they should function is not the favourite amongst journalists. The reason is that journalism is

much more interested in things that deviate, in conflicts and controversies, in extraordinary things, in exceptions, in unexpected things, or simply in things that break the rules. Government-owned media outlets are the ones that seem to focus on what they perceive as good-governance-related news, and they often do so from the perspective of the officials involved in the news event. The few examples from *Radiodiffusion télévision du Burkina Faso* that I cited in section 1.3 should suffice to illustrate my point. Another example comes from the Central African Republic, where government-owned *Radio Centrafrique* was expected in August 2013 to receive equipment from the South African government. According to the official news agency, the *Agence Centrafrique Press*, this grant, coupled with expertise from South Africa would doubtlessly increase the radio's competitiveness while *popularising government's development policies*, amongst others.[178]

What mobile community reporters do in this respect is reporting good-governance-related news from the community perspective. In other words, the members of the community or simply citizens are the ones who evaluate the good and appropriate actions by public officials. Public officials are somehow subjected to the verdict of the community. If the judgment is negative, as it was in the Goma restaurant closure story, then one could speak of bad governance. If the judgment is one of satisfaction, then one has to do with good governance.

To go on with the example of the Goma restaurants closed following a waste management issue, I should mention Gaston Mungumwa's report titled '*Goma: La population se réjouit de la construction des poubelles publiques*'[179] [Goma: Population happy about construction of waste facilities], which was made less than a year after the story about restaurant closure. In that report, the mayor presented a three-compartment and well-fenced facility where residents would deposit their wastes before a truck came to collect them. The members of the community who were interviewed were unanimous in praising the facility, saying that it would reduce cases of diseases that were related to poor hygiene.

Another such report came on 11th May 2010 from Yusuf Maleli, a reporter near Mombasa, eastern Kenya. His report, 'Mombasa: Locals enjoy decriminalised wine,'[180] was about the government lifting the ban on the locally brewed coconut wine known as *Mnazi*. It captured what villagers in Junda thought about that official measure that ended what villagers called a long time of deprivation. One villager holding a bottle of *Mnazi* wine and whom the reporter interviewed said: 'I am happy! As you can see I am having a good evening, and a good Friday. Normally in our culture, we have to take this drink.' Another one, holding two bottles as a sign of celebration, said in a mixture of English and Swahili: '*Mnazi* is a natural drink. It does not kill like *Changaa* [a locally brewed liquor]. One drinks it like one drinks milk.' The reporter closed the story showing a villager climbing up one of his coco trees (Figure 5), happy that he would no longer receive unexpected police visits that would harm his business.

Obviously, the report reflected a sentiment of relief in the Junda village following a decision taken by the public officials. Although the official voice was missing to tell the motivations and the contours of the decision, one nonetheless has the feeling that the officials took a decision that went in the direction of

what the villagers wanted. More interestingly, villagers could distinguish between harmful and harmless brews. For them *Mnazi* was not only deeply rooted in their traditions, but also had the same status as milk. This was not the case of *Changaa*, which could cause death. Therefore, the police decision to arrest *Changaa* brewers in Ugunja in July 2010, as shown in Njeri Meressa's report titled 'Kenya: Police arrest Changaa brewers,'[181] could be considered as a case of good governance, as the aim was to avoid preventable deaths.

In that report, a police inspector said his men were going from door to door in search of *Changaa* brewers, whom they arrested and took to court. A villager who admitted being a regular consumer of *Changaa* complained about that particular police action, saying that 'the government should also consider poor people like us.' The latter argument which evokes poverty as a reason why people drank *Changaa* might prompt the misleading conclusion that the ban and arrest of brewers were rather signs of bad governance. Similarly to the governance issues that were causing such dilemmas discussed in the previous section, here public officials had to weigh health and even public order issues that the liquor caused against what *Changaa* consumers perceived as a right to consume affordable liquor.

In conclusion, it appears that MCR-minded journalists fulfill their watchdog role in some interesting ways that integrate what the bottom thinks, sometimes alongside what the top thinks. The reports I have provided above as illustration have shown three important things: firstly, that serious and preventable issues often go unsolved simply because no one brought them to the public sphere. Secondly,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwx6WCn-csA

1:29 / 1:36

Four years after the Coconut tree wine known as Mnazi was decriminalized in Kenya's coast province of Mombasa, locals have re-integrated it into their traditions, this time without fearing police harassment. This mobile report takes us to the Junda village, where residents explain the role the long-forbidden wine plays in their culture and traditions.

Figure 5: Coconut wine brewer climbing a coco tree in Junda village, Kenya.
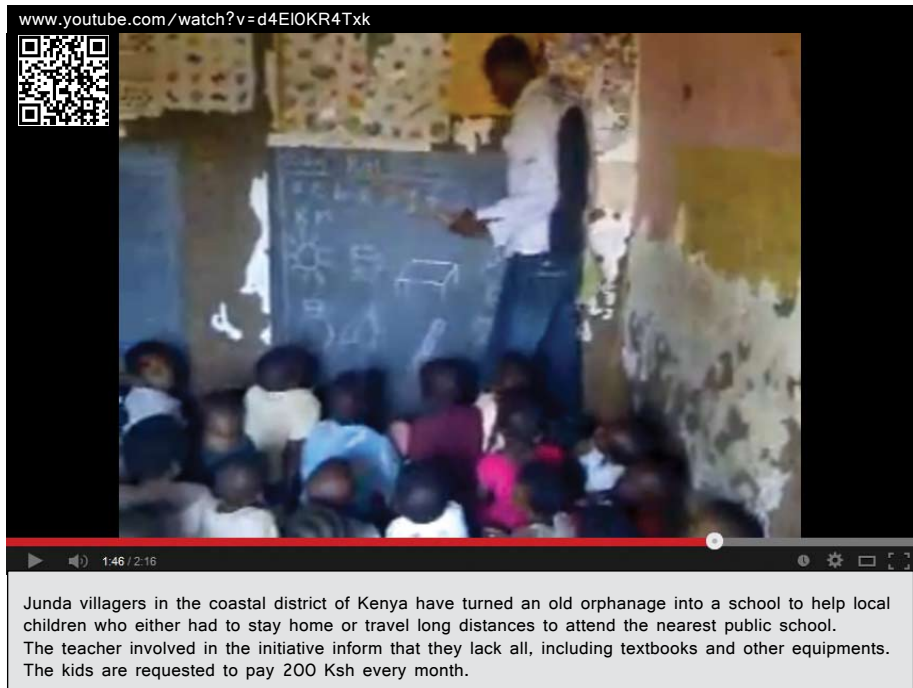
that the watchdog function does not necessarily require sophisticated investigation or to target the highest on the public authority ladder. It can be fulfilled in a simple way with little to no budget. Thirdly, that a journalist playing the watchdog role does not *necessarily* have to be confrontational at those occupying public offices or in position of power. In other words, at least from an MCR perspective, journalists can, and actually do, play their watchdog role, without *necessarily* afflicting the powerful or the comfortable in order to comfort the afflicted.[182] Unlike the previous two sections that involved both citizens and public officials, the next section focuses on local communities substituting for public officials.

3.3 Community Initiatives

One important merit of the MCR approach to journalism is the significant emphasis on what the community itself sets out to do to solve the issues facing it. In other words, the reports show not only what the bottom thinks on governance-related issues, but also and most importantly what the bottom *does* to overcome or alleviate those issues. Since governance is at the centre of discussions here, it is implied that what the community decides to do itself is normally the task of public officials. Thus, in most cases, but not in all, the community takes action because of a governance failure at some point. In this section I explore some of the most illustrative mobile reports whilst trying to map some of the ways in which the MCR approach helps report community-initiated actions. In doing so, I focus exclusively on primary education, the dispensation of which is universally recognised as a high-priority task for any State or government.

In a report made in a Ghanaian village called Yevuyiborkofe, Francisca Nuvor showed a concrete case of how villagers' dissatisfaction about public education turned into a decision to build and run a school. The report titled 'Ghana: Village takes education in own hands'[183] took the viewer into the three-compartment, no-sidewall hall that served as a school, where more than 70 pupils received elementary education from three volunteers. Since there were five classes for only three teachers, some of the classes were put together. One of the teachers was quoted as saying that several calls to the Ghana Education Service for help [textbooks, salaries, classrooms] had proven futile. One parent said that they were in the process of making bricks and collecting sand, which was shown in the report, to build a conducive learning environment for the children.

Yusuf Maleli reported a similar situation from the village of Junda, in Kenya. There, small children from standard one to standard four had either to walk two kilometres to the nearest public school or stay at home. Titled 'Kenya: Villagers start private school,'[184] the report showed a two-room, mud-walled building that previously served as a village orphanage. The owner, who was also a resident of the village and the main initiator of this unregistered school, said that her intention was to help children who were unable to walk for two kilometres to receive education. Parents had to pay 200 Kenyan shillings [about US$ 2] per month for each child. The teacher, another resident of the village, raised the concern regarding the

www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4EI0KR4Txk

1:46 / 2:16

Junda villagers in the coastal district of Kenya have turned an old orphanage into a school to help local children who either had to stay home or travel long distances to attend the nearest public school. The teacher involved in the initiative inform that they lack all, including textbooks and other equipments. The kids are requested to pay 200 Ksh every month.

Figure 6: Junda village private primary school.

building and the increasing number of pupils, the lack of textbooks, and the like. For him, the government should intervene and support their initiative.

The two reports described in the previous paragraphs start with one governance issue: citizens complained that the government had failed them by not building a school nearby. Even when they managed to have schools by their own means, public officials failed to support them. In most cases journalists would be tempted to confront public officials with these governance failures, by stressing or exclusively showing failures and omitting altogether community initiatives to substitute for public officials. As the two reports have shown, the MCR approach advocates that some hierarchic order guides the reporting process: firstly the community shows ways in which it strives to cope with, and solve, the issue; secondly the community outlines challenges that hinder its efforts; finally, the community identifies its limits. Depending on the reporters' creativity and the complexities of the issues, the order might change starting for instance with limits and ending with community efforts.

In Alexandra, a township near Johannesburg, South Africa, communities seemed to be faced with a different issue. In February 2011 Anthony Mmatli dedicated two reports on the safety of school children on the streets to or from school. In the one titled 'Johannesburg: Oldie helps kids cross road,'[185] the reporter focused on one crossing point on the London Road, where dozens of children had previously been victims of road accidents, and showed a special solution that one member of the community had proposed and implemented to solve that issue.

An old man called Molokomme had volunteered to spend the day at that crossing point to help children going to, or coming from three primary schools, safely cross the four-lane London Road. He would first stand in the middle of the way on one side of the road to stop the traffic before escorting the children to the middle of the road, and would do exactly the same to cross the other part of the road (Figure 7). Molokomme had been doing that for 10 months at the time of the report. At some point, his work showed results of a 90 percent reduction of child deaths at that particular crossing point. One of the three schools, the Bovet Primary School, proposed a pay to the old man, who then did the job on a full time basis.

In another report dated 8th February 2011 and titled 'Johannesburg: Kids can now cross safely,'[186] the same reporter showed the solution that the Ithute Primary School in Alexandra had put in place to reduce child deaths at the main crossing point on Selbourne Street. In conjunction with the Police, who supervised the operation, senior school children regulated the traffic themselves at the crossing point. Unlike the London Road crossing point which had no signalised crossing, the Selbourne Street did have a clearly marked crossing on which children stood to stop the traffic using handheld stop boards.

These two road-crossing reports bring to mind the one about hawkers turning wardens in Accra that I discussed in the previous section. In all three cases, there appeared to be a failure of public officials to provide appropriate security to the users of the streets and roads in Accra and Alexandra. While in Accra the solution came from public officials, it was mainly members of local communities
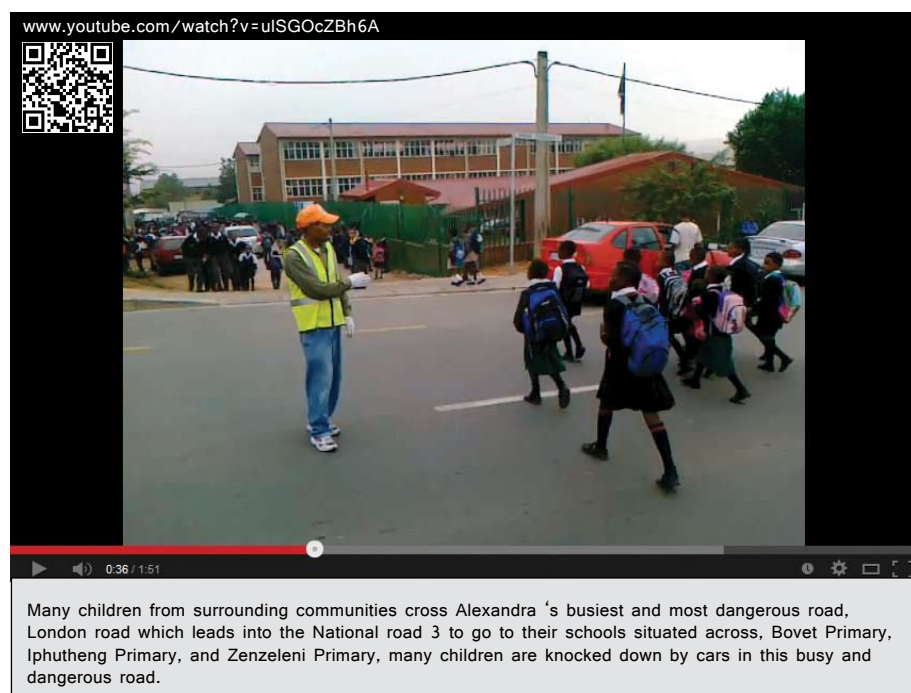

Figure 7: Crossing point for school children in Alexandra, South Africa.

in Alexandra who, with some help from the police in one case, thought out and implemented solutions, thereby substituting public officials.

All in all, these reports and many others lead to the conclusion that the MCR approach to reporting governance issues casts more light not only on the shortcomings, limits and perhaps omissions of public officials, but mainly on the community's actions to fill that gap left by public officials.

Conclusion

In summary, the MCR approach to reporting governance issues creates a situation whereby a variety of angles and perspectives are given to the relationships and interactions between citizens and those who exercise power on their behalf. In some cases, governance issues are depicted as challenging dilemmas, to which no one simple and straightforward solution could be found. In that case, many problems appear in parallel and solving one worsens the other. By placing the community members' issues and views at the heart of their reporting, MCR-minded journalists maximise their chances to report governance issues in a new way that does not present the sole perspective of public officials.

In other cases, MCR-minded journalists show other ways of fulfilling the watchdog role by monitoring the doings and omissions of public officials and their effect on citizens. As the community is their main subject of concern, their investigation consists mainly in observing and then presenting governance failures and/or successes as perceived by members of the community. Yet in other cases, MCR-minded journalists create room for community-initiated efforts, many of which aim to fill the gap left by public officials. Being part of the community about which they report, those journalists are themselves affected in some ways by those governance wants. By reporting them with an insider view, their hope is to trigger public officials to take up their responsibilities vis-à-vis the citizens they are meant to serve. The next chapter takes my thematic exploration further to the subject of the rights of the child.

Chapter 4

Reporting the Rights of the Child

There is no way one can discuss community reporting without coming across the issues that relate to children, simply because children are the mirror through which the community sees itself and its future. In almost all the examples provided so far to illustrate the various aspects of MCR-inspired journalism, childhood and the rights and welfare of the child constantly appeared, either directly or indirectly. For instance, the report about banana plantations that were devastated by a disease thereby pushing many children out of school (see Introduction) managed to link the food crisis directly to the rights of the child, whilst other reports had those rights in the background. The market women in Nyawera, Bukavu, and the soldiers' wives whom they chased from the market (see section 3.2), both had the same argument: catering for their children. The weeping woman in Bulawayo whose cabbage was brutally thrown away by police (see Section 3.1) was desperate because she could see no other way to pay for her children's school fees.

According to the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* [ACRWC] adopted in 1990 by the members of the Organisation of African Unity, later renamed African Union, and which entered into force on the 29th November 1999,[187] 'a child means every human being below the age of 18 years.'[188] That category of human being enjoys special protection by law, which should guarantee that any action that concerns the child should primarily consider 'the best interests of the child.'[189] The ACRWC specifically stresses 'the values of the African civilization' and cultural heritage as sources of inspiration in defining the rights and welfare of the child.[190] At the same time, the ACRWC urges states to discourage 'any custom, tradition, cultural or religious practice that is inconsistent with the rights, duties and obligations' outlined in it.[191]

In this chapter, I present some of the ways in which mobile community reporters in various African countries approached issues that related explicitly or implicitly to the rights and welfare of the child. I do so by first exposing what reporters themselves depicted as violations of the rights of the child. Then, since the ACRWC suggests that local customs and traditions have the potential both to foster and infringe the rights and welfare of the child, I look into ways in which reporters portrayed children as victims of their community's customs and traditions. Finally, I focus on reports that show children managing their fate on their own or using their creativity to claim their right to leisure and recreation on one hand,[192] and the danger that it all too often entails on the other hand.

4.1 Violations or What Appears So

The title of this section reflects the confusion that marks discussions about the rights of the child in one cultural context but viewed and judged from the perspective of another context. Said differently, as the argument goes, certain practices or situations considered to be rights violations in a Western context, might be considered differently in an African context. In the last decades several African states embarked on a process of domesticating the notion of the rights of the child, a journey that involves not only assimilation and formulation, but also *adaptation* and specialisation, amongst others.[193] While Sloth-Nielsen and others approached the rights of the child from a legal perspective,[194] other scholars and experts approached them from a cultural perspective. For instance, Auma Okwamy and colleagues opposed the homogenisation of the notion of childhood dominated by the Western narrative of that notion. They called for the inclusion of 'local narratives, including local competing discourses and notions of childhood.'[195]

What emerges, then, is that despite all national, regional and international instruments that have been put in place, there persist multiple interpretations of the notion of childhood, and therefore, of the rights and duties that go with it. With this in mind, I move on to what the reporters presented as violations of the rights of the child, which, in some cases, could otherwise appear in a different context.

On the 17th May 2010, Jacob Mugini, a Tanzanian journalist based in the Mara Region, in northern Tanzania, made a mobile report titled 'Tanzania: Mother burns 7-year-boy over Ugali [Cassava fufu].'[196] Matiko, the boy, was hungry after class and wanted to satisfy his hunger. A police officer who was handling the case said that his [step]mother had been infuriated by the fact that Matiko had eaten without being given, that is, without her authorisation. As punishment, she took his right hand, probably the one Matiko had used to eat, and forced it into burning charcoal. All five fingers of the right-hand were badly burnt. Fearing arrest, Matiko's father and stepmother ran away, while Matiko was taken to an NGO-run orphanage.

This report is very instructive in at least two respects: firstly, it showed how far cruelty against children could go; secondly, it brought to the surface the notion of punishment as part of the notion of childhood. The police officer said the reason of the punishment was that the boy had eaten *without being given*, which implied that normally, children had to wait until they were given, and could not eat if no one had given them or authorised them to eat. The sole problem here appeared to be the disproportionate nature of the punishment. If it had been a slap or a spanking, it would have been a different story, an ordinary thing not worthy of noting, let alone reporting. Yet, the stepmother's attitude might be interpreted as reflecting a traumatic situation that Matiko had endured for years.

More important, perhaps, is what Okwamy and colleagues called the loss of the notion of the rights of the child through translation. Translation here refers both to the corresponding words or expressions in a different language, but also to the concepts the words or expressions reflect. In the Luganda language for instance [spoken in Uganda], 'child right' is translated as *Eddembe*, a word that

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kthI5xN3zfQ

1:58 / 2:36

A seven year boy has been badly burned by her step mother after eating small fish (saladine) in the Northern in Northern Tanzania. Police in Tarime have identified the boy as Matiko Mwita, a nursery pupil at Abainano primary school.
'The woman become unhappy and burned right hand of the kid by using charcoal stove simply because he ate small fish when he arrived home from school in the after noon', Tarime special zone regional police commander assistant commissioner of police (ACP) Constantine Masawe says yesterday.
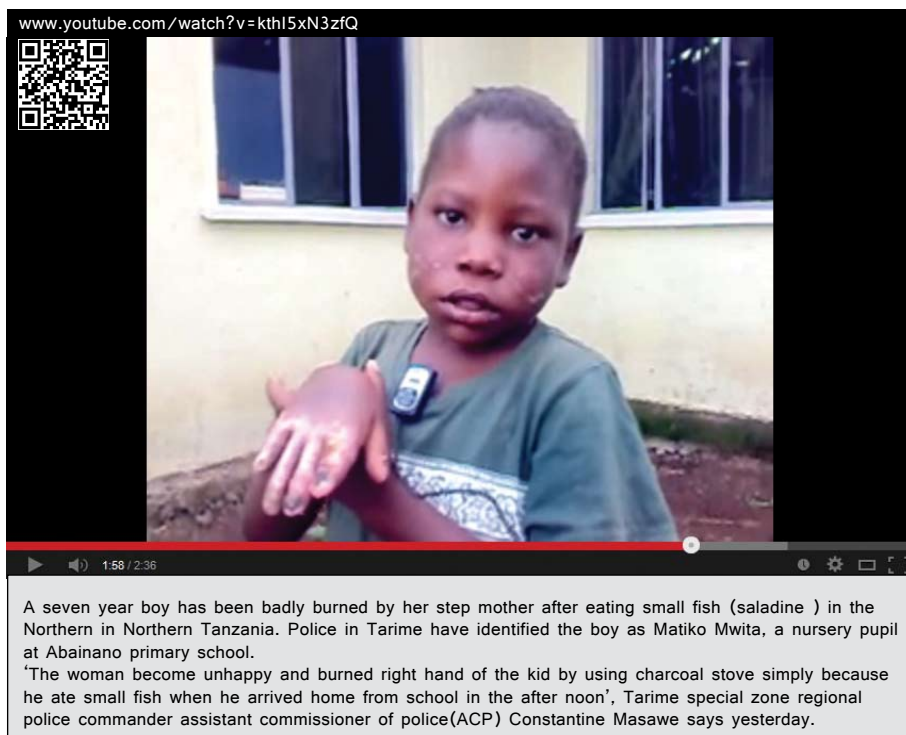
Figure 8: 7-year-old Matiko showing the hand burnt by his mother.

refers to 'children's freedom/liberty to do whatever they want' in the local cultural context.[197] Children doing whatever they please, for instance eating without being given, is far from reflecting the rights of the child. A similar reflection can apply to the Kinyarwanda language [spoken in Rwanda and eastern DR. Congo], where the term 'rights' is translated by *uburenganzira*. Literally, this means 'something that allows you to go beyond the path.' It also contains in itself the concepts of 'authorisation' or 'permission.' The idea of 'path' suggests that someone or the community has traced the most appropriate way from point A to point B. So, going 'beyond the path', implies prior authorisation, and authorisation implies on its turn authority. Hence the potential confusion or loss of meaning in translation, as each culture brings the notion back to its own context.

Whilst the report discussed above showed in a blatant way Matiko's misfortune and left no doubt about the 'culprit', other reports about the rights and welfare of the child depicted more complex situations. For instance, Salma Said's 2nd August 2010 report titled 'Zanzibar: Children break rocks for money,' described a case of child labour on the island of Zanzibar, which was justified by the often cited argument of survival.[198] Featuring 11-year-old Salim Omar, the report showed how children broke rocks all day long and failed to attend any form of education. One mother said that she knew of five children who had died whilst breaking the rocks to obtain gravel. Like Salim, the mother, too, designated poverty as the culprit. Whether approved or tolerated, this was child labour, at least if one looks at it from

a legal perspective. The ACRWC defines child labour as 'all forms of economic exploitation' and 'any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.'[199]

The same 'poverty' and 'survival' arguments came back in the report by Gaston Mungumwa titled '*Goma: Quel sort pour les enfants-travailleurs*?'[200] [Goma: What lot for child labourers?]. One boy was shown pushing a locally made wooden bicycle loaded with dozens of boxes, which he later had to unload himself. That boy said he wished he could go to school, a luxury he had forgotten since the death of his parents. Another one spent his days washing trucks, and believed it was a temporary situation that would once enable him to resume his education from the sixth form, where he had stopped.

All the examples provided so far with regards to the rights of the child, especially their violations, had a physical aspect in them, in that children's physical integrity and development were at stake due to domestic violence or to some forms of child labour. The MCR-inspired reports allow the detection of other forms of violence that affect mainly children emotionally and psychologically. For instance, Paul Mukhufi's report titled 'Limpopo: Children shocked after family tragedy,'[201] described a tragic situation in which two children [six and 16] together with their 19 year old sister found themselves witnessing their father kill their mother before hanging himself. Shot in Mamaila village in the Limpopo province in South Africa, this report showed no single physical act of violence against children, but suggested that much harm was done on their emotional and psychological development.

This murder and suicide report brings to mind one that is titled 'Kampala: Co-wives fight, public watches,'[202] which I discussed in Section 2.3 from an ethical perspective. In that report two co-wives fought in public to prove who, amongst them, was a better mother. Amongst the spectators were many children, including those of the bleeding, naked-torso mothers who were fighting. Okello Fathil, the reporter, chose the 'public order' perspective, but could also have chosen to focus on the impact of such scenes on children's emotional development. To use once again the indigenous knowledge argument, one could say that those children were likely to imitate their mothers, which is the idea behind the Luo [Kenya] proverb that says that 'whatever a child says, they have heard at home, whatever a child does, they have seen at home,'[203] which is also confirmed by a Rwandan proverb that 'a mother who steals while carrying a baby on her back invites the latter do the same later.'[204]

The health aspect also appears in a number of reports, whereby the poverty and survival arguments emerge once again as the main motive to justify child labour. In Accra, Ghana and Kampala, Uganda, the so-called 'scrap business' seemed to be the favorite trade in which children engaged. Francisca Nuvor made a series of reports from Agbogbloshie, a suburb of Accra, where all sorts of wastes were dumped. In one report titled 'Accra: Joshua's day in scrap business,'[205] Nuvor showed what the day in the life of a scrap-business child looked like: 14-year-old Kojo Joshua woke up at 5 a.m. and walked to the dumping site where he burnt electronic devices to extract copper wire, aluminum and other 'precious' metals (Figure 9). All this was done without a mask to protect him from the black smoke and without gloves

to protect his hands. In a day, he managed to sell collected metals worth 8 to 9 Ghanaian Cedis [± US$ 9]. Joshua's day ended around 8 p.m. when he then climbed onto the roof of a building to sleep.

A similar situation was shown in the report titled 'Kampala: Scrap generates cash in slum,'[206] by Ismael Asiimwe Mustapha in Kisenyi slum, Kampala, Uganda. His focus was on 12-year-old Ssemwanga Javilla, who was very happy and satisfied about what he was doing. He said his business was to dismantle old fridge compressors to extract copper wire and sell it. Javilla proudly showed a motorbike he had managed to buy himself after three years in that trade, to which he had also introduced his younger brother. A scrap dealer who was interviewed said he paid well and immediately, and was looking for more suppliers, as the demand from the hoe and machete factories was high.

The power of these reports and many others on this subject resides mainly in one thing: children were doing dangerous work unprotected, yet they were making money and earning a living. Joshua earned around US$ 9 a day, which theoretically speaking placed him above the poverty line. Javilla saw himself already in the middle class, with a motorbike and a second bread-winner [younger brother]. Yet, on a daily basis, Joshua was inhaling black smoke, the nature of which he ignored. He was handling, barehanded, all sorts of metals without knowing what type of skin diseases they may cause. Javilla and his brother had become 'specialists' of old

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ik4Rq8-w5U

1:24 / 4:02

The life's of many children the ages of 14 years and below in the scrap yard in Agbogbloshie, a suburb of Accra, has nothing good to write home about. Kojo Joshua, a 14 years and a school dropout is no exception.
It was Wednesday morning, as usual in the life of Joshua, as he goes about in search for scraps as part of his daily activities. He said, he wakes up around 5am and starts his daily activities, sometimes without breakfast or shower.
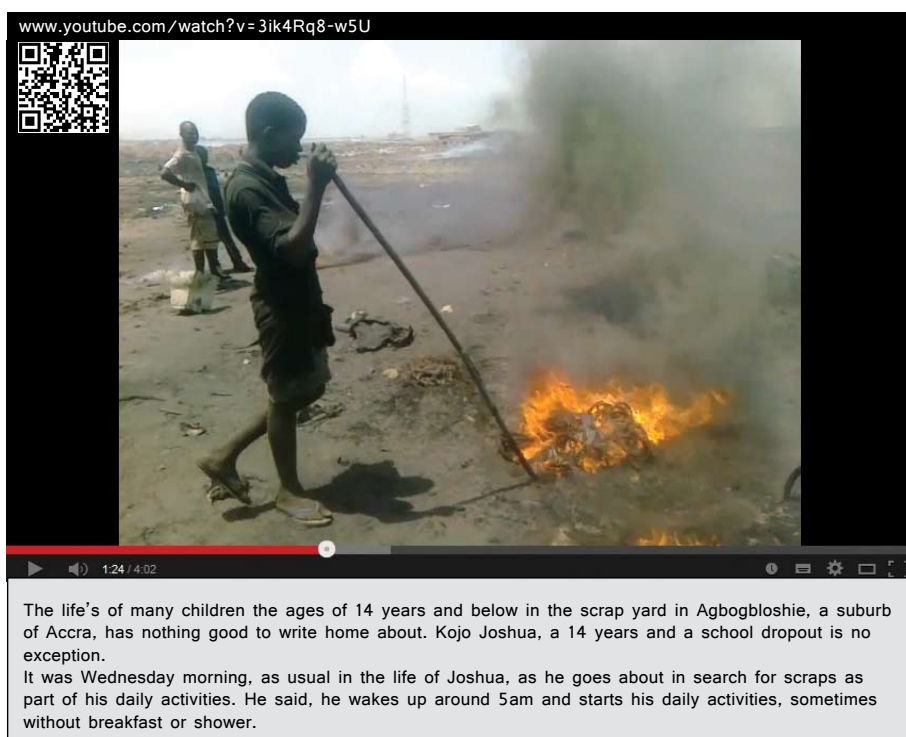
Figure 9: Kojo Joshua, a scrap business child in Accra, Ghana.

fridge compressors, but they ignored what harm the gas they contained could cause to their health. Whilst these reports showed, in an unambiguous way, that children were being both exposed to hazardous work and exploited economically [by the industry that ultimately used those cheap metals], they posed, at the same time, a serious dilemma: removing that [dangerous] source of income would deprive children of their income, without offering them a better alternative.

Unlike Joshua, Javilla and his brother, the rock-breaking children in Zanzibar, and the Goma luggage-transporter or truck washer, many children in Tarime, Northern Tanzania, were luckier to attend school. However, some of them were reported to be working on the teachers' farms instead of attending classes. In his report titled 'Tanzania: pupils work on teachers' farms,'[207] Jacob Mugini showed girls and boys in school uniform tilling the soil using hoes. One girl, 14 years old, said with perceptible anger, that sometimes they stayed on the farm from morning until 2 p.m., running the risk of being bitten by snakes. One boy, nine years old, added that his teacher used to send them to the bush to fetch firewood, which they would carry on their head to the teacher's home. Obviously, what was supposed to be a right to education ended up being a form of economic and hazardous exploitation of children. That situation had been taking place for years, but stopped soon after the report was published. The journalist later reported that the District's educational officials, who had seen the report online, projected it publicly at the school in question, thereby confusing the teachers and the principal, who, as punishment, was transferred from that school to another one, far away.

Most of the issues highlighted in the reports reflect the complexity of the notion of the rights of the child, in various local contexts. The MCR approach helps capture that complexity, connecting for instance the notion of childhood and that of punishment, or that of 'survival.' It enabled reporters, who were known to the subjects and the environment about which they were reporting, to capture the views and thoughts not only of the children, but also of adults, in the most natural way. The result was that what the bottom thought emerged at the end of each report, providing policy and decision makers with valuable information that could guide their actions and help make them efficient and effective. The next section explores the rights and welfare of the child as conflicting with, or taking advantage of local notions of parent-child relationships, and of customs and traditions.

4.2 Children, Parental Responsibility and Customs

In most African cultures, the notion of respect for parents and older people is a sacred one. The ACRWC outlines both the duties of the child and the responsibilities of parents in a way that places absolute respect for parents and older people at the centre of their upbringing. The very first duty of the child is 'to work for the cohesion of the family, to *respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times* and to assist them in case of need.' [Emphasis added][208] As for parental responsibilities, they include ensuring the best interests of the child, to secure conditions of living

necessary to the child's development, and 'to ensure that domestic discipline is administered with humanity and in a manner consistent with the inherent dignity of the child.'[209]

These principles are rooted in customs and traditions in various parts of Africa and have been coded into sayings, adages, and proverbs. Amongst the Luo/Lyhyia of Kenya, for instance, the idea of disciplining children is coded in the following proverb: 'you must stretch the skin while it is still fresh' or ' [you must] mold the clay while it is still wet.'[210] The Baganda of Uganda [and the Rwandans] express the same idea saying: 'you must shape/bend a branch while it is still fresh.'[211] Another proverb in Rwanda stresses the absolute respect of children towards their parents, saying: 'If you refuse to obey your father and mother you will have an unfortunate end,'[212] an idea that a Kiswahili proverb renders saying that if one refuses to obey the elders, one will break one's legs.[213] This section revolves around the intersection between the duties of the child and parental responsibilities, discussing ways in which community mobile reporters approached that intersection in their reporting.

In a report titled 'Accra: Not just begging but business,'[214] Ghanaian reporter Kester Aburam focused on nomadic people he presented as coming from Niger and other North African countries. The reporter was dismayed to discover that whilst parents would sit in the shade along the street, their children would be criss-crossing the main streets of Accra, begging or pick-pocketing and running the risk of being knocked down by passing vehicles. One resident said authorities should find a solution to that. The only thing that one mother whose child was begging on the street could say on camera and smilingly was that they were hungry and needed money.

What this report showed is that in that particular group, begging was traditionally a task for children. However, since the report considered the situation from the perspective of the complaining community rather than one of the begging community, it would be impossible to know the ins and outs, the whys and hows, of that tradition. An MCR-minded reporter from within the latter community could have presented *the other side* of the story. Whatever the case, a situation in which young children earn money in risky ways whilst adults are resting in the shade contradicts the principles of parental responsibilities outlined in the ACRWC.

Reporting this time entirely about his own community, Kester Aburam exposed a situation almost similar to the one of begging children and resting parents. In a report he titled 'Accra: Child labour persists despite laws,'[215] 12-year-old Denis Kwameh told his story: his father told him that he should collect rubbers and sell them to put money together to pay for his own school fees. Each day, he managed to get about 1 Ghanaian Cedi [±US\$ 1]. Kwameh went to school for only a few days, and would spend the remainder of the week pushing his two-wheel cart packed with rubbers (Figure 10).

To the north, in Tamale, Psalm Mark Quao was working on a story about football ahead of the South Africa 2010 World Cup, when he realised that many of the children who would come to play would first do some hard labour to earn some
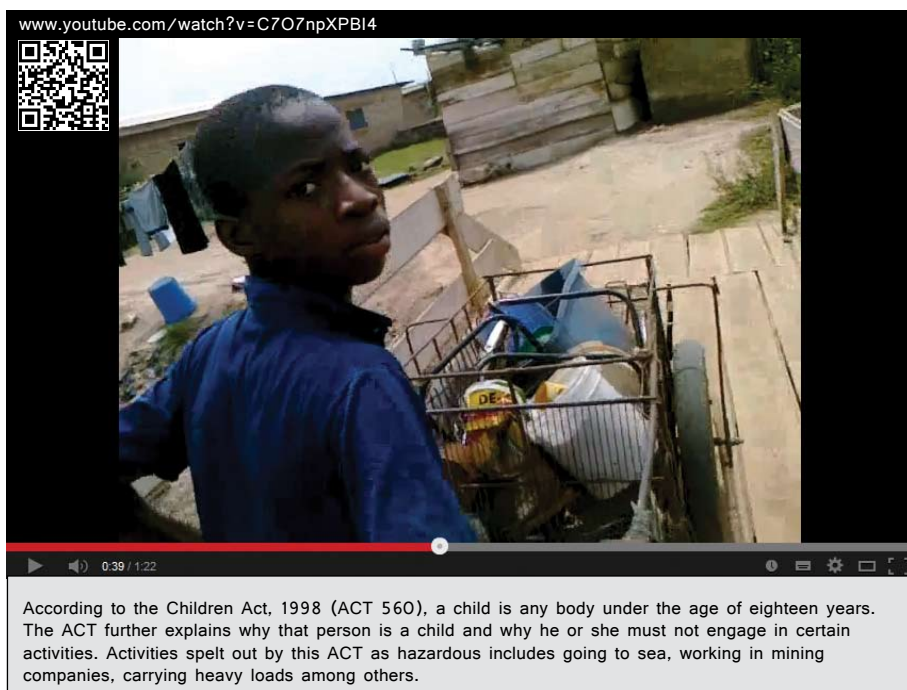
> According to the Children Act, 1998 (ACT 560), a child is any body under the age of eighteen years. The ACT further explains why that person is a child and why he or she must not engage in certain activities. Activities spelt out by this ACT as hazardous includes going to sea, working in mining companies, carrying heavy loads among others.

Figure 10: 12-year-old Denis Kwameh pushing a cart packed with rubbers.

money. In one village called Kalariga, Quao showed children weeding alongside a road. He interviewed one of them, a boy aged eight, who said that his parents were home, while he was weeding to earn money for his school fees. The boy hoped to later become a soldier.[216]

All these reports tell us one important thing, namely that the MCR approach helps unmask abuse of, or local perceptions of, parental responsibilities. Whilst all international legal instruments protecting children stipulate that parents have the responsibility to provide for their children financially or otherwise, these reports exposed cases of young children taking risks to provide for themselves and/or their parents. To this point I should add the notion of absolute obedience for parents that both the ACRWC and local customs advocate. Unlike Joshua and Javilla who joined the scrap business simply to survive, the begging and the weeding children as well as rubber-collecting Kwameh, were substituting for their parents, who were all presented as relaxing either in the shade or at home, whilst the children were engaging into exploitative labour.

Customs are even stronger when it comes to domestic chores, as tasks are traditionally divided between parents and children, and within the latter category, between boys and girls.[217] In her report titled '*Goma: Les enfants surexploités par les parents*'[218] [Goma: Parents over-exploit children], Lucie Bindu managed to capture both what the parents and the children thought about heavy domestic chores traditionally reserved for children. 10-year-old Grace had to fetch 50 litres of water before going to school in the morning and another 50 litres after school

in the afternoon. That meant 10 times the walk from home to the source and back, with a jerry can of 10 liters on her head or her back. For Flora, eight years old, things were different. She had to fetch 120 litres of water every day, that is, six jerry cans of 20 liters. On top of that, she had to wash the dishes and the clothes of her younger siblings. Parents refused to speak on camera but told the reporter that this was the best way of bringing up their children. This reaction could be analysed as meaning that the children needed to be trained for future adult life, which is one possible [mis]interpretation of the proverbs that urge parents to shape/bend a branch whilst it is still fresh.[219]

The matter is also complicated in Northern Tanzania where most rural populations depend, to a great extent, on cattle and livestock. Traditionally, children have been the ones herding cattle and livestock all day long, often to the detriment of their formal education. From Tarime, Jacob Mugini highlighted this issue in a report titled 'Tanzania: Relieve kids of herding-Pastor,'[220] with views and thoughts from a pastor on one hand, and those from cattle-herding children on the other. As the title shows, the pastor called for a change in the age-long tradition that kept children behind cattle and livestock, whereas they were supposed to be learning. The two children who were interviewed said their job was to look after the cattle, sheep and goats.

The two reports about water-fetching in Goma and cattle-keeping in Tarime, together with those discussed above, have in common the fact that the best interests of the children were presented as conflicting with those of their parents. For instance, in the Goma report children were openly complaining about being late and tired at school, whilst in the Tarime report children's complaints were voiced by the pastor. These two reports are concrete examples of the issue of compatibility of the rights and welfare of children and customary laws.[221] African Customary Law scholars, amongst whom Chuma Himonga, suggest that 'there is an inherent conflict between the child's individual rights and his or her family's interests,'[222] which many of the reports discussed here proved to be true from different perspectives. The next and last section of this chapter leaves aside the violations [or what appears so] of the rights of the child to discuss reports that highlighted ways in which children managed to enjoy their childhood and created a pleasurable and playful environment for themselves under local circumstances.

4.3 Finding the Way

Play and other recreational activities are very important aspects of children's social, emotional and intellectual development. For that reason, the ACRWC clearly requires the States that ratified the Charter to 'recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'[223] However, in many cultures, not only in Africa, play and recreation for children have been considered opposites and even detrimental to serious work. The logic has been that play would come when work was finished. The situation has slightly evolved especially with play and recreation facilities in some major African cities, but in

most places, children have no choice but to turn what their immediate environment offers them into playing and recreation facilities. In this section, I explore some of the recurring topics that mobile reporters covered, highlighting both children's creativity and the dangers of the improvised recreation facilities.

Kibera, the Nairobi slum which is said to be the largest in Africa, offers an interesting illustration of ways in which Kenyan authorities are trying to offer a conducive space for children to play. Beryl Omunya, a Kibera-based reporter made a series of reports about the ambitious project to relocate Kibera residents to new, modern flats, with all basic facilities. One of them focused on children and the new spaces they had for play. Titled 'Kenya: Former Kibera kids want playing area,'[224] the report showed three situations: [1] an unhealthy and unsafe environment in Kibera where the relocated children used to play, and thus where children, who were still there, played; [2] a large, clean, paved area between cement-block flats with young children joyfully skipping; and [3] older children, amongst whom was 16-year-old Denis, who had no space where they could play football. In this last case, Denis and his friends were happy to have moved to the flats, but were less so when they had to walk back to their former playing area in the slum.

Some children in Accra, Ghana, were even more creative in their search of playing areas. In a report titled 'Cape-Coast: Kids turn gutter into stadium,'[225] Edward Aklade shed some light on ways in which children managed to play football and to attract fans. Using more or less a five meter large gutter as a playing ground, they played without boots, with the ball running every now and then into blackish water right in the middle of the gutter. The running water divided the playing ground into two halves, forcing the players to jump over that smaller gutter within the bigger one. To distinguish the players of each team, those in one team painted their faces white. A sports presenter who happened to be there at the same time as the reporter said local authorities should do their best to offer those children better playing facilities.

Some of the children in Masvingo, Southern Zimbabwe, are equally innovative when it comes to practicing the sport activity that they love. Wilson Maposa made a report titled 'Masvingo: We love gym, but lack facilities-Boys,'[226] in which he exposed ways in which children in the Mucheke suburb of Masvingo had found a way to do acrobatics in a sand-covered open space, using amongst other things, old tyres. The reporter showed them jumping on the improvised 'springboard' supported by stones, and making forward saltos in a spectacular way (Figure 11). The three children who were interviewed said they all enjoyed gymnastics but deplored the lack of appropriate facilities. The report showed both how ingenious the children could be in creating their own playing area, but at the same time pushed to wonder about what would happen if the supporting stones moved apart, if the iron wires in the old tyre would come out, or simply if the gymnasts would accidently fall down in a bad position on the hard ground.

What appears here is that the Kibera older children, the Cape-Coast gutter footballers, and the Masvingo acrobats were eager to engage in sporting activities of their choice, but could not do so in a safe way. Those reports placed children at the centre, as they were the ones to find solutions, some of which were creative,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBloUItvFko

A group of young boys from Mucheke suburb of Masvingo, Zimbabwe, are using old tyres as springboards to do acrobatic moves. Their love for gymnastic have made them to be innovative as there are no gyms around the suburb . After a day at school the boys would group up to do their moves with great execution.

Figure 11: Child acrobats in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

to meet their need to play. Unlike the three reporters who did not emphasise the dangers of the playing environment, some other reporters stressed just the risks that those [innovative] solutions presented.

For instance, South African reporter Simphiwe Gwija's report titled 'South Africa: Risky games to show you're a boy,'[227] stressed the fact that due to peer pressure, children ventured far from home to fish in a one-meter deep river near Johannesburg. In doing so, they exposed themselves to abduction, drug abuse and drowning, to mention but a few hazards. Dalen, one boy at the river, said: 'We catch frogs and crabs. We love doing it. It's fun,' and when the reporter asked him whether the environment was safe, he replied: 'Yes it's safe because we make it safe for us.' The point that the reporter wanted to make here was that the natural peer pressure amongst children pushed them to challenge each other, and in doing so, to take risks that could be avoided if they were offered better playing facilities.

Dangers and hazards are also present in rural areas, where children find ways to create playing environments themselves, without and even far away from adults. Njeri Meresa's report titled 'Kenya: The cooking game and its dangers,'[228] featured children aged six and below imitating the cooking scenes they saw everyday at home. Those children from Ugunja collected tins and turned them into cooking pots. They did that far from home, because, as one boy said, adults would beat them. The main issue was that the very young ones burned their fingers and could not receive any help. The report showed a child of two years of age crying hard, whilst the rest of the group was busy 'cooking.' Besides injury, the reporter also

showed children eating the food that they had cooked, which implied high risk of diseases due to the lack of hygiene with the utensils being used but also with under cooked food, amongst other hazards.

Other special cases show children engaging in performing cultural activities such as dancing, singing, and the like. However, the report by Jacob Mugini titled 'Tanzania: 9 year orphan struggles to feed family,'[229] revealed a special reason why a child would engage in a cultural activity. Together with a blind artist, nine-year-old Emmanuel Marwa from Tarime, Tanzania, performed music with traditional instruments to make money. Marwa was in the third year of primary school and could earn between 20,000 and 40,000 Tanzanian Shillings [±US$ 15 – US$ 30] per month from his public performances in ceremonies, weddings, and other public gatherings.

Her mother was very proud, as Marwa had replaced his deceased father. Her four children, including Marwa, could survive with the US$ 15 – US$ 30 he earned every month. What we have in this report is obviously not a child trying to enjoy his rights to exercise cultural activities, but a child turning his talents into a business. This case is challenging especially when considered side by side with those of parents exploiting their children discussed in the previous section. The main question would be whether Marwa was being affected either physically [exhaustion, hunger, etc.] or intellectually [e.g., concentrating more on securing the daily bread than on school work]. The report seemed to present Marwa as a boy wonder, who managed to do things that he was expected to do during adulthood.

In many of the reports discussed in this section, one realises that children were doing natural things, that is, those activities in which they were expected to engage at their age. Yet, doing those natural things meant in most cases exposing themselves to risks and hazards affecting either their physical integrity or their health. Shot in the natural environment in which the children played on a daily basis and showing the dangers of that environment, these reports also raised governance issues both at national and local levels. Public officials had the duty to ensure that whatever happens is in the best interest of the child. Playing and recreation definitely being in the best interests of the child, it follows that the situations exposed in most of these reports were somehow signs of governance failure, at least in that particular respect. However, as the report about the money-earning child artist suggested, things are more complex than they appear at first sight. In this particular case, cultural activities were a source of income, rather than a source of leisure, for the child.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown some of the possibilities that MCR-inspired journalism offers to capture issues relating to the rights and welfare of the child. In a way, right violations or those that might appear so in other places, are brought to light taking into account local circumstances and perceptions of childhood. Child labour emerged in many reports and many of its facets were shown. In almost all cases, the main reason justifying child labour was poverty, which pushed children

to find themselves in a survival position and to act accordingly. Paradoxically, considered from an MCR perspective, that is, with the insider view at the centre, some child labour situations seemed to offer enjoyment for children who could pride themselves with incomes above the extreme-poverty line. At the same time, however, it appeared that children were exposing themselves to hazards, the harmful nature of which they ignored.

This chapter has equally highlighted the conflicts that often characterise the 'parental responsibility – children's duty to obey – and the rights of the child' triangle. In this triangle, where a certain balance is expected, the rights of the child seemed to be overwhelmed by the other two sides of the triangle. The result, as the reports discussed in section 4.2 illustrate, was that children would be exploited economically and physically, which would affect their education, amongst other things. These MCR-inspired reports did not present a black-and-white situation, as each community had its own conception of the notion of childhood and proper upbringing.

Finally, this chapter has presented and discussed MCR-inspired reports that showed children in their playing and leisure environments, both those they created on their own and those that public officials designed for them. In most reports it appeared that the latter were rather few and far between. In most cases children used their creative and innovative sense to design their own playing environments, or to turn existing areas into something for their own advantage. The main issue here was that designing those areas by themselves, or doing those natural leisure activities where they could, entailed dangers to their health and physical integrity, amongst others. All in all, it seems that MCR-inspired journalism offers a new perspective to reporting child-related issues, which so far had been mostly approached from a top-down perspective, ignoring the views and voices from the bottom. In the next chapter, I do a similar exercise, but this time focusing on environmental issues and ways in which MCR-inspired journalism helps to report them.

Chapter 5

Environmental Reporting

In the last two decades or so, the environment has long been on the agenda of those involved in politics, diplomacy, international development co-operation, academia and business, to mention but a few sectors. This interest in the environment is mainly motivated by the increasing fear that the natural balance on which the entire ecological system is based is being lost, mainly due to human action. Most literature has been on the announced gloomy future that awaits humanity if nothing is done now to reverse the situation, and on possible causes of that human-caused misbalance.[230] Very little has been said or written to explain what one should understand by 'environment,' a concept whose meaning is often taken for granted.

 In general terms, environment refers to 'the air, water and land in or on which people, animals and plants live.'[231] *Encyclopedia Britannica* provides more details, suggesting that environment consists of 'the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.'[232] These two short definitions tell us three important things: firstly, that land, air and water appear as offering a living or survival framework for organisms [humans, animals, plants]; secondly, that the living framework influences the life or survival of those organisms. The third point is deducted from the previous two, namely that those organisms' harmful action against their living or survival framework affects the life or survival of those very organisms. However, since only humans can take conscious actions, this third point should be limited to only humans.

 In this chapter, I explore and discuss ways in which mobile community reporters covered subjects that related directly or indirectly to the environment. These included those showing environmental phenomena and their impact on community life and livelihood, and human actions in favour, or to the detriment, of the preservation of the environment. The last section discusses and analyses the coverage of topics relating to climate change and argues that the MCR approach presents the chance to look at global warming from a less bureaucratic and scientific perspective.

5.1 Nature Protection and Destruction

In his paper titled 'The Rhetoric and Reality of Nature Protection: Toward a New Discourse,' Holly Doremus suggested that 'nature has long been viewed not only as the foundation of human subsistence, but also as a source of economically

important resources.'[233] It goes without saying that the foundation of one's subsistence and the source of one's economic resources are primordial for the very survival of human beings. However, things are not as simple as they might appear at first sight, especially amongst the members of communities in marginalised areas in Africa. As this section shows, the very fact of trying to protect one's source of income might lead to the destruction of part of the nature. In other cases, protecting nature is essentially a matter of doing business. Yet in other cases, the very fact that natural catastrophes or irregularities occur means a new source of income for members of the community.

Let's consider Joseph Aron's 10th June 2009 report titled 'Tanzania: Peasants upset as pigs destroy crops,'[234] in which protection and destruction of nature were linked in a very interesting way. This report was shot in a maize plantation where farmers near Arusha National Park were building makeshift huts to protect themselves against rain whilst they guarded their plantations. Guarding plantations at night was not a usual activity, but was rather prompted by frequent nightly invasions by wild pigs and monkeys from the park. Those animals had already damaged maize plantations, and peasants had decided to kill those that would venture into their farms again.

This report is about destruction at two levels: on one hand, destruction of maize plantations by wild pigs and monkeys, and on the other, 'destruction' of pigs and monkeys by farmers. However, the latter destruction was done in the name of protection, as the farmers' aim was not to kill the animals for the sake of killing them, but rather ensuring that some maize were left until harvest time. Man-animal conflicts are sometimes in the mainstream news, but one rarely captures what the bottom thinks and does to ensure that animals do not overwhelm them.

Once again, the report about wild pigs and monkeys could be criticised for failing to explain why the animals were this time venturing outside the protected area. The same arguments provided in previous sections and chapters remain valid. The ecologist and zoologist are far away in the capital city, and even if they were nearer, they would most probably reject a citizen journalist's request for an interview. Hence the need for a complementary attitude between citizen journalists and conventional journalists, as the former have access to the insider view while the latter have better access to official and expert sources.

However, not all nature destruction reports featured man-animal conflicts. Some of them were based on traditional practices like bush fire. In many African countries, burning the bush prior to a farming season is the most natural thing, and actually part of the farming process. Bush fire destroys both the soils and vegetation, but for most farmers, it constitutes the best way to fertilise the soil. In one report titled 'Kenya: Bush fire as soil fertilizer'[235] by Peris Wairimu, the idea of bush fire as a fertiliser is praised. According to the reporter, bush fires helped farmers to increase their productivity, an argument she supported by showing a green, and well-looking maize plantation.

During his research about bush fires in Benin, John Hough asked villagers why they would burn the bush and learnt from them that the activity [1] had always been done [thus, a matter of tradition]; [2] helped them clear the land for instance

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KifkzskRqwI

0:02 / 1:18

One of the signs of the Harmattan is dryness. Dry lips, dry grasses, dried up wells, streams and rivers. Bush fire is rampant during this season. Sometimes, stones knocking against each other cause the fire. Sometimes too, left over cigarettes disposed off indiscriminately can cause bush fire. But most bush fires are intentional. People do it to hunt game.

Figure 12: Bush fire lit by rat hunters in Tamale, Ghana.

enabling them to get rid of sorghum stalks that did not easily decay [thus, practical reasons]; [3] helped hunters flush game from the bush [thus, economic reasons]; amongst other reasons [10 in total].[236] From this perspective, one understands the reporter's positive approach to bush fire in the community because, as an MCR-minded journalist, she provided the thoughts and views of her community about that nature destruction phenomenon. Based on these thoughts, environmentalists and nature preservation authorities had material on which to base their awareness campaigns.

In Tamale, Ghana, hunting is one of the reasons why people burn bushes. In a report titled 'Ghana: Burning bush to catch just rats,'[237] Psalm Mark Quao followed rat hunters as they set fire on dried grass to chase rats out of it (Figure 12). He showed flames consuming the bush on one hand, and young hunters forming a chain and waiting for fleeing rats on the other. One young man said he exclusively burnt bushes without owners. The rats that they caught were eaten and/or sold at the local market. Another young man said he had no choice but to engage in rat hunting, as there were no other jobs available.

Unlike Wairimu who adopted an approving tone about bush fires in her community in Meru, Kenya, Quao seemed to have adopted a critical stance in relation to the hunters' methods. The title itself suggests that burning bushes for *just* rats should not justify the damages caused by the bush fires. Even the answer provided by one interviewee that they were not venturing into people's land, suggests that the reporter had [critically] asked about the extent of bush-fire-based

hunting. In the same vein, the answer provided by the other interviewee that he had no other job but hunting rats implied that the reporter had asked why he would not engage in another nature-friendly activity. In another report,[238] Quao showed even more damages caused by bush fire not necessarily on nature, but mainly on infrastructure such as electrical masts, underground cables, and the like.

The same disapproving tone can be detected from Yusuf Maleli's report titled 'Mombasa: Search for sand destroys nature,'[239] which the reporter introduced in a dramatic way saying: 'this was a flat land with a green vegetation cover here in Junda village […] but it has been turned into a quarry, the main reason being to obtain this valuable soil used for construction.' Whilst saying that, the reporter was showing a digger at work in a 1.5-meter deep quarry. This way of starting a report with a past lost did not prevent the reporter from capturing the views of those amongst the community members who engaged in the sand business. One old man called Dumbwe Ralo said that his sole aim was to secure money for his children's education and food. However, he complained, police were coming every now and then to collect his hard-won money. 'That's not rightful,' he said. The reporter then interviewed one businessman whose truck was being loaded with sand. The businessman praised the quality of the sand in Junda village, which he would take to Mombasa.

Two major issues emerge from this report: firstly, the reporter obviously wanted to take a nature destruction angle, which he backed with a melancholic tone and images of the naked soil turned in a quarry. Secondly, in gathering the community's views on that 'sad' situation, the reporter ended up with an economic livelihood situation coupled with a governance failure issue. This aspect of placing one major issue in its local social, economic, and governance context, is one considerable strength of MCR-inspired journalism. As the theoretical discussion in chapter 2 (section 2.2.) has shown, each story begins with a choice of perspective. In this particular report, Maleli chose to look at the sand business from an environmental perspective. Yet, as an MCR-minded reporter, he could not have ignored the economic livelihood aspect, or the governance aspect, which were all closely linked to his main topic, namely nature destruction.

There are also many cases of MCR-inspired mobile reports in which reporters focused on nature-protection and environment-friendly initiatives. Reports from that category could be divided into two groups: those focusing on direct community-initiated nature-protection activities, and those focusing on activities that indirectly contribute to nature protection. Peris Wairimu's report titled 'Kenya: Protecting soils against erosion,'[240] is part of those reports that showed farmers' actions with direct effect on nature. In that report, Wairimu showed and spoke to farmers digging drains in their banana plantations to retain soils in that mountainous area. She further showed other techniques used in rocky areas where digging was impossible. Farmers built a sort of wall by piling up rocks and throwing grass on top. One farmer explained that those efforts contributed to maintaining the fertility of soils, amongst others.

One cannot discuss this report without referring to the 'bush fire for soil fertility' report by the same reporter and in the same area. In that report, bush fires were praised as making soils more fertile, whilst in reality bush fires rather destroy nature. In this anti-erosion drain-digging report, the same fertilisation argument was put forward. Both reports are about community-initiated activities with direct impact on nature. The belief at the community level in both reports was that the two activities were beneficial for nature and for the community whose land was believed to be made more productive. Considered side by side, these reports are very instructive for environmental campaigners and policy makers, because they provided a contradictory understanding of how nature works amongst the members of that particular community. In both cases, the aim was to enrich the soils, not to harm them. Yet, one technique used to that end was nature-unfriendly, while the other was nature-friendly.

On her side, Beryl Omunya from the slum of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, made a series of reports reflecting some of the ways in which her community had engaged indirectly in nature protection activities. One of them is titled 'Kenya: Kibera develops own renewable energy.'[241] That report is about the KibLight [Kibera Light] lamp project run by Kibera Community Youth Program [KCYP]. The report started with the still widely used kerosene lamp with a close-up on its flame and fumes, before turning to Sunday Wycliffe, a member of the project team, who explained how the lamp worked: the system was housed in a wooden case, with on one side a solar panel and on the other a holder with rechargeable AA batteries
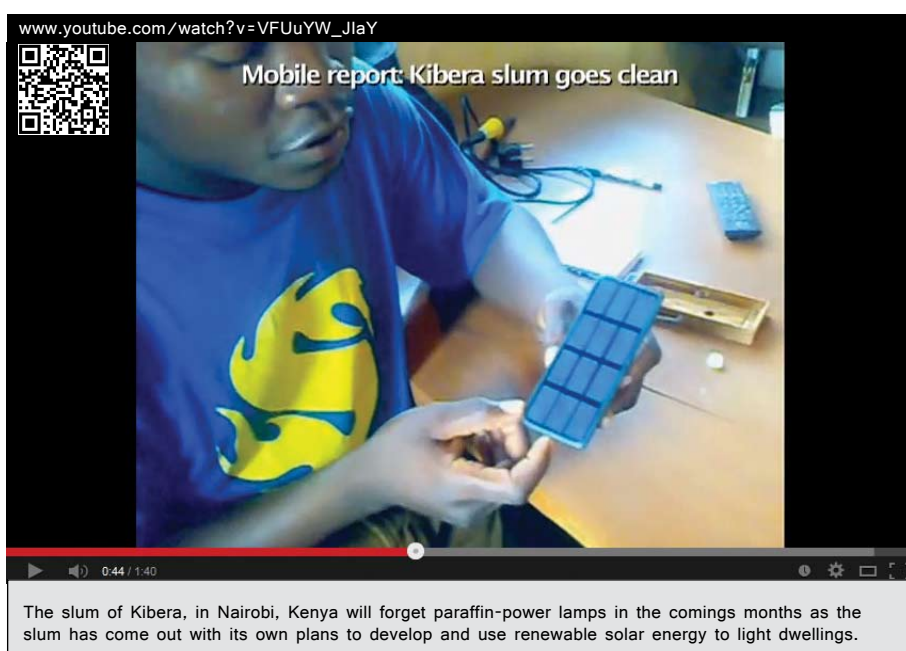

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFUuYW_JIaY

Mobile report: Kibera slum goes clean

0:44 / 1:40

The slum of Kibera, in Nairobi, Kenya will forget paraffin-power lamps in the comings months as the slum has come out with its own plans to develop and use renewable solar energy to light dwellings.

Figure 13: Locally designed lamp in the slum of Kibera, Nairobi.

(Figure 13). During the day, the solar panel was exposed to sunlight to recharge the batteries connected to a small bulb that provided light during the night.

Whilst the reporter clearly took an environmental stance with a strong stress on the clean energy aspect, the project co-ordinator Elisabeth Otieno, who was also a member of the community, seemed to stress the health aspect. For her, all the lamps in use at that time in Kibera produced fumes that were not good for health. From her perspective, it was obviously for that health-related reason that the KibLight project had been launched. Like the case of the reporter who made the sand digging story and who ended up linking environment to livelihood and governance, the KibLight report presented two community perspectives: the reporter's environmental perspective and the community project's health perspective. Unlike the reports about direct actions in the previous paragraphs, this one showed actions that contributed to nature protection in an indirect fashion. The community was not consciously engaging in nature protection in a direct way, but was nonetheless going in that direction by both designing and using a nature-friendly lamp.

Even though the business side of the report about KibLight lamps was not highlighted, it was implied that the project would generate some profit, as the lamps were for sale rather than for free distribution. Other reports have more explicitly elaborated on the link between nature protection, whether direct or indirect, with some types of business. For instance, Peris Wairimu made a report titled 'Kenya: How museum guard turned tree planter'[242] and featured an old man called John Maraju, who owned a prosperous tree and flour seedling business. Maraju, a former museum guard, had 70,000 seedlings representing 67 species of trees and flowers at the time the report was made, and was very proud to say that he was making a profit from it. One of his associates took the reporter on a tour and explained ways in which they protected seedlings against diseases.

Like Maraju, a 40-year-old widow called Grace Nyonje from Ugunja, Kenya, had engaged in seedling business to sustain her family financially. In a report titled 'Kenya: Woman champions tree planting,'[243] she told Njeri Meresa that she had so far managed to keep her children in school, but was working hard to ensure that they reached college. Nyonje's work consisted in collecting seedlings in a nearby forest and re-planting them in a specially prepared soil mixed with organic manure. Once the seedlings were ready, she would sell it either on the spot or at the Ugunja market for a price between 5 and 200 Kenyan Shillings [US$ 0.06 – US$ 2.3] depending on the species. Very interestingly, Nyonje considered her activity both as a business and as an efficient poverty-alleviation activity. At one point she said: 'I invite families to have small tree nurseries in the compound. It has [generates] money. Don't sit back and say you are a mama and [that] you can't make it. You can make it.'

In this and the previous report, the reporters chose the business perspective rather than an explicitly environmental one. Nonetheless, if one proceeds by deduction, the profit that Maraju and Nyonje proudly evoked meant considerable numbers of sold, and thus planted, seedlings, which contributed to reforestation. It is important to underline these secondary dimensions that MCR-inspired

journalism helps to bring out. We have realised that the sand-digging story that was approached from an environmental perspective, led to two secondary dimensions, namely economic livelihood and governance. We have also pointed out that the main perspective of the KibLight report was environmental, with health and, to a lesser extent, business, as secondary dimensions.

In Yusuf Maleli's report titled 'Kibwezi: Turning drought into business,'[244] the business dimension appeared as the main angle of coverage, and actually left no room for nature protection which the viewer has to detect in the background. The report is situated at the height of the 2009 prolonged drought in Kenya, the one to which I refer in more depth in the last section of this chapter. At the time Maleli made the report, the cattle had no green pastures anymore and owners who had not faced a similar drought before, were left with no alternative. Suddenly, the idea of selling hay emerged. 51-year-old Agnes Muosyo started selling hay in the Kambu market in the Kibwezi district (Figure 14). She said she had been in business for only two months at the time the report was made, and could make 5,000 Kenyan Shilling [US$ 58] a week.

Obviously, the business dimension dominated this story, but all along one smells nature protection. Humans had no way to influence weather irregularities to their advantage, but knew part of the nature, namely cattle, could be saved. Saving that part of nature called 'cattle' was another form of nature protection that

www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXeAWergopE

1:29 / 2:22

Cattle have no green pastures anymore in most places in Kenya, especially in Kibwezi, where green plants have become rare due to drought. While cattle owners are worried, other people, especially women, have taken advantage of the situation to collect stalk and sell it to cattle owners. It has become a booming business.

Figure 14: Villager selling hay during unprecedented drought.

allowed reaching two goals at once: A source of subsistence was rescued, and that rescue operation was in itself a source of income.

In short, MCR-inspired journalism offers a new way of shedding the light on nature protection and nature destruction at the level of communities. By focusing on what the community thinks about, and does with, nature, MCR-minded reporters end up with stories that mix their own sentiments of survival, their livelihood, and their locally designed solutions. In some cases, contradictions appear between what the community thinks and what is generally thought to be nature-friendly. MCR-inspired journalism has also proven to offer a way to report nature-related issues not solely from an environmental perspective, but also from other secondary perspectives that emerge from interviews with the members of the community. The next section explores MCR-inspired journalism and its coverage of issues relating to waste management and pollution.

5.2 Wastes and Pollution

The environment as 'the foundation of human subsistence, but also as a source of economically important resources,' is also the place that receives whatever remains after those resources have been, or are being, exploited. To put the notions of waste and pollution in simple terms, let's consider some concrete examples. Drinking water is one of those resources humans obtain from nature. To conserve it, plastic bottles or containers are needed. Once water has been consumed, the plastic bottle becomes a waste. The same is true for the spare car parts that are defective, for food items that were not, and can no longer be, consumed, for the water that flows away after a shower and after washing dishes, for the industrial substances that are used in manufacturing objects but are evacuated at one point, etc.

Some of these wastes are organic [e.g., food wastes] and can decompose and be part of the environment without any damage, whilst others [e.g., plastic containers] either remain intact for a very long period or cause some misbalance or damage to the environment. The phenomenon called pollution can affect air, soil, and water, which are the main environmental components on which human subsistence and survival is based. In this section, I want to explore those MCR-inspired reports that covered the notions of waste and pollution, especially ways in which community members positioned themselves in relation to these two notions. I start with cases of waste and pollution as being part of local livelihoods before considering those in which waste and pollution constitute a source of income. In the end, I focus on those reports in which waste and pollution were explicitly depicted as putting people's lives in danger.

In a report titled '*Goma: La Plage du Peuple devient un lave-auto*[245] [Goma: Plage du Peuple now car-washing point], Magguy Kakule described a very interesting situation in which waste and pollution played a significant role. She opened the report with a scene of children fetching water from the Lake Kivu, which was the source of water for most residents, before showing all other polluting but income-generating activities that were taking place on the shores of the lake. Young men were washing vehicles using chemicals; women were cleaning small fish called

Sambaza before taking them to the market; yet other mothers were washing clothes (Figure 15). All the water used in those activities was fetched from the lake, where it ultimately returned but this time with all the chemicals [soap, motor oil, etc.] used in the various washing activities.

The reporter obviously took a disapproving attitude and, instead of highlighting ways in which young members of the community managed to earn some money, or ways in which mothers earned money from the fish trade, she wanted to show how dangerous those activities were to public health. She interviewed a local dispensary nurse who told her that she received 10 to 15 cases of diarrhoea per month, which the nurse blamed on the consumption of polluted water. Then, the chief of Imbi neighbourhood, who was responsible for that part of the beach, admitted being incapable of stopping those activities. Whenever he tried to do so he failed, as people would come back the next day. At the end, the reporter showed some people disinfecting their water with chlorine before taking it home.

This report posed a challenging dilemma. On one hand, people needed to earn some money either by washing cars or by processing fish before selling them, or else by saving time and energy [by coming to wash at the beach rather than fetching jerry can after jerry can]. Yet, by doing that, those people were slowly but surely polluting the same water they would drink and that would be used to cook their food, which made it an endless vicious circle. The powerlessness of the neighbourhood chief is also interesting, as it could be interpreted not as a confession of powerlessness but rather as loyalty to the community to which he

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLwns87b8k8

0:21 / 1:59

Au lac Kivu, à la plage du peuple les habitants des quartiers affectés par la carence d'eau viennent s'approvisionner en eau potable devenue rare depuis un certain temps à Goma. Néanmoins, l'usage de cette plage devient de plus en plus un danger pour la population de Goma.

Figure 15: Young men washing vehicles on a beach in Goma, DR. Congo.

belonged. In other words, forcing people to stop the sole activities that enabled them to feed their families without offering an alternative would be against the interests of his own community.

In the last analysis, then, this report focused mainly on waste [used water mixed with chemicals] and on the pollution they caused once in the lake, but had at the same time other important dimensions. Health for instance emerged as a preoccupation emanating from the waste-pollution combination. Although not mentioned, economic livelihoods hovered all along the line, as the cause of pollution was presented as people's sole source of income. Finally, governance failure transpired in the background, as public officials seemed completely absent from the general picture, whilst nature protection and public health were at stake.

It is important to note here that the reporter did not interview any of the people involved in the income-generating but water-polluting activities, whilst she was supposed to voice their perspective. My opinion here has two components: firstly, being initially a conventional journalist, the reporter seemed to have used her reflex of going first to the official sources, namely the nurse and the neighbourhood chief [although the latter was also a member of the community]. Secondly, given her chosen angle of coverage, namely one of disapprobation, she felt that the standard two minute length would not leave her enough room for additional two or more interviews. She might then have decided to use her observation and insider knowledge about the activities, and to favour official sources that backed her disapproving stance. At the end, we still had what the bottom did, and implicitly what they thought about what they did.

The situation described in a report titled 'Nairobi: Dumping site becomes fertile farm'[246] by Beryl Omunya is less complex, but equally reflected one way in which local community members managed to interact with nature to their advantage. A community-based group called Kibera Youth Reform Self-Help Group cleaned a former dumping site and turned it into a 'fertile farm' that supplied the slum market with fresh vegetables. The aim of the group, as its secretary said, was to help slum youths be self-reliant. The reporter showed a young man cutting cabbage from his farm for a client who preferred to buy directly from the farm [rather than at the market].

In contrast with the previous report and its disapproving tone, this one was marked by enthusiasm all along. Whilst opening the report, the reporter offered an overview of the garden and commented saying: 'As beautiful as it looks, it was once a dumping site.' This initial comment was followed by the efforts made by the community to get rid of something negative, the dumping site, by turning it into something positive, a fertile farm. The report suggested that money followed the initiative: vegetables were displayed at the market, and clients were even coming to fetch them from the farm.

This report could be interpreted in two ways: firstly, it could be perceived as a self-congratulatory report, whereby the community told the world that it had done something great by removing the dangerous dumping site and supplying the market with vegetables. That is what that particular community was thinking about itself and its efforts at that moment. Secondly, the report could be considered from

a different perspective, one that takes into account the other side of the medal. Can ordinary young men and women manage to clean a site that had served as a dumping site for years without any help from better equipped experts? How deep had they gone to sanitise the multiple soil layers and the groundwater that most likely had suffered from any surface waste? Or simply, how could they be so sure that the site was clean and free of any pollution?

MCR-minded journalists, whose aim it is to report what the community thinks [and does], and when possible to link it with what experts and other official sources think [and do], are not required to answer all these questions, which go beyond what the bottom thinks. Those questions rather emanate from experts and those who know exactly how nature works. The enthusiastic tone of the report should rather push the experts and public officials in charge of nature preservation and agriculture, to take action, knowing exactly what the people in question think about their own environment.

In a very similar report titled 'Nairobi: Farming in polluted suburbs'[247] equally made in the slum of Kibera, Neville Omondi adopted a different perspective. Whilst showing a garden of well-looking vegetables, Omondi immediately announced that the garden was watered with polluted water from the Nairobi River streaming a few meters away from the garden. According to the reporter, Nairobi factories dumped their chemicals into that river, which he zoomed in probably to show the dark colour of its water. Referring to the farm of Njoya, the farmer whom he featured, the reporter said: 'It's doing well in terms of production, and most of what is grown here finds its way to the kiosk.' Then, he immediately cut short that positive comment to say: 'but one would like to question whether it's safe to consume products from this farm.'

Given the zoom on the dark-coloured water, the observation that it was polluted, and the doubt about the safety of vegetables from that particular farm, the reporter was definitely convinced that public health was at stake. The farmer's view was that those vegetables were safe for consumption. He and his family consumed them, and none of them had ever complained of anything. His sole problem was that the land did not belong to him. He was afraid that he would be chased away if the owner came to claim it.

Unlike the previous report about cleaning and then exploiting a former dumping site, this report highlighted an individual initiative. Whilst in the former report enthusiasm seemed to be shared by both the reporter and the members of the community, in the latter, enthusiasm appeared only on the farmer's side. What these and other reports have in common is their power to position the main dimension of the report alongside other secondary dimensions. The report about the former dumping site had economic livelihood as the main dimension of the story, but kept the notions of wastes [that were removed] and [possible] pollution constant in the background. The report about the garden near the Nairobi River took economic livelihood, waste and pollution in parallel, whilst explicitly raising a public health issue. Implicitly, the reporter also raised a governance failure issue in the sense that public officials had failed to ensure that the river remained clean of any chemicals.

One can even go further and say that other issues underlined most of these reports. The car washers and the fish processors went to do their income-generating activities at the beach because they had no other place that had appropriate facilities to provide them with water and to recycle used one. The slum youths cleaned the dumping site, most probably because they had no other land to exploit in the vicinity. The same was true with the farmer near the Nairobi River, who was afraid of being chased out.

In the last analysis, then, one can confidently say that MCR-minded journalists made it possible to consider waste and pollution not just for the sake of considering them, but by creating connections between them and other issues facing members of the community. Once again, one realises that MCR-minded journalists have no one single path to follow in their reporting. The sole sacred principle is to keep what the bottom thinks at the centre. What the reporter does with it depends on their own knowledge, views, and creativity. The reporter might embrace the enthusiasm expressed by their community, or express their scepticism whilst at the same time voicing the community's enthusiasm.

5.3 De-bureaucratising Climate Change

One popular topic that has dominated discussions about the environment in the last two decades or so is global warming, a phenomenon that has been blamed as causing climate change. Climate change, its causes and its consequences have divided the scientific community, and a consensus is far from reached. Besides, the science behind climate change is not accessible to the lay public, as only the initiated seem to understand what causes it, and to which consequences it leads. In its report titled 'Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis,' the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] noted that climate change was due to 'changes in the atmospheric abundance of greenhouse gases and aerosols, in solar radiation and in land surface properties [that] alter the energy balance of the climate system.'[248] The report pointed out that concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide had increased markedly to the extent of exceeding pre-industrial values.

The African Journalism scholars who met in South Africa in 2011 to reflect upon the challenge of climate change for journalism in Africa, converged in saying that journalists [like the lay public] did not fully understand the science of climate change,[249] which pushed them to pay less attention to that subject. If journalists themselves still need to fully understand the science behind climate change, it follows that the community itself and its members who are an important source of the MCR-minded journalist are even more ignorant of that science. Besides scientific understanding of climate change, other reasons have been mentioned to explain why news media outlets do not cover news relating to climate change. Firstly, they do not 'sell' as they often lack sensationalism and other traditional features that attract audiences.[250] Secondly, they often lead to conflicts of interests whereby news media firms are caught in between and left with no choice but to skip those stories.[251]

As this section shows, the MCR-minded journalist has the advantage that no full understanding of the science behind climate change is required, as the needed understanding is one of the effects [or those considered so] of that environmental phenomenon, and of the actions that the community takes to prevent or aggravate it. In other words, the MCR-minded journalist collects information and packages it from the community's perspective and invites viewers, including scientists, to interpret that information in one way or another.

The report titled 'Isiolo: Cattle cannot resist drought any more',[252] by Kenyan reporter Adhe Dida, is one example that invites experts and those knowledgeable in climatology to draw their conclusions. On one hand, the report showed how extreme drought threatened pastoralists' livelihood, as their cattle could not even walk to the remaining water points, let alone to the cattle market (Figure 16). On the other hand, the report informed that the government of Kenya had taken emergency measures by massively buying weak cattle and transporting them by truck to the cattle market. The main news in this report was the government's action to rescue pastoralists in Isiolo, but in the background, one detects that drought, an environmental phenomenon that affects cattle's survival and to a great extent, humans' livelihood, was omnipresent in this report.

It is important to note here that the reporter refrained from speculating about the cause of extreme drought. However, given that the government measure was presented as unprecedented, and since the reporter was not reminding of any previous drought similar to the one he reported about, it could be said that something had changed in the weather pattern. This assumption was comforted by the advice of the public official in charge of livestock production to affected pastoralists, that they should keep the money until the next rains came. This declaration betrayed an obvious uncertainty as to when the next rains would come.

Several months after the drought-affected cattle report, the same reporter, who was a member of the Isiolo pastoralist community, made two follow-up reports that showed that the pastoralists' life was completely taking another direction. The first one titled 'Kenya: Pastoralists engage in agriculture,'[253] was about pastoralists investing in farming, probably using the money they had collected after selling their cattle to government. One pastoralist said that the prolonged drought that had killed most of their cattle had prompted them to diversify their sources of income. As the report was being made, pastoralists were harvesting. The second report titled 'Kenya: Pastoralists turn to fish farming,'[254] confirmed the trend that pastoralists had renounced total dependence on cattle. With a total of 50 tilapia fish, they dug a number of pools, and were intending to expand that initiative.

These three reports from and about Isiolo pastoralist communities could be given many descriptions depending on where one puts the stress. They were definitely about economic livelihood, as the pastoralists' sole source of income seemed to be in jeopardy. They certainly touched upon [good] governance, as the government took its responsibility in acting swiftly in the interests of its citizens in need. They are doubtless environmental reports, as the change in weather pattern was blamed for the catastrophe. Whether that change of pattern was the result of climate change is another discussion beyond the scope of MCR-inspired

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRBfKTeVdC0

Pastoralists in Isiolo are unable to move their cattle to the slaughter house or market as the persisting drought has weaken them to the extent that they can no longer walk. They have now to carry them in trucks, which is likely to make life more difficult both for the pastoralists and the consumer. Isiolo is a semi-arid area in Kenya's Eastern Province.

Figure 16: Cattle unable to walk due to extreme drought.

journalism. Nonetheless, those who believe that prolonged, unprecedented drought is one symptom of climate change will find a de-bureaucratised version of it in these, and other reports.

Unlike Isiolo pastoralists who could count on the Kenyan government, Zimbabwean counterparts in Plumtree, who also faced unprecedented drought, were given no choice but to sell their cattle at a very low price. In Nigel Mabiza's report titled 'Zimbabwe: Drought leaves no choice but sell cattle,'[255] cattle owners complained that they had no grazing lands anymore, and that the middlemen were ruthlessly taking advantage of the situation. The only thing the desperate owners wanted was mediation from the government, so that the middlemen could offer a reasonable price. Once again, one sees a connection between what could be called a symptom of climate change, local economic livelihood, and governance.

Like the Isiolo reporter who monitored one particular issue affecting his community over a year, Abisae Maeda, a Tanzanian reporter in Arusha, made the melting of the legendary Kilimanjaro ice cap his topic. Over a period of one year, Maeda, who climbed the mountain many times a month, made about ten reports, not only showing the melting itself, but also voicing the views of his community about it. In one report titled 'Kilimanjaro and its worrying ice cracks,'[256] he interviewed a guide who blamed the fast melting of the ice cap to global warming (Figure 17). The guide showed where the ice was eight years before, which was at least a dozen meters away.

Mobile report: Kilimanjaro on the rhythm of ice cracks

1:01 / 2:27

For years now, the beautiful Kilimanjaro glaciers have been gradually melting, to the extent of predicting its total disappearance in a decade or two.

Figure 17: Kilimanjaro ice cap crack.

Another one titled 'Kilimanjaro: Last glacier blocks falling apart'[257] was even more dramatic with close-ups of the just fallen blocks that started melting immediately. Maeda began his story saying that the big crack had happened the previous month. When he returned, he found that the crack had broken into smaller blocks, which were on their turn melting (Figure 18). This no-interview report ended with Maeda saying: 'It will be sad, when this glacier is gone.' The news here was obviously that one big piece had broken from the remaining ice cap. The reporter's comment suggested that he, like his community, had expected that the broken part would stay intact. The reporter realised with sadness that cracking was just the beginning of a process that would end with the complete disappearance of the fallen piece, and later on, of the entire ice cap.

Sadness came back in another report titled 'Kilimanjaro guides powerless as ice melts,'[258] in which the reporter interviewed two guides who were with him near the top of Kilimanjaro. One of them had heard from American researchers, whom he had accompanied in 2004, that the ice cap would disappear in 15 years. For him, the ice would not wait that long. He was afraid that tourists would not come back, as most of those he guided were interested in climbing with hikes in the ice. 'It will be very sad when this glacier has disappeared,' he said. However, he had some hope, as he thought that tourists who had been there before would return to discover what the iceless Kilimanjaro top would look like.

These reports about the melting of the Kilimanjaro ice cap reveal two interesting aspects of MCR-inspired journalism: firstly, a disaster attributed to climate change was discussed by those who ignored the science behind it, but

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiPMgqeR2g0

0:47 / 1:22

Abisae Maeda, VoicesofAfrica mobile reporter in Arusha, Tanzania (14 March 2009)-The last blocks of ice on the top of Kilimanjaro are gradually detaching themselves and falling down, thereby quickening the melting process of the legendary glacier of Africa's highest mountain.

Figure 18: Kilimanjaro ice cap melting.

who knew everything about what the melting of the ice cap would mean for their incomes. The guides and the reporter stressed the 'sad' situation in which they would find themselves when the ice cap is completely gone. Secondly, beyond the loss of income and the uncertainty that goes with it, one sees a strong emotional attachment to Kilimanjaro. This was reflected in the mixture of hope and fear that the reporter expressed when he returned to the top only to realise that the fallen crack had started melting after breaking into pieces. The same mixture of hope and fear was observed amongst the guides, who thought that the new look of their Mount would be equally attractive.

This section has highlighted only two aspects of climate change [or what could be considered so]. Unlike most reports in mainstream journalism, MCR-inspired journalism manages to break, or at least to ignore, the scientific barriers that either prevent journalists from venturing into reporting about that subject, or prompt them to wait for major events [conferences, meetings, workshops, (inter)national day of…] to report on it.[259] As Alan Finlay wrote, due to the fact that newsrooms are based in cities far from rural communities, where the most adverse effects of climate change are felt [think of the drought-weakened cattle in Isiolo], journalists face a framing problem, as they are often inclined to report from the vantage point of pity.[260]

In contrast, as this section has shown, MCR-minded journalists tend to choose their angle of coverage in such a way that the members of the community tell the story, express their fear and their hopes, and present the initiatives that they take to solve issues facing them. Reporting about climate change in this way is making

that complex and almost bureaucratic concept accessible to the lay public on one hand, and giving it a concrete face by showing what it means to local communities, on the other.

Conclusion

In this final chapter dedicated to thematic analysis three subjects were discussed, all of which relate to the environment. It opened with reports that looked at nature from the protection-destruction perspective, to point out that the situation might be complex in many cases. Nature being both the foundation of subsistence for both humans and animals, it is not always easy to protect humans' sources of subsistence, especially when animals claim those very sources for their own survival. This chapter has shown ways in which MCR-minded reporters covered that issue from the perspective of the communities to which they belonged. In addition, it has appeared that talking about nature protection and destruction can hardly be possible if one ignores local traditions and cultural or economic activities.

I have also considered those environmental reports that opted for the waste and pollution perspective. Waste is unavoidable in any society but the ways in which communities handle their waste, or those that happen to be on their territory are different. In this chapter, I discussed those reports that portrayed the waste and pollution issue as a dilemma, as the very fact of polluting constituted a source of income for some members of the community. In other cases, MCR-minded journalists presented local community initiatives not only to clean their environment, but also to generate income by exploiting the recovered land. I have stressed that whilst some reporters would share the community's enthusiasm in those initiatives, others would opt for a more sceptical tone.

Finally, I analysed the reports that were made about climate change, a concept that seemed to make sense mainly to scientists and policy makers, whilst it meant very little both to journalists and members of communities in marginalised areas. A few examples have shown ways in which MCR-minded journalists approached that complex subject, by giving the phenomenon of climate change a concrete human face. It appeared that the scientific understanding of climate change was of little importance compared to the effects [or those perceived so] of that phenomenon on people's livelihood. Moreover, it has emerged that contrary to pity-tainted reports that one often reads or sees in conventional journalism, MCR-inspired journalism focused not only on catastrophes, but also on locally initiated attempts at solutions.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Paths for Future Exploration

After explaining the key concepts underlying the Mobile Community Reporting approach in chapters one and two, and illustrating how that approach offers new ways of reporting about governance (chapter three), about the rights of the child (chapter four), and about the environment (chapter five), I want to now draw some general conclusions whilst opening up some reflections on other communication areas where the MCR approach could be helpful. I look at the whole and provide some general points on one hand, and some challenges inherent to MCR-inspired journalism on the other. After that, and based on the experience and experiments of MCR-inspired journalism, I suggest ways in which the MCR concept could possibly be combined with advocacy-oriented and activism-related communication, and with development-project communication.

6.1 Filling the Gaps

Throughout this book I have kept stressing capturing *what the bottom thinks* as the ultimate aim of MCR-inspired journalism. In capturing what the bottom thinks, journalists fill the big gap left open by conventional journalism, which seems to serve the interests of the top in the first place. This interest in the top has mostly to do with the fact that the news buyers and advertisers are exclusively amongst those with political, economic, and intellectual power. The result is that journalism has marginalised local communities, especially those in rural areas who, until recently, could neither produce nor buy or otherwise access news.

For instance, Zimbabwe's *Daily News* published a story titled 'Zim Agric set to Go Up,'[261] in which the journalist solely focused on what a high-ranking official at the ministry of economic planning and the finance minister thought and projected. This article provided thoroughly researched details about key agricultural sectors and exact amounts set aside in the budget to boost them. Yet one big gap remained: *what the farmers thought* was nowhere to be found in the report.

As the examples provided in this book have shown, MCR-inspired journalism could only be called so if what the bottom thinks is at the centre of the entire reporting process. In many cases, though, MCR-inspired reports, too, leave a gap by not capturing what the top thinks. Hence my first general conclusion is that *MCR-inspired journalism tells but part of the story, while conventional journalism as practiced until now, tells another part of the story*. The ideal news media landscape would doubtlessly be one in which both journalistic forms are allowed and

encouraged to flourish and even to interact. In that landscape, journalism would fully and more efficiently play its role as mediator of the public sphere, where the bottom would be involved in debates and discussions about issues that touch upon their lives and livelihood.

The second general conclusion is that *MCR-inspired journalism is far from perfect, just like conventional journalism is. It attempts to fill one gap, but in doing so it creates a new one*. In many cases, issues relating to incompleteness, lack of some key details, ethics, amongst others, arise. However, these issues are not a specificity of MCR-inspired journalism, as conventional journalism, too, suffers from them. It is here that the need for both peer and professional coaching could be valuable, as it would enable these new types of journalists to improve with each and every new mobile report they make. By professional coaching I mean feedback and suggestions for improvement that professionally trained journalists would provide to their citizen counterparts.

As I mentioned somewhere in chapter two, the MCR approach applies to both citizen and professional journalism. The mobile reports that I discussed in this book were made by reporters belonging to both categories. Even though the ultimate aim is the same, capturing what the bottom thinks, the way in which that aim is reached is different. This leads to my third general conclusion that *professional journalists who embrace the MCR approach tend to keep many of their 'old' reflexes, which are not often observed amongst citizen journalists*. In most reports by professional journalists, officials and experts receive a prominent place, while the tendency amongst citizen journalists is not to include them altogether. As I explained throughout this book (see also challenges below), official authorities are not always accessible to citizen journalists due to mostly the deeply rooted belief that journalism is an exclusive realm of professional journalists. Professional journalists were also keen on enquiring into details, in providing statistics and percentages, whilst citizen journalists tended to be too general because, once again, of the lack of access to sources of information.

It has also appeared in many reports that reporters either embraced or disapproved what the bottom thought. This observation takes me to my fourth general conclusion that *despite their dependence on the community, its values, and its interests, MCR-minded journalists still have room to make their judgment without alienating their communities*. This conclusion brings in a very important nuance to the relationships between the reporter and the community that I discussed in the introduction and in Section 1.1. A deduction from those sections of the book could be that whatever the reporter reports should be in the interest of the community. The nuance that this conclusion is bringing is that some issues do not lead to consensus in the community. If the reporter is amongst those who disapprove one practice, new or old, he or she still captures what other members of the community think but with a disapproving, sceptical tone. If he or she fully agrees with the practice, the report is made with an approving, enthusiastic tone.

Despite the gaps that it often leaves open, MCR-inspired journalism has a major advantage of not being held hostage by editorial lines dictated from above. In mainstream journalism, editors often impose a perspective that responds to what

they think their target audience expects.[262] On the contrary, and that is my fifth general conclusion, *thanks to the freedom they enjoy to choose one or many perspectives they deem to be the most relevant from the vantage point of their communities, MCR-minded journalists come out with multi-dimensional reports that place one particular issue in a web of other issues*. This multi-dimensional character is essential for those outside the community who want to understand why things happen the way they do. For instance, an environmental report ends up showing governance and business dimensions of deforestation. Similarly, a food security report ends up talking about primary school dropouts and absenteeism, as well as creative, locally designed solutions to overcome that catastrophe.

The last general conclusion that I want to draw relates to the capacity to simplify and give a face to bureaucratic concepts that ring no bell in the minds of most members of communities in marginalised areas. That conclusion is that *the knowledge of the community and its values enable MCR-minded journalists to de-bureaucratise and give a concrete face to abstract concepts*. Concepts such as governance mean very little in many local communities where governance failures or successes occur on a daily basis. The rights of the child as outlined in international legal instruments are one thing, and local conceptions of those rights are another thing. Climate change, as crucial as it might appear, does not provoke the same worries amongst those who ignore what it is as it does amongst those who understand it. MCR-minded journalists manage to circumvent the abstract character of those concepts, at which they look from within the communities in an effort to give them a concrete meaning.

6.2 Facing Challenges

Until this point, all I have written is about the concept of Mobile Community Reporting and its application in some countries in Africa. I have a feeling that stopping at this point without informing the reader about the other side of the coin would be unfair on my part. The six years of experiments [2007-2013] that I covered in this book have also helped detect where things could deviate from the initial plans or go wrong. In the next few paragraphs, I make a brief overview of the challenges the VOAMF Mobile Reporting Programme faced, so that those who are tempted to embrace this new concept can anticipate them.

The first challenge is psychological and has to do with the acceptance of citizen journalists on one hand, and with the idea that mobile phones, rather than big cameras and audio recorders can do the job, on the other. One Ghanaian professional journalist who was involved in the programme once told me that his colleagues, who accused him of degrading their profession by using non-professional tools, had verbally assaulted him at a press conference in Accra. The incident took place in 2008, when 3G phones were at their peak. The journalist took his time to explain to the colleagues that his phone allowed him to do much of what they did with professional tools. He browsed with his phone on the Web to show what he had achieved with the phone that he was holding, which prompted apologies from his colleagues. Currently, this type of incident is unlikely to take place, as many

journalists have embraced advanced, high technology phones as a working tool to make pictures, record sound and moving images, and to surf the Web.

The issue is different with police and some other public officials. One citizen journalist was held in police custody in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, because he was shooting with a mobile phone near the city's licence office. Police confiscated his mobile phone and refused to believe his account that he was doing journalism. Moreover, they told him, he had no press card. As a result, many reports made in places where police were likely to be present were shaky as reporters were hiding their cameras to avoid trouble with police. This challenge is very serious as the safety of reporters is at stake. Reporters should know that their safety comes first. They should not take unnecessary risks. In this respect, the size of the phone, its portability and its omnipresence does help them a bit, as police cannot track all those that are holding a phone in their hands.

Another challenge is at the financial level, as each training trajectory has costs, including purchasing advanced phones, an initial training on the basics of journalism and on MCR principles, as well as the running and maintenance of an online platform for both display and [peer and professional] coaching. Training is essential especially to invite citizen and professional journalists to acquire or revisit some of the key concepts of journalism, such as the notions of news and newsworthiness, ethics, sources, framing, etc. As stressed throughout this book, those notions and many others have to take into account those at the lowest level of the social ladder.

In addition, like many other development projects, this approach poses the problem of sustainability in the long run. What happens after the six to eight months of training and practice? The initial intention is that the trainees would keep on making MCR-inspired reports and publish or sell them independently on both commercial and non-commercial websites. Some alumni, like Zimbabwean Mthokozisi Ndebele managed to have their reports published by the French TV station *France 24*.[263] However, as the news media industry seems to be in perpetual financial crisis in most African countries,[264] and in other parts of the world, it becomes problematic for mobile community reporters to integrate existing online platforms.

In a way, thus, the fate of MCR-inspired journalism is tied to the news media industry. In other words, there is a need to rather work on the convergence approach between the two types of journalism. Throughout this book I advocated for this convergence, arguing that the gaps that one type fills are those left open by the other. One way of encouraging this convergence is to lobby governments and other financial supporters of the news industry to partly tie their subsidies and grants to convergence efforts. In the Central African Republic, for instance, the government granted 25 million francs CFA [US$ 50,600] to news outlets in 2013.[265] In Burkina Faso the amounts were much higher. The government granted an annual amount of 100 million francs CFA [US$ 202,000] to the industry starting from 1997, an amount that increased to 150 million francs CFA [US$ 303,000] in 2001. Governments in Benin, Mali, Senegal and many other countries were doing the same.[266] A converged media landscape would lead to more or less balanced news

coverage, where most of the gaps would be filled both from the top and from the bottom. It can even contribute to winning back disenchanted members of the audience who are tired of the exclusively elitist approach of the industry.

Linked to that is the challenge related to the lifespan of the mobile phone. Most of the mobile phones used in the VOMAF programme could not resist more than three to four years. Many of those purchased locally and whose origin could not be accurately traced had an even shorter lifespan. For some, the telephone would vibrate and the battery become very hot 'as if the phone wants to explode', as one Kenyan reporter told me. Others would completely freeze and refuse to respond to the reporters' commands. These problems are often solved either by repairing the phone locally or by replacing it, which puts some pressure on the budget. However, it is not sure that former trainees will invest in repairs or in new phones, unless they see a financial incentive. This challenge brings us back to the previous one, as connecting MCR-minded journalists to the industry would make them part of the business model of the media house in which they would be associated. In other words, if the phone helps the news outlet generate some income, it will be replaced when the need arises.

However, since the business nature of journalism has a strong impact on the practice of journalism (see section 2.1.), a new problem would arise from the convergence between MCR-minded journalists and the established news media industry. The question would be: Once MCR-minded journalists depend on the news media industry, will they still be able to enjoy their freedom, the one that allows them to accord primacy to the community and to produce multi-dimensional reports? There would be much to gain on the part of the industry, if they could keep that freedom. In the digital era, the success of media business depends not solely on the quality of the content, but also on the sheer amounts of contents one has on a given website. Having a news site that has a variety of reports and views from various parts of the country, and a different perspective would constitute an innovation likely to increase the audience.

In addition, the great number of reports, some good, some less good, would place the news media industry in the 'Long Tail' business logic that has made the fortune of many global companies [e.g.: Amazon, Apple with its iTunes service]. The Long Tail approach integrates both the notion of 'hits,' those media products deemed of high quality and generally made by professionals, and the notion of 'niche,' i.e., those small but many groups within the public with specific interests. Chris Anderson, who coined that expression and elaborated upon it, wrote that 'hits are great, but niches are emerging as the big new market.'[267] The convergence I am suggesting here would make it possible for news outlets to offer *hit* news reports made by professional journalists, alongside *niche* reports, i.e., those that do not necessarily respect the rules of the market but have the potential to attract and enlighten small but many groups of readers and viewers.[268]

In short, three points emerge from what I have just discussed: Firstly, the experiments conducted in eight African countries have shown a great potential for MCR-inspired journalism, which is summarised by the six general conclusions mentioned above. Secondly, while conducting those experiments many obstacles

and challenges arose, slowing down or hindering the full implementation of the experiments. Thirdly, many of those challenges are temporary and are likely to disappear soon, whilst others need medium- to long-term co-ordinated and concerted efforts involving multiple actors within and without the news media industry.

In the next two sections, I move away from journalism to open discussions and reflections about ways in which the MCR approach could be applied to advocacy and activism, and to development-project communications. Discussions in these two sections are mostly speculative because they are not based on any prior experiments. They are only meant to trigger further reflection based on the journalistic experiences discussed in this book.

6.3 Advocacy & Activism

Advocacy and activism are two areas of communication in which reporting plays an important role. From this point of view, reporting consists in gathering information following the demands and attributes of advocacy and activism. Unlike journalism, which has developed conventions and standards (see section 2.1), advocacy and activism do not have clearly defined conventions. However, a few common aspects relating to communication can be pointed out and discussed briefly. My starting point is that advocacy and activism are close to one another in a way I explain a few paragraphs down. To make sure that they are not confused, I discuss advocacy first before focusing on activism simply because the latter integrates to a great degree many aspects of advocacy. It should be remembered that the discussion of these two concepts is conducted from the reporting vantage point, since the aim is to pave the way to further discussions on advocacy and activism from an MCR perspective.

John Daly dedicated an entire book on the practice of advocacy, which he briefly described as a way of 'Championing Ideas & Influencing Others'. In that book, Daly provided a very helpful, concise definition of advocacy, which, as he wrote, consists in 'persuading people who matter to care about your issue'. He wrote:

> *It is about getting listened to, being at the table when decisions are made, being heard by people who make decisions. It is about facing and overcoming resistance. It is about speaking and writing in compelling ways that make decision makers want to adopt your ideas.*[269]

Three elements appear to be central to the advocacy-centred communication process: [1] 'an issue' or 'idea,' [2] 'persuasion' of decision makers whom one wants to push into a certain direction, and [3] 'communication techniques,' that have to be compelling if the advocacy campaign is to be successful. In other words, any advocacy campaign or effort has an object [an issue or idea], a goal [convincing] and a target group [decision makers] and the means to reach that target [communication]. At this stage I do not go into detail to explain the communication techniques. It

will only suffice to stress that it is the communication aspect of advocacy that involves reporting.

What does the above mean in terms of Mobile Community Reporting? Based on discussions about MCR-inspired journalism, one can say that MCR-inspired advocacy communication is about filling the gap left by the mainstream practice of that type of communication. In filling that gap, it strives to capture and then communicate *what the bottom thinks* about the object of advocacy. A few reports made by mobile reporters in the framework of the VOAMF programme navigated between advocacy and journalism, and allowed for making some initial observations about MCR-inspired advocacy.

I have already mentioned one report titled 'Ugunja: Motorcycle accidents increase'[270] from a governance perspective (section 3.2.), but this report could also be considered from the perspective of advocacy. The issue facing the community was an increased number of motorbike accidents in that particular community. What the community thought, and which the reporter amplified, was that speed limits should be placed along the roads and streets. The intended audience, one that had the means and power to solve the issue, was convinced by the report that pushed them to promptly take action. One could assert that the zoom on the bandaged leg of the school boy, his unhappy face, his missing school for days, his call for speed limit boards, together with chocking statistics were all useful ingredients that made the report compelling and convincing to decision makers.

Similarly, the report titled 'Tanzania: pupils work on teachers' farms,'[271] which I analysed from the perspective of the rights of the child (section 4.1.) is another instance of the potential of MCR-inspired advocacy communication. The combination of the images of children in school uniform tilling the soil during class time or carrying firewood together with the reporter's disapproving tone as well as the call of almost-crying and tired children, left no choice for decision makers but having empathy. Convinced by the report, the latter eventually took disciplinary action.

These and many other cases show that advocacy can take a bottom-up form and lead to palpable results. Unlike its top-down counterpart, it has a huge potential to present a compelling account in a natural way. The power of the message owes much to the fact that the reporter, in a way, faces the same issue about which he or she advocates. However, advocating from within the community has its own limits, because issues might be emanating from agents outside the community, and thus outside the reach of the MCR-minded reporter. This is where the traditional way of doing advocacy becomes helpful. One path to explore in the future would then be finding ways communities could take advantage of new technologies [the mobile/smart phone and the Web] to engage into advocacy communication relating to issues facing them. The best way of doing that would be to consider convergence between MCR-inspired advocacy and traditional top-down advocacy usually done by various types of organisations.

More complicated to briefly explain is activism. Generally speaking, activism refers to 'a doctrine or practice that emphasises direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.'[272] It implies 'the

use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one.'[273] Like advocacy, activism has [1] an object, namely a controversial issue and a clear position about it; [2] a goal, generally changes in policies relating to the issue in question; and [3] means to achieve or to push towards that change, namely direct action.

Obviously, activism involves a great deal of advocacy in the sense that activists must mobilise some people and the public opinion by *convincing* them to sympathise with their cause. The difference resides in the fact that advocacy stops at the persuasion stage, whereby action is left to the relevant decision makers whom the campaign targets, while activism essentially involves mobilisation followed by action conducted by the same people who were mobilised.[274] Action can take place physically in the form of protest or demonstration, or using SMS [SMS activism[275]], or via the Web [cyberactivism[276] or hacktivism[277]], or via other channels. The persuasion and mobilisation processes, and the action stage involves a great deal of reporting, as activists have to wage an 'information war' to defend their cause.

Information war, as Kevin Gillan and colleagues explained, consists of 'struggles of representation and interpretation' via all sorts of mass media.[278] In the digital era, the 'weaponry' is no longer just print newspapers, pamphlets, radio and television, but increasingly computers, mobile phones and other new technologies. The battlefield, too, is gradually shifting to cyberspace, where 'Activists generate and share symbolic representations of movement identities and values that challenge those of the larger culture.'[279] The information war primarily aims to seek popular legitimacy, a goal that is reached by carefully managing public perception. In other words, those who wage or engage in that war need to provide 'news and reports that justify their conduct.'[280] Since one of the major strengths of the MCR approach is to give a concrete and multi-dimensional face to a given issue, it follows that it would immensely boost activists' perception management and legitimacy-seeking efforts, by feeding the public with mobile reports from local communities.

The recent turmoil in the Arab world has shown how indispensible images, especially videos, have become in pushing one's cause forward. In Tunisia,[281] Egypt[282] and even Morocco,[283] and other Arab nations, activists massively made and published on websites and social media video images to denounce what they perceived as cases of injustice. If one considers closely those video images made by activists, one realises two important things: firstly, those video images are often raw footages that show one particular incident [i.e., police unethical behaviour, a bomb blast], without necessarily creating a narrative around it. These images are increasingly making their way onto television where they are dubbed 'activist video.' Secondly, those images are often produced by activist groups or civil society organisations that claim to act on behalf of the bottom, while their members often tend to belong to upper income levels.[284] As stressed in section 1.4 about bridging thinking and saying, the distance between activist groups or civil society groups and the bottom affects what the camera captures and attributes to the bottom.

If the idea that is being defended or opposed affects the bottom, it follows that the MCR-approach to activist video making would be beneficial to the campaign. Some news reports made by mobile reporters could trigger some reflection on ways in which the MCR approach could inspire activist communication in at least two ways. In the first place, it has the potential to gather ideas that give a concrete face to the issue being denounced or the idea being defended, thereby contributing to mobilisation. This 'mediated mobilisation,'[285] has the advantage of bringing up various concerns from the bottom, but also and most importantly, the various multiple dimensions they might have. In the second place, it has great potential to amplify the community's voice once mobilisation has been achieved.

Let me take two examples from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe to illustrate my point. I should first say that these reports were not made primarily for activism purposes. Nonetheless, they provide some ideas about how activists could take advantage of the MCR approach. In a report titled 'Zimbabwe: Residents resist pre-paid water system,'[286] Nothando Mpofu, a journalist at a local radio, made a report in which the residents of the densely populated suburb of Cowdray Park said they would oppose at all cost the announced pre-paid water system. One resident said that after five years of having no water at all, they did not want to have water only as long as they had money. On his part, a local Council member said it was a matter of mis-communication without providing more details. This report could easily be considered as an activist video aiming to build momentum around that community's resistance and to mobilise even more residents against the City Council's policy. It could be part of a series of similar videos, each attempting to mobilise more members of the community.

In addition to mobilisation videos, there are those that amplify community actions once mobilisation has been achieved. The report titled 'Bulawayo: Power outages frustrate residents'[287] by Valerie Matsaudza is a good illustration in this respect. The report showed hundreds of residents protesting in front of the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority [ZESA] against frequent power outages on one hand, and against high bills for non-delivered electricity, on the other. The reporter zoomed in on a bill showing US$ 2,498.03 whilst saying that the average wage in the area was around US$ 200. Residents were furious because they ignored how the amounts were calculated and how they would pay such exorbitant amounts.

Whilst commenting, the reporter made close-ups of boards with protestors' complaints. She also interviewed protestors, some of whom called upon the City Council to take over ZESA. Considered from an activist perspective, this report powerfully relayed and amplified the community's resistance to what it considered unfair and unjust. Without such coverage that gave primacy to voices from the community, such actions would most probably go unnoticed outside the very district where they took place.

Since all these reports were not part of an activist or an advocacy campaign but rather news reports that happened to have some features of activist and advocacy videos, I cannot further elaborate on MCR-inspired activist and advocacy communication without engaging into even more speculations. To

have a more comprehensive understanding of ways in which the MCR approach could influence activism and advocacy communication, experiments need to be conducted over a certain period of time, and in a variety of societies. By now, I want to turn to communication within and around development projects, which, generally speaking, has been in the hands of project communication officers and has excluded community members.

6.4 Development-Project Communication

Development has poverty at its heart, as it basically consists of all the thinking, planning, and activities that aim to alleviate and ultimately eradicate poverty.[288] Better qualified authors have engaged into heated debates about the concept of development, some predicting the end of poverty soon,[289] others proposing new efficient approaches to fighting poverty[290] or questioning the very idea of development aid,[291] yet others shedding some light on ways in which the poor perceive and manage their own poverty.[292] My intention in this section is not to engage in any of these debates, but rather to look at development from a communication perspective rather than the usual ones [economic, health, social, etc.]. Nowadays, communicating about planned activities, their implementation, their monitoring and their evaluation is an essential part of any project team.

My contention here is that project-related communication has exclusively been in the hands of project staff, especially communication or public relation officers, whereas the development process itself involves both the project team and the so-called poor, who correspond to those I am calling the bottom. In the following paragraphs I suggest some tentative ways in which the MCR approach could contribute to the inclusion of the bottom in the communication that takes place around development projects. I focus mainly on communication that relates to monitoring and evaluation, which can feed into the larger project's communication strategy and even make the task of fundraising agents much easier.

The 2010 documentary by Landon Van Soest and Jeremy Levine titled *Good Fortune* provides an interesting insight into how communication around development projects often takes place.[293] The development project in question was a partnership between the government of Kenya and United Nations Habitat, and aimed to provide slum residents with modern, low cost housing. To achieve that, tens of thousands of families had first to be evicted from their settlements, pending the completion of the new houses [Remember the report about Kibera modern flat project that did not leave space for football in section 4.3]. In one meeting, a UN-Habitat official told a dozen community representatives that nothing would be done without informing the community. Yet, in that very meeting, one community representative said:

> But the majority of them [slum residents], maybe doesn't know a number of things, because they are just within the slums [thus marginalised]. So how about if you go and tell them 'we want to construct houses for you', and then they say 'we don't want the houses'. Will we adopt that?

This question reflected some resistance on which the documentary further elaborated in more detail. Responding to that question, a [Kenyan] member of the project team said: 'They should follow what we are advising them, *because we are experts in development.*' Then another member of the community, called Francis Omondi, whom the subtitles introduced as a UN Community Representative intervened to say: 'You realise this is a very contentious issue, because it involves removing people from their settlements.' The answer from the same development expert was: '… you have to educate them, to educate the residents who do not understand, that whatever is being done is for the benefit of the residents of this area.' At the end of the meeting and whilst walking home, Omondi realised that '[When] I go there [to the meeting] I am an official [UN Community Representative], [while when] I come back here, I am a common man.'

The project was launched and execution is still underway as I write. Based on the type of exchange between the project team and the community that took place in that meeting, one can suspect that subsequent communication relating to the project followed the same pattern, whereby the expert did the job, whilst the community and its representatives had to trust the team and follow its choices and instructions. The MCR approach to project-related communication could help change this way of communicating by enabling the community and its representatives to voice their concerns at various stages including need assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation. In other words, community members [like Omondi] should not find themselves in a situation where they have to cease to be common men. They should be able to bring the common man's concerns to the public space and be able to give them a concrete face.

In this respect, the expert's knowledge, or 'technical expertise' or 'buried' knowledge as Michel Foucault would call it,[294] and the bottom's knowledge or what Foucault called 'subjugated knowledges,' 'inferior knowledges from below,' 'unqualified or even disqualified knowledges,'[295] would complement each other, and even be in competition. Foucault contended that those inferior knowledges from below have made critique possible in disciplines like medicine, which used to marginalise 'the knowledge of the psychiatrised, the patient, the nurse, the doctor…, the knowledge of the delinquent.'[296] As Foucault suggested, that local, particular, regional and differential knowledge derived their power 'solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges that surround it.'[297]

It is that marginalised knowledge and particularly its inherent power that the MCR approach should help integrated into monitoring and evaluation practices within development projects. Monitoring and evaluation, the focus of this final section, have often been considered as being related to one another. Yet, they constitute two different activities that can even be conducted separately. Monitoring refers to

> *A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds.*[298]

As for evaluation, it is explained as a 'systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results.' The main aim is 'to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability,' by providing information collected following a set of standards that ensures that it is credible and useful. That information is primarily meant to enable 'the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors.'[299]

Considered from the 'reporting' perspective that I outlined in section 1.3, Monitoring and Evaluation [M&E] could be explained as consisting in gathering information about the progress and achievements of a project, taking into account a set of requirements and standards. As we noted with regards to journalism, many actors and factors also play a role that often interferes with the M&E process, pushing to highlight certain aspects whilst leaving some others out. William Easterly has criticised current M&E methods because they appeared to him more as 'self-evaluation' exercises than anything else. He disagreed about the idea that the people who evaluate are the same who implement the projects.[300] His point is that evaluators, whether project staff or external consultants 'have incentives not to deviate too far from the party line of aid Planners.'[301] One solution Easterly suggested is to give more power to the bottom so that beneficiaries can hold aid agencies accountable and point out what works and what doesn't from their own perspectives.[302]

Easterly's criticism of evaluation methods is part of his larger criticism of what he called the 'Big Plan' approach that has marked development projects for decades. He basically blamed planners for sticking to their big and often rigid plans and for tracing the path that projects should follow towards a certain pre-determined goal.[303] In doing that, they rarely ignore to adapt to local conditions, to take into account the knowledge of, and the reality at, the bottom, and favour outsiders' solutions to the detriment of insiders', homegrown solutions.[304] Viewed from this 'Big Plan' perspective, the M&E process is heavily influenced by the pre-set goals and the pre-traced path, as the progress and achievements are measured against the pre-set goals and the pre-traced path. The best way, Easterly suggested, is to embrace the 'Searcher' spirit, based on the idea that 'The right plan is to have no plan,'[305] which leaves room to explore any opportunities that could help relieve the suffering of the poor, and to test various paths so that those that work can be adopted.

To achieve that, feedback from the bottom is crucial, and this is where MCR-inspired M&E could greatly help. Like MCR-inspired journalism, which manages to cover never- or rarely-covered news and to present it in a multi-dimensional way, MCR-inspired M&E could potentially help bring out those progresses and achievements, but also failures, omissions and deviations that fall outside the pre-determined standards and requirements.

Let me give one concrete example of what I mean. In its effort to slow down the HIV pandemic in Goma, DR Congo, an HIV-control organisation distributed condoms for free to whoever came to its kiosks to collect them. Young men and women, including many university students, massively and frequently reported

to the kiosks to collect as many condoms as they could. The report titled '*Goma: Condom comme cirage moins cher*'[306] [Goma: Condom as cheap shoe-shining wax], revealed a situation that only someone from within the community, enjoying its full trust, could detect. Young men told the reporter that they rubbed their shoes with the inner part of the condom, whose lubricant did a better job than usual, but expensive shoe-shining wax. Young women, on their side, used the condom lubricant as body lotion and praised it for its impressive face care. It would not be astonishing to see M&E reports by the organisation in question praising local youths for their strong HIV-awareness.

Many other news reports presented development projects as they were being launched, and left a feeling that MCR-inspired M&E could contribute to the assessment of the progress and achievements from a community perspective. Those reports include '*Goma: 3 millions de moustiquaires distribuées*'[307] [Goma: 3 millions mosquito nets distributed] (Were they immediately sold?[308] Were they handled properly?); 'Solar cooking reaches northern Tanzania,'[309] which reported the news that Global Resources Alliance Tanzania, a local NGO, had started training and equipping women in solar cooks to stop deforestation (How does it affect those who lived on charcoal or wood selling? How is it affecting school performance as children no longer have to go to fetch firewood? Etc.); and many others.

Other news reports somehow evaluated projects that had been completed. The two reports about patients being retained and being used as free labour in Goma (see section 3.2) could be interpreted as an evaluation of the emergency medical aid projects that somehow introduced the culture of free medical care and one of high salaries. More explicitly, the report titled 'Zimbabwe: Nature reclamation project turns sour' evaluated a nature protection project that ended up in a disaster for the community in a village called Chivi near Masvingo.[310] A local NGO planted one special plant on the banks of the Chendebvu Dam in an effort to prevent soil erosion. Within a few years, the plant invaded the dam from where farmers irrigated their farms and where they took their cattle to drink. Villagers blamed that plant for containing a poison that killed their cattle and for having brought a destructive pest that ravaged vegetables and other plants.

This report, which was more journalistic than an evaluation report showed the multi-dimensional character that the MCR approach could bring to existing M&E practices. It is true that the goal of preventing soil erosion had been reached, but in achieving that goal, heavy and long-term damages were imposed to the community whose livelihood was in jeopardy. Another report titled 'Tanzania: Kids stand behind desks to learn'[311] journalistically evaluated a desk-distribution project, coming to the observation that all the children had desks, indeed, but could not sit at them as they were too high for their age. Those desks were rather used as tables, which children used whilst standing, a situation which teachers held responsible for bad handwriting amongst their pupils.

Once again, one path that needs exploration is associating communities to the communication process that takes place around development projects. The same observations made with regards to journalism and to activism and advocacy are valid in development projects. The experts have a certain professional approach,

follow certain professionally designed and tested methods, which push them in one direction and prevent them from looking in other possible, but not prescribed, directions. Constant MCR-inspired M&E communication has the potential to generate media contents that could greatly help larger communication activities around the project. In the first place, the project and the organisation[s] behind it would gain more publicity, as newsworthy stories are likely to be 'picked' or built upon by mainstream media.

Secondly, the organisation's newsletter and social networking sites' pages would include grassroots contents that would give a bottom-up perception of the project. Thirdly, fundraisers and managers would have a wide range of ready-made material to use whilst showing the impact of completed or still-in-progress projects to their partners and potential funding organisations.[312] These types of reports would track project impacts and failures and introduce more transparency and visibility in project implementation, with the bottom fulfilling the watchdog function.

For sure, it is not possible to go in all directions at the same time. Therefore, it is necessary and beneficial to integrate the community, which looks at the progress and achievements from the bottom. In terms of gaps, the experts often leave the gap of 'what the bottom thinks' open [the *Good Fortune* documentary provided some interesting clues in this respect], whereas MCR-inspired M&E would most likely fill that gap whilst leaving the gap of 'expert knowledge' open. The convergence of expert M&E and MCR-inspired M&E would enable the bottom to monitor their own activities and those of the project staff,[313] and would add new dimensions to the larger approach known as Participatory M&E,[314] whereby participation does not mean attending meetings and conveying experts' views, but rather fully engaging into, and influencing, decision making.

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Notes

Introduction

1   Kasoma, F. (2002). *Community Radio: Its Management and Organisation in Zambia*. Lusaka: Zambia Independent Media Association, pp. 8-9.
2   *Ibid.*, p. 23.
3   *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
4   *Ibid.*, p. 43.
5   *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
6   *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
7   As country Manager for Burkina Faso at the Hague-based International Institute for Communication and Development, the NGO that provided the initial funding for *Radio Pag La Yiri*, I worked closely and on many occasions [in 2012 & 2013] with the radio's staff and management and attended some of the Listeners' Club discussions.
8   In the DR Congo, for instance, where salaries are either non-existent or very low, practices such as *coupage*, that is, gifts or money offered to a journalist for favourable coverage of one's activities, are ordinary and part of the profession. As Vicky Elongo Lukulanga (2012, p. 65) wrote, 'this coupage generally serves to replace the journalist's non-existent salary, whereas elsewhere it supplements an insufficient salary'. As such, thus, *coupage* is 'systematic, recurrent, recognised and accepted' (p. 68). In Nigeria, as Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012, p. 516) wrote, the *Brown Envelope Syndrome* has been part journalism for decades despite its fierce criticism by scholars. The *Brown Envelope*, like the *Coupage* in DRC, is 'a form of inducing writers and editors with financial gratification to influence their writings in favour of the givers. That phenomenon is so widespread that 'a journalist might accept it without knowing that he/she has actually accepted a bribe that can make him/her compromise journalistic principles or expected ethical standards. Similar practices are observed in Burkina Faso, where the *gombo*, i.e., the financial compensation that journalists receive from the person or organisation whose activities they covered, is common currency (Frère, 2003, pp. 61-62).
9   Atenga, T. (2012). 'Cameroon's private daily press: In search of a viable economic model'. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 33-3, pp. 13-29, p. 18.
10   *Ibid.*
11   Jones, J. (2012). '"Sexing up" environmental issues: Exploring media eco-ethics, advocacy and journalism in a South African context'. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, Vol. 33-1, pp. 26-43, p. 32. Also see Lukulanga (2012, p. 65); Frère (2003, pp. 61-62).
12   Badawi, Z. (15th September 2010). 'Niger facing catastrophic hunger crisis'. *BBC News Africa*. Retrieved 8th March 2012 from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11312019.
13   Kakule, M. (23rd Septembre 2011). 'Nord-Kivu: Bananeraies ravagées par une maladie'. *Voicesofafrica. com*. Retrieved 8th March 2012 from: http://www.voicesofafrica.com/?p=752. UhakiNews.net is a project supported by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. It aims to train women in North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on how to produce multimedia contents about issues relating to women's rights, among other topics. In May 2011 ten reporters were trained in mobile community reporting by Voices of Africa Media Foundation, a Dutch media training organisation.
14   For sociologist Herbert Gans ([1979] 1980, p. xiv), 'sociology and journalism are similar', since they both report about society using some empirical methods, though with different aims, deadlines, and audiences (Also see pp. 93 & 307).
15   More about 'insider's view' in Creswell (2007, p. 39); Silverman (1993, p. 11); Wester (1984, p. 56); and Spradley (1980, pp. 4 & 57).
16   Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: SAGE, p. 11.
17   Sociologist Fred Wester (1984, p. 56) makes the knowledge of the language an essential condition if one has to capture an insider's view. In other words, one must learn to express oneself using the community's verbal and non-verbal language, and through its ways of behaving and expressing emotions.
18   Bourdieu, P. ([1982] 1991). *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*. Paris: Editions Fayard, pp. 84 & 103-104.

19 Gueye, A. (2005). 'Le secteur informel à la périphérie de la presse sénégalaise'. In Taurge, M. & Wittmann, F. (Eds.), *Entre tradition orale et nouvelles technologies: Où vont les mass media au Sénégal?* (pp. 93-103). Dakar: Enda, pp. 95, 97 & 99.

20 Barthes, R. (1980). *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie*. Paris: Gallimard Seuil, pp. 24-27.

21 Stiegler, B. & Derrida, J. ([1993] 2002). *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews.* Cambridge: Polity, p. 71.

22 Bruijn, M. de, Nyamnjoh, F., & Brinkman, I. (Eds.) (2009). *Mobile phones: the new talking drums of everyday Africa*. Bamenda: Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group. Also see Hahn & Kibora (2008, p. 102).

23 See: Brown *et al.* (2003); Morawczynski & Miscione (2008); Camner & Sjöblom (2009).

24 See: Molony (2008); Elegbeleye (2005).

25 Prizes include: Honoree for the Webby Awards 2008, the *World Summit Award 2009* in the category 'e-Inclusion & Participation', and Deutsche Welle's Best of the Blogs [BOB] 2009.

26 See for instance Goggin (2011), Mudhai (2011), Kreutz (2010).

Chapter 1

27 Sembène, S. ([1965] 1972). *The Money Order with White Genesis.* London : Heinemann, p. 77.

28 *Ibid.,* p. 81.

29 Aristotle ([350 B.C.] 1998). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Minoela: Dover Publications, Inc., p. 2.

30 For instance: MacIver ([1926-1950] 1970) & Tönnies ([1935] 1944).

31 For instance: Murdock (1949).

32 For instance: Dewey ([1927] 1991).

33 In 1957, for instance, the Colonial Office [United Kingdom] organised a conference to discuss the concept of Community Development. The conference resulted in the book titled *Community Development: A Handbook* (1958), in which the concept of community is discussed in some detail.

34 Brownell, B. (1950). *The Human Community: its Philosophy and Practice for a Time of Crisis*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, p. 195.

35 Cary, L. ([1936] 1970). 'Introduction'. In Cary, L. (Ed.), *Community Development as a Process* (pp. 1-6). Columbia: University of Missouri Press, p. 2. See similar definitions in MacIver ([1926-1950] 1970, pp. 29-30), Murdock (1949, pp. 79-80), Dewey ([1927] 1991, p. 151).

36 Bruijn, M. de, Brinkman, I., & Nyamnjoh, F. (2013). 'Introduction: Mobile margins and the dynamics of communication'. In Bruijn, M. de, Brinkman, I., & Nyamnjoh, F. (Eds.), *Side@Ways: Mobile margins and the dynamics of communication in Africa* (pp. 1-16). Leiden: Langaa & Africa Studies Centre, p. 8.

37 For more information about the sociological theory of community, see Tönnies ([1935] 1944, pp. 9-38).

38 Murdock, G. P. (1949). *Social Structure*. New York: The MacMillan Company, p. 82.

39 Tönnies, F. ([1935] 1944). *Communauté et société: Catégories fondamentales de la sociologie pure*. Paris: PUF, p. 20.

40 Brownell (1950, p. 201).

41 *Ibid.,* p. 199.

42 See: Dewey ([1927] 1991, pp. 39-40).

43 Brownell (1950, p. 201).

44 Tönnies ([1935] 1944, p. 20).

45 MacIver, R. ([1926-1950] 1970). *On Community, Society and Power: Selected Writings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Edited with an introduction by Leon Bramson, p. 37.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

47 *Ibid.*; also see Dewey ([1927] 1991, p. 159).

48 Dewey ([1927] 1991, p. 153).

49 Murdock (1949, p. 83).

50 Castells*, M. (2009). *Communication Power.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 11.

51 At that time I was working for The Hague-based International Institute for Communication and Development as country programme manager for Burkina Faso.

52 See for instance: Nkwi (2013, pp. 125-126), & Seli (2013, pp. 28-29).

53 Sembène ([1965] 1972, p. 82).

54 Driel, H. van (2004). 'Inleiding'. In Driel, H. van (Ed.), *Beeldcultuur* (pp. 11-14). Amsterdam: Boom, pp. 11-12; also see: Van Driel (1999, pp. 16-17 & 22); Overdijk (1997, p. 90); Van Dijck (2002, pp. 42-44); Stephens (1998, p. 101).

55 Ling, R. (2004). *The Mobile Connection: The Cell Phone's Impact on Society*. Amsterdam: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, pp. 28-30.

56 Further readings on the adoption/domestication of mobile phone and other new media technologies: De Bruijn *et al*. (2013, pp. 4 & 12); Castells *et al*. (2007, pp. 39, 127 & 246); Nyamnjoh (2005, pp. 4, 39-40 & 91, 92-93); Buckingham (2007, p. viii); Karaganis (2007, p. 9).

57 Ruston, S. (2012). 'Calling Ahead: Cinematic Imaginations of Mobile Media's Critical Affordances'. In Arceneaux, N., & Kavoori, A. (Eds.), *The Mobile Media Reader* (pp. 23-39). New York: Peter Lang, p. 25.

58 Etzo, S., & Collender, G. (13th August 2010). 'The Mobile Phone "Revolution" in Africa: Rhetoric or Reality'. *African Affairs,* 1-10, p. 2; also see James and Versteeg (2007, p. 120).

59 Kreutz, C. (2010). 'Mobile activism in Africa: future trends and software developments'. In Ekine, S. (Ed.), *SMS Uprising: Mobile Phone Activism in Africa* (pp. 17-31). Cape Town: Pamazuka Press, p. 17.

60 Dutt, P., Chee, C., Magalhães, J.N., Sebastião, B., Silva, J.N. da, & Valente, P. (April 2006). *The Impact of Mobile Telephony in Tanzania*. EMDC, p. 12; also see Scott *et al*. (2004, p. 1); Donner (2006, p. 18); James and Versteeg (2007, pp. 118-119).

61 Castells and colleagues (2007, p. 245) described the Mobile Network Society as resulting from the fact that 'mobile devices have become mass-consumer products, woven into the communicative practices of hundreds of millions of people everywhere in the world.' The Mobile Network Society is the expansion of the Network Society, as it includes previously excluded hundreds of millions in developing countries, whose technology of choice is not the mobile phone.

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63 See Molony (2008); Elegbeleye (2005).

64 Molony, T. (2008). 'Running out of credit: the limitations of mobile telephony in a Tanzanian agricultural marketing system'. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46-4, 637-658, p. 645.

65 See for instance Sane and Traore (2009, pp. 107-118).

66 See for instance Vital Wave Consulting (2011).

67 See Brown *et al*. (2003); Morawczynski and Miscione (2008); Camner and Sjöblom (2009)

68 Castells *et al*. (2007, p. 7) have estimated the adoption process at about ten years.

69 Carey, J. ([1989] 2009). *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. New York: Routledge. Revised Edition, pp. 156-157; also see Goggin (2006, p. 19).

70 Steinbock, D. (2005). *The Mobile revolution: The Making of Mobile Services Worldwide*. London: Kogan Page, pp. 4 & 36.

71 Goggin, G. (2006). *Cell Phone Culture: Mobile Technology in Everyday Life*. London: Routledge, p. 20.

72 Farman, J. (2012). 'Historicizing Mobile Media: Locating the Transformations of Embodied Space'. In Arceneaux, N., & Kavoori, A. (Eds.), *The Mobile Media Reader* (pp. 9-22). New York: Peter Lang, p. 15.

73 Goggin (2006, p. 8).

74 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

75 Steinbock (2005, pp. 2 & 35).

76 Goggin (2006, p. 31). Also see Steinbock (2005, pp. 36-37).

77 Goggin (2006, pp. 31-32). Also see Steinbock (2005, p. 37).

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82 Arceneaux, N., & Kavoori, A. (2012). 'Introduction: Mapping Mobile Media'. In Arceneaux, N., & Kavoori, A. (Eds.), *The Mobile Media Reader* (pp. 1-8). New York: Peter Lang, p. 2.

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99 Vygotsky, L. ([1934] 1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 251.

100 Gillett, G. (1992). *Representation, Meaning and Thought*. Oxford: Claredon Press, p. 6.

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102 Stebbing, S. ([1939] 1952). *Thinking to Some Purpose*. London: The Whitefriars Press, p. 30.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

104 Santayana, G. ([1905] 1954). *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress*. New York: Charles Scribner' Sons, p. 24.

105 Stebbing ([1939] 1952, p. 28).

106 Vygotsky ([1934] 1986, p. 250).

107 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 183. For detailed discussion about the inner speech, read Sokolov ([1968] 1972). Aleksandr Nikolaevich Sokolov defined inner speech as meaning 'soundless, mental speech, arising at the instant we think about something, plan or solve problems in our mind, recall books read or conversations heard, read and write silently. … Inner speech is nothing but speech to oneself…' (p. 1). According to psychophysiologist Paul Chauchard ([1956] 1970, p. 6), the inner speech enables and facilitates human thought, while outer or overt speech enables and facilitates communication with other humans.

109 Vygotsky ([1934] 1986, p. 251).

110 *Ibid*.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

112 Bock, K. (1995). 'Sentence Production: From Mind to Mouth'. In Miller, J., & Eimas, P. (Eds.), *Speech, Language and Communication* (pp. 181-216). San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 184; 186; 187-188.

113 Sokolov, A.N. ([1968] 1972). *Inner Speech and Thought*. New York: Plenum Press, p. 3.

114 Gusdorf, G. (1991). *Auto-bio-graphie. Lignes de vie 2*. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, p. 94.

115 RTL Nieuws (1st January 2011).'Erik Mouthaan terug naar Haïti'. Retrieved 22nd March 2011 from http://www.rtl.nl/%28/actueel/rtlnieuws/%29/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/2011/01_januari/12/verrijkingsonderdelen/erik_mouthaan_terug_naar_hait.xml

116 Original text: '*pourquoi pas en blanc? Non, non, non, ici c' est comme ça, c' est notre culture. Beaucoup de couleurs... si cette camionnette n' est pas vraiment jolie, on peut dire il ne faut pas la monter ou voyager avec.*'

117 Original text*: 'Nous ne vivons pas très bien ici. Nous ne trouvons de eh eh… On ne trouve rien ici, je veux dire.*'

118 In this report for instance: http://www.rtl.nl/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/miMedia/2010/week13/Thu22.hoe-rtlnieuws-in-haiti-werkt1.xml (Retrieved 24th March 2011).

119 Deese, J. (1984). *Thought into Speech: The Psychology of Language*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, p. 97. Deese further explained that the nature of the audience is a factor that can affect the speaker's fluency (p. 100), which was probably the case for Xavier.

120 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

121 For more discussions about ways in which the social condition of linguistic production could intimidate one of the speakers see Bourdieu ([1982]1991, pp. 79 & 100-101).

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123 Castells (2009*,* p. 28).

124 Bruns, A. (2008). 'The Active Audience: Transforming Journalism from Gatekeeping to Gatewatching'.

125 *Ibid.* Also see Merritt (2010, p. 28); Ryfe & Mensing (2010, p. 41); Turner (2010, pp. 81-82); Gillmor (2009, p. 2); Allan (2006, pp. 9-10).

126 Atton, C. (2009). 'Alternative and Citizen Journalism'. In Wahl-Jorgensen, K., & Hanitzsch, T. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (pp. 265-278). London: Routledge, p. 265.

127 Castells (2009*,* p. 4).

128 Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Sur la télévision*. Paris: Liber, p. 62. Also see Jones (2012, p. 33); Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe (2012, p. 515).

129 Bourdieu, P. ([1994] 1996). *L'emprise du journalisme*. Paris: Liber, pp. 84-85.

130 Gans ([1979] 1980, p. 83). For more discussion on this subject see: McNair (2005, p. 29); Fuller (2010, p. 10); Goldberg ([2002] 2003, p. 40); Jones & Salter (2012, pp. 16-17).

131 Influential people and organisations can pay bloggers and other ordinary users of new media to write positive stories about them; companies can pay huge amounts of money to popular bloggers for a positive review of their products. For instance, Sony paid $ 25,000 to Gawker Media, which runs many popular blogs, to sponsor its Lifehacker blog about personal gadgetry software (Singer, 2011, pp. 124-126).

132 Bruns dedicated his book titled *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* (New York: Peter Lang, [2005] 2009) to the concept of gatewatching and its workings.

133 Bruns, A. (2009). Blogs, *Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 73-74.

134 *Ibid.*

135 For an in-depth discussion of audience management by mainstream news media see Domingo (2011, p. 81).

136 Schudson, M. (2003). *The Sociology of News*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 4. Also see Schudson (2008, p. 55).

137 Anthony P. C. (1985). *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood, p. 17.

138 Omunya, B. (9th March 2010). 'Nairobi: Safe water thanks to solar disinfection'. *Voicesofafrica.com*. Retrieved 21st May 2013 from: http://www.voicesofafrica.com/?p=1872.

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140 The story-based coaching draws the reporter's attention to issues like this. The reporter is advised to add, for instance, interviews with one of the 'fishermen,' with someone consuming locally packaged water or juice, and with a slum restaurant owner taking advantage of the cheap bottles.

141 Stovall (2004, p. 55). Also see Buijs (2011, p. 91).

142 Gans ([1979] 1980, p. 80).

143 Stovall (2004, p. 55). Also see Buijs (2011, pp. 91-92).

144 For more discussion about balancing sources see: Smith ([1983] 1999, pp. 41 & 42); Aldrich (1999, pp. 24-25); and Kovach & Rosenstiel ([2001] 2007, p. 46).

145 For in-depth discussion about the 'both sides' issue see: Kovach & Rosenstiel ([2001] 2007, pp. 46 & 87-88); Schudson (2003, p. 50); Schudson (1995, pp. 9-11); Herman & McChesney (1997, pp. 192-193).

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147 Aristotle ([350 B.C.] 1998, p. 2).

148 Durkheim, E. (1957). *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, p. 2.

149 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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154 See for instance Sidgomdé (8th April 2013). 'Assassinat d' un commerçant à Kombissiri: Le neveu de la victime, co-auteur presume du crime'. *Sidwaya* N°7391, p. 21.

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Chapter 5

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231 *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, p. 471.

232 *Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* [Computer-based].

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Chapter 6

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280 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

281 See Denieul (2013).

282 See Ksikes (2013).

283 See Collado (2013).

284 Jones (2012, p. 27).

285 Lievrouw (2011, p. 150).

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291 See for instance Moyo (2009).

292 See for instance Banerjee and Duflo (2011).

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297 *Ibid.*

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301 *Ibid.* pp. 205-206.

302 *Ibid.* p. 206.

303 *Ibid.*, pp. 11; 22-23; 24; amongst others.

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Appendix

The Voices of Africa Media Foundation

At the end of 2007, the Voices of Africa Media Foundation (VoAMF) published a series of mobile video reports on the elections from all over the country in Kenya. In all of these video reports, people complained about the organisation of the upcoming elections and people expressed their worries about what was to come. After the elections, in January 2008, the riots broke out (as was predicted in the reports) and the VoAMF staff realised the power of mobile reporting. A mobile report does not only reflect the opinion of the people in a community. In some cases, a series of mobile reports can be an early warning for upcoming unrest.

This conclusion was one of the outcomes of the first mobile reporting project the Voices of Africa Media Foundation initiated. Pim de Wit founded this non-profit foundation in 2006. Together wit his staff members Olivier Nyirubugara and Henri Aalders, he subsequently started a first series of training programs both in West Africa and in East Africa. The basic set-up was simple: provide young Africans with a mobile telephone, give them face to face training and coach them on-line how to improve their videos and how to become a mobile community reporter. Their mobile reports were published on www.voicesofafrica.com. This site is freely accessible.

The team knew from the beginning that a journalistic approach and strong communication were as crucial to the success of the project as the technical skills. A profile for intended participants was made: The participants should be aged between 20 and 30, have a secondary education and a proven affinity with journalism. During the six-month training course, they needed local support to solve practical problems as a hampering telephone and to get advance payments for travels etc. A local manager was appointed in some countries or the participants were supported by a local partner organisation. An alumni program provided the successful participants with a possibility to continue to improve their skills and to market themselves as journalists.

From the end of 2007 till 2014, The Voices of Africa Mobile Reporting Program has organised 16 mobile reporting projects in eight African countries: Ghana, Cameroun, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, The Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Over 100 young Africans have been successfully trained in making mobile reports. About 30 percent of them continued their career in the media after the training. Most of the others found their way in other directions, using their acquired skills.

The VoAMF continues to realise mobile report programs. It will also continue to publish the most striking community reports on www.voicesofafrica.com.

Since 2011, the Voices of Africa media Foundation has been looking for ways to reinforce the sustainability of its activities. This has resulted in a project called Community Media Houses. A pilot was started in 2010 in Nairobi and in 2011 the Nairobi Community Media House Ltd was formally established: a full-blown media house with roots in the slums of Nairobi. Its objective is to give a chance to the less privileged young Kenyans from the many slums in Nairobi to pursue a career in the media. The VoAMF trains the staff members not only in reporting and film making skills but goes further. They are also trained to generate an income. This approach allows the media house to become independent from sponsors. Staff members are offered the chance to become shareholder. One of the productions is called the African Slum Journal and can be seen on http://www.africanslumjournal.com

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Mobile Community Reporting

Almost everyone in Africa knows a mobile phone, the most widespread communication technology on the continent. That technology started as a voice-only tool before integrating other functions such as messaging, sound and image recording and many others. This book is about ways in which some of those new functions are giving a new face to the field and practice of journalism. That field has for long been dominated by professionally trained journalists, but the trend set in motion by the arrival of the World Wide Web and the mobile phone, among other technologies, is that ordinary people, including members of local communities in marginalised areas, are increasingly doing journalism.

In this book, the author presents what he calls the *Mobile Community Reporting* approach based on a six-year training experiment in which he was involved as trainer and coach in eight African countries. The main argument underlying the MCR approach is the following: if a member of the community covers news using a reporting tool that is familiar to that community, and taking into account the values, interests and worldviews of that community, chances of capturing what the community thinks are very high.

This book is a must-read piece for those in Africa and elsewhere, who are involved or interested in journalism and communication, and those involved or interested in activism, advocacy, and development projects, where communication processes could take advantage of the Mobile Community Reporting approach to capture what the community thinks and does.

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