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DISCUSSION PAPER

How to foster constructive dialogue as part of media development?

Lessons from a case study on interactive radio formats in Niger

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Promoting constructive dialogue is an important endeavor in international media development. In hostile environments however, this goal comes with special challenges. The mixed-methods study by DW Akademie summarized here investigates the case of an interactive community radio project in Niger to identify factors that can support or inhibit constructive dialogue. Its key findings and take-aways are especially instructive for efforts to strengthen constructive dialogue in hostile environments and foster the voices of women and displaced people.

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Contents

Introduction	4
Research focus and methodological approach	6
How to foster constructive dialogue as part of media development?	8
Key findings and take-aways	8
What to consider when promoting dialogue in hostile environments?	10
What to consider when dialogical formats are intended to give IDPs/refugees a voice?	12
What to consider when dialogical formats are intended to give women a voice?	13
At a glance: Conclusion and take-aways	16
Annex 1: Methodology in detail	18
Annex 2: Tables with in-depth results	19

Introduction

One of DW Akademie’s major ambitions is to “empower people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.” With “Innovation for Dialogue” as one of its central fields of action, DW Akademie works with local and international partners who aim to foster dialogue in manifold ways: by establishing listeners’ clubs at local radio stations in Northern Kenya, by bringing together journalists, Indigenous peoples, and human rights professionals in expert panels to tackle disinformation in Central America, or by launching an online archive on Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge to spark dialogue about the country’s history.

Many organizations in the field of media development, in addition to DW Akademie, highlight fostering dialogue as one of their main goals. But what exactly is constructive dialogue? And what are media development actors trying to achieve by supporting it? The underlying assumption across all implementation approaches is that enabling an exchange between different actors promotes mutual understanding and thereby encourages individuals to take each other’s needs into account when seeking solutions to societal problems. This process is thought to improve social cohesion and strengthen democracy—especially in times of mis- and disinformation. But is that really what happens in media development projects aimed at fostering dialogue? What impact can realistically be achieved? To answer these questions, evidence was collected as part of a comprehensive study focusing on the project “Promoting peace and social cohesion through community dialogue” in Niger, which was part of DW Akademie’s Initiative for Transparency and Freedom of Expression. Data collection took place from September 2022 to March 2023.

DW Akademie’s partner in Niger—“Réseaux des Journalistes sensibles aux Conflicts” (Ré-JsC), a network that advocates for conflict-sensitive journalism—aims to create spaces for exchange in villages and small towns in the Sahel based on the principles of conflict-sensitive journalism. The region is marked by insecurity: More than three million internally displaced persons are on the move.¹ This has increased pressure on resources, which are already severely depleted, and aggravated the potential for social conflicts. Ré-JsC’s goal is to create opportunities for conflicts to be discussed and solutions to be developed directly between affected groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), representatives of the host communities and representatives of local authorities. For this purpose, the network’s community radio stations have teamed up with so-called “dialogue and concertation committees” who meet regularly to prepare interactive radio formats during which issues can be addressed in a conflict-sensitive manner. The committees consist of various—often conflicting—actors (such as members of local listeners’ clubs, refugees/IDPs, municipal representatives, NGO workers, and the like) who are in charge of both selecting the topic and the guests for the radio program and helping to disseminate their self-elaborated approaches to possible solutions.

Studying dialogue dynamics in Niger can also be instructive for other contexts, for example when it comes to promoting the voices of marginalized groups or supporting media outlets in hostile environments. After a brief comment on the study’s methodological approach, we turn to the key findings and specific take-aways for different contexts.

¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/sahelcrisis>

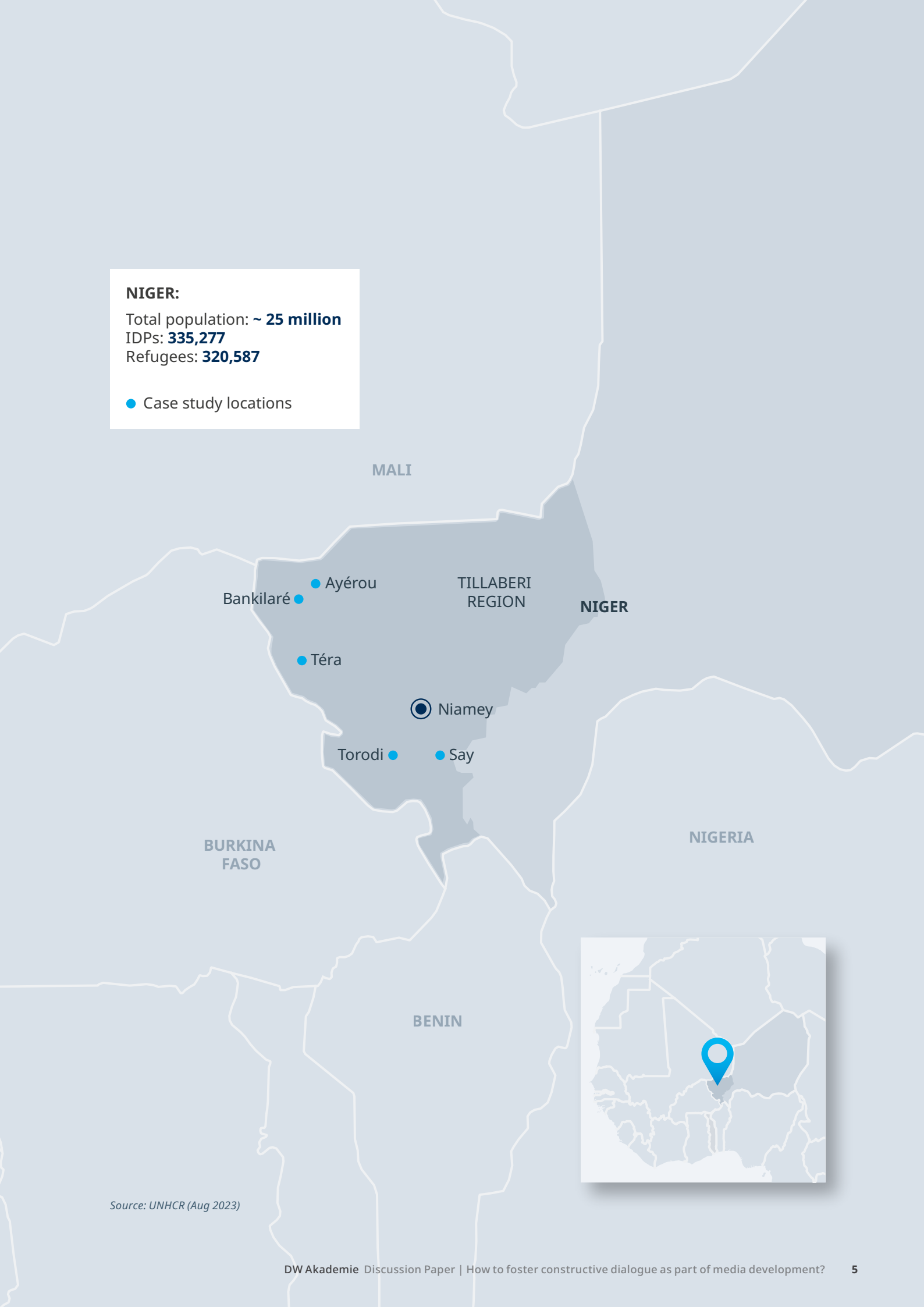
NIGER:

Total population: ~ **25 million**

IDPs: **335,277**

Refugees: **320,587**

● Case study locations



Source: UNHCR (Aug 2023)

Research focus and methodological approach

This study used a mixed-methods approach that encompassed focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, a questionnaire, a document analysis, and a quantitative content analysis. All research instruments were developed by a research team consisting of an independent Nigerien media researcher and DW Akademie research staff.

Whether meaningful dialogue actually took place was the primary question motivating this study. In general, DW Akademie focuses on promoting constructive dialogue, which is understood as a fair, goal-oriented exchange about topics and issues of social relevance. With this in mind, eight criteria for constructive dialogue were defined (relevance, exchange, reasoning, balanced participation, diversity, transparency, comprehensibility, and factuality). These were submitted to members of the “dialogue and concertation committees” and to radio guests in the form of a questionnaire.

Focus group discussions with the “dialogue and concertation committees” of the participating stations helped shed light on the considerations involved selecting topics or guests for the radio programs. How guests invited to the programs perceived their participation was examined based on in-depth interviews. Project monitoring documents—such as minutes of committee meetings, listening reports or follow-up sheets—were analyzed to enrich the data from the discussions and interviews. Finally, a quantitative content analysis of the radio program recordings allowed for the compilation of statistics on the demographic representation and speaking time of the social groups involved.

For the data collection in Niger, the research team cooperated with a local research institute. The focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted in March and April 2023. The content analysis encompassed documents and radio programs produced between September 2022 and January 2023.

The focus was on five radio stations: Radio Soudji in Ayérou, Radio Gomni in Bankilaré, Radio Tapoa in Say, Radio Liptako in Téra und Radio Tébonsé in Torodi. As these radio stations are scattered across different language areas, data was collected in Songhai, Zarma, Fulfuldé and Tamaquesh, as well as in French (if convenient for the participants).

Details about the methodology, which might be of particular interest to media developers planning a similar study, can be found in Annex 1.

The following table provides an overview of the research methods used and their focus:

Overview of research methods used in this case study

METHOD	SAMPLE SIZE	DATA SOURCE	FOCUS OF EXAMINATION
Questionnaire	n=50	Members of “dialogue and concertation committees” and radio guests	Level of agreement with eight criteria for constructive dialogue: relevance, exchange, reasoning, balanced participation, diversity, transparency, comprehensibility, and factuality
Focus group discussions	n=5 (35 participants in total)	Members of “dialogue and concertation committees”	Rationale behind topic and guest selection, perception of the outcome
In-depth interviews	n=15	Radio guests (one representative of the host community, one IDP/refugee representative and one representative from the local authorities per station)	Perception of their participation in the radio program, perception of the outcome
Document analysis (qualitative)	n=112	Project monitoring documents	Rationale behind topic and guest selection
Content analysis (quantitative)	n=45	Radio programs	Representation and speaking time of the social groups participating in the programs

Table 1

How to foster constructive dialogue as part of media development?

In this section, we outline our findings on how constructive dialogue can be fostered as part of media development by first presenting the key findings, before turning to specific insights into how to strengthen dialogue in hostile environments and promote the voices of IDPs, refugees and women. Practical take-aways for media development actors are provided at the end of each sub-section.

Key findings and take-aways

Overall, we found that constructive dialogue was fostered as part of the interactive radio formats under study and that conflict solutions were developed as well as implemented. While this study did not use any experimental methods to test for the effects of the dialogical radio formats, it did find clear evidence in the interviews and focus group discussions of the project's positive impact:

Interactive radio formats offer important spaces for constructive dialogue and the development of concrete solutions that would otherwise not necessarily have emerged.

Several interviewees highlighted that their participation in the program had brought them in contact with members of other social groups for the first time and provided an opportunity to get to know their points of view. One individual, for instance, said:

“It was an advantage for me [to take part in the show], because before I didn't even know how to go and talk with the authorities.

Likewise, a representative of the local authorities pointed out: “One of the young people talked about their leader, and said that he should be the one to present their problems to the authorities. It is only by coming forward that the authorities can know about their problems.”

Many members of the dialogue committees shared their observations that listeners of the programs had gained knowledge and/or “changed their mentality.” They gathered this from instances where listeners approached and thanked them. Evidence for increased awareness could also be found in the interviews with the guests of the interactive programs, as the following quote illustrates: “I learned [something new about the issues discussed]. [...] It's the sharing of experiences. When someone gives a tangible example of a practice that we don't know about, this helps us a lot to edify our minds. [...] For example, when the women's representative

gave us examples of practices that needed to be acted on, that awareness-raising had to be carried out in order to put an end to it definitively. When the civil society representative talked about the behavior of young people in the city—you see, I was not aware of all that.”

The study participants were also asked to rate the **quality of the exchanges that happened as part of the interactive radio programs** as part of a standardized questionnaire: To what extent did they agree with statements such as “all participants had a fair share in the discussion” or “the most important groups that needed to be part of the discussion were present in the radio show”? The questionnaire results (see Annex 2, Table 2) suggest that:

The appraisal of the participants confirms the fulfillment of the criteria for constructive dialogue.

There was very strong agreement¹ among the guests and members of the dialogue committees that their exchanges during the radio programs and meetings were relevant, transparent, truthful, comprehensible, and engaged everybody equally, as well as that they helped them to understand the reasoning of the other participants, and that people listened to each other. There was also agreement that the most important groups that needed to be part of the discussion were present in the radio shows.

More detailed information about factors that contributed to constructive dialogue was brought to light in the interviews and focus group discussions. They revealed that:

Radio hosts played a major role in ensuring balanced participation, comprehensibility and — most importantly — safety.

Several study participants highlighted the radio host's skill in making sure that all guests were involved in the discussion, while not taking a side themselves. In addition, the local knowledge of the radio hosts stood out. It was considered crucial that they could speak the local languages and were sensitive to the risks associated with addressing certain topics, because “when we talk about insecurity, even the bandits

¹ The participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements related to relevance, exchange, reasoning, balanced participation, diversity, transparency, comprehensibility, and factuality on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Except for “diversity” which scored 4.0, all other aspects scored between 4.6 and 4.9. See Figure 1 for the exemplary rating of the criterion “exchange” and Table 2 in Annex 2 for a detailed overview.

Exchange:

“On the whole, the discussion participants listened to each other and took each other seriously.”

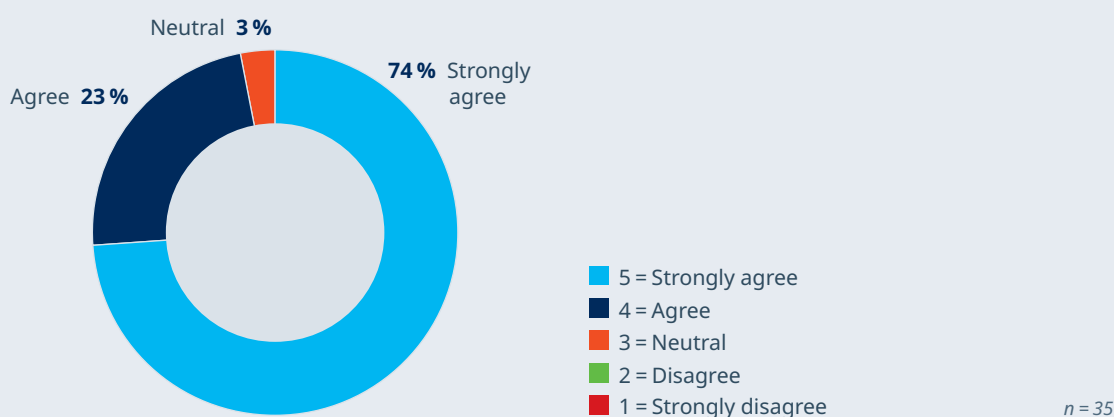


Figure 1 Focus group participant (n=35) rating of the dialogue criterion “exchange” (Mean: 4.7143; SD: 0.51856)

are listening; so, it is up to the host to know the appropriate terms for this.” The following quote illustrates the complexity of the job of the radio hosts: “The job of facilitator is not an easy task, bringing together different people and being able to dialogue with them is not easy. [...] It’s not easy to hand over the microphone and, in these kinds of situations, the damage it can do is worse than a weapon because there are those who tend to [only] talk about their own problems, but the moderator kept the participants in line.”

To what extent did the achieved constructive dialogue elements also lead to concrete proposals for resolving problems or conflicts? By looking at the data from the quantitative content analysis, which recorded whether guests proposed any solutions while participating in the program, it is possible to say that:

The vast majority of guests participating in the interactive radio shows made suggestions for conflict resolution.

155 of 168 guests (92.3%) made at least one suggestion as to how a problem discussed during the show could be solved. This was irrespective of the guest’s gender or their status as a refugee/IDP, representative of the local authorities or representative of an NGO.

Did the proposals made during the shows result in concrete action? In this respect, the interviews with radio guests and the focus groups discussions with members of the dialogue committees provided insights:

Examples of conflict resolution spanned from activities to increase personal contact between the host community and refugees/IDPs (such as friendly football matches) to practical measures (such as the construction of additional water points to cater to more inhabitants).

The interviewees and discussants mentioned various examples of solutions that had been proposed during the programs and then implemented in the broader community. Sometimes, the radio guests themselves implemented them, like one of the representatives of a refugee community who, during the radio program, had faced complaints about reckless behavior:

“ I replied on behalf of the refugees that we take action and since then we have created an internal committee to manage this.

In other instances, the dialogue committee “went to the mayor to highlight our problems.”

So, what do the findings imply for media development activities aimed at promoting dialogue?

TAKE-AWAY 1

Bringing together different social groups and ensuring equal participation is worth every effort. It enables exchange between people who, otherwise, would likely remain wary of one another.

TAKE-AWAY 2

It is crucial to ensure broad participation and to have participants agree on ground rules for their exchanges to create a productive dialogical setting. A highly participatory and inclusive project set-up like the one in Niger (involving listeners' clubs and dialogue committees, working with radio stations that broadcast in local languages and are embedded in the local community, holding a kick-off workshop on conflict-sensitive journalism etc.) proved conducive to fostering constructive dialogue in this specific context.

TAKE-AWAY 3

As part of these interactive programs, the job of radio host is crucial for fostering dialogue and thus demanding. It deserves special support, for example, in the form of peer-to-peer exchange between radio hosts within a network.

What to consider when promoting dialogue in hostile environments?

Niger is a country struggling with insecurity, scarcity of resources and, thus, instability—as illustrated by the recent military takeover. Especially in the tri-border region between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, a security crisis has developed in response to the presence of numerous armed terrorist groups. Insights from a case study in this type of context can be instructive for places facing similar challenges, for example when it comes to promoting the voices of marginalized groups or supporting media outlets in hostile environments. One insight gained during the project, later confirmed by the study results, was that:

Live interactive programs involve certain risks for the people participating.

While 40 of the 45 examined programs employed a live interactive format, five were magazine programs. The latter were produced by a radio station that—over the course of the project—deemed it too risky for staff and guests to engage in live programming as the security situation in their village had become increasingly tense. In response, they decided to produce magazine programs instead. These programs did involve pre-recorded vox-pops, but no live interaction between people assembled in a studio where terrorists could easily find and threaten them.

Even if the remaining radio stations and dialogue committees felt safe enough to organize and take part in interactive programs, security concerns made participants prone to self-censorship:

Despite its daily relevance, the security situation is a touchy topic that was rarely addressed in the radio programs.

A large share of the examined programs dealt with awareness-raising on issues such as public health and preventing extremism (88.9%), peaceful coexistence (77.8%), peacebuilding (77.8%), social cohesion (77.8%) and community dialogue (66.7%).² Furthermore, the qualitative analysis revealed that access to basic services and schooling for IDPs/refugees was a popular issue in the programs. However, security issues—a topic that obviously worries the communities a great deal—were found to be addressed only sporadically for fear of negative consequences. First-hand knowledge of villagers threatened by gang members after they had commented on the security situation in a public space, for example the market, is widespread in the communities, as the focus group discussions revealed, and made

² See Table 3 in Annex 2 for a detailed overview.

the radio hosts and guests shy away from addressing these topics knowing that:

“The bandits are listening.”

This was also underlined in earlier research³ on project-related radio production as part of media development in Burkina Faso. The author, Viviane Schönbachler, found that the choice of a certain format involves a “trade-off between voice and protection” (see Figure 2).

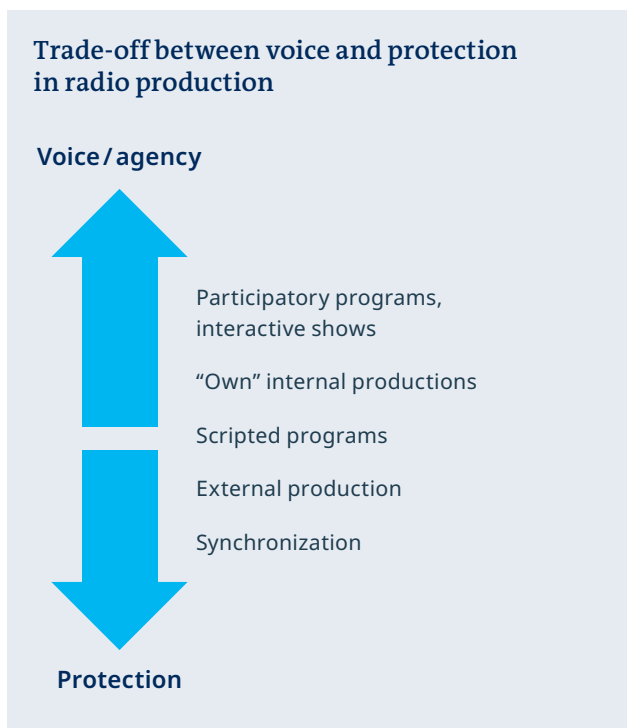


Figure 2 Source: Schönbachler (2023)

Taking part in interactive radio formats can be concerning for guests.

While the interviewed guests did not report any direct negative consequences from taking part in the programs, some remarked that certain fears were always present. One internally displaced student, who had agreed to take part in the program on the condition of absolute secrecy, noted: “I was just afraid that the show would be broadcast on TV and that my parents would be kidnapped by bandits because of me.”

Considering these findings, the following conclusions can be drawn for media development activities oriented toward the promotion of dialogue in hostile environments:

TAKE-AWAY 4

Dialogical radio projects must stay flexible in regard to format: While interactive live formats are the most participatory, they also make participants more vulnerable. The safety concerns of guests participating in dialogue formats need to be taken seriously, as they can have a limiting—or in the worst-case scenario, a harmful—effect.

TAKE-AWAY 5

In hostile environments, certain topics—despite being highly relevant—cannot be addressed in a dialogical radio format. There will most likely be issues that are too risky for people to talk about, not because of any taboos, but due to immediate security concerns.

³ Schönbachler, V. (2023, July 11). In women we trust? Female Journalists in Proximity Radios in Burkina [Paper presentation]. IAMCR 2023, Lyon, France.

What to consider when dialogical formats are intended to give IDPs/refugees a voice?

The emphasis of the project examined as part of this study was on promoting the voices of IDPs and refugees. The participating community radios are situated in villages and towns that have seen an influx of people fleeing their homes and seeking safety. The large-scale displacement in the tri-border region between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso is increasingly jeopardizing social cohesion, as natural resources are already scarce and basic services quite poor. According to the project partner Ré-JsC, poor communication and a lack of dialogue between the displaced and host communities have the potential to aggravate conflicts. In this context, the study found the dialogical radio formats to be perceived as beneficial in the following ways:

Refugees and IDPs were able to convey their personal feelings of stigmatization.

The interviews conducted with refugees and IDPs who had been guests on the interactive programs indicate that they welcomed their participation as an opportunity to speak out about their experiences of stigmatization. As one interviewee stated: “One of the [other] guests, while taking the floor, underlined a very touching point. I quote: ‘Since we’ve been here, when someone makes a mistake, he is directly blamed for it. It’s the refugees this, it’s the refugees that. Quite simply because we are foreigners on their land. This really has to stop.’ I’m really relieved that he underlined this very important point because it is a reality that we have lived since our arrival here.”

The dialogical exchanges fostered mutual understanding, for example, relating to experiences of flight or differences in ways of life in rural or more urban settings.

The interviews with representatives of the host communities also revealed that, on their part, the interactive programs made them more sympathetic to the struggles of the refugees and IDPs. One interviewee explained:

“The point of the [radio program’s] subject is to not see these people as strangers. They are our brothers and sisters who are facing difficulties, consequently, they need our moral support.

This kind of support was also highlighted in the focus group discussions as a major purpose of the programs: “The exchanges are very important, especially in these times of insecurity, when people can’t sleep. Villages have moved, officials have left because of the insecurity. So, I think that to

deal with this we’ll have to exchange ideas to find solutions and see what we can do to create peace.”

Another aspect perceived as beneficial was that the interactive shows allowed participants to talk matter-of-factly about differences in their lifestyles. In particular, differences in understandings of hygiene had apparently caused major irritation in the communities. In this respect, one IDP stated in the interview that he was able to explain: “We’re villagers, [...] in the village we don’t sweep our houses every day, they have to be very dirty first, whereas in the city it’s not like that, it is the opposite in the city, so our lifestyles are different. So, the locals have to be patient and accept us with our realities.”

On the issue of lack of hygiene, actors in one town were found to be vigilant against aggravating the antagonism between the host population and displaced people from rural areas. In response, they chose to organize general awareness-raising caravans, rather than radio programs in which individual group representatives might face stigmatization. The programs they did organize on the topic featured health experts who explained the risks associated with hygiene issues.

Refugees and IDPs participated both as members of the dialogue committees and as guests on the radio programs.⁴ How did they benefit from their participation apart from the ways mentioned above? The interviews and focus group discussion also brought to light that:

Participation strengthened the sense of self-reliance of refugees and IDPs.

One interviewee stated:

“I am the first person to benefit from the exchange because my participation as an IDP scared me at first. I had thought that we are strangers and that we cannot do anything. The exchanges made me understand that I can also do something and that we are the same, we are from the same country. I was very happy with that.

⁴ At least 14.2 % of the radio guests were (internally) displaced people according to the quantitative content analysis. The exact number could not be determined, given that quite a few refugees and IDPs did not describe themselves as such on air for security reasons. Hence, the actual share of (internally) displaced people among the radio guests is likely to have been higher. Our estimate is that this group made up 20 %. See Table 4 in Annex 2 for a detailed overview of the composition of guests.

This indicates that the formats offered a way for people to take action and, in doing so, recognize their power to affect situations. Especially the participation of refugees and IDPs in the dialogue committee seems to have been helpful in this respect. In several focus group discussions, it was highlighted that getting to know one another in the first place, forming a group and learning from one another was perceived as beneficial.

In practical terms, these results can inform dialogical projects that are intended to give IDPs/refugees a voice as follows:

TAKE-AWAY 6

A highly participatory and inclusive project set-up, like the one in Niger, was valuable for giving refugees/IDPs a voice and fostering mutual understanding between the displaced and the host communities. In particular, opportunities to work on something together (like the dialogue committees) strengthen a sense of human connection and self-reliance.

TAKE-AWAY 7

Stigmatization of refugees/IDPs can be a major concern. It is advisable to ensure that dialogical radio programs deal with it in a sensitive manner and do not (unintentionally) contribute to its aggravation. In the project under study, this was achieved through training in conflict-sensitive journalism.

TAKE-AWAY 8

Refugees and IDPs have most likely experienced traumatic events. While choosing to talk about their grievances during interactive radio programs can be a salutary experience for them and sensitize others, it may also revive traumatic memories. Thus, it is advisable to offer special training to radio producers in how to handle such situations responsibly.

What to consider when dialogical formats are intended to give women a voice?

The study data was also used to find out more about the participation of women in the project. Gender inequality is widespread in Niger; according to UNICEF, only 14 % of women (compared to 42 % of men) can read and write.⁵ Child marriage and fertility rates⁶ are among the highest in the world. Girls and women in Niger generally have limited access to health services, and those who are displaced—according to a 2022 study by the Institute for Security Studies⁷—find it even harder to get medical help. Against this backdrop, a constructive dialogue in which women are able to address their needs and make suggestions for solutions seems desirable. Thus, to what extent did the project contribute to making space for women's voices? In terms of their participation in the radio programs is concerned, the quantitative content analysis revealed that:

Overall, more than a third of radio guests were female. One station stuck out with an exceptionally high share of female guests.

The data shows that 36.3% of guests across the radio programs considered in the analysis were female.⁸ Looking at the figures by radio station reveals an exceptionally high share of 71.8% female guests at one of the stations. It turned out that there is a local women's association in this station's village that is quite active and had gotten involved both in the local dialogue and concertation committee as well as in the programs. This resulted in a remarkable number of female guests. Considering the entire sample, however, it must be noted that there were instances where programs were produced with few or no women involved.

In general, the committees tended to reach out to official associations, clubs or groups to find knowledgeable "resource persons" for their interactive programs. In addition to radio guests from women's associations, there were representatives of youth associations and civil society organizations for child protection. The candidates' social status and their prominence in the town/village also played an important role in the committees' selection of guests, "because these are people who carry weight or are listened to in society."

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/niger/stories/girls-education-strengthens-economies-and-reduces-inequality-niger>

⁶ In 2021, the average Nigerien women gave birth to 6.8 children according to the World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=NE>)

⁷ <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/WAR-41-eng-rev.pdf>

⁸ See Table 4 for a detailed overview of the composition of guests.

In addition to analyzing the share of female guests on the radio programs, the study also recorded their actual speaking time compared to that of male guests. Here, the quantitative content analysis showed:

Women’s average speaking time on the programs was clearly shorter than that of the men.

On average, a female guest spoke for 2 minutes and 33 seconds per broadcast. The average speaking time of a male guest, in contrast, amounted to 4 minutes and 49 seconds. That women’s speaking time was considerably shorter holds true across all radio stations in the sample, even for the one where women represented the majority of guests.⁹ The exact reasons why female guests may not feel as comfortable as male guests in taking up airtime in interactive radio formats in the context at hand is an important question for future research. A host of factors are conceivable: From increased security risks associated with women’s presence in the public sphere, to the gender of the other guests, to the performance or gender of the radio host.

What can be concluded from these findings when it comes to supporting women as part of media development activities aimed at promoting dialogue?

TAKE-AWAY 9

It seems promising to look for women’s associations and get them onboard. If these do not (yet) exist, women should be supported in forming or joining associations, clubs or networks that strengthen their expert status regarding issues that specifically affect them.

TAKE-AWAY 10

In addition to aiming for gender-balanced participation, it is important to pay special attention to increasing women’s speaking time in radio formats. Here, it is crucial to find out what kind of support or conditions the women in question require to engage in public dialogue safely and confidently.

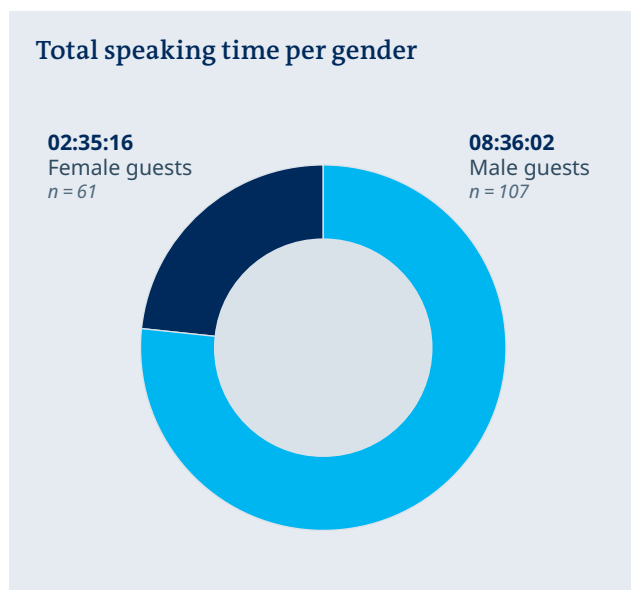


Figure 3 Total guest speaking time by gender in hh:mm:ss across 45 radio programs

⁹ See Table 5 in Annex 2 for a detailed overview of average speaking times.

Average speaking time of female and male radio guests

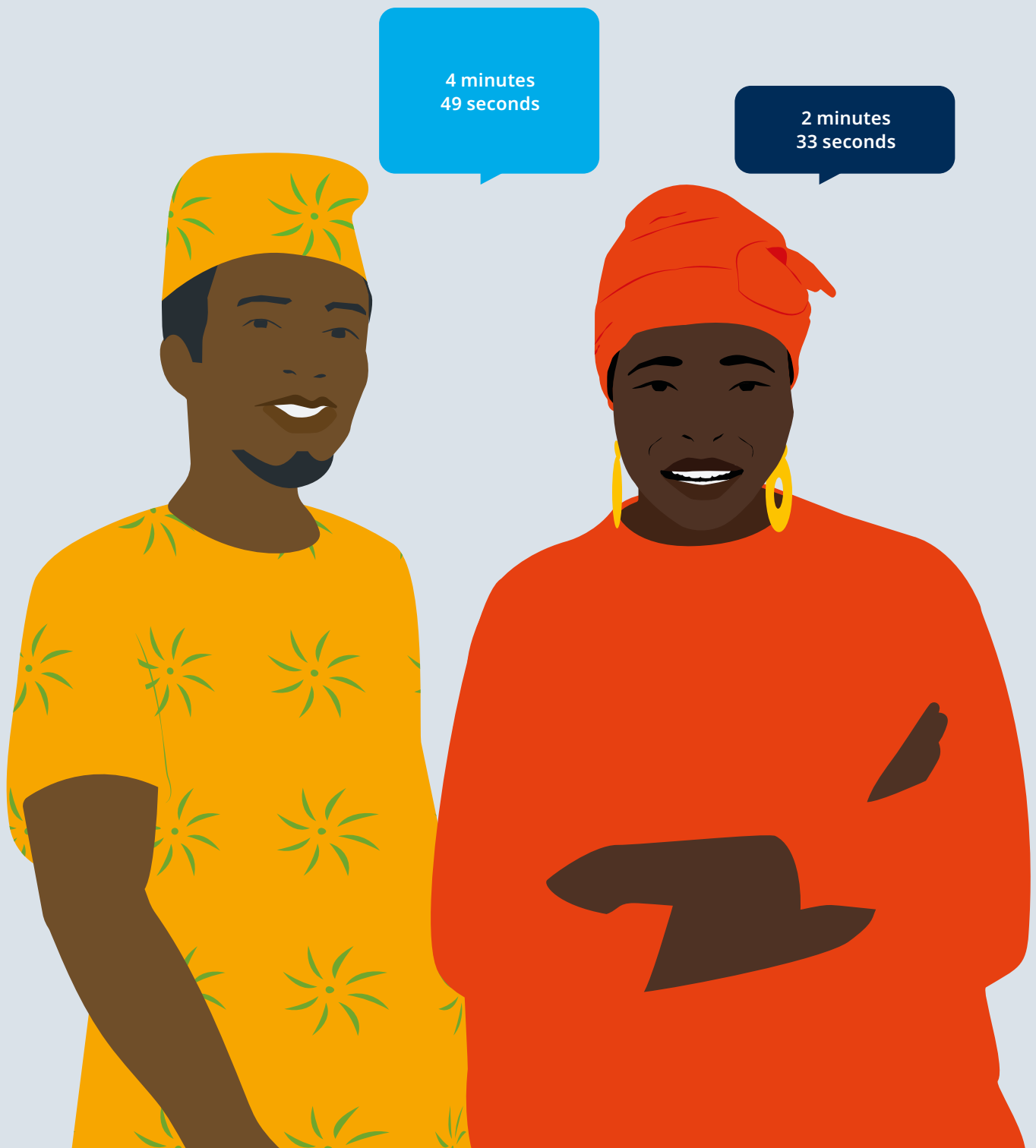


Figure 4

At a glance: Conclusion and take-aways

This case study shows that media development endeavors to foster constructive dialogue require concerted effort. They have to be in closely interwoven with local realities and needs—be it at the country, community or individual level. The example of interactive radio formats in Niger illustrates that journalistic formats bringing together conflict-affected groups require thorough preparation, an understanding of the challenges posed by safety threats, trauma or gender inequality (and their intersections), and the ability to act upon these challenges sensitively and flexibly. Yet, these efforts are worthwhile, because they do make a difference: In our case study, people from various social groups perceived the value in making contact, engaging in exchange, being listened to, learning about each other’s concerns, developing common approaches to problem-solving and implementing them in their communities. In doing so, they enlarged the space for self-reliance in often tense and unpredictable situations, which seemingly continued even after the project as such (and our data collection) was completed. In Téra, for example, members of the “dialogue and concertation committee” founded a club that takes engages in IDP and refugee issues.

Of course, there are many different ways to foster constructive dialogue. While this study focused on a single project with a specific design, its take-aways are able to inform dialogical media development projects more broadly—especially those strengthening media outlets in hostile environments and promoting the voices marginalized groups. Here are the take-aways at a glance:

Take-aways for media developers interested in fostering constructive dialogue

- 1** Bringing together different social groups and ensuring equal participation is worth every effort. It enables exchange between people who, otherwise, would likely remain wary of one another.
- 2** It is crucial to ensure broad participation and to have participants agree on ground rules for their exchanges to create a productive dialogical setting. A highly participatory and inclusive project set-up like the one in Niger (involving listeners’ clubs and dialogue committees, working with radio stations that broadcast in local languages and are embedded in the local community, holding a kick-off workshop on conflict-sensitive journalism etc.) proved conducive to fostering constructive dialogue in this specific context.
- 3** As part of these interactive programs, the job of radio host is crucial for fostering dialogue and thus demanding. It deserves special support, for example, in the form of peer-to-peer exchange between radio hosts within a network.
- 4** Dialogical radio projects must stay flexible in regard to format: While interactive live formats are most participatory, they also make participants more vulnerable. The safety concerns of guests participating in dialogue formats need to be taken seriously, as they can have a limiting—or in the worst-case scenario, harmful—effect.
- 5** In hostile environments, certain topics—despite being highly relevant—cannot be addressed in a dialogical radio format. There will most likely be issues that are too risky for people to talk about, not because of any taboos, but due to immediate security concerns.

6

A highly participatory and inclusive project set-up, like the one in Niger, was valuable for giving refugees/IDPs a voice and fostering mutual understanding between the displaced and the host communities. In particular, opportunities to work on something together (like the dialogue committees) strengthen a sense of human connection and self-reliance.

7

Stigmatization of refugees/IDPs can be a major concern. It is advisable to ensure that dialogical radio programs deal with it in a sensitive manner and do not (unintentionally) contribute to its aggravation. In the project under study, this was achieved through training in conflict-sensitive journalism.

8

Refugees and IDPs have most likely experienced traumatic events. While choosing to talk about their grievances during interactive radio programs can be a salutary experience for them and sensitise others, it may also revive traumatic memories. Thus, it is advisable to offer special training to radio producers in how to handle such situations responsibly.

9

It seems promising to look for women's associations and get them onboard. If these do not (yet) exist, women should be supported in forming or joining associations, clubs or networks that strengthen their expert status regarding issues that specifically affect them.

10

In addition to aiming for gender-balanced participation, it is important to pay special attention to increasing women's speaking time in radio formats. Here, it is crucial to find out what kind of support or conditions the women in question require to engage in public dialogue safely and confidently.

Annex 1: Methodology in detail

This study combined qualitative and quantitative methods to fully encompass the complexity of the project's dialogue dynamics.

Focus group discussions were conducted with members of each "dialogue and concertation committee" at the five radio stations selected for this case study (Radio Soudji in Ayérou, Radio Gomni in Bankilaré, Radio Tapoa in Say, Radio Liptako in Téra und Radio Tébonsé in Torodi). Each focus group consisted of six to eight participants.

For each of the five radio stations, three **in-depth interviews** were conducted with individuals who had participated in the respective station's program as a guest. For each station, interviewees from different societal groups were selected: One representative of the host community, one IDP/refugee representative and one representative of the local authorities.

The recruitment of the research participants was facilitated by DW Akademie's project partner Ré-JsC, who reached out to members of the committees and to former radio guests in order to ask whether they were interested in taking part in the study. Participants who showed interest and agreed to provide their contact information were then called by phone and asked for an appointment in March and April 2023.

Both the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were semi-standardized and relied on a guideline reviewed by a Ré-JsC staff member for comprehensibility and context-sensitivity before use. The guideline was available in the local languages Songhai, Zarma, Fulfuldé and Tamaqesh as well as French. Each focus group discussion and in-depth interview was conducted by a Nigerien research assistant from the research institute who spoke the respective local language/s. All focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted in person in the respective town/village, except those with participants from Bankilaré as the security situation made it impossible for the research assistants to travel there from the capital city Niamey. While the focus group discussion with participants from Bankilaré could take place in person in a different town, the in-depth interviews were conducted by phone. Before each focus group discussion and interview, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and asked for their consent.

Standardized questionnaires were filled out by each study participant. In total, 50 questionnaires were filled completed. The questionnaire was printed out on paper and either completed by the participants themselves (if literate) or by the research assistants after reading the questions aloud to the respondents. The questionnaire covered ten statements relating to eight dialogue aspects (two items were phrased both positively and negatively to check for response biases). The respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree" and 5 meaning "strongly

agree." The numbered scale was complemented with visual symbols (face emojis) to accommodate illiterate and literate respondents alike.

As part of a **qualitative document analysis**, 112 project monitoring documents (such as minutes of the committee meetings, listening reports and follow-up sheets) were reviewed. The analysis was based on an analytical grid that considered, in particular, the selection of topics and guests.

A **quantitative content analysis** was conducted based on a sample of 45 radio programs, that is, all programs produced and broadcast between September 2022 and January 2023 by the five radio stations under study as part of the project "Promoting peace and social cohesion through community dialogue." The recordings of the programs were available as audio files. A codebook with pre-defined categories was developed by the research team. The coding itself was performed by five coders from the research institute in the local languages Songhai, Zarma, Fulfuldé and Tamaqesh. After receiving training by the independent Nigerien media researcher, the coders listened to their assigned programs and then entered the codes in digital coding sheets.

Limitations and challenges: In order to measure the effects of the dialogical project activities, this study relied on qualitative methods that assessed outcomes as perceived by various participants. Admittedly, scientifically proving a cause-effect relationship between project activities and outcomes would require an experimental research design including a baseline and a control group. However, the complex multi-directional communication flows in dialogical projects like the one under study make it difficult to single out the factors that led to a particular change. What is more, the region's instability increases the likelihood of confounding effects. These factors make an experimental design challenging, but still worthwhile. The radio audience, in particular, could serve as a promising additional source of data that could not, for practical reasons, be covered in the study at hand.

Putting the current research design into practice involved challenges that are important to note for future research endeavors in similar contexts. Research assistants with data collection expertise and local language skills were key for this study, but relatively hard to find. In order for them to conduct interviews and in-person focus group discussions, a constant monitoring of the security situation and the resulting travel restrictions as well as flexibility with regard to communication methods and locations was necessary. Of course, the ever-present security concerns were also relevant to the study participants, and most likely impacted how much they eventually disclosed. Nonetheless, these efforts are worthwhile to ensure that systematic and rigorous research is conducted even in remote and/or crisis-prone environments.

Annex 2: Tables with in-depth results

Dialogue qualities as rated by participants on a scale from 1 to 5

	RADIO GUESTS (N = 15)	MEMBER OF DIALOGUE COMMITTEE (N = 35)
Relevance	4,8 (SD: 0,41404) "On the whole, the participants discussed things that were important for the topic."	4,7 (SD: 0,47101) "On the whole, the interactive radio shows we planned and conducted covered the things that were most important for the topics."
Exchange	4,9 (SD: 0,35187) "The participants of the discussion listened to each other and took each other seriously."	4,7 (SD: 0,51856) "On the whole, the participants of the discussions listened to each other and took each other seriously."
Reasoning	4,7 (SD: 0,45774) "The discussion helped to understand the reasons for the views of other participants."	4,6 (SD: 0,49024) "The interactive radio shows we planned and conducted helped to understand the reasons why the invited guests hold certain views."
Lack of reasoning	1,9 (SD: 1,03280) "The reasons for the views of other participants remained unclear in the discussion."	2,4 (SD: 1,49902) "The reasons why the invited guests hold certain views remained unclear in the interactive radio shows we planned and conducted."
Balanced participation	4,7 (SD: 0,45774) "All participants had a fair share in the discussion."	4,6 (SD: 0,80753) "All invited participants had a fair share in the discussion."
Unbalanced participation	1,7 (SD: 1,22280) "Some participants dominated the discussion while others came up short."	2,2 (SD: 1,45117) "Some invited participants dominated the discussion while others came up short."
Diversity	4,0 (SD: 1,06904) "The most important groups that needed to be part of the discussion were present in the radio show."	4,0 (SD: 1,42428) "The most important groups that needed to be part of the discussion were present in the radio shows."

Table 2 Scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree"

Continued on page 20

	RADIO GUESTS (N = 15)	MEMBER OF DIALOGUE COMMITTEE (N = 35)
Transparency	4,5 (SD: 0,51640) "It was clear in the discussion what each participant's interest in the topic was."	4,5 (SD: 1,06668) "It was clear in the interactive shows what each discussant's interest in the topic was."
Comprehensibility	4,4 (SD: 0,82808) "On the whole, the participants in the discussion expressed themselves in a manner that could be understood by the others."	4,6 (SD: 0,77024) "On the whole, the participants in the discussions expressed themselves in a manner that could be understood by others."
Factuality	4,1 (SD: 0,74322) "The participants did not lie during the discussion."	4,5 (SD: 1,01087) "The participants did not lie during the discussion."

Table 2 Scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree"

Number of programs that addressed certain pre-defined topics according to the quantitative content analysis

RADIO	PROMOTING PEACE	SOCIAL COHESION	COMMUNITY DIALOGUE	SENSITIZATION	PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE
Radio Gomni de Bankilaré n=9	2	3	2	4	5
Radio Liptako de Téra n=10	10	10	10	10	10
Radio Tapoa de Say n=9	8	6	3	9	4
Radio Tébonsé de Torodi n=7	7	7	7	7	7
Radio Soudji d'Ayérou n=10	8	9	8	10	9
Overall n=45	35 (77.8%)	35 (77.8%)	30 (66.7%)	40 (88.9%)	35 (77.8%)

Table 3

Demographic composition of guests by radio station

RADIO	MALE GUESTS	FEMALE GUESTS	GUESTS REPRESENTING				
			LOCAL AUTHORITY	HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER	IDPS	REFUGEES	OTHER
Radio Gomni de Bankilaré n=33	26 (78.8%)	7 (21.2%)	11 (33.3%)	5 (15.2%)	2 (6%)	1 (3.0%)	14 (42.4%)
Radio Liptako de Téra n=37	28 (75.7%)	9 (24.3%)	8 (21.6%)	11 (29.7%)	6 (16.2%)	9 (24.3%)	3 (8.1%)
Radio Tapoa de Say n=33	21 (63.6%)	12 (36.4%)	6 (18.2%)	6 (18.2%)	0	0	21 (63.6%)
Radio Tébonsé de Torodí n=26	21 (80.8%)	5 (19.2%)	6 (23.1%)	10 (38.5%)	0	0	10 (38.5%)
Radio Soudji d'Ayérou n=39	11 (28.2%)	28 (71.8%)	8 (20.5%)	3 (7.7%)	4 (10.3%)	2 (5.1%)	22 (56.4%)
Overall n=168	107 (63.7%)	61 (36.3%)	39 (23.2%)	35 (20.8%)	12 (7.1%)	12 (7.1%)	70 (41.7%)

Table 4

Average speaking time by gender and social group in min:sec (rounded to the second)

RADIO	MALE GUESTS	FEMALE GUESTS	GUESTS REPRESENTING			
			LOCAL AUTHORITY	HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER	IDPS	REFUGEES
Radio Gomni de Bankilaré	3:18 (198 sec) SD: 105.008	2:43 (163 sec) SD: 106.488	3:04 (184 sec) SD: 69.879	3:09 (189 sec) SD: 91.566	2:14 (134 sec) SD: 33.941	0:46 (46 sec) SD: 134.963
Radio Liptako de Téra	5:29 (329 sec) SD: 173.597	4:27 (267 sec) SD: 97.185	4:43 (283 sec) SD: 141.163	3:36 (276 sec) SD: 92.720	7:11 (431 sec) SD: 271.881	4:34 (274 sec) SD: 98.893
Radio Tapoa de Say	5:03 (303 sec) SD: 209.573	3:54 (234 sec) SD: 162.778	6:51 (411 sec) SD: 271.844	4:03 (243 sec) SD: 165.194	0	0
Radio Tébonsé de Torodi	6:08 (368 sec) SD: 274.530	1:43 (103 sec) SD: 54.261	7:23 (443 sec) SD: 284.730	7:39 (459 sec) SD: 271.836	0	0
Radio Soudji d'Ayérou	3:33 (213 sec) SD: 155.125	1:27 (87 sec) SD: 65.578	3:43 (223 sec) SD: 161.183	0:45 (45 sec) SD: 29.366	3:11 (191 sec) SD: 116.503	0:43 (43 sec) SD: 7.071
Overall	4:49 (289 sec) SD: 199.262	2:33 (153 sec) SD: 122.092	4:47 (287 sec) SD: 200.713	4:50 (290 sec) SD: 206.929	5:02 (302 sec) SD: 236.985	3:36 (216 sec) SD: 133.816

Table 5

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