17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 2, April 16, 2016: Afternoon Session - 2:30-4:15pm

Global Round Up: Creative Solutions for Online Journalism Challenges Around the World

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Chair and Discussant: Maria Teresa Ronderos, Director of the Program on Independent Journalism, **Open Society Foundations**

- **Andrei Dynko,** Editor, **Nasha Niva, Belarus**
- **Enock Nyariki,** Editor, **Hivisasa, Kenya**
- **Kelly G. Niknejad,** Editor-in-Chief, **Tehran Bureau**
- **Carlos Salamanca,** Business and Administration Manager, **El Faro, El Salvador**
- **Trevor Snapp,** Director of Programs, **Nuba Reports, Sudan**
- **Galina Timchenko,** Executive Editor, **Meduza, Russia**

Andrei Dynko: This is Belarus. It's in Europe, because many people do not know. [laughter/applause] We have such great neighbors like Russia, for instance. [laughter] We have some problems with them from time to time, but not so big problems like Ukrainians have right now. This is our dictator. [laughter] It's a dictatorship. But we have some more people. This is Sviatlana Alexievich, our recent Nobel literature laureate, a very great person. [applause] Maria Teresa, she will be in Columbia this month.

World of Tanks. Do you know World of Tanks? This a Belarussian game. [laughter] Yes, produced in a dictatorship, but not by Lukashenka. Also, Lukashenka is also a great war commander. [laughter] And Viber is another thing/product made in Belarus.

So you see, it may be astonishing to you that all the dictatorships are not like Cuba or North Korea. You have very modern dictatorships, digital dictatorships, which go relatively well. And Belarus is one of them—smart dictatorship, soft dictatorship, fortunately for me.

Now Nasha Niva. And the BY means Nasha Niva not known name. Nasha Niva is a very old title. In fact, I am 110 years old as Nasha Niva. And since July of this year, we will stop our printed version. We have turned digital and we don't bother about it. It's a very small publication. Only 16 people do it now. And we have 7-million page views every month in a country of 9-million people. I think this is quite a lot. I am proud of it.

We are small. Why we are so small? Because Belarus is small. I will be turning to this point. This is a small market, poor market. Average salary in Belarus is only $350. And this is a harsh environment. It is a dictatorship, and moreover,

our portal is published in the Belarussian language, and the Belarussian language, the number of users of Belarussian language was dwindling, was shrinking over the last year. So it's a very unfriendly environment. Still, we have to do something with this.

Belarus online media—top 4. It may be interesting to some of you who live also in small countries. What can be successful in such small countries? So the number one was built around a mailing service. It was before Google arrival. The number two was built around an online shopping catalog. Of course, in a country like Belarus, you might—you must have some connections with the government to start such interesting projects. And then another interesting thing [is] that the hardline opposition contents is also very popular online, because people cannot meet a position offline. So opposition is online in Belarus. All the opposition is [online].

My experience can be valuable to those among you who have small sites, both media and NGOs and who have little money and operate in harsh environments. If you are from Wall Street Journal, maybe it's not for you. Our experience is that one needs to have specific approach to specific audiences.

Of course, we are behind. I'm here. It's very interesting to me. Imagine that I went to the future. And then tomorrow, I went back to my past, maybe two years ago, three years ago. We are, of course, we are behind. So in countries like Belarus it may be interesting to do international donors. You have not to be too quick. You should not overpass your audience.

We have now three major audiences. If you want, one of them is still those people who come mainly most often to the main page of the website. Another group is those coming most often to the mobile version main page. And only the third group is those who live in social networks and come to our webpage from social networks.

It's important to have in mind all the three groups of people when you're working in markets like Belarus. The usability of the site's main page is still the key to the success in such markets. It's key to make people your regular readers. You have a huge number of views from permanency. Moreover, what's very important for projects like NN.by, you have huge readers' input from these regular readers. They are your own community. It is priceless.

If you build your community, you will be able to have volunteers. It's also very important for projects in a country like Belarus. It will be a very important moment for me. It would be hard for you to catch up with the quickly changing, developing needs, if you're not helped by volunteers. Software developing cost so much. So volunteers' input, it is a solution to this.

So my suggestions that are that, in a harsh environment, you might prioritize. You should prioritize software, technical, and development solutions. You should use civic energy towards your and our common goals.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Enock Nyariki: Yeah, I'm Enock Nyariki from Nairobi, Kenya, like she said. I edit news at Hivisasa.com. So Hivisasa is a combination of two Swahili words, Hivi meaning—Hivisasa meaning *right now*. So we are a news organization that focuses on local news. Because in Kenya things are gapped. When we passed the new constitution six years ago in 2010, power we decentralized. So right now, we have counties. There are 47. But all the major news outlets focus on national news. So there's a real gap. So that's why we decided to connect local people interested in what's happening around them and the governors and the news.

OK. Let me just say that we did a pilot in 2012, and then it was quite successful. And we decided to launch it fully about two years ago in 2014. And that's the homepage of one of the counties. We are in 10 counties. 10 out of 47. 10 of the major regions in the country. And we continue scaling up. So in the next few months, we will probably cover the rest of the country.

OK. So, why are we unique? Why are we not like the rest of the media outlets? We generate content from the users. We allow anyone to write to us. And we also have an online port/page called Hivisasa Academy where anyone interested in writing news can quickly learn. We have videos. We have text material. You can learn or submit a news story. Looking at the experience in the past two years, we've really trained a lot of journalists. People are writing to us, submitting news daily, on a daily basis, and they are getting published.

And once we publish them, we give them a small token or payment of about 100 Kenya shillings. That's like about a dollar. And we do it by M-Pesa. Vodafone is one of the leading payment systems in Kenya for Safaricom.

So the editorial team, we're about ten at the moment. What we want to do is just making sure the legal concerns are dealt with, and then publishing. So the readers, the people on the ground, are the ones who set the agenda. We don't do it for them.

And the site, the site actually works so well. Since our target are the people on the ground, the site works very well on any form which has internet connection, even the feature-low-end phones. In Kenya, although many, many people are beginning to use smart phones, we still have those who have feature phones, but are very much interested in accessing content online.

We started…. In Kenya, there's a perception that local news isn't really interesting. But we have proven is, we have done some really interesting news stories that have been—that other news outlets are beginning to notice and are picking them up and, of course, they're publishing.

But one of the challenges, big challenges we have, and I think it's all over the country, and like here, is that when someone picks your story, they don't necessarily acknowledge the source. So they just pick it up and publish it as if it's their own. But that's just about to change. As one example, last week, someone acknowledged and picked on the leading stories that went viral that day from our site.

So we are all going to elections next year, so we all—now that we have governors [and] challenges in the country, especially corruption, putting to us the government, the people, uh…. We hope to offer them a voice, a platform where they can generate conversations about the issues of governance around them and that can put the people in authority on those to be accountable on how to use public resources.

So yeah, that's it. So I look forward to an interesting conversation during the panel. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Kelly G. Niknejad: Hi. My name is Golnoush Niknejad. I am the founder and editor-in-chief of the Tehran Bureau. The Tehran Bureau is a virtual bureau. It's not based in Tehran. It's based in Boston. The digital revolution allowed us to redraw the line of what it means to be in Iran, who we can be in touch with, in terms of sources, and who our audience is.

The idea came up—was planted when I was in journalism school when David Remnick at the New Yorker came to our class. I started bombarding him with questions about, "Why aren't you guys covering this? Why did you miss this? Why don't you do a profile of this?" Probably to get me to shut up, he said, "Look, hey, you know, no one has a real full-fledged bureau in Tehran. We don't know what's going on in that country." So I thought that I would create one. And I did it to improve the level of journalism [and] the quality of news reporting inside the country and outside the country.

Inside the country, journalism means something completely different than what we think of journalism. And, you know, the quality of journalism education ranges from non-existent to low. There's a great deal of state censorship, and there's a lot of self-censorship in order to avoid landing in jail or being assassinated.

Non-Iranians do not have access to Iran. And when they do have access, the access is very superficial. Once their news organization has negotiated, you know, a bureau there or a visa there, they end up exercising more self-censorship than the journalists in Iran who are printing Iranian news media. For example, Nazila Fathi, who was the local correspondent for the New York Times, once she left the country, was no longer working for them, she said that, "I wasn't allowed to cover what's happening in Iran in the Iranian press."

Basically, by being based outside the country, we can circumvent a lot of those censorship issues, but at the same time, kind of apply the principles of journalism that we love and that made us love journalism here. And we can do…. The model, the way we do it is, to me—some people think it's innovative—to me, it's common sense. It's a lot like when, you know, a big news organization has a correspondent in Iran. Our correspondents are inside the country.

When they file a story, an editor in London or in New York does the editing. If there's a magazine, we do the fact checking. And we're able to do that because we focus on one issue, which is Iran, single subject. We can build over expertise, and each one of us, because we have a background in Iran, we have a great deal of sources, a network that we can all tap into. So when we do a story, it's very collaborative in terms of how many filters it goes through before it's fact checked.

And we've been from 2009, when we covered the election, when everybody else was thrown out, to this recent election, when under the Rouhani administration, people were allowed to go into the country. I think our reporting has set us apart.

So just to give one quick example. When someone like Ahmadinejad is president, everybody is on their toes. They know that everything that comes out of his mouth is spin. They know that they have to dig. They're not allowed into the country, so they have to talk to activists. They have to talk to the opposition. They have to talk to independent journalists. But once they're allowed into the country, they're so happy to go there that they are willing to focus on food and spices and the so-called startup scene to attract investment.

So executions actually shoot up when someone like Rouhani becomes president. When Khatami was president, there was a serial murder—chain murders that were going on. They were assassinating secular intellectuals. When Khatami became president and all the news organizations started sending correspondents there, those assassinations also shot up. But once the limelight, you know, from the mainstream media is on how great these reformists or pragmatists are, they get away with doing that kind of reporting. So that's why we are here.

[Applause.]

Carlos Salamanca: Hi, you all. Thank you for having me. As Maria Teresa said, I'm Carlos Salamanca. I'm from El Salvador. I'm not a journalist. I work for the dark side as Professor James said yesterday. And my media is El Faro, which means *the lighthouse* in Spanish. And we work in El Salvador in Central America which is that small beautiful piece of land between Mexico and Columbia.

We are a strange case, because we are almost 18 years old, and we are one of the first native digital media. We were even born before Google, and that's very strange. We wish we were as profitable as them. [laughter]

This is our site. It's ElFaro.net. We also produce a radio program to discuss the main information we publish on the site. We have around 300,000 unique visitors per month and 1.1-million page views. And we are a team of about 30; 20 journalists and 10 in the dark side.

The experience that I wanted to share to you is a crowdfunding campaign we made last year. It was called Excavación Ciudadana, which in English will be like Civic Excavation. We made it for 30 days last October. And the problem that we were trying to solve and we are still trying to solve is that most of our income comes from grants. Almost 70-75% comes from grants, and that makes us very dependent.

So we found out and concluded that the involvement of the audience is very important for independent media to achieve sustainability. So we designed this campaign, which the concept was about our audience. We created a microsite that gave the opportunity to our audience to [give] us one dollar and tell us which are the main coverage access that we do [that] worries them the most. We have corruption, impunity, inequality, migration, and violence.

So people [were] able to give us money through the microsite, since one dollar. To make it vital, we made some videos. We literally dealt in different locations, different word. This is for example *corrupcion*. We made a big word and didn't finish it. The last two letters aren't dull because the logic of the campaign was that our audience had the opportunity to let us go deeper. And that is related with our kind of journalism that is in-depth journalism. So it worked quite well. We have three different videos and three different words.

With the people that helped us and supported us, we sent them automatically a diploma that's up there. We also invited them to share their pictures with shovels in the social networks, in order that [it would] make it more vital and people to see us working on a crowdfunding campaign like a real movement.

We also invited different artists in El Salvador to paint shovels that we sold for different amounts. And this was an activity of the campaign. We sold them as pieces of art, and it was a success. And we also made interventions in public spaces that were, for example, this violence, where she was jogging. And so the big word [was] dug and joined the campaign.

And finally, we learned three specific lessons with this experience. The first one is that as long as you are transparent, it doesn't matter if you do not put a name and a last name to the crowdfunding campaign. That was one of our fears, because we didn't designate the money for any specific project, because we needed the money to survive and do our core work. But as long as you are transparent, it doesn't matter, because people will understand it.

Second of all, it's all about community building. More than a crowdfunding, as it sounds, it's all about building a group of people that belongs to a specific movement.

And the last lesson we learned is that at least our audience didn't give us money, because of rational reasons. Like, they are making a rational transaction, a commercial transaction, and we received something in exchange. They gave us money because of emotional reasons, because they understood the importance of having independent journalism in our country and in our region. So they decided to join the movement.

The final results were that we generated, like, $26,000 through 570 donors from 23 countries. And within that, we can go very, very much higher. And as eldiario.es says, basically, people won't give us money because they are buying information. People will give us money because they want that that information exists.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Trevor Snapp: Good afternoon. My name is Trevor Snapp. I've been a foreign correspondent, photo journalist for the last decade, working in places like Libya, Somalia, El Salvador, and a few other places. During this time since I started, press freedom has drastically been reduced. It's gotten really, really bad as you can see from this map. And in fact, a lot of countries that I could go and report on, like Libya, I can't really even go anymore.

This is a big problem. Because then, you know, the world and people inside these places are not getting the news. Like an example of that is Darfur, which was all in the news ten years ago. And there has been two journalists that have been in there since about 2006, and very little stories.

(Oops. I didn't want to go there quite yet.)

Now I work as program director or director of programs at Nuba Reports. Nuba Reports is an experiment to address this issue by investing in local networks. We're a non-profit, single-issue news organization that is based in Sudan's war zones. And we take information from there. We broadcast it out to the world and also back into Sudan.

This is a short video, which will give you a little idea of the work we do. Just a sec to load.

[Video plays.]

Narrator: Generations of Sudanese have grown up in conflict. Violence which the government hides from the world and its own people.

We are bringing light to an invisible world. The journalists of Nuba Reports are victims of this war. They are refugees, their families displaced, and their dreams for the future delayed. But they are also young people who have chosen to document what is happening to their homeland, so that you can know about it, so that governments can act, media can report, and history is recorded.

They work on the frontlines of the battlefields in refugee camps and remote villages—places where NGOs and journalists are banned.

Using GPS data and video, they show the reality on the ground...often at great danger. Help them tell their stories. Make it news.

[End of video.]

So Nuba Reports was formed in 2011 after the independence of South Sudan. As you can see here, the state of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, there was rebels that lived there, and they had supported the south and fought for the south for many, many years. When the countries were divided, they were left on the wrong side of the border. So literally days after independence happened, the war started up again in these two areas, and civilians were caught in the crossfire.

Ryan Boyette, a humanitarian worker living in the region, stayed behind while all the NGOs pulled out. And he worked with some of his friends and colleagues to start documenting what was happening. There was a lot of disappearances. There was bombing. There was assassinations. All the things that happen in a war. And nobody was paying attention, it felt like.

So when we started this, we wanted it to be different. You can go to our site now and check out some of the work we do. We wanted it to be flexible. We wanted it to be fast. We wanted to be able to be edgy, creative, innovative, do new things, try new things.

We were also blessed at the time, because this is the time that online video was becoming big outside of Sudan and inside of Sudan. So we invested in video. We invested in video for two reasons. One, because it's powerful, especially emotionally, and also because with minimal training, people on the ground can start gathering important news that can be then edited and analyzed by more professional journalists.

I'm just going to talk about some of the cool things I think we've done in the last few years. We did a kick starter to launch our organization. We raised

$40,000 to buy gear and training. We also took a model not of just posting raw video to the web, but matching our journalists on the ground with professional editors so that their video would get the same treatment that you would have on the New York Times or CNN.

We had a very firm belief at the very beginning that citizen journalism is just a stage. It's a phase. People that are committed citizen journalists should become journalists. There's no reason why not. We made a very nice and pretty website.

We invested in tracking all the bombings that were happening in civilian areas. We documented over 4,000 bombs dropped since the war began—well, not since the war began—since 2012 when we started that.

We made a pivot very early on when we realized that politically the international community was not going to invest much in changing the situation on the ground. The people that were, were going to be people that were living inside Sudan. So we partnered with local organizations to get the news into Sudan, especially places like Khartoum, where these wars are based, but don't really know anything about what's going on, because journalism is banned in these regions.

But we also pivoted quickly when we realized that not many people were going to actually come to our website. It was a niche website. It was only useful for actors in the region really. So we invested in partnerships. We found fertile ground with a lot of great organizations that worked closely with us to craft content that mattered to their audience. These are some of the organizations we've had the pleasure of working with.

Since that time, we are expanding. We've done a lot across Sudan, because we realize the problem is intractable, and you have to have a holistic way of viewing of it to understand what's really happening. We're doing a lot of stuff with WhatsApp as a broadcasting platform, but also as a way of gathering news.

We've definitely played with drones. We've done some. We made a refugee bot recently. Give people an experience of why people are leaving Sudan and going to Europe. We haven't launched it. We've been playing with it.

We also are looking at different types of investigations that we can be doing in the region. We work light and fast. We also work in a very difficult security situation.

Our founder has been bombed. We've been hacked numerous times. And the only way to deal with this is to be flexible and, you know, and to -- yeah, be very creative in working in a very low resource environment.

My point I want to leave everybody with, I guess, is that, like I said at the beginning, there's a lot of stories that are not being told. Because the typical foreign correspondent that looks a lot like me can't parachute in and get the story anymore. So right now, we're just letting those stories go untold.

The only way to change that is to collaborate and to invest in local networks and to use the technology that we have to get those stories out there.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Galina Timchenko: Thank you. I hate to be the last. So I'm CO of Meduza Project. And let me start from a very short glance. You know, five years ago, Russian segment of internet was maybe the most free space in the world. And everything seemed to be okay. I was editor-in-chief of the number one news outlet in Russia, and I had 84 journalists, and everything was cool. Then Mr. Putin decided to return. [chuckles]

He and his administration, they were fast to [get] stations and newspapers under total control. But, you know, in 2008, '11 and '12, there were huge protests in Moscow against falsification on the elections. And all of these protests were organized through Facebook, and online news outlets covered them very good.

So I, of Russian sovereign, turned on internet. And I was fired in a moment just before Kremlin annexation just before Ukrainian war. And after two days of crying, my staff, all the journalists—almost all the journalists—decided to resign in protest of my firing. And then, we have met and decided not to give up. We decided to establish new, brand-new, bulletproof media for young audience, and decided to make fresh start outside Russia.

Frankly, nobody believed that we can succeed. They said, "Well, it will be the next boring opposite side outside Russia." Something like—sorry, guys—Voice of America or svatbata.org. And here we are 18 months later. We have—it's my proud—we have more than 4-million unique users per month. And the most important thing for me, that 35% of our audience are under 35. They are the most active audience in Russia. And frankly, they have very good chances to live after Putin.

So when we decided to start Meduza, we explained to ourselves that we do not want to be serious every time, every minute of our life. You know, Russians are serious. We do not like to smile, frankly. And the Russian accent is scary as maybe you remember. [laughter] But we strongly believe that we are too serious and we have to laugh sometimes, because laughing is good for—is the best medicine against [being] scared and against haters and against social apathy.

You know, the second point, Russian people really do not understand news. There are a lot of propaganda. There are a lot of white noise. And you need to explain every, every news topic. Sure, maybe I'll skip something about propaganda and our sustainability. It's not so interesting.

The most important thing that we are against [is] isolation. We think that Russia is part of the world. There is no special way for Russia. We're just part of the big world.

So, what we are doing. News. It's very usual, but we do something about rethinking the news format and put news topics in very, very concrete content. Then we do long-form journalism as every respectful media do. There are my favorite guys. Do no tell them if you meet them.

Special correspondent, Ilya Azar. He was a Russian journalist who covered all Ukrainian crisis, all Ukrainian war, Euromaidan, and he is a real war correspondent, and now he covered conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

And my favorite guy, Daniil Turovsky. He covered topics about LGBT pressure, pressure on LGBT society in Russia, firing teachers, beating and torturing gays. And he was the first Russian journalist who began to write about ISIS threat in Russia. He found the parents and relatives of one of the main commander of ISIS. They lived on the border of Chechnya and Georgia. And he was awarded Journalist of the Year.

Ilya was awarded Journalist of the Year last year.

Explanatory journalism. Do you remember that Russians do not understand news? [chuckles] Thank you, Vox. We have made some very short format call cards to explain obvious things. For example, a couple of months ago, Russian State Duma approved law. This law allows police to detain you and to torture you and to beat you anytime they want to. So we have made cards. It sounds, "I've been detained by police. What should I do?" And first question is, for example, "I do not [break] the law. Why should I read this?" So we try to explain to our readers how to behave in difficult situations.

This is an explanatory example of chats. You know, Russia is in economic crisis. And we have made special chats with special paths, where a reader can choose the way and questions they want to have answered.

And my favorite part of this show. You know, there are a lot of social apathy in Russia. Nobody wants to take part. Nobody wants to put emotion on these news topics. And we do special games based on real news. For example, after elections, we made these game up. No, no, sorry. It was day of start of fourth season of House of Cards. And we published this game. Do you want to play with Frank Underwood? [laughter] Frank Underwood has three cards, and you have three cards with the portraits of president, dictators, and leader of states. So Frank Underwood put Putin on the table, and you have three cards. For

example, Barack Obama. For example, President of Kyrgyzstan. And your card win if election results is higher than Putin, Putin's results. You have only three cards.

One more about Putin. Sorry, guys. Maybe you know that Putin is late all the time. He was late to the meeting with Queen Elizabeth. He was late with the meeting [with] Barack Obama—almost two hours. And when Pope Francis said that he wanted to meet with Putin, we did this game, "Let Putin be in time to Pope Francis." [laughter] We made mechanism from Super Mario. You have just one minute to let Putin come on time. And if you succeed, Pope Francis said, "My son, thank you from the deep of my heart. You bring this guy in time."

So this is not [a] politically correct game. You know, maybe in Russia, Russian Orthodox Church are deeply involved in all space of our private life—in schools, museums. They interrupt at rock concerts. They smash exhibitions of modern art. So we made game, "Please let the priest find the route to church." You can see school, museum, theatre, concert, and church in the middle. And a lot of priests running out from the church. And you should tap your smart phone to stop them and to return them to church. [laughter]

And my favorite quiz. You know, Putin very often commanded news. Not Putin by himself but his press secretary. And we realized that there is [a] typical way of answering of press secretary. If something happened, Press Secretary Mr. Peskov said, "Putin is informed." "Putin is not informed." And "I'm not informed whether Putin informed or not." So there are news, and you should guess what answer Peskov gave.

And the last one, it's [a] quiz. It's something about everyday life in Russia. You can guess is it Norwegian prison or a Russian hotel. [laughter/applause]

So thank you. That's all about creative content.

[Applause.]

Q&A Session:

Maria Teresa Ronderos: Thank you so much to all of you. It was a fantastic round. I'm sure you all have lots of questions. [applause] I'm just going to start with a short question just to get things going. I want you to please, if you could, give us one short example of some investigation you have done, some good piece of reporting that you feel proud of, that you think that it was good. You don't all have to answer. Anybody who wants to answer it, that's fantastic.

Carlos Salamanca: Can I?

Several Panelists: Yeah.

Carlos Salamanca: I remember in 2012. First of all, some context. We are the most violent country—that is the official word—in the world. So there's a big problem with gangs. We have two main gangs that fight each other and fight and kill each other. So in 2012, as a strategy, the government designed a truce between them in order to give them some privileges in prison to the gang members. So El Faro discovered that case and published it. Actually, El Faro won—I think Gabriel Garcia Marcus won another prize because of that, because they published a chronicle about how this truce was designed between the government with the gang leaders.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: Thank you. Any other?

Trevor Snapp: Quickly, just we got a clip online from a group that had found—that the government had taken of them kind of torturing and threatening a young student they had captured when they were destroying a village. Some of our team hiked about four days across the mountains to go to the village to find out what happened to him. We found the kid, and he talked about his experience. And it was the first kind of established proof of someone who had been captured, disappeared, and tortured.

Galina Timchenko: My special proud [reporting] is [an] article about a Neo-Nazi group. My special correspondent come to this group and he was undercover. And this group posted special ads on gay sites. Then catch those people and tortured them and put the videos on the internet. They were Neo-Nazi. And he discovered these and investigated these. And they were published, and police began criminal investigation on them.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: Andrei or Carlos?

Kelly G. Niknejad: I think our investigation is ongoing. To give you an example of how the media is spun—how the Western media is spun—we just had elections in Iran, parliamentary elections and elections for the assembly that elects the supreme leader. Basically, within a ten-day period, our media went from reporting that all the reformists were disqualified to run for the elections to the reformists won all the elections. And we were in a position to very quickly explain what had happened. And it was amazing to see how quickly everybody else had to change their narrative in order to fall into, "Yes. How did that happen?" But it's just so easy to spin foreign journalism. I'm sorry.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: Andrei and Enock, I wanted to ask you something specific about your sites. Because both of you said that you had a lot of help from your readers, or from what you called, Andrei, what is it, the civic energy or something like that? This is something very special, and it's not very common in other countries. Could you tell us a little bit, how do your readers help you make your sites?

Andrei Dynko: We need help from readers in different ways. First of all, they provide us news, both simple text information, photos, videos. We also are reliant on their money. In the situation was are [in], we need to private donations to survive. But also, we need most—what we need most [is], we need ideas from them. And now, the ideas from our readers, which we get both from comments on the website, so Facebook, VKontakte, which are the most popular social networks, Twitter, etc., etc.. You only need to analyze to catch it and we will have thousands of ideas.

Enock Nyariki: At Hivisasa, we just depend on the people on the ground. People have no training in journalism to write to us to submit news stories. And if you look at what we pay them, it's not really something that you encourage someone sort of to pursue a career in that. It's just a small amount of money to somehow cover the cost. But basically people report about what's around them. And if you look at some of the posts we've been getting, it's about the issues that they feel concern them, concern the community around [them], the governors, or the issues.

There's a recent story. We just started publishing videos as we try and test and learn, and there's a video we received from one of our citizen reporters about a local chief, a local chief, who was criticizing the president. The president was in Nakuru the previous week—not actually the previous week—a few days ago. And then he was criticizing him for his campaign to end leak. He was totally blank. So one of our citizen reporters sent out—captured the video, sent it to us, [and] we published it. Of course, it went viral. So he was actually questioning, because they were questioning his integrity. He's supposed to lead the fight against elicit leak in the area. But he's the one who's blank, who is like he doesn't know what's happening around him.

So such things of empowering citizens to report what's happening around them and putting their leaders to task is what has given us the energy and is what is driving the momentum to cover local news in Kenya.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: You're receiving like 1,000 stories a month?

Enock Nyariki: No, no. We are published actually 1,000 stories a week.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: A week. From the readers.

Enock Nyariki: From the readers, yeah.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: And how do you control quality? Is there any quality control?

Enock Nyariki: Not so much. [laughter] Yeah. Although, we provide them with a tool to learn about just the basics of news reporting. It's called Hivisasa Academy. But when we receive, say, a report that we feel may not be accurate, then we take the extra steps to make sure we verify that the reports we are

publishing are actually accurate and true. And of course, the citizen reporters usually send us their photos, live photos, of the things they are reporting about, or even videos. And then, so there's some element of evidence/proof of what we are seeing. And if you look at the news stories we've done over the past two years, there are very minimal cases of inaccurate reports coming from our….

Maria Teresa Ronderos: So people are more prone to telling the truth than if you were, for example, asking politicians to send you stories.

Enock Nyariki: Yeah, exactly.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: [laughs] OK. I had another point, another question for all of you. You are proposing good national or even local journalism or international in some cases, but journalism that really knows places that are not easy right now to do good journalism about. These are also places with a lot of international interest—a lot of them. Are you building these international partnerships? Are you finding difficulties in building these international partnerships? I know, Trevor, you mentioned that you have had some international partnerships. So have you, Golnoush. But has it been difficult? The thinking of these international news organizations, has it been changing? The digital revolution has also helped them to start changing how they view reporting in difficult places?

Kelly G. Niknejad: Yes and no. Every once in a while, you have like geniuses like David Fanning who pulled us into Frontline. You had Alan Rusbridger who facilitated our partnership with the Guardian. But when they go, people don't understand why you're there. When the big boss isn't there to say, "This is important," they don't really know. So it's very difficult, because there's this mentality when I started journalism that if you're Iranian, you shouldn't be covering Iran. I mean, one of my first interviews, a producer asked me, he goes, "This film is going to be about Iran and Iranians. Is that going to be a problem?" I said, "Who's covering Washington, D.C.? Iranians?" And he got it and gave me the job.

But now that same, you know, mentality in terms of who the gatekeepers were, in terms of who can do mainstream journalism, that mentality has like shifted to the foundation. So the people who are getting the money to do the journalism projects are the white man who used to run these organizations. And as I was eluding to earlier, when there's an Ahmadinejad in power, people understand, but then when there's more of a need for it, but it's more nuanced, then they don't understand the need. And they go, "Why should we read you? Why should we have you? Why should we support you?" So it's a mixed bag in terms of being associated with news organizations that have their own agenda.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: What about you, Trevor? What has been your experience in Sudan?

Trevor Snapp: I mean, I think we're going through a pretty large revolution in what large international news organizations will take from the field. When I was starting out, you know, everything had to be the foreign correspondent on the ground who saw it himself. And then all of a sudden, you know, big newspapers are publishing human rights watch reports virtually verbatim. So there's a comfort for these partners to work with trusted organizations, where they know the methodologies [and] they know the workflow.

And I think that's a good thing. And I think, you know, we've had a lot of success working with partners. It really helps us, because it helps us up our game and our team gets to work with, you know, very experienced journalists. It's a lot of work, because every single partner we work with has its own format and its own, you know, type of news that it wants. But I think, I mean, I think it's the future. I don't think there's any other way.

I mean, all the bureaus in Nairobi are one man. You know, the bureaus in Tehran are maybe one person. So everybody is going to have to work together to get news out. We have to come up with institutions and structures and standards that will enable that to happen; otherwise, we're just not going to have news getting out.

But it is a Wild West time. I mean, a lot of the content you guys are all seeing from mainstream trusted news brands is coming from not their staffers. It's coming from other people. And we have to acknowledge that, and I think, you know, work together on making sure that that's the right stuff.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: Anybody else?

Galina Timchenko: Actually, we have very good relationships with the media. At first, every media in the United States and Europe wrote about launching this crazy Russian project in small Latvia. To remember where Belarus is, it's a little bit to the north. [laughter] So from New Yorker to BuzzFeed, from Limón to the Deutsche sites, every media wrote about launching our project. And now we have [the] English version. And Guardian and Quartz republished our investigations and our big interviews. So everything is okay. Thank you.

Enock Nyariki: And at Hivisasa, since we started and we've proven we are doing very well with local news, community radio stations in several parts of the country have been very interested in partnering with us to pick our stories. For example, there's a leading radio station in Nakuru. Nakuru is like the fourth largest city in the country. They have partnered with us, so when they are doing their new bulletins, they just go to our site and then pick the stories and then share them with their audience.

And then we also have organizations that are interested in, say, promoting maternal health. Like, that's a campaign which we are part of right now in the

rural areas, the areas which are very much affected. So what they do is they offer incentives to our citizen reporters to do more of those stories, because the readership is quite huge at the moment.

Andrei Dynko: When you say that there is a lot of international interest to places like we are from….

Maria Teresa Ronderos: For you, I don't know. [chuckles]

Andrei Dynko: In the Belarussian case, you know that we only have foreign correspondents from Russia in our country. And correspondents from other countries come to Belarus one every five years at the presidential election, not more. That's a problem for us—that lack of interest, that reproducing of stereotypes about our countries. We would you all to come to Belarus and write about us. [laughter]

Maria Teresa Ronderos: I think they're more….

James Briner: Andrei, I had a question for you. I did come to Belarus five years ago. [laughter/applause] But as a trainer. My name is James Briner. I'm with the University of Navarra. And in 2011, I went to Brest, and Slonim, and Slutsk, and Baranovichi to work with editors and publishers there. At that time…. I'm just curious to know what the situation is now with the independent press, because at that time these publishers were not able to get their newspapers onto the newsstands, because the government has a monopoly, and they banned these publications. And also the government has a monopoly on supplying paper, the newsprint, and they have to buy it from the government, and it's very expensive. I'm just wondering is that still the same? And are those publications still publishing? Brest Courier, Brest Gazette, Slonim Gazette, and so on.

Andrei Dynko: Thank you for the question. I am from Brest. I was born in Brest. The situation is still the same, a bit different, and I would say a bit worse than it was five years ago. Because now we have a combination of two bad factors for all these publications. They are all alive and very strong, very motivated. One factor is that in Belarus, like in other countries, people go online. Early it was easier because at least you had subscribers who paid, but now you have to monetize online, which is not very easy in the situation when the government controls advertisement. So on the one hand, you have this problem of transition online, and on the other hand, there is a kind of Belarussian fatigue—nothing changes in our region. And international donors which supported the media are pulling out. So the combination of these two factors makes difficulties, but I am sure that we will overcome all the difficulties.

Alejandro Gonzales: Thank you. My name's Alejandro Gonzales. I work with Catorce de Mayo, which is a Cuban news outlet, very similar to the ones that—the work that you guys are all doing. One of the challenges that we are having

now is growing our distribution beyond the site and finding and creating new revenue streams that are self-generating. Would love…. And we're learning from other models and other people. So I would like to know from a variety of you, how are you growing your distribution outside of your sites? And what tools are working for you? And what are some of the revenue streams that you're implementing that are not dependent on donors that are proving successful?

Trevor Snapp: I'll just say three things. You know, one is partnerships. That can bring in some amount of money if you prove, you know, indispensable or vital to the people you're working with. Other thing is mobile cinemas, like sending people around to show your content if you do video. It can be a great way to engage, not a huge audience, but it can engage people, get you story ideas that can be kind of an event. And then also, you know, podcast and audio.

Carlos Salamanca: Thank you. In our case, we are producing an annual event called Central American Forum of Journalism, which makes us able to invite lots of journalists from the region. And we invite our audience, and they buy tickets to participate in the forum. And we also give workshops, and students of journalism pay for receiving the workshop. And that has been one of the main examples. And the other one could be that we have tried to make alliance with international media. For example, this year, we will have a project with the New York Times that will help us and work with us to make an investigation about guns. And they will publish in English, and we will publish at the same time in Spanish. So that's another…. We don't see it as a grant. We see it as a partnership with another media.

Galina Timchenko: Speaking of Meduza, we launched the project not based on a website but on applications, because of the threat of blocking. I know the Russian authorities cannot block apps still. So we launched Meduza around the application. Now we have website applications to Messenger channels. I have browser extensions, a special email subscription, and it works, and maybe six mobile version. So it's six or seven channels of distribution. Now we are working on other.

Speaking about revenue, we covered more than half of our budget this year by advertising. And it's all about branded content or native advertising. So we hope to be sustainable before the next year.

Kelly G. Niknejad: One of the things that we're experimenting with is business, financial, and legal news, because all the interest in Iran is in that department right now. And you know, the news organizations that have made money, like the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, they sell subscriptions or terminals that give that kind of information. So if we're able to be even moderately successful, that will bring hopefully the kind of revenue that will allow us to do all the work that we need to do that we haven't been able to do,

because we are dependent on our partnerships and funding that is very difficult to get.

Galina Timchenko: May I add? Sorry. There were a lot of discussions about paywall here at the conference. And frankly, it's not our situation, because I am totally against paywall in Russian situation, because paywall in Russia, it's like selling medicine in the poorest regions in Africa or selling fresh air to people. There are millions of people in Russia who desperately need objective information. We do not want to sell it. And that's why paywall is not the solution for us.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: Thank you.

Jordan Melendez: Hi. My name is Jordan Melendez. I'm from Mexico. I do research about digital media outlets in Latin America. And I would like to know from you guys, how many people do you have in your teams? How many people work with you nowadays? With how many people did you start your teams? The other question is, where did you get the talent? Your journalists—where did you, yeah, get them?

Kelly G. Niknejad: Should I go first? Ours has changed significantly over time. It depends on what's going on. Sometimes when you expect people not to want to cooperate from inside the country [and] to be afraid, the times when the government is clamping down, for some reason, that's when they all want [to help]. They risk and they give you the information. They are journalists working for state media, but they're filing the real stories for you. It changes. But we've been very lucky. Most of our talent has come from Columbia Journalism School, because they go and work at other news organizations and then they come back and want to work for us, because they're really into the journalism and not so much into some of the other things they have to do to have a job these days at a news organization—making lists, and running after trends, and making lists.

Carlos Salamanca: El Faro was started with around six or seven journalists, students of journalism. It's a strange case, because since 1998 to 2003 or '04, El Faro's revenue was zero. And its costs were zero also, because they made it in house and everybody did it as a volunteer. And since we started getting projects till this time, we are around 30 people, which to the newsroom belong around 20-21, and the other ones have administrative, business, and commercial responsibilities.

Trevor Snapp: I'm happy to talk with you about that afterwards. [laughter]

Galina Timchenko: We started with 15 people. And I do not like to divide journalists and programmers or developers. We are all a team. And we started with 15 people. Now there are 26 in my team.

Enock Nyariki: The people we started with were three. Right now, we're about 20.

Andrei Dynko: We are 16 including the accountant. [laughter] All of them are multifunctional, but the accountant. [laughter/applause] And now I'm thinking, what can the accountant do inside our team? [laughter] As for the roots of the journalist, my grandmother, my babushka, was telling me stories before sleep, and I loved it so much. And now when I have time, I'm telling stories to my children before sleep. They love it as well.

Woman: OK. I think the Meduza project is brilliant and just mocking your leader, your dictator, in that way is brilliant. You know, a lot of Chinese people are trying to do same thing. Chinese people are using humor means to defy suppression of freedom of speech as well. But I have never seen—in China, it's impossible to mock the top leader like you do. So I was wondering, how can you survive? How do you make yourself survive in a harsh political environment like that? And for how long?

Galina Timchenko: You know, hard to say. Every day can be the last day as you know. And I'm a devoted believer in same jobs. So every day, I stand behind—I stand near the mirror and say, "This day I can die." So, you know, every day could be the last day, but we try not to think about it at all, because it's some kind of loser method of thinking. We try not to notice those Russian authorities or watchdogs or so-called civics. But frankly, it seemed to me that there is a border or cross line. It lies near 5-6-million unique users per month when you can be on their radar. So we are near [that]. Let's see.

Emma: My name is Emma. And I work with an organization called Just Vision. And we produce digital media and documentary films about Israel, Palestine, and specifically focusing on grassroots leadership and community organizing. And one of the projects that we have is a site that's similar to a lot of what you guys have shared. It's called Local Call, and it's an alternative Hebrew-language blog within Israel that works to agitate in the mainstream media there. And my question is coming off of something Enock said, which was in relationship to how your stories get picked up by the mainstream media and how you see that as beneficial as it may be validation for the work you are doing. And I wanted to hear from others about how you navigate relationships within the media landscapes that you're working in. And do you see that as a goal to be integrating or getting picked up by those mainstream media outlets? Or, is it more adversarial the type of relationship that you have?

Kelly G. Niknejad: It keeps changing. It depends who's president and what the U.S. foreign policy is. It's very difficult. When we were at PBS, we were getting picked up all the time. We were being quoted all the time. We were getting inundated with requests from reporters. Since we switched, I don't know if it's a kind of advers--…. First of all, if we get quoted, it's the Guardian that's going to get quoted, not Tehran Bureau. And most news organizations don't want to quote another, like, you know, they are competitors. So it was

amazing…. It's amazing to watch our stuff get picked up, copy and pasted with absolutely no reference. So right now…. I think in the past, it was more—it was friendlier, and I think right now it's much more adversarial, because we're going against the stream.

Carlos Salamanca: In our case, we do not have a bad nor a great relationship with traditional media. We have great relationship with other media, as independent journalism sites in Central America. For example, Guatemala, Nomada, plus Publica, Confidencial in Nicaragua. But with traditional media, in cyber, it's a small market in a small country. So some of our stories reach a lot of people on the internet; although, traditional media do not replicate them.

Trever Snapp: I think the first thing you need to start with, I guess, yeah, I mean, we're all very close to the ground working with people who have biases, obviously, but it's about having a verified, accurate journalism product. And I think that most news organizations, regionally or internationally, are quite interested in that if they can trust it, but that relationship takes a lot of time. I mean, you know, B'Tselem in Palestine, Israel, they've been working on this for a long time. They have a great, strong network, and they tend to have a lot of luck getting their material into media. But it's just about trust. But it's also, yeah, it's also another issue. They have different agendas than maybe the people on the ground do. And navigating that and bridging that is, I think, a really important thing to do, but it's definitely not an easy thing to do.

Galina Timchenko: We have two projects. One we call Meduza's Friends, and we picked up a few independent and high-quality media and gave them—are sharing our audience with them, putting the widgets and the special blogs or titles to our first page. And second is Meduza Care. There are a lot of NGOs media in Russia, and they have no chance to reach audience. Audience is too small. So we do free-of-charge promo through banners on our sites to these NGOs. And that, it seems to me, it's very good example of relationships.

Enock Nyariki: At Hivisasa, we have become the go-to place when you're at something that's happened at some remote place, part of the country. If you go to our site, you are most likely to find the story, because we tend to report things as they happen. So we've had a lot of requests from the other mainstream media houses, who want to pursue or to make a further story on something we've done. So it seems like it's working pretty well for us.

Andrei Dynko: In Belarus, simply this new media became the mainstream. We became the mainstream now.

Faruq: Hi. My name is Faruq. I'm from Kyrgyzstan. In most former Soviet Union countries, the governments try to block webpage, even social media. I would like to know, what's the situation in your countries in this sphere? And also, it would be nice to hear what kind of methods and pressure your governments [use] for keeping in control with the community and journalists? Thank you.

Galina Timchenko: I can start. You know, Russian authorities didn't block us, thanks, God. But on the second day of our job, Kyrgyzstan authorities, they blocked us in all country of Kyrgyzstan. And for a year-and-a-half, we played cat and mouse. We did special applications. They block us through mobile operators and so on and so on. And our last attempt was to put our pages on the Google Cloud servers in Kyrgyzstan. And Kyrgyzstan authorities yesterday tried to block us, and Google went down for all over Kyrgyzstan. So after half-an-hour, they re-block our site, and we are in Kyrgyzstan—we can open in Kyrgyzstan freely. We have a lot of technical methods and tweaks to avoid blocking, but frankly, I do not share all of them with you. Sorry. [laughter]

Trevor Snapp: Yeah. I mean, we have a similar cat-and-mouse relationship with the authorities. It's constantly evolving. It's constantly changing. And on the ground, it's incredibly dangerous to do this kind of work in Sudan. I mean, torture is common. Arrest is common. Yeah, it's pretty high-risk stuff, but it's also stuff that I think people believe in enough to take these risks. Yeah, it's being stubborn and patient and very, very cautious.

Carlos Salamanca: In our case, regarding the government, it's really hasn't been difficult to make journalism; although, going to the ground may be dangerous regarding the government. It has not been difficult. I really do not know why, because it's a difficult country to live in. But what has been difficult is to reach information and to be able to interview. For example, El Faro hasn't been able to interview any of the last five presidents, because—I guess five or four—because they don't give us interview, because we are the only ones that make uncomfortable questions.

Kelly G. Nyariki: In 2009, we were able to use—actually really effectively deal with it. There was a service of denial attack. They took our website down, because everybody was getting their news from us. And I was sitting there with all this information coming in from sources that I knew. So I started using Twitter to put the story out. And I think I was probably one of the—it was one of the first places that started using Twitter effectively. So in two days, I went from having like 40 or 60 followers to 19,000. And now it's more subtle. One source inside the country told me once that, "If we can't get to you directly, we'll get to you indirectly." And so the Iranian establishment has foot soldiers. And depending on how sophisticated or unsophisticated the media is, the person who's kind of assigned to that website to tarnish your credibility to make it go away is that much more sophisticated.

So when we were at PBS, we were Frontline, the person assigned to discredit us was very articulate. The syntax was perfect. Commas in the right places. And so as soon as we had a story, you know, he'd come out and say—he—I'm assuming it's a he—would say that, "Oh, you guys are lying. This is not… There

weren't this many protestors. You're lying about this. You're lying about that." And when I tried to cut him off from scaring all of our other commenters away, they go to the ombudsmen. And if the ombuds…. If what they say about us feeds the ombudsmen's own latent prejudices and biases about other Iranians covering Iran, then they have a very effective method. But if you're doing your job, and you're doing it well, and you know that the truth is on your side, it somehow pulls you through. And you always find alternative ways of doing things.

Enock Nyariki: And in Kenya, actually, right now we are enjoying very, very print media freedoms, but that was not the situation before 2012. After 2012, when someone who is actually considered a dictator left office, we've enjoyed a lot of freedoms. So right now, we don't see cases of journalists being largely arrested, but we have a few instances. But the 2010 constitution, which is the independence one, has given journalists a lot of freedoms. So we are quite good at that.

Nilsa Varela: Hello. I'm Nilsa Varela from Sembra Media and also Diario El Vistazo. I would like to know how to return the content to the community that you are covering. I ask because I work in an oil region of Venezuela, where we have a little penetration of internet and we also have—[cell phone ringing]… It's not my cell phone.

Galina Timchenko: It's Putin game. [laughter/applause]

Nilsa Varela: OK. I'm asking because I work in an oil region of Venezuela, where it's a little penetration of internet and also we have communities that don't know how to use technology. And I want to know, like Nuba Reports, how do you make it possible [to] return the content that you cover to that community?

Trevor Snapp: So in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, where a lot of our team operates, we do mobile cinemas. So we have a team that—actually right now because their motorbike is broken—but they will walk for hours to different villages and they will show our films. They usually start at 9:00 and end about 5:00. They do about five different rounds. People just like it so much, but that's not a huge amount of people. But these are places that have no cellular network, that have no internet, that have no digital. But the other thing that we're looking…. I mean, a lot of this wouldn't have worked three or four years ago. You know, there wasn't enough mobile and internet penetration inside Sudan to justify even doing this. But it's literally been the last few years where at least there's enough now. It's only going to increase, and it's going to increase exponentially. So I do think, you know, in the next three or four years, what we're doing now is going to be omnipresent across Sudan and undeniable.

But the other thing, you know, we're looking at and people have used quite effectively in Africa is SMS messaging. So they'll be sending out updates and getting updates through that. And then we're also talking to a number of radio

partners on the ground and also looking at shortwave. You can beam in shortwave for about a half-hour for—$200 for like a half-hour. So radios is another way of doing it.

But it's, yeah, it's really complicated and difficult in these kinds of [countries]. And that's the thing, I mean, it's great, because the internet allows you to get around the barricades, but it makes it still very difficult for people to actually read this. Because what people want to read is the newspapers in Sudan actually. It's not old fashioned there. People love newspapers, and they share them amongst themselves. But you can't do that. So yeah, we're not…. It's just, yeah, it's just tough.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: But one case that I found really interesting, and I would like Enock to just mention it very briefly, related to this, is how you do adapt. You were telling us earlier how in your case some of the advertising, you're doing it on print.

Trevor Snapp: Say that again.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: For Enock. That they do the advertising on print. That you do the advertising on print, even though everything is mobile, and your whole Hivisasa experience is mobile. Like Trevor was saying that they're adapting to the situation. In your case, you're adapting to the situation, because the advertising people didn't want it—I understand—they didn't want it online. They wanted to see their ads on print. So you created a printed magazine of advertising to distribute in the communities, no? In the counties, no? Is this right or not?

Enock Nyariki: Yeah, it is actually. It's something we are testing and wanted to see if it worked. So we rolled it out in one of the counties called Elgeyo-Marakwet, where we go to local businesses who are actually the people we target to work with us on our site. But now in this case, because they want to see their ads on paper, so we went and they gave us their ads and we printed them with some, of course, some interesting stories from that area. But we do it monthly. And so far, it's been doing well. We've run it, I think, in this or that month.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: OK. I think...

Woman: We're out of time.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: We don't have anymore….

Woman: Do you need to say something?

Maria Teresa Ronderos: No. No.

Man: We're done.

Maria Teresa Ronderos: We're done. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[Applause.]