Colaboración sin Fronteras: Exploring the potential of collaborative multimedia cross-border investigative reporting in Latin America

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Abstract
The Latin American media faces many of the same financial pressures that have challenged the watchdog role of commercial media in other regions. At the same time, the region’s media continues to struggle with escalating threats to freedom of expression by organized crime and governments. As a result, much of the mainstream media has reverted to superficiality and sensationalism. Recently, however, development in digital technology has engendered the creation or rapid expansion of several online investigative journalism incubators that are now leading the way in human rights and corruption reporting. To explore the potential for in-depth reporting on cross-border trends in organized crime, the outlets formed Colaboración sin Fronteras, a new joint venture launched in April, 2011 among Verdad Abierta (Open Truth) and Fundación InSight Crime in Colombia; El Faro (The Lighthouse) in El Salvador; Plaza Pública (Public Forum) in Guatemala; and Animal Político (Political Animal) in Mexico. This paper hypothesizes that cross-border investigative collaborations among these outlets will improve the quality, security and sustainability of online investigate journalism in Latin America and justify the effort required to coordinate such projects. This paper addresses the following key questions to evaluate the success of the collaboration:
• Quality: Did the collaborative multimedia reporting projects strengthen the digital media and investigative reporting skills of each individual outlet? Did the collaborative project lead to the incorporation of new reporting techniques or editorial policies?
• Security: Are outlets willing to take more security risks in reporting with the support of a network of investigative outlets publishing the same stories at the same time? Do the outlets modify or create a security policy as a result of the project?
Sustainability (linked to readership): Did the investigations generate more web traffic for each of the outlets compared to similar investigations with a national scope? Will the collaboration lead to new approaches to generating income? Do the outlets have plans for future collaborations with other outlets in the network?

**Keywords**: collaboration, investigation, multimedia, networks, security

**Executive Summary**

Journalists across Latin America face increasing threats as organized crime sweeps across the region, governments turn their backs on human rights violations and media conglomerates dominate the news industry. A collective investigation into organized crime by independent online investigative outlets could serve the dual purpose of revealing how organized crime networks operate and perpetuate human rights abuses, while also drawing a new audience, increasing revenue and dramatically change in the way small online outlets inform the regional debate. Four media outlets participated in a six-month experiment to produce two investigations on the human rights fallout of organized crime in the region. This study finds that:

- All outlets felt that that their outlet had improved as a result of the collaboration.
- Exposure to new multimedia formats proved effective in inspiring experimentation.
- All outlets experiences cited an improvement in accuracy, planning and topics covered for their outlets investigative reporting as a result of the investigation.
Collaboration obliged participants to develop a more universal perspective to understand how similar phenomena are happening region-wide.

Indicating the need for more training and awareness raising in this critical area, there was little change in security awareness or action as a result of the collaboration.

All outlets reported either running the same or less risk in terms of digital security. During this collaboration, in part because participants deliberately avoided sharing sensitive information exchanged digitally.

One aspect this activity surfaced was the need for creating balance between information to make collaboration more effective but safe versus inspiration to ‘go beyond’ and push the limits of safety, emboldened by the regional solidarity.

Collaboration led the outlets to work and consult with outlets and journalists that they wouldn’t have before. Encouragingly these networks appear robust and plan to maintain working relationships with other members of the collaboration in some capacity.

Clearer project goals, editorial policy and authority by coordinators would have ensured a smoother process and stronger final product.

Introduction

The Latin American media faces many of the same political and financial pressures that challenge the watchdog role of media
globally. Simultaneously, it continues to struggle with escalating threats to freedom of expression by organized crime. The result is that much of the mainstream media has reverted to superficiality and sensationalism, avoiding coverage of critical issues, in order to generate much-needed income.

Recently, however, development in digital technology has engendered the creation of several online investigative journalism incubators that are now leading the way in human rights, corruption and organized crime reporting. They build advanced databases to track corruption and campaign financing, create visualizations to help the public understand the impact of government mismanagement and in many cases bring an end to human rights abuses simply by putting information online.

Challenges for these outlets include: lack of digital media and investigative reporting training opportunities, dependency on traditional media to disseminate findings to a larger audience, vulnerability of journalists due to lack of protection by a media house, contained impact of reporting due to lack of coordinated regional investigations, and absence of a strong business model to compensate for loss of advertising revenue. In order to overcome these challenges, the study focused on a collaborative project that sought to enable a network of digital media outlets to produce a high-quality multimedia investigation that reveals regional trends of the impact of organized crime on human rights.

This study investigates both the process of collaboration among the selected outlets, as well as the impact on the resultant reporting. It addressed the following key issues:

- Quality, diversity and regional relevance of investigative
and multimedia content

- Physical and digital security and awareness and practices
- Sustainability of the collaborative network
- Collaborative model in terms of effective structure to achieve established goals

Overview of Project and Research

The project was overseen and funded by Internews, an international non-profit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need. The Internews Global Human Rights program is focused on increasing coverage of human rights issues across the world. InSight Crime, an online media outlet focused on investigating organized crime in Latin America, coordinated and edited the collaborative project. InSight Crime has created a network of journalists from niche local investigative outlets across Latin America.

Table 1: Media Experience in years

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Editor's experience</th>
<th>Online Outlet Time</th>
<th>Outlet's investigative experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Verdad Abierta</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Animal Político</td>
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<td>El Faro</td>
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<td>Plaza Pública</td>
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The project used the following criteria to invite the **four outlets** to participate: online-only publication, investigative reporting experience and location in an area of organized crime activity. New or redesigned, online, investigative journalism projects that have produced ground-breaking reporting in their countries include *Verdad Abierta* (Open Truth) in Colombia; *El Faro* (The Lighthouse) in El Salvador; *Plaza Pública* (Public Forum) in Guatemala; and *Animal Político* (Political Animal) in Mexico. *El Faro* has the longest history online and one of the longest traditions of investigative reporting along with *Ánilmal Político*, which has only been online for two years but has been conducting investigations for 12 years as well. *Verdad Abierta* and *Plaza Pública* were founded as online publications dedicated exclusively to investigate journalism, with the former operating for four years and the latter for two. Editors chosen from each outlet to participate each had at least a decade of journalistic experience.

The collaboration was conducted over seven months from April to October, 2012:

- Pre-activity interviews to identify priority areas for collaboration
- 3-day coordinating meeting in Bogotá with all four partners in April 27-29, 2012 to select a thematic focus, determine editorial, legal and ethical policies and develop workplans and timeline for the two investigations.
- Post-meeting follow-up with InSight Crime coordinator to finalize topics
• Grant issued to each outlet to cover reporting and publication costs
• Mid-term meetings between two partners and the coordinator for each investigation
• Joint editing process among partners and InSight Crime coordinator
• Publication of two sets of four independent investigations on each outlet’s mini-site developed for the project and on InSight Crime: one on the topic displacement and another of modern slavery by organized crime.
• Post-publication assessment among partners and InSight Crime coordinator

Research Methodology

The research combined qualitative and quantitative research methods, using both in-depth interviews and questionnaires. The research consisted primarily of a pre-lab survey as well as in-depth interviews and a post-lab questionnaire conducted several weeks after the publication of the first of two investigations. The research generated data through:

• A pre-event online survey of the four selected outlets.
• Six semi-structured short interviews after the publication of the first series of investigations with the four editors as well as the two InSight Crime coordinators.
A post-collaboration online survey completed by participants after the publication of the first series of investigations.

**Research Findings**

The following section outlines the findings of the pre and post event research conducted to address the above research questions.

**Quality:** Did the collaborative multimedia reporting projects strengthen the digital media and investigative reporting skills of each individual outlet? Did the collaborative project lead to the incorporation of new reporting techniques or editorial policies?

All outlets either agreed or strongly agreed that their outlet had improved as a result of the collaboration and two strongly agreed and two agreed that their process for planning an investigation improved as a result of the collaboration.

Three of the four agreed that they have improved the way they work with new sources of information as a result of the collaboration. Measurements of the quality of the collaboration focused on: use of multimedia, depth of investigative reporting, development of regional perspective and impact on editorial processes. Two outlets listed improved investigative reporting techniques and diversification of multimedia reporting tools as a way in which the collaboration helped their media outlet develop. No outlets reported a better understanding of journalistic ethics as a way the collaboration helped their organization develop.
Multimedia production: Multimedia exposure proved effective. Partners with little previous experience in multimedia production saw the largest adoption of multimedia content production. The participant outlets responses for whether they used multimedia reporting tools that they would not have considered before evenly covered the range from complete disagreement to complete agreement. Half of the outlets said that improved multimedia reporting skills helped the development of their outlet. The responses corresponded with the outlets’ previous experience with multimedia content. On average, those outlets that did not have a tradition of multimedia storytelling to accompany investigative reporting found at least one multimedia component that they plan to integrate into their reporting cycle.

According to Omar Sánchez de Tagle, deputy editor of Animal Político, the pure volume of investigative content produced through the project led to an expanded exploration of multimedia content. “For the multimedia component, we sat down for weeks to think about how to present all the information we had online.” They sited improved video and photography content as crucial tools to continuing to grow their multimedia presence.

For María Teresa Ronderos, editor of Verdad Abierta, an outlet that has a tradition of telling stories through multimedia, “In terms of multimedia, we did a bit more than usual but not much.” She noted that several of the other outlets consulted with her on their own planning of multimedia content, such as with Plaza Pública, who further explored the development of Flash elements.
For *El Faro*, which specialized in long-form narrative journalism online, the introduction of video was the most transformative. “The potential of multimedia resources is not a subject we think about,” Óscar Martínez explained. The grant offered the financial opportunity to grow their documentary work. In the previous year, *El Faro* produced only three videos. Halfway through the collaboration, they have produced two short documentaries of 20 minutes each. In the next two years they have created a production timetable to incorporate a short documentary of 20-25 minutes into one investigation per month, adding to a video library at a rate of 12 videos per year.

**Investigative reporting:** All outlets experiences cited an improvement in accuracy, planning and topics covered for their outlets investigative reporting as a result of the investigation, with
the most drastic change experienced by the outlets newest to investigative reporting. The majority of partners strongly agreed that the experience of the collaboration strengthened the accuracy of their reporting while two strongly agreed, one strongly agreed and one neither agreed nor disagreed that the quality of information that they produce improved as a result of the project. The majority either agreed or strongly agreed that they covered topics they never would have covered otherwise.

The youngest outlets or those newest to investigative reporting registered the most significant change to the quality of their investigative reporting content. “We revisited basic questions of journalism in face of pressure to sell a story and we tightened the content in the headline and lead,” said Martín Rodríguez of Plaza Pública. “After seeing how the story was presented across platforms we made some changes to our graphic presentation and narrative style using others as a reference.” Working with a team of veteran journalists, “obliged us to increase the rigorousness of our reporting and feel more confidence and trust since we were backed by international support and exposure.”

Ánimal Político’s previous experience in investigative journalism had been focused on conducting investigations that lasted for one or two weeks. “It was a good opportunity for two journalists to dedicate two months to a solid topic, which generated a lot of information and content and motivated us to do another kind of journalism,” explained Sánchez. “It was a huge challenge to find more sources and we needed the support of InSight Crime in-country to deliver on our portion of the investigation.”

The collaboration motivated Verdad Abierta, which specializes in revealing secrets of Colombia’s violent past, to examine both the
present. “Verdad Abierta uncovers secrets of the past,” explained María Teresa Ronderos. “This theme forced us to look at what is happening today and realize these trends are not something that happened but rather something that continues to happen.” In order to increase the regional relevance and appeal, they also provided more context and told more present-day stories. “We had to write more comprehensively and historically,” she said.

**Regional Perspective:** Collaboration obliged participants to develop a wider regional perspective to understand how similar phenomena are happening region-wide. Half of the participants agreed the experience led them to report on countries they never would have considered.

Ronderos said that the project reminded them that nobody is isolated in the topics they are reporting. “Putting four stories together has more value than publishing them one by one because it illustrates a regional problem,” she said. It widened their perspective to consider the regional scope of pressing issues. “I think the impact of collaborating with media in three other countries was that we came to understand two phenomena that are unfolding from Colombia to Mexico in very similar ways,” said Sánchez.

**Editing Process:** As participating outlets had a national staff, the editing process helped them understand how people view their content from the outside in terms of reader comprehension.

*El Faro* has a special section that has been carrying out investigative reporting on regional violence for two years. “Like-minded media outlets serve as a test audience,” explained Martínez. “I want to continue the dynamic.” Feedback from editors from outside national borders who are standard-bearers for quality
journalism also helped *Verdad Abierta, Plaza Pública* and *Animal Pólitico* adapt content to provide more context for external readers.

*InSight Crime* coordinators’ perceptive diverged in the following ways from that of the participants. Coordinators felt that the quality of reporting was limited by some poor story choices that were out of the media’s depth or reach that hindered the possibility of them complying with objectives and there was confusion about the difference between investigative and narrative journalism and the result was much more of the former than the latter. In terms of comprehensive story packages, they felt there was consistent resistance to exploring new modes of investigation, topics and multimedia content, which came through in a lack of complexity in the stories produced. The attempts to improve quality through collaborative editing were less evident in the final product. The mid-term check-ins generated a good discussion but in most case it didn’t fix what we identified was wrong in the reporting process and in the editing process, most of the suggestions being made were not necessarily being incorporated. They did, however, note that a barrier was broke in that participants were interested in what each other were doing and the collaboration made them at least think outside their comfort zone.

**Security:** Are outlets willing to take more security risks in reporting with the support of a network of investigative outlets publishing the same stories at the same time? Do the outlets modify or create a security policy as a result of the project?
Indicating the need for more training and awareness-raising in this critical area, there was very little change in security awareness or action as a result of the collaboration.

Two outlets believed the investigations increased their physical risk as they published more sensitive content than they normally run. There was a slight decrease in terms of physical security, security of sources and security of digital tools of the collaboration in comparison to their regular reporting. All outlets had a security policy before the collaboration and all of the outlets adapted those security protocol based on the InSight Crime model and discussion in Bogotá. The impact of the collaboration on security focuses primarily on security policy and procedures, digital security and security in collaboration.

**Security policy and procedures:** Only one outlet reported a change in their awareness of security risks as a result of the collaboration. This outlet’s awareness of physical risk, risks to sources, security protocol and partner security moved from fair to good. Two outlets reported that a greater awareness of security risk was a benefit of the collaboration. Generally the focus and resources of this project would not support a widespread overhaul of security policies to each outlet minimized its personal risk. All of the media outlets had security policies and procedures in place before the coordination meeting and all adapted them based on the meeting in Bogotá though adherence was varied.

Ánimal Político developed a short safety protocol based on the model suggested by InSight Crime but does not offer life insurance for its reporters. Adherence was another matter. According to Sánchez, one of their reporters disappeared for a few days while on assignment for this project before reappearing unharmed. “All the
safety protocol were broken after he entered a dark area without cellphone service,” Sánchez explained.

Plaza Pública did invest in life insurance and according to Rodriguez, both editors and reporters are much more conscious of safety issues and they plan to continue purchasing life insurance that they bought through the grant.

Both El Faro and Verdad Abierta have longstanding safety protocol in place. In addition, Martínez from El Faro didn’t believe that the topics covered caused serious security concerns since they did not denounce specific armed actor or expose hidden corruption. The names of judges and gangs were mentioned but no new incriminating information was revealed. Many participants felt that if incriminating content had been revealed or shared, additional security protocol would have been needed.

All outlets reported either running the same or less risk in terms of digital security during this collaboration, in part because participants deliberately avoided sharing sensitive information exchanged digitally. The mechanisms of the project for sharing information were generally considered unsafe and content was shared after sources had been anonymized to present fewer security risks. “If we were to exchange information across borders about state security apparatus, the police, paramilitary ties to businesses, subjects like that, we would need more precautions such as encryption and hushmail,” explained Martínez. He also noted that the level of sophistication of armed groups is much higher in the other partner countries is much higher so the risks of being hacked are lower in El Salvador. Rodriguez felt DropBox was especially vulnerable and encryption methods should be used in the future.
Security in collaboration: One aspect this training surfaced was the need for creating balance between information to make collaboration more effective but safe versus inspiration to ‘go beyond’ and push the limits of safety, emboldened by the regional solidarity. Half of the journalists felt they ran more physical security risk as part of the collaboration while half reported no change in physical security risk. This was associated with journalists reporting more aggressively for the collaboration. Several outlets said their overall security was strengthened by international publication in several countries. Two outlets reported that a greater awareness of security risk was a benefit of the collaboration.

Many of the partners had already formed content exchange agreements in order to minimize the chances of retaliation. “El Faro is always looking to build stronger alliances with similar media,” explained Martínez, “We think it gives us more security. When criminals see that we are publishing in alliance with other media in other countries, it gives us more protection.” Rodríguez agreed that the increased risk by deeper investigative reporting was mitigated by the safety provided by broader dissemination. “The project forced us to strengthen the rigor and quality of reporting and it gave us more confidence to know that it would be published in four countries,” he said.

Sustainability (linked to readership): Did the investigations generate more web traffic for each of the outlets compared to similar investigations with a national scope? Will the collaboration lead to new approaches to generating income? Do the outlets have plans for future collaborations with other outlets in the network?

Collaboration led the outlets to work with and consult with outlets and journalists that they wouldn’t have before. Encouragingly
these networks appear robust and plan to maintain relationships with other members in some capacity. For one outlet, collaboration has led to a new financial strategy though all reported an increase in web traffic.

**Partner communication:** For all participants, building relationships with other partners was one of the major benefits of the collaboration to their media outlet. Less experienced outlets sought advice on use of sources, writing style, use of anonymous sources and presentation of documents while others worked quite closely and visited each other during the course of investigation. *Animal Político* worked in-country with *InSight Crime* to conduct investigations and consulted with *Verdad Abierta* on the use of anonymous sources. Journalists from *El Faro* also travelled to Guatemala to work with *Plaza Pública* staff on investigations and to México, where the author of the first *Animal Político* investigation explained the evolution of their coverage. Ronderos said *El Faro* was especially helpful in providing guidance on context. “El Faro publishes regionally but for the rest the context perspective was new,” explained Ronderos, who also provided guidance to partners on presentation of multimedia content and use of maps.

**Audience reach and exposure:** All outlets identified audience reach, international focus and getting to know partners as key benefits of the collaboration and many planned to continue to pursue partnerships with other members of the collaboration. All outlets reported an increase in web traffic as a result of the collaboration and one reported developing a new financial strategy as a result of the collaboration and one establishing a new formal partnership with another partner.
“The variety of digital content, the navigability in two or three clicks and the creation of the mini-site generated a lot of visits,” explained Sánchez, who also reported higher rates of social media activity generated by the story. “We are interested in how long people stayed on the page, which was an average of 25 minutes, which is an achievement for us. We also generate traffic for the other partner outlets.” Ánimal Político is now planning to produce a monthly long-term investigative piece.

Many outlets have plans for forming or expanding formal relationships among partners ranging from content exchange to revising each other’s content. Martínez recently returned from a journalism conference in Colombia hosted by Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberamericano where Argentinian and Peruvian journalists who had seen the first investigation and were interested in the collaborative project approached him. “We can’t pretend we are going to form alliances between all the partners,” said Martínez. “The best idea would be to conduct investigations in pairs in the future.”

Assessing the Structure of the Collaboration

In addition to addressing the research question posed at the beginning of the project, the study also developed an additional focus on the process of collaboration itself. In order to achieve the higher goals, the collaborative structure was assessed continually, beginning with a pre-event survey. This initial tool helped define the structure for the collaboration, identify potential roadblocks and preferred methods of communication, as well as initiating the discussion around content topics and quality.
The main findings from the initial survey around process were:

- Participants strongly preferred a loose collaboration in which everyone agrees on a type of human rights violation to investigate independently.

- Two outlets identified the editing process and editorial authority as a potential obstacle to the collaboration, which was borne out.

- Three outlets said a shared calendar and monthly meetings among editors would be important.

- Only one outlet thought that a meeting once every two weeks between reporters working on an investigation and the *InSight Crime* coordinator would be beneficial.

While all outlets said they learned from the planning and editing process, the planning process and editorial support from *InSight Crime* were viewed as much more valuable than the mid-investigation check-ins and collective editing process. The coordination and editing roles were not clearly defined, which caused delays and confusion.

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<th>Ranking of usefulness of collaborative structures</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Pre-meeting questionnaire and planning meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Editorial support from Insight Crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Mid-investigation meetings with two partner outlets and <em>InSight Crime</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Collaborative editing process</td>
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Findings focus on the administration, communication, editing and recommendations for future collaborations.
**Administration:** Most of the outlets cited the bureaucracy of their grants to be out of proportion with the amount of funding they received. Two outlets reported exceeding their budgets and absorbing those extra costs. All felt that a more extended grant period with a larger scope of work was needed to justify the administrative burden.

**Communication:** Perhaps surprisingly for print journalists, personal communications using Skype or similar over written communication using email is seen as more effective. Most participants felt that the communications mechanisms should have been clearly delineated from the outset with an emphasis on Skype over e-mail. The Skype calls enabled the project to advance much more concretely than long series of e-mail exchanges. Two participants cited received seven e-mail exchanges about titles for the series and ten e-mails a week for editing as laborious. “The system for communication should have been made clear in Colombia,” said Martínez. “There should have been ground-rules for calls.”

**Editing:** A lack of agreed-upon editorial authority led to frequent delays, frustration by partners about critical editorial feedback and a simplified structure for the second series of investigations in which editing was done in pairs instead of as a whole group.

“At the end we divided the editing to minimize the chaos and to reduce the time needed for editing,” explained Sánchez, “If we had more time then we could have more editors. We were at risk that the information would not be relevant by the time we published.” “At Verdad Abierta we work much faster,” Ronderos said. “Our story was ready a month and a half early and we had to do the work twice to update all the numbers so they wouldn’t be outdated. This put us
behind. The coordination became tangled a bit with too much back and forth and about who was sending what to whom and everyone reading everything.”

Committing to an editorial workflow and timeline, choosing topics that are relevant over a longer span of time and prioritizing practicality and efficiency over consensus were identified as solutions explored during the second half of the project. Most participants said the second round of investigations went much smoother because the timeline is stricter, the number of editors reduced and a publication plan in place. “We should have wasted less time in trying to get everyone to agree about everything and instead have more clarity about the review process,” explained Ronderos.

Animal Político said the extra time was beneficial for them. “We did take longer in editing but it gave us more time to strengthen the content,” said Sánchez, who said InSight Crime’s visit to their office was crucial to understanding how the outlet operated. “By the second story we had improved the time, quality and exchange of ideas.”

Martínez pointed that while clearer rules and a managed process would have helped, the question of editorial authority is a sticky one. “Perhaps we should have a more extensive debate about editing but the question of editing will never be resolved,” he said. “We could have had a more open discussion and come up with a board of editors in which everyone sat down and discussed the themes more deeply but not with the time constraints of this project.”
Conclusions and Recommendations

Due to the timeline of this project, with final investigative reporting projects published on October 28, 2012 this study provides insight into the collaborative process but has yet to generate the audience and financial data to effectively address issues of long-term impact on quality and security and immediate or long-term impact on sustainability. While this research elucidates many of the factors that influence a successful collaborative journalism project, it does not address whether the collaboration yielded the ultimate goals of participants and coordinators. Content analysis, a comprehensive security assessment and website traffic analytics as well as continued interviews with participants would help establish the long-term impact of the collaboration.

Initial findings suggest that the collaboration inspired outlets to improve their investigative process, explore multimedia production tools and develop a more regional perspective while impact on security of each outlet was limited and the most promising finding in terms of sustainability was a universal desire to continue the relationships developed during the collaboration and a common sentiment that the collaboration became increasingly valuable during the second of two joint investigations once the participants knew each other better and the editorial process ran more smoothly.

However, the most significant stumbling block identified by participants and coordinators alike were related to the collaborative process, which is reflected in the recommendations below. Much of these recommendations, both from partners and coordinators,
revolve around the need for both clear objectives and a more structured editorial policy.

Further study into permanent changes in content, evolution of security policies and procedures and audience and revenue analysis are warranted in order to understand the value added of the collaboration.

**All of the outlets agreed that with more time and joint projects, the collaborative process would have become much smoother.** Participants:

- Lengthen the original planning meeting and adhere to a strict agenda to meet goals.

- Invite both an editor and a reporter to the planning meeting to ensure richness and depth of each theme and strengthen relationships and build trust among participants.

- Devote more time to defining themes through more open debate in order to ensure each partner makes a valuable contribution and that problems are anticipated and addressed.

- Require participants to sign a one-page written agreement before the planning meeting that outlines the guidelines for the collaboration, including editorial policy.

- Incorporate digital security policies, a strict editorial workflow and timeline.

- Assign two reporters to conduct investigations together in one country.
• Ensure that outlets produce several investigations over a longer period of time with an evaluation mechanism in place to modify the model after each publication.

Coordinators’ Perspective:

• Define goals of the collaboration when soliciting participants and accept only those who commit to a single collaborative investigation that requires daily communication.

• Focus on a collaborative process in the conception and design but establish external editorial control to ensure a coherent project and product.

• Determine the priorities of the project: a unified project that explains a regional trend, developing investigative journalism skills through a more student-teacher dynamic or building one-on-one relationships and design the project to meet that goal.

Recommendations

• Determine whether the goal of the collaboration is a quality final product, capacity-building for partners or building relationships within the network.

• Design a structure that relies on a strict editorial process to develop a unified product, a trainer-trainee dynamic for capacity building and a flexibility for relationship building.

• Launch an open solicitation with clear selection guidelines for participation.
• Develop an editorial workflow to meet goals of the project with partners signing a written agreement to comply with structure.

• Evaluate proposed themes based on project goals and partner’s demonstrated capacity to carry out reporting and ensure all reporters attend coordinating meeting.

• Integrate processes to meet secondary goals such as multimedia reporting development by working directly with the graphics team through a central multimedia coordinator.

• Conduct a comprehensive physical and digital security assessment for high-risk collaborations and develop security protocol that all partners adhere to.

• Integrate an expert in website optimization and social media marketing to ensure financial benefits for participants and common strategies for ensuring sustainability.

• Extend timeline to at least a year and lower intensity of collaboration.