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8 **'Working with the media taught us a lot':**

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10 **Understanding *The Guardian's* Katine initiative**

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21 **Abstract**

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24 One of the more important ventures in the world of media and development over the past decade has
25 been *The Guardian* newspaper's "Katine" project in Uganda. The newspaper, with funding from its
26 readers and Barclays Bank, put more than two and a half million pounds into a Ugandan sub-county
27 over the course of four years. The project was profiled on a dedicated Guardian micro-site, with
28 regular updates in the printed edition of the newspaper. In this article I look at the relationship that
29 developed between journalists and the NGO and show that the experience was both disorienting and
30 reorienting for the development project that was being implemented. The scrutiny of the project that
31 appeared on the microsite disoriented the NGO, making its work the subject of public criticism. The
32 particular issues explored by journalists also reoriented what the NGO did on the ground. I also point
33 to the ways the relationship grew more settled as the project moved along, suggesting the amount of
34 work that sometimes goes into what is often characterised as the relatively uncritical relationship
35 between journalists and NGOs.
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¹ I would like to give particular thanks to Kate Wright, Martin Scott, Penny Plowman and Dan Wroe
49 and two anonymous referees for comments on earlier drafts of this article. The interviews that
50 provide quotes for the article came out of a review of the Katine Initiative funded by The Guardian and
51 administered by the School of International Development at the University of East Anglia. Other
52 material was taken from the website www.guardian.co.uk/katine
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3 Keywords

4 *The Guardian*, NGOs, Journalism, Civil Society, International / Transnational Journalism, Internet
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10 **Introduction**

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13 The Katine initiative was a major development initiative that ran from 2007 to 2011. It was located in
14 Katine sub-county in eastern Uganda and was sponsored by readers of *The Guardian* and Barclays
15 Bank and was implemented by the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) AMREF. Over four years,
16 more than two and a half million pounds was channelled into development work in the sub-county.
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18 Journalists from the newspaper – sports writers, feature editors, staff from the health and environment
19 desks – went to Katine and described what they saw. The sub-county was also visited by politicians,
20 business leaders, development experts, and even the English Premier League Trophy (as part of a
21 football tournament). The novelty of the partnership was recognized for the way it brought
22 development to a wider audience, and the website won the 2008 International Visual Communications
23 Association's Clarion award and the 2008 One World Media "new media award". *The Guardian*,
24 Barclays and AMREF (the NGO responsible for the project) also won the 2010 Coffey International
25 Award for Excellence recognising the positive impact the project had had in promoting the UN's
26 Millennium Development Goals.²
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38 This public recognition needs to be understood against what turned out to be a difficult relationship.
39 The initiative trained a spotlight on the NGO and this was an often uncomfortable experience for those
40 involved. Parts of the project were picked apart by journalists and bloggers. In some cases, the NGO
41 changed its approach because of the focus of a particular reporter, with new elements being
42 introduced because they worked in media terms. *The Guardian* was both funding and reporting on the
43 project, and so the words of journalists, and what appeared on the website influenced the way the
44 project worked out on the ground. A senior manager at AMREF told me that 'being in the spotlight is
45 not something we are used to' and described the experience as a 'healing process'.³ A field worker
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54 ² AMREF is an acronym referring to the African Medical Research Foundation.

55 ³ Interview with management, Kampala country office, 1 July 2010.
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3 commented that 'with this project every small bit of what you do in the community is on the website'
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5 and that 'a newspaper is always on the watch, twenty-four hours...they see what you are
6 implementing, [if] you try to divert a bit [then] there is a big question'.⁴
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10 Later parts of the article look at examples of this scrutiny and how this was difficult for the NGO to
11 deal with. I give examples of what happened when stories of things going wrong appeared on the
12 website, and of commentators questioning the competence and ethics of the NGO. I also show the
13 relative power of journalists and how this shaped aspects of the project, an example that runs counter
14 to much of the literature on journalism and NGOs (where NGOs are assumed to have the upper hand)
15 (Cottle and Nolan 2007, Franks 2008, Polman 2010, Powers 2013). Amidst these discussions of
16 conflict in the project I also point to the ways the relationship grew more settled and, in some ways,
17 less critical over time. Over the course of the project, the NGO got better at managing the demands
18 of *The Guardian* as interest in the initiative within the paper appeared to fade. I make a point about
19 the amount of work that sometimes goes into what has often been assumed to be an easy and
20 relatively uncritical relationship that exists between journalists and NGOs. Before looking at the
21 project in more detail, I discuss some of the assumptions that characterise studies of NGOs and
22 journalism. I then introduce the Katine initiative and my own relationship to the project, before moving
23 onto examples from the field.
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39 **NGOs and journalism**

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42 NGOs have exercised a good degree of authorship over how their work appears in mainstream
43 media. In many of the places where they work they are assumed to be the good guys in a context
44 where most of the actors are a problem: corrupt governments, militias, armies, big business. While
45 academic work has long been critical of work in the NGO sector only very recently has the work of
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54 ⁴ Interview with field staff, Katine office, 5 July 2010. By "divert" the respondent meant "diverge" from
55 the project place, rather than anything that might imply corruption.
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3 NGOs come under similar levels of scrutiny in mainstream journalism (Fisher 1997).⁵ As Polman has
4 argued 'journalists scarcely question aid organizations' and often struggle to see the work of NGOs in
5 a critical light (2010). Lugo-Ocando and Nguyen, in a harshly worded critique of the way journalists
6 work with the development sector, suggest that 'not much has been done to investigate how the
7 media and aid agencies... interact with each other in shaping the agenda on international
8 development' and that the current state of affairs is 'opaque, superficial and ideologically biased' and
9 'an example of a failure of transparency and accountability' (Lugo-Ocando and Nguyen 2017: 71-73).
10 Rothmyer goes as far as to suggest that reporters writing about the developing world can be found
11 'routinely following the lead of press-savvy aid groups on topics such as war victims and refugees'
12 (2011: 4).⁶ NGOs are often presented as skilful in managing journalists, while journalists come across
13 as both dependent and sympathetic in their dealings with NGOs.
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25 In the following section I develop these ideas in light of the particular experience of the Katine
26 initiative. I discuss both the increasing sophistication with which NGOs approach their work with the
27 media. I look at the ways in which scholars have understood the position of journalists reporting on
28 development issues. I also question assumptions made above about the dependence and sympathy
29 of journalists or the apparent sophistication of 'press-savvy' NGOs. As the relationship between *The*
30 *Guardian* and AMREF shows it is not always a story of journalists being taken in, or of an aid
31 organisation charming a particular journalist into producing uncritical or unquestioning reporting.
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37 Even when it looks like a journalist is being uncritical we should not assume that this is something
38 arrived at unquestioningly or easily.
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Publicity is at the heart of the NGO enterprise, and good publicity is important for obvious reasons:
fund raising; awareness raising; and also because it helps NGOs influence policy and development
debates (Smith and Yanacopulos 2004, Powers 2013, 2016; Van Leuven and Joye 2014). Smaller

⁵ The recent crisis surrounding the use of sex workers by OXFAM staff in Haiti – and other stories of
abuse and corruption in the sector – illustrate how 'shocking' this sort of behavior appears when set
against the more usual way the work of NGOs working in humanitarian situations is reported.

⁶ Scholars working on the NGO sector have noted examples of NGOs being criticized by the media,
though this is more than outweighed by accounts that largely supportive (cf. Lewis 2007: 10-12).

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3 NGOs often concentrate publicity around fund-raising, with less of an interest in the mainstream
4 media; larger international NGOs need publicity for awareness-raising and campaigning and policy
5 work (Yanacopulos 2005).⁷ As Powers observes the identity of larger international NGOs is
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7 increasingly tied to their interest in global policy agendas (Powers 2016) and campaigning NGOs like
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9 OXFAM and ActionAid have professional press and publicity divisions, with journalists on the staff,
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11 and success is measured, in large part in media terms, by influencing global policy agendas (Jones
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13 2016). Smith and Yanacopulos make a general point about NGOs getting involved in a more complex
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15 'production and reception of development's public faces' as in many ways they have become more
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17 like media organisations (2004).
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21 This leads to the first set of observations around the sophistication of NGOs in their relationship to the
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23 media. Kimberly Abbott of the International Crisis Group has argued that 'NGOs are taking on more
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25 and more functions of news media in their capacity to gather and manage foreign news' (2009).⁸
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27 NGOs produce press releases and media packages and in many cases NGOs are behind the stories
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29 that appear in the mainstream media (Rothmyer 2011, Powers 2016). Suzanne Franks, a former BBC
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31 producer, makes a point about the 'growing media sophistication of NGOs', who 'send out well-trained
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33 staff – some of them former journalists – to produce well-edited packages and then offer them' to
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35 media organisations (2008: 31). Powers writes of NGOs with 'sizable public relations departments
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37 whose primary task historically has been to pursue media coverage' (2016: 12). A number of NGOs
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39 have should rather be thought of as 'expert news source organisations' ready with 'background
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41 information and reliable eyewitness accounts' (van Leuven and Joye 2014: 160). Wright makes an
42
43 interesting argument about the way digital technologies make it easier for NGOs to produce carefully
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45 constructed pieces in an effort to have their copy picked up by cash-strapped news organizations
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47 (2015).
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52 ⁷ This shift towards advocacy took on particular importance in the late 1990s and early 2000s as
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54 many international NGOs pulled out of direct "in-country" work, instead preferring to sub-contract their
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56 work to local civil society organizations working on development issues (Watkins and Swidler 2012:
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58 199).

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60 ⁸ <http://www.niemanlab.org/2009/11/kimberly-abbott-working-together-ngos-and-journalists-can-create-stronger-international-reporting/>

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5 In the above there is something close to Nick Davies's argument that newspaper reporting has
6 become a form of 'churnalism', with journalists simply relaying press releases over which they have
7 little direct input (Davies 2008). A 2014 study of reporting on development issues in the Belgian press,
8 for example, found that media reporting on development issues depended mostly on NGO press
9 statements, while a more recent study looking at media coverage of the UN's Millennium
10 Development Villages project found that most of it was 'derived from press releases' (Schiffrin and
11 Ariss 2017: 76).⁹ The picture is of hard-pressed journalists recycling the press releases and media
12 packages of well-resourced NGOs. Though as we will see later on the landscape inhabited by NGOs
13 is more diverse than this. International NGOs are not always as media-ready as they would like to be
14 and few organisations have the sort of media outfits available to the larger campaigning NGOs such
15 as OXFAM or Save the Children.
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26 The second set of observations concern what has been termed the 'social proximity' of journalists and
27 NGO workers (Powers 2016). In a recent article, Powers points to the way NGO workers and
28 journalists often see themselves as 'natural allies', sharing similar outlooks and values. There is a
29 sense in both professions, particularly those doing humanitarian work, that they are responding to
30 what are often acute crises and where it is important to quickly assemble some facts (cf. Hoijer 2004;
31 Cameron and Haanstra 2008). Though Powers' is more interested in the way this closeness
32 encourages NGOs to focus their media strategies on mainstream news outlets (rather than alternative
33 media sources), his work points to the assumed similarity between the professions. As one
34 respondent, a media officer from International Crisis Group told him: "they're sharing planes, they're
35 sharing cars, and they're sharing food. They're living together in many cases" (Powers 2016: 13).
36 Wright, in a discussion of the role freelance journalists play in producing the media content of many
37 NGOs, found one respondent describing their work as that of an 'activist', seeing this both as a way of
38 making sense of the blurred boundaries between the professions, and the emergence of a category of
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50 ⁹ The attraction for NGOs in this sort of coverage is relatively clear. A much cited study suggested
51 that for every New York Times article a disaster stricken country would receive an extra \$600,000 in
52 US humanitarian aid, while each additional death would only increase the amount by an additional
53 \$400 (Drury, Olsen and Belle 2005: 465).
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3 journalist that increasingly relies on commissioned work (2015: 14, see also Dichter 1999).
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6 These leads to what can seem like a given when it comes to writing about NGOs and journalists –the
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8 lack of questioning, the sense of alliance between the professions, the ‘media sophistication’ of
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10 NGOs. And yet the case material below shows a situation where questions were asked, where
11
12 distrust was part of the mix, and where the NGO often felt fairly unsophisticated when it came to
13
14 dealing with a media organisation. The larger point to make is that any relationship between an NGO
15
16 and a media organisation comes out of what are often complex sets of interactions, negotiations and
17
18 compromises, and it is helpful to observe these interactions in the making (cf. Wright 2015). In the
19
20 later case analysis, I use evidence from the Katine initiative to point to the amount of work that went
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22 into what became a more settled relationship between *The Guardian* and AMREF. Before discussing
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24 some of these interactions, however, a few more words on the project and the source material that
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26 forms the basis for the analysis.
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32 **The Katine initiative** 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55

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3 Katine was launched through a Guardian Christmas appeal back in 2007. Interested readers could
4 give a one-off donation or commit to giving a monthly sum. They could also track the progress of the
5 project on the website and in the newspaper. Barclays Bank made an initial donation of £500,000,
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7 part of which helped meet the costs of setting up the website, and contributed a further £1 million in
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9 match-funding, much of which was directed to the village savings and loans associations that formed
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11 part of the livelihoods part of the project. The project got off to a slightly bumpy start with a piece by
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13 *The Guardian's* then editor, Alan Rusbridger: 'Can we, together, lift one village out of the Middle
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15 Ages?'.¹⁰ The article captured both the optimism surrounding the project in the newspaper, and the
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17 awkwardness that finds its way into many mainstream media representations of Africa.
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22 A number of NGOs responded to *The Guardian's* original call for expressions of interest. AMREF's
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24 winning proposal came in the form of what is referred to as an "integrated rural development project".
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26 The project made investments in health, education, governance, livelihoods and water and sanitation
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28 across a single location. Those involved told me that there was a sense that AMREF was chosen
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30 because the proposed project site was rural; it would be a place that readers could identify with in
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32 thinking about development in Africa. It was uniformly poor and its rural location meant that it seemed
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34 like a more bounded space than an urban location. Readers viewing the website or reading the paper
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36 would have a defined sense of the geography within which their project was operating. Of the
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38 shortlist of three organisations, the other two appear to have been bids by major, UK-based,
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40 international NGOs. What seems to have given AMREF the edge was that the NGO, though
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42 international, was based in Africa, with its headquarters in Nairobi. It had a different profile from the
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44 more famous or visible international NGOs in the competition. Alan Rusbridger noted in his
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46 introductory piece that the staff were '97% African'.¹¹
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50 When I spoke with staff at the NGO they told me they were not 'like the OXFAMS' and that Katine had

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52 ¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2007/oct/20/about>. Many of the comments posted at the foot
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54 of Rusbridger's initial piece received were critical of the 'Middle Ages' tag (though it is, perhaps, worth
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56 noting that Rusbridger was himself paraphrasing the development economist Paul Collier and his
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58 view that many poor people live in, 'a reality that is the 14th century'.)
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60 ¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2007/oct/20/about>.

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3 been a 'sharp learning curve'.¹² AMREF's earliest iteration was as a Flying Doctors service in the
4 1950s, with most of its money coming from a small but consistent pool of donors. AMREF had arrived
5 fairly late to the sort of media work that defined the operations of many large international NGOs.
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7 AMREF's background in health also made it a slightly unusual choice to run a rural development
8 project (and Guardian staff would later wonder about whether the 'top down' approach of AMREF
9 owed something to its medical background – many senior staff are doctors). The decision to work
10 with *The Guardian* was made with a degree of hesitation, and AMREF, like many smaller
11 development NGOs, lacked the sorts of elaborate press and media outfits that dominate accounts of
12 aid organisations working with the media. When I spoke with staff members there was little sense at
13 the outset of what working with *The Guardian* would mean: 'within AMREF we had a lot of
14 discussions, we saw both sides; working with the media was a significant area of interest, it taught us
15 a lot', suggesting a mixture of curiosity and inexperience.¹³
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26 By now it should be clear that the sort of 'natural alliance' between NGOs and journalists, with the
27 NGO in the stronger position, was not a perfect description of the Katine initiative. In many ways
28 neither party was entirely clear how things would work; AMREF lacked much of the media
29 sophistication of many of the NGOs that form the focus of the literature outlined above, while for *The
30 Guardian* it was their first time doing anything like this. As one Guardian journalist told me 'none of us
31 were development experts' going into the project.¹⁴ While one AMREF staff member told me that we
32 are 'not like the OXFAMs with their big media outfits', and many NGO workers I spoke to felt that they
33 were in a fairly weak position relative to the newspaper. Field staff spoke of the disorienting
34 experience of having journalists visit the sub-county, asking questions and raising expectations in the
35 community. It was also clear that in the early stages of the project AMREF were not prepared for the
36 type of publicity that came with the project.
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48 *The Guardian's* involvement in Katine grew out of a desire to form new partnerships and an interest in
49 making sense of new media technologies (Lewis, Williams and Franklin 2008, Franklin 2014, Conrad
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53 ¹² Interview with management, Kampala country office, 8 July 2010.

54 ¹³ Interview with management, Kampala country office, 9 July 2010

55 ¹⁴ Interview with Guardian journalist, 22 June 2010.

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3 2015).¹⁵ The key impetus came from *The Guardian's* then editor, Alan Rusbridger who wanted to use
4 'all the possibilities of the web to give maximum exposure to the challenges of development'.¹⁶ It is
5 also important to understand how little web-based technologies had been used up to that point, and
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7 how different the media landscape has since become (Fenton 2009). Facebook had 20 million
8 subscribers and Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram had not yet been invented, or were not yet widely
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10 used. Katine moved coverage away from one-off stories, or the time-bound reporting that traditionally
11 profiles major crises in the developing world; what Cottle and Nolan refer to as the 'fleeting coverage'
12 of much development journalism (2007: 863 see also Schiffrin and Ariss 2017). In place of one-off
13 stories there would be an account of development work in something close to real time.¹⁷ It was this
14 sort of long-form reporting that resulted in the Katine initiative winning a number of media awards.
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23 Katine should also be seen as a response to the 'structural changes, brought on by dwindling
24 profitability, technological transformation, audience fragmentation' with less coverage of international
25 affairs in the newspaper sector (Powers 2013: 6, see also Hannerz 2004: 23). The project was part-
26 funded by Barclays Bank at a time when The Guardian was just coming out of a period of staff
27 retrenchment. For younger staff at the paper Katine offered a relatively secure space to continue in
28 journalism at a time the sector as a whole was struggling (cf. Waisbord 2011). The initiative also
29 helped The Guardian link up to a number of other actors – development agencies, micro-finance
30 institutions, universities, pharmaceutical companies, government ministries – who used the website
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37 ¹⁵ The *Pew's State of the News Media* 2016 report noted the precarious situation of newspapers in
38 the United States, with delinking advertising revenue in both print and online versions (down 8% from
39 the previous year).
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42 ¹⁶ Interview with Alan Rusbridger, 22 June 2010.
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45 ¹⁷ It is perhaps worth saying that ordinary readers of the newspaper seemed to have little interest in
46 the project. Though I was never able to get a precise sense of overall traffic to the microsite, I was
47 told by one of the website editors that it was 'very, very small'. Much of the sustained interest in
48 Katine came from the media divisions of larger NGOs, and I was told by one of the editors that these
49 divisions wanted to know 'how we are using the internet, Twitter, blogging and videos to talk about
50 development and how we can engage people... how you can have those "north-south dialogues" on
51 the blog'.
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3 as a space for discussion and publicity.¹⁸ *The Guardian's* "Global Development" website which is, in
4 many ways the successor to Katine, relies on financial support from the Gates Foundation (along
5 similar lines to *The Guardian's* Cities website which has funding from the Rockefeller Foundation).¹⁹
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12 **Methods**

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16 My understanding of the stresses and strains of the project came from my own involvement with the
17 project over its full life, and in this sense can be considered part of what Mosse has written of as the
18 type of analysis that comes from being partly an 'insider' (2006). I authored one of the early blogs on
19 the site (about the history of the region) and also conducted a review of the project at the end (I have
20 published a number of articles and a book on the Teso region where Katine sub-county is located).
21 (Jones 2009). For NGO workers there was weariness and wariness when I met them, particularly as
22 the project came to a close. They regarded my review of the project as one more thing that might
23 provoke criticism. Journalists were more open in conversation, and I remember one particular instant
24 where a reporter told me of both the simultaneous achievements of the initiative and the 'blurred'
25 boundaries that emerged. *The Guardian's* position was both a funder of the project and as a
26 journalistic enterprise committed to professional standards of reporting.
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37 The article draws on the semi-structured interviews with Guardian journalists, AMREF staff, and
38 people living in Katine. I spent time at *The Guardian's* London headquarters, visited AMREF's
39 country offices in London and Kampala, and participated in some of the public events that *The*
40 *Guardian* organized around Katine. I have anonymised sources, and the quotes used are illustrative
41 of what a number of respondents told me about an issue. Journalists often repeated the same points,
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46 ¹⁸ It also made sense of *The Guardian's* commitment to campaigning journalism. I was told by one
47 of the reporters on the project that it was an opportunity for journalists to take a very specific situation
48 'and see if it is happening in the rest of Uganda, the rest of Africa.'
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51 ¹⁹ A relationship between news journalism and financing from foundations such as Rockefeller and
52 Gates that is growing. A report found that 'between 2009 and 2011, 1012 foundations in the United
53 States made 12,040 media related grants' totaling \$1.86 billion. (Bunce 2016: 3).
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3 while project staff often had a similar experience of the project and the relationships involved. A total
4 of twenty-two interviews were conducted: eight with journalists and staff employed by *The Guardian*;
5 fourteen with AMREF staff (of which four were with senior managers in London and the Uganda
6 country office, and eight with AMREF staff in the Katine office).
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12 In what follows there are two examples of the relationship between AMREF and *The Guardian*. The
13 first looks at the public scrutiny that surrounded the early phases of the project and the building of a
14 primary school. I show how this coverage was disorienting for staff at the NGO, and points to the
15 ways in which scrutiny was very different from the sort of publicity the NGO hoped for. The second
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17 looks at the health strand of the project, and shows how journalists influenced what the project did on
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19 the ground by their focus on particular issues. In this instance journalism reoriented the NGO's work.
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21 I also suggest that as the project evolved the moments that were disorienting or reorienting became
22 fewer, and that the relationship grew more settled and established. What may be thought of as the
23 relatively uncritical relationship between NGOs and journalists is not always arrived easily (cf. Lugo-
24 Ocando and Nguyen 2017).
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34 35 **Disorienting scrutiny**

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39 In the early part of the project the main effect of *The Guardian's* spotlight on Katine was to show up
40 the sizeable gap between the public face of the NGO and the way it went about its work in the field.
41 This was not a particularly comfortable experience for AMREF. NGOs are usually able to control the
42 differences between what turns out to be fairly messy work on the ground, and presentational aspects
43 of their work: a leaflet, a web campaign or a policy paper (Lewis 2007: 165). AMREF staff were also
44 less practised in dealing with criticism than their counterparts in some of the bigger, more high profile
45 NGOs. Criticism focused on the details of a single project, rather than the generalities of the NGO,
46 and could be levelled against individual staff as well as at the NGO as a whole. Commentary on the
47 website was often sharp in tone. There were concerns early on that the NGO was spending too
48 much money on trainings; that some of the building work was over-budgeted and of poor quality; that
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3 the relationship between the NGO and the local population was less than the stated ideal of
4 'participation'.
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8 Take what was, perhaps, the most complicated story told on the website; that of the building of
9 Amorikot Primary School. Over the course of two years, Guardian journalists and members of the
10 public who wrote into the website documented the mixed and uneven experience of Amorikot.
11 AMREF adopted an approach that differed from the usual 'community-supported' model used by other
12 NGOs in the Teso region. They brought in a contractor from Kampala, the capital city, and the school
13 was put up quickly, and there was a sense that things were not quite right. A quick rundown of what
14 appeared on the website demonstrates just how contested, problematic and long-running was the
15 story of building the school:
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24 Sep 08 The new school opens.²⁰ Alam Construction refurbished seven classrooms in
25 Amorikot. These classrooms were budgeted at 18.7 million Ugandan shillings. Katine
26 also provided Amorikot Primary School with 126 desks and a number of new
27 textbooks.
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32 The same month there were reports that Alam were delaying their work.²¹
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36 The budget for Amorikot is questioned by journalists and bloggers. Richard Kavuma
37 noted that the government spends only 14 million Ugandan shillings per classroom.
38 "Ugandalife", who regularly comments on Katine blogs and who runs a project in
39 Masaka district in Uganda, said that he had built classrooms for only 9.5 million
40 Ugandan shillings²².
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48 Mar 09 Katine staff defend their approach by stating that their work was of better quality than
49 government contracted school buildings and done more quickly.
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52 ²⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2008/sep/16/education.news>
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54 ²¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2008/sep/22/education.news>

55 ²² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/katineblog/2008/sep/29/education>
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5 Jun 09 Guardian journalist Madeleine Bunting reviews the project and questions the
6 education budget.²³
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10 AMREF take legal advice over delays in school building work, claiming that Alam
11 construction have defaulted in their work²⁴
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15 July 09 Community journalist Joseph Malinga reports that the number of desks accounted by
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17 Katine staff contradicted the actual number of desks found in the schools. AMREF
18 suggests that this report was inaccurate²⁵
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22 Sep 09 Joseph Malinga reports on the unhappiness of locals, school teachers included, with
23 the work of AMREF. After trying to end the contract with Alam Construction, AMREF
24 is obliged to let them resume work on another primary school in Katine.²⁶
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30 Nov 09 Concerns among parents and teachers are reported, particularly over the question of
31 whether Amorikot will become a registered government school.²⁷
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35 The last piece, by Anne Perkins from November 2009, suggested that the confident exterior of the
36 new school at Amorikot threatened to become a “shell”, with declining local support, no money from
37 the district education office, unused textbooks and a shortage of teachers.²⁸ While there were a
38 number of more positive, descriptive pieces elsewhere on the website – “training to make a
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43 ²³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/katineblog/2009/jun/23/education-AMREF-review>
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45 ²⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2009/jun/17/kadinya-school-construction>

46 ²⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2009/jul/29/school-desks-textbooks>
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48 ²⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2009/oct/12/education-AMREF>
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50 ²⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/katine-chronicles-blog/2009/nov/30/amorikot-school-government-failure>
51 failure
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53 ²⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/katine-chronicles-blog/2009/nov/30/amorikot-school-government-failure>
54 failure
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3 difference”, “primary schools get health kits” – the dominant story was of Amorikot was of the
4 unevenness of AMREF’s work and the poor design of the project. This was all a long way from the
5 idea of Katine as an opportunity for AMREF to advertise its work.
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10 Getting schools built in Uganda is a difficult business. It relies on a range of actors – contractors,
11 builders, NGOs, district officials, Parent Teachers Associations – where mismanagement and
12 corruption would seem to be the norm (Wiegratz 2016, *The Monitor* 2002). What was unusual about
13 the construction of Amorikot Primary School was that it happened on a website in something close to
14 real time, in ways that risked damaging the reputation of the NGO. The reporting focused on whether
15 or not the NGO was competent to do its work.²⁹ The following comment posted by “Ugandalife” was
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19
20 highly critical of AMREF’s decision to use outside contractors in school building work:
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24 It was insulting [of AMREF] to suggest that local builders could not build a quality school...
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26 Was the community informed that 173 million (£52,424) was being spent on a school? Not
27
28 likely. There were no specifics about what the community involvement was... Of course the
29
30 people would be happy with what they got. An oversized tent could have been erected and they
31 would have been happy...³⁰
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35 This sort of criticism proved difficult for AMREF staff, and was a long way from the sort of publicity
36 that NGOs desire. The article on school desks carried a strong whiff of corruption (suggesting that
37 the NGO was budgeting for items it was not delivering). Moreover, these sorts of critical pieces got
38 more reaction than articles of the more anodyne type: “opening new doors at Katine primary school”.³¹
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40 An external evaluation of the project conducted at the half-way stage noted that project staff had little
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²⁹ In this there is a slight difference to the more recent scandal that engulfed OXFAM in the spring of
2018. In the case of OXFAM the scandal focused first on the personal actions of staff members – the
use of prostitutes – and only later focused on broader governance questions.

³⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/katineblog/2008/sep/29/education>

³¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2008/sep/16/education.news>

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3 work anticipating what they might see on the website' which makes them feel 'upset, sometimes
4 confused and angry'.³²
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8 By the end of the project it was possible to see a more established relationship between the NGO and
9 the newspaper. This was for a number of reasons. Interest in the website fell away, and the
10 comments of critical bloggers such as Ugandalife grew less frequent. *The Guardian* and AMREF had
11 gotten more used to each other, and were more conscious of the sorts of difficulties that might arise
12 when stories appeared on the website. While Katine never achieved the sort of easy 'alliance'
13 described in much of the literature, AMREF developed mechanisms for managing its relationship with
14 the newspaper, and journalists often felt managed by AMREF. AMREF's country office in Uganda
15 exercised a degree of control over interactions between the staff on the ground and visiting
16 journalists, and field staff told me they resisted responding to pieces on the website, in part because
17 they felt they had to spend time checking what they said with those higher up. Journalists spoke of
18 the 'top down' style of AMREF management. In a description of a later workshop, one of the
19 Guardian journalists present wrote of the way 'the agenda was tightly controlled' and that AMREF 'left
20 no space for people'.³³
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34 On a more prosaic level the relationship itself grew more routine, and the personalities involved got
35 used to each other. The possibility of corruption hinted at in the pieces on school desks and in the
36 contracting of the school building work were not followed up, nor was there much discussion of the
37 close and often problematic relationship that exist between AMREF, the Ugandan government, and
38 the corporate sector. This was not because journalists were not concerned with the way the project
39 was being implemented, or the way AMREF managed its relationship with other actors. (I was told
40 later on by one of the journalists involved that there was more to the story of poor contracting and
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50 ³² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2009/sep/03/mid-term-review-report>

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52 ³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/katineblog/2009/sep/29/amref-exit-strategy>. Though, in a sign
53 of the uneasiness this sort of reporting produced, there was a follow up piece where participants at
54 the workshop stating uniformly that they were happy with what had gone on.
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3 possible 'shadow work' within the project).³⁴ It was rather that such stories, if published, had the
4 potential to add more stress and strain to what was already a complex set of relationships and
5 negotiations.
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10 11 12 13 **Reorienting journalism**

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17 Journalists, they come to Katine and interview staff. It raises expectations in the community.

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19 When they [community members] see a white person they express their needs. Journalists are

20
21 not experts in development, but people go to them and complain to them and say "ask AMREF.
22 You gave them the money"... that has been very challenging.³⁵
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26 The above was a comment from one of AMREF's employees working in Katine. The experience of
27 having journalists turn up and ask questions raised expectations among locals, and for many people
28 in Katine journalists were regarded as donors and sponsors of the project. *The Guardian* was not just
29 reporting on Katine, it was, in a very real sense, funding Katine, and the tensions that surrounded this
30 dual role remained throughout the project. While some journalists emphasised a fairly clean
31 distinction between their work and the work of AMREF – 'we made a decision to do fundraising and
32 then report on it' – others spoke of the blurring of boundaries and the awkward sense that journalists
33 were the 'white people' who had 'given them the money'.³⁶ The decisions taken by journalists in
34 terms of what they chose to report had consequences for the project.
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44 One area in which the decisions of journalists made a tangible difference was in the field of health.

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46 As time moved on coverage of health focused a lot of attention on issues of drug delivery and the
47 poor state of the local government health centre. This differed from the approach AMREF had taken
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50 ³⁴ Interview with journalist in Katine 7 July 2010. 'Shadow work' meaning work that is billed for but
51 does not take place.
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54 ³⁵ Interview with field staff, Katine office, 7 July 2010.

55 ³⁶ Interview with Guardian journalist, 22 June 2010.

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3 in the project design, which had been more interested in preventive measures and community
4 development initiatives. There was not always an easy marriage between the focus of the NGO and
5 what interested journalists. In the case of the health strand of the project this divergence affected the
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7
8 work of the NGO.
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12 In the original design of the health programme, Katine concentrated the majority of its efforts on
13 prevention rather than treatment. The focus was on having a public health strategy – immunisation,
14 mosquito nets, trainings, clean water, village health teams – rather than investing too heavily in the
15
16 sub-county's medical infrastructure. AMREF was reluctant to involve itself in the work of the
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18 government-run health centre at Tiriri. AMREF's position was that the obvious failings of the health
19
20 centre – the lack of drugs, absence of qualified medical personnel were matters for the government –
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22 and the most that the NGO could do was to raise awareness of these issues. AMREF focused
23
24 instead on community-level health work including the training of village health teams alongside the
25
26 provision of clean water and mosquito nets. Journalists, however, increasingly turned their attention
27
28 on the problem of the health centre.
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32 A series of articles on *The Guardian's* Website put the failings of the medical system in human terms.
33 In December 2008, a piece asked 'why is there no medicine in the dispensary?'³⁷ The author, Sarah
34
35 Boseley, questioned why other aspects of life in Katine had seen 'modest but significant
36
37 improvements' and yet the health centre still lacked drugs. In May 2009, Boseley reported the death
38
39 of a woman at the health centre. The piece was titled 'I watched a woman die', and documented the
40
41 story of a woman who had haemorrhaged after giving birth:
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44 I counted the seconds ticking away while nothing was done. No drip, no oxygen mask, no
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46 injections, no resuscitation. They [the medical staff] had seen it too often before. They knew
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48 there was nothing they could do.³⁸
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54 ³⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/katineblog/2008/dec/02/health-centre-drugs>

55 ³⁸ Interview with Guardian journalist, 22 June 2010.
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3 The piece makes clear the lived experience of what it is like to turn up to a health clinic in Uganda: 'it
4 has an operating theatre, but nobody qualified to do surgery, and hardly any drugs, let alone a blood
5 bank', and connected the story to wider development concerns such as the UN's Millennium
6
7
8 Development Goals, the International Day of the Midwife and the work of charities such as Merlin
9
10 International to tackle these issues. This was later referred to in the newspaper as one of the most
11
12 powerful pieces to appear on the website.
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15 In a later piece AMREF's Uganda country director Joshua Kyallo, was asked directly whether 'health
16 initiatives... could hope to succeed when the drug stores were empty?'.³⁹ The article linked back to
17
18 the piece by Sarah Boseley and Kyallo had to defend AMREF's approach by saying that drug
19
20 provision was not within AMREF's remit and that the best it the NGO could do was to lobby 'hard at
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22 both national and district level to try to improve this situation'. This sort of public questioning of an
23
24 NGOs approach to a single element of a project was unusual, and AMREF staff explained to me their
25
26 frustrations about the way the health programme was being shifted from what was originally proposed
27
28 in their project outline. One of AMREF's managers explained to me that 'the project was not to
29
30 change the system established by government...staff and drug distribution are issues we were not
31
32 involved in'; but that there had to be changes because 'what comes through the newspaper acts to
33
34 modify our activities'.⁴⁰
35

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37 These sorts of pieces moved AMREF towards a more active role in making drugs widely available in
38
39 Katine and in lobbying to upgrade the facilities at Tiriri health centre. By the end of the project the
40
41 NGO was giving village health teams drugs to distribute; Tiriri health centre had a supply of drugs,
42
43 solar power, a newlybuilt laboratory and had, for a time at least, piped water and a resident doctor, all
44
45 consequences of AMREF's work in the area. This was not something originally envisaged in the
46
47 project proposal, nor was it something AMREF staff were supportive of, at least in the initial phase.
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49 As one of the field officers told me of reports on the website: 'It can make you divert from what you
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51 had planned. You had planned A but are forced to do B because at the end of it all the demands are
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54 ³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/katineblog/2008/nov/21/joshua-kyallo-drugs-and-cattle>

55 ⁴⁰ Interview with management, Kampala country office, 1 July 2010.

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3 different, the expectations are different'.⁴¹
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6 In all of this there is a departure from the usual narrative of NGOs successfully managing journalists
7 and of NGOs having the upper hand. There is also a departure from the sense that journalists and
8 NGO workers are natural allies. As the project came to a close, managers spoke instead of a process
9 of 'adaptation' and 'healing', which meant turning the project to some of the issues raised by
10 journalists. A "management forum" was set up, where 'on a monthly basis we [project staff] are on
11 call' to discuss issues related to the project'. The forum resulted in 'far less issues and far few
12 challenges than we did in the past'.⁴² In this evolution there is something closer to working through
13 the stresses and strains captured in Kate Wright's account of the negotiations between freelance
14 journalists and NGOs. Though in Wright's case the journalists are almost always in a dependent
15 position, the wider point about the tensions and questions that these sorts of collaborations produce
16 remains (2015).⁴³
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32 **Conclusion: Getting used to 'being in the spotlight'**

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35 Katine was unusual. A British newspaper, with funding from its readers and Barclays Bank, put more
36 than two and a half million pounds into a rural sub-county in Uganda over the course of four years,
37 and worked in close collaboration with an NGO. The particulars of the initiative, of a newspaper
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41 ⁴¹ Interview with field staff, Katine office, 6 July 2010.
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43 ⁴² Interview with management, Kampala country office, 1 July 2010.
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45 ⁴³ It is perhaps worth noting that though AMREF staff sometimes felt pushed around by what
46 appeared on the website, there is also a sense that, as the project evolved, those working in the NGO
47 became better at resisting or postponing what was asked of them. While the health programme was
48 reoriented there were examples of project elements moving forward in ways that many journalists
49 regarded as unsatisfactory.⁴³ The governance strand, for example, was described to me by
50 journalists as something they had never really 'got their head around', and though they were critical of
51 AMREF's approach to empowerment, AMREF made few changes.
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3 funding a development project, and reporting on it on an almost daily basis appears to be a one off,
4 and the dynamics outlined in this article are in some ways peculiar to Katine.⁴⁴ In other ways,
5
6 though, Katine can be seen as part of a broader trajectory in the relationship between NGOs and
7
8 journalism. In seeking out new partners, and in wanting to have a media profile 'like the OXFAMs',
9
10 AMREF offers an example of what can be thought of as the mediatisation of the NGO sector (Jones
11
12 2016). NGOs are increasingly coming to value those parts of their work that work in media terms, and
13
14 the decision to work with *The Guardian* was part of a broader story on AMREF's part of moving into
15
16 advocacy and public policy work. At the same time, the desire, on the part of *The Guardian*, to bring
17
18 development closer to individual sponsors, to make the 'distant other' less distant and more
19
20 immediate, was a follow-on from the sorts of media technologies that were starting to become
21
22 available in 2007.

23
24 Katine is also something of a synecdoche for the changing face of the news media. It was possible
25
26 because *The Guardian* was seeking out new sorts of partnerships and revenue streams. The
27
28 involvement of Barclays Bank was central to the financial model of Katine, and the initiative also
29
30 allowed for visits by the CEO of GlaxoSmithKline and a number of development experts and
31
32 philanthropists to Katine. The successor to Katine, the Guardian's "Global Development" microsite,
33
34 receives financial support from The Gates Foundation, and many of the journalists involved in Katine
35
36 played a key role in setting up this new microsite.⁴⁵ This is part of the slow evolution of newspapers
37
38 away from a model of selling newspapers and working with particular advertisers, towards a world
39
40 where newspapers becoming a place for different sorts of content, and where issues that would once
41
42 be of little interest to sponsors – global development, cities – become a source of sponsorship.

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45 ⁴⁴ The closest example I could find was Save the Children's Kroo Bay project, set in a slum in
46
47 Freetown, Sierra Leone. This project also had its own blog and micro-site, though the initiative was
48
49 more straightforwardly a public relations and media exercise; Save the Children managed the content
50
51 and coverage.

52 ⁴⁵ Browne questions claims that this sort of 'foundation funded journalism' promotes some sort of
53
54 unitary public interest, suggesting instead that it introduces new types of censorship and self-
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56 censorship in what should be the public square (2010 see also Scott et al. 2017).

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3 The particular focus of this article has been to use Katine as a way of nuancing some of the more
4 general statements made about the relationship between NGOs and journalism. The standard view is
5 that journalism has been tilted in favour of NGOs, and that this is because journalists and NGO
6 workers are seen to be natural allies, and because NGOs are themselves fairly media-savvy. The
7 case shows that this relationship is not always an easy one, and that not all NGOs are alike. While
8 focus has often been on NGOs having the upper hand with journalists in a dependent relationship,
9 and with the work of NGOs seemingly beyond criticism, Katine was more complicated (Polman 2010,
10 Powers 2013, Lugo-Ocando and Nguyen 2017). In the Katine initiative there was scrutiny and
11 criticism, and journalists were in a position where they are able to influence the work of the NGO.
12 Katine also reminds us that many NGOs are not always 'the OXFAMs with their big media outfits', and
13 that the landscape populated by NGOs is mixed. As the title to the article makes clear, AMREF staff
14 felt that they have been taught a lot through their experience working with *The Guardian*. That they
15 got better as managing their relationship with *The Guardian* over time should not disguise the
16 tensions and variation inherent in the ever-changing relationship between NGOs and journalists.
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