

**CONFLICT SENSITIVE JOURNALISM AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS, BEING TEXT OF A PAPER
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Introduction

Journalism as a profession is undergoing a crises worldwide, caused by not only new economic and technological challenges, but by the loss of trust between media and society, society and the state and representatives of various groups and cultures.

Journalists deal with conflict all the time and no doubt, conflicts make headline news where ever and whenever they occur. Journalists cover violent conflicts such as wars, terrorism and riots. Journalists write about daily disagreements and even one sided conflicts as robberies and assaults. A demonstration that gets violent receives more attention than a peaceful one.

Conflict Sensitive Journalism/Peace Journalism

Scholars generally agree that Conflict Sensitive Journalism or Peace Journalism is the practice of writing news stories about a conflict in a way that does not make the discord worse. It seeks a wide range of opinions, avoids inflammatory language and seeks out ideas about how the confrontation can be resolved. They also argue that it is when Editors and Reporters make choices of what stories to report and how to report them- which creates opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non violent response to conflicts.

Peace is a basic requirement in a democracy. No democracy can flourish in the absence of peace. While it is inevitable to eliminate crises and conflicts from our society, it becomes therefore very pertinent that efforts are made toward conflict resolution and peace building.

One of the cardinal principles of peace journalism is how media professionals can use the media pro-actively to help the complex process of conflict management and transformation to peaceful co-existence , and that while examining the ethical issues involved in reporting conflict, how can the media best play a constructive role in conflict and Post Conflict Scenarios?

Journalists should develop a thorough understanding of conflicts and convey that understanding to their audiences and readers in a way that reflects the truth of the conflicts in all their complexities. Similarly they should identify common ground, examine and evaluate any effort made at resolving such conflicts as well as the dynamics at play, and in doing so, they should know that their audiences and readers need to be provided with a foundation upon which to make informed judgments about the parties involved and in the process help to de-escalate tension and help the government in taking meaningful decisions.

Journalists should strive at all times to give accurate representation of the causes of conflicts whenever and where ever they occur. Media professionals must brace up for the challenges ahead, especially since they are expected to participate in the process of social reconstruction and democratization in the

aftermath of any conflict by providing a positive and participatory forum for the exchange of ideas, democracy and nation building.

Any attempt to deviate from the ethics of the profession will not auger well for the nation. Since the role of the media in Nigeria's emerging democracy is central, media professionals must maintain the highest possible standards in their practice.

Peace building is a continuous exercise needing "constant investment, re-investment and counter-investment". Journalists, must guard against hate journalism and rather embark on development journalism. The role of the media in peace promotion or conflict escalation has been heightened by a number of factors which include ownership and funding, editorial policy and the regulatory agencies. We recommend to participants peace journalism as an instrument to promote peace and reduce conflict to the barest minimum.

The media have a vital role to play in nation building, by being active partners in the implementation of the development processes of their respective nations. The media are veritable instruments and are therefore central to any input-output functions of any political system. Let me however equally enumerate the constraints of the media in this regard which among others include lack of conducive working environment, mass poverty, and lack of adequate training and anti media laws.

Managing conflict requires an appreciation of the sources, processes and strategies for reducing conflicts however interventions would be more effective if deployed within the context of established strategies. We urge participants to take up the role of remaining a reliable institution especially in the context of development, because inherent in the media are the elements of development journalism, social responsibility and agenda setting which all combine to give the media the capability to become a manager of conflict.

Protecting Journalists in a dangerous and changing world

Safety implies freedom from danger and, in the news gathering context; safety implies protection from a range of threats journalists encounter, including arrest, legal action, imprisonment, kidnapping, intimidation, bombs, landmines, being shot in the cross-fire and murder, amongst others. Journalists are exposed to more danger in violent armed conflict than in peace and stable situations.

Threats and attacks against the media are aimed at inducing fear and self censorship. These are the basic strategies of authoritarian regimes and not democracies like in most African countries. The recourse sometimes to fierce and lethal counter reactions to reports by journalists who would challenge the statusquo or reveal discomfiting truths would not auger well for democracy.

The systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of international law in situations of armed conflict constitutes a threat to peace and security, especially the deliberate targeting of journalists, media personnel and associated personnel which is a violation of international law.

WAY FORWARD.

The Media Industry around the world has witnessed more transformation in the last three decades than in its entire history. In Africa particularly, we have seen dynamic changes relevant to the prevalent trends globally. In other developed and developing societies, the media and their effects are continually whipping up dreams and fantasies which are being eloquently executed through programming and realistically geared towards individual and mass appeal.

International Code of Practice for the Safe

The dangers posed to journalists and media staff working in dangerous situations and conflict zones are the subject of extensive record. The International Federation of Journalists- IFJ has recorded the deaths of more than 1000 journalists and media staff over the past ten years.

Many journalists are killed, injured or harassed in war zones, either targeted by one side or another or caught in the crossfire of violence. Others are the victims of premeditated assaults and intimidation either by criminals, terrorists or by agencies of the state, the police, the military or the security forces-acting secretly and illegally.

Very often there is little that journalists or media organisations can do to avoid casualties. There will, inevitably, be accidents, no matter how much care is taken to provide protection and there is little one can do when those targeting media use ruthless and brutal methods to crush journalistic inquiry.

However, there are steps that journalists and media organisations should take to minimize the risks to staff. In particular, the following are vital considerations in providing protection:

- Adequate Preparation, Training and Social Protection. It is essential that journalists and media staff be in a state of readiness when difficulties arise. There should be a state framework for providing individuals with health care and social protection.
- Media Professionals must be informed and inform themselves about the political, physical, and social terrain in which they are working. They must not contribute to the uncertainty and insecurity of their conditions through ignorance or reckless behavior.

- Media Organisations must guard against risk-taking for competitive advantage, and should promote co-operation among journalists wherever conditions exist which are potentially hazardous.
- Governments must remove obstacles to journalism. They must not restrict unnecessarily the freedom of movement of journalists or compromise the right of news media to gather, produce and disseminate information in secure and safe conditions.
- People must keep their hands off media. Everyone should respect the physical integrity of journalists and media staff at work. Physical interference with filming or other journalistic work must be prohibited.

Conclusion

It should be made a point of duty to include training on safety and security in the curricular of Schools of Journalism in the Country. Journalists who are practicing must equally receive training and retraining on safety and security as a deliberate policy if we desire to reduce the prevalent rate of impunity against media professionals and media equipment. The media as the conscience of the Nation cannot be neglected, abused or frustrated. It is therefore very important to call for a comprehensive welfare package for journalists which should be enshrined in well negotiated conditions of service that will include a comprehensive insurance cover.

The media should help prevent the circulation and broadcasting of propaganda, inflammatory materials, hate media and damaging rumour, which can destroy communities and prevent the building of trust.

Journalists are advised to give accurate and unbiased representation of facts in a conflict situation, just as they are expected to participate in the process of social reconstruction and democratization in the aftermath of any conflict.

We advocate for the promotion of community/rural media, so that more people will have access to media information.

Timeliness should not be a barrier for unbalanced report but journalists should ensure that they uphold truth, justice, objectivity and accuracy in their reportage.

Irrespective of media ownership, journalists must always uphold and abide by the ethics of the profession.