

## Introduction

Communication as we all know is an essential ingredient in any human activity whether at the family level, group or the society at large. Where effective communication is lacking, the tendency for conflict is high, hence the need for a free flow of information to ensure proper understanding of actions and reactions.

In every society, not the least, a democratic one, the media is given that role of disseminating information between the government and the governed, and the task falls squarely on the shoulders of the practitioners of the profession of journalism; the journalists.

The Nigerian constitution (1999) specifically assigned that role to the Nigerian journalists to monitor governance and hold the government accountable to the people. When we talk of government, remember there are three arms; the executive, legislature and judiciary. And under the Executive is the armed forces, which means our men and women in uniform are also accountable to the Nigerian people for all their actions and inactions through the Nigerian media whether directly or indirectly.

This being the case, the armed forces will naturally come under the scrutiny of the media anytime they are engaged in any conflict, whether low or high intensity, hence the importance of this paper presentation on the Role of the Media in Internal Security and Low Intensity Conflict, to this distinguished audience.

As the institution most likely to be involved in any form of internal security operation or low/high intensity conflict it is good for the Nigerian armed forces as a body to know what role the media is expected to play in the reportage of such conflict and their own responsibility to the media toward achieving a fair reportage of the event.

### Understanding the media

Before we go into that it will do this distinguished audience a lot of good if we take a minute or two to understand the way the media work.

Whether broadcast (Radio & TV) or print (Newspapers and magazines) and now online publication, the media thrive on information and whoever provides that information, that is the source, is the reporter's friend. The reporter does not have a permanent friend or enemy whoever it is that gives him that information to write his report (story) is his friend, and if he/she is such a reliable source, could be his friend for life, even outside the call of journalism.

In collecting the information, the reporter will have to cross check for its accuracy and fulfill all the other demands of the ethics of the profession, including balance and fairness. There are times he has to ascertain the motive of the source of the information first to know whether to believe or not. If he suspects the motive of the source, he may need to crosscheck over and over again with other sources who may know before filing his report. He needs to do this to convince himself that the report he is about sending to his Editor is correct, accurate, truthful and fair. He has to convince himself that the story is true, because his Editor relies on him,

and whatever report he filed would be believed by the Editor, any other report to the contrary will be circumspected by the Editor.

The reporter whether print or broadcast works with deadline. While the newspaper man may have time to play with till the production time, late in the evening when his paper is put to bed (produced), the TV/Radio reporter is often immediate he has to send the report for broadcast, especially in this era of breaking news. He doesn't have to wait for the time allotted to news.

What this means is that you must take the peculiarities of the medium into consideration when dealing with a journalist. A reporter in a broadcast media house wants the information immediately, unlike his counterpart in a newspaper. Even for the newspaper man, the emergence of online publication means that he also needs to file in his report immediately to meet the deadline/demand of the online edition. In reality, to both the print and broadcast reporter, time is of the essence.

### How to use the media

Knowing how to use the media to get your message across is also important in getting to achieve your goal. In a situation of low intensity conflict, insurgency or internal security challenges as we currently have in Nigeria with the Boko Haram situation, members of the Nigerian armed forces especially those at the theatre of operation need to know how to use the media, including the much maligned social media to get the message across to the rest of the society, including the local audience in their area of operation.

Making the information clear and unambiguous and on time to the reporter, on ground or in the newsroom is very essential to achieving your goal. There is no point denying the obvious. For example, it makes no sense denying there was no casualty in an explosion where corpses of the dead litter the area or where the number of the injured clearly overwhelms the medical facilities. You can make the best of a bad situation by coming out clean, explain how and why it happened, in spite of your best efforts, and seek the understanding of the media. If you fail to give the journalists the correct and accurate information they will get it elsewhere and it might not help your cause. Try to cultivate the reporter so as to have his ears always.

### Embedded Journalism

Integrating the media into the fighting forces could also be a way of getting the best out of the media in the coverage/ reportage of conflicts. Made famous by the Allied Forces in the first Iraqi war, embedded journalism as the practice was later to be known, gave western media first hand access to the theatre of operation during the war and afforded them the opportunity of reporting the conflict very well and bringing it vividly to the home of everybody around the world, especially via CNN satellite TV broadcast. This afforded the audience back home to know/see and appreciate the efforts being made by their soldiers to bring the conflict to a quick end. It not only boosted the image and prestige of the military, it also gave them a large say/influence in policies back home.

Nigeria tried it with ECOMOG during the Liberian civil war, but unfortunately the Nigerian media lost some of the reporters that were so

embedded, particularly Messrs Kris Imodibe and Tayo Awotusin of The Guardian and Champion newspapers respectively. May their souls rest in perfect peace Amen. I was to be one of those reporters to be embedded in the second batch, but the programme was suspended and the rest of the reporters who were lucky to escape with their lives were hurriedly ferried home by the Nigerian military. But the appetite for embedded journalism has not waned and I think some Nigerian journalists are so embedded by the military in the current fight against the Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism in the North-East.

### The media

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 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 augur 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. To achieve this you may need to partner with the media in giving out information that promotes peace.

The media in managing conflicts 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 Journalists 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.

### Low Intensity Conflict/Internal Security

Low intensity conflict according to Wikipedia is the use of military forces applied selectively and with restraint to enforce compliance with the policies or objectives of the political body controlling the military force.

The term can be used to describe conflicts where at least one or both parties operate along such lines. It explains Internal Security or IS, as the act of keeping peace within the borders of a sovereign state or other self governing territories, generally by upholding the national law and defending against internal security threats.

### Terrorism

Briefly speaking, let me for this talk borrow the FBI definition of terrorism which says that "Terrorism is the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce government, the civilian population, or any segment therefore, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

Terrorism therefore essentially tries to negate the existence of political power.

What do terrorists want (from journalists?)

With their objectives not often clearly spelt out, terrorists demand of journalists to publish their side of the conflict without question. In most

cases these are mere propaganda. They want their atrocities broadcast/published just to strike fear into the populace and perhaps force the hands of government into either negotiating or surrendering.

This is often a difficult proposition for the journalists because it runs counter to the provisions and demands of the ethics of the journalism, profession but he nonetheless has to navigate this treacherous terrain to get his story across. At times it results in fatal consequences.

What does the government want (from Journalists?)

To the government, the journalists should blackout whatever is coming from the other side or at best give it a minor mention. But how do you report a large terrorist attack that claimed hundreds of lives in a minor way? Definitely, this is not possible or even realistic.

So the reporter is between the devil and the blue sea. To be "patriotic" by siding with government or be fair to both sides, by bringing the truth to the public, not minding whose ox is gored, in accordance with the ethics of the profession and the code of practice.

This is a tricky terrain and the reporter has to rely on his experience, training, sense of patriotism and dictates of the ethics of his profession to know what to write/publish and what to leave out. Both the government and the terrorists are competing for his attention understanding and support. In the face of all these the journalists need protection

## 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 augur 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. In the midst of all these, access to information in very

important and to the journalists, it is a human right issue. The society must realize that the journalists' work is geared towards the good of the society and their quest for information or access to information is only to the extent that such will serve societal interest. All impediments to free and unfettered access to information must be removed. Both the state, its agents as well as employers of the journalist must do everything possible to ensure and protect the safety of journalists including prompt payment of salaries.

### International Code of Practice for the Safety of Journalists

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 materials 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 an excuse for unbalanced report as 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.

I thank you for listening.