



My Tribe is
JOURNALISM

SPECIAL EDITION KENYA

Conflict sensitive journalism

A handbook by Ross Howard



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Professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present **accurate and impartial** news. But it is often through good reporting that **conflict is reduced**.

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Preface

Reacting to the sudden outbreak of violence in Kenya and the mounting pressure on media following the disputed presidential election on 27 December 2007, International Media Support (IMS) together with Article 19 and Reporters Without Borders carried out a mission to Kenya in the early days of January 2008 to assess the needs for support to the Kenyan media community.

One of the findings of this assessment mission was the imminent need for promoting the concept of conflict sensitive journalism among Kenyan journalists – most of them reporting for the first time in their life a conflict of the magnitude that was witnessed in Kenya in the weeks after the election.

This handbook in conflict sensitive journalism – special edition Kenya – is part of IMS' response to the needs expressed during this first and following assessment missions to Kenya.

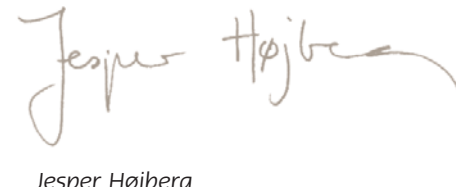
The handbook is designed to be a practical everyday guide, which seeks to contribute to the theoretical refinement and practical realization of conflict sensitive journalism as a tool for usage by Kenyan media practitioners covering the conflict.

Peter Mwaura, a former director at the School of Journalism, University of Nairobi, and former editor-in-chief of the Nation, is responsible for writing the Kenyan sections of the handbook. His contribution was thoroughly consulted with Kenyan media stakeholders; Kenya Editors' Guild, Media Council of Kenya, The Kenya Association of Photographers, Illustrators and Designers, Kenya Correspondents Association and Kenya Union of Journalists.

The Special Edition builds upon the important work of Ross Howard and his handbook in conflict sensitive journalism, first published by IMS in 2003. The initial handbook was produced in partnership between IMS and IMPACS, as well as the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo and the Nepal Press Institute in Katmandu. In addition, the in-country research and workshops conducted by Ross Howard have been instrumental in developing and refining the concepts and tools outlined in this publication.

IMS would like to express special thanks to Peter Mwaura and to its Kenyan partners for their commitment to this important task. A special thanks also to the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo and the Nepal Press Institute in Katmandu for providing important contributions to the original version of the handbook.

IMS is pleased to be able to present this handbook jointly with its partners in the hope that it may serve as a useful guide to the conceptual basis and as a practical everyday tool for conflict sensitive journalism.



Jesper Højberg
Executive Director
International Media Support

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Context

Three views have emerged over the role of the media in the post-election violence in Kenya that killed at least one thousand and displaced half a million people. The first, supported by review missions, is that the Kenyan media did not stoke the violence but it failed in its duty to report in full the bloodletting and political crisis.

The second is that the media did, in fact, add fuel to the fire. This is an opinion shared by the authorities. In the days following President Mwai Kibaki's disputed re-election on 27 December 2007, the government accused some vernacular radio stations of inciting ethnic unrest and imposed a ban on live broadcasts. The government apparently feared Rwanda-style bloodletting encouraged by inflammatory broadcasts.

The third point of view is that the media was made a scapegoat. The eruption of violence was bound to happen. It was the result of historical and economic inequalities. The perpetrators were just venting their bottled-up anger and frustrations.

All the three viewpoints, regardless of the stand taken, justify the need for conflict sensitive reporting because in conflict situations the role of the media is critical in providing the public with full, reliable and non-partisan information to manage the conflict and make intelligent decisions.

Conflict sensitive journalism empowers reporters to report conflicts professionally without feeding the flames. It enables journalists to report conflicts in depth, to cover all sides and ventilate issues related to the conflict.

The approaches and methods of conflict sensitive journalism, as opposed to traditional journalism, would have empowered the Kenyan media to inform the public more completely, objectively and accurately.

The public was dependent on the media for comprehensive, neutral and accurate information on the conflict. But, by all accounts, the media fell short. As ARTICLE 19, International Media Support and Reporters Without Borders observed in its report released in March, the coverage of the post-election crisis by the Kenya media was low-key, even timid. The media apparently self-censored, calling instead for harmony and apparently abandoned their watchdog function for "preachy editorials and analysis."

The failure of the Kenya media to report the violence completely, accurately and responsibly is explainable. Kenya journalists have had no experience, or training, in reporting conflicts of the magnitude that erupted in the country three months following the disputed elections.

Philip Ochieng, a long-standing editor and columnist with a leading media company in the country, pinpointed at least one aspect of this problem. He said many of the newspaper reports, analyses and personal columns that he had read "appeared lopsided on the basis of the tribal grouping with which the one or the other party was identified."

But he said he was not sure "whether this failing was subjective or merely objective". The doyen of Kenyan journalism argued: "The difference is significant. Objective failings happen unconsciously. They may result simply from lack of training or experience. A reporter just may not know how to squeeze all the low-down out of a source."

The need for training in conflict sensitive journalism also became obvious during a three-day workshop in Nairobi organized by the International Media Support. Most of the journalists who covered the post-election violence said, for example, that they used words without fully realizing their implication. The journalists acknowledged that in talking about ethnic cleansing and massacre, they might actually have contributed to fanning the violence. "We learned which words to apply when writing a story," said one radio journalist. "Now I know better."

This Kenyan version of the publication "Conflict Sensitive Journalism" seeks to introduce Kenyan journalists to professional reporting of conflict situations. The original version is retained intact – it contains universal truths regarding the best practices in reporting conflicts. What has been added are local examples, pictures, and extracts from the "Code of Conduct for Kenyan Journalists", which is part of the country's media law.

In the Kenyan examples given, we have simply pointed out what was done and should not have been done and what was not done and should have been done. Hopefully, the lessons will be clear.

Peter Mwaura

Journalist/trainer specializing in communication policy and development communication

Introduction

Conflict sensitive journalism

Good journalism is difficult work at the best of times. There is never enough information and not enough time. Reporters rely on their training and standards to overcome these difficulties and deliver news which is accurate and impartial. That is the traditional role of journalism — to enable the public to make well-informed decisions. However, when a society is threatened by violent conflict, journalism faces greater difficulties. Opposing sides seek to control the media. Information can be unreliable or censored. There is personal risk. But this is also when good journalism is most important.

To provide reliable information to the public in a time of violent conflict requires additional journalism skills. Reporters need to understand more about what causes conflict, and how conflict develops and ends. Reporters need to know where to look for these causes and solutions. By providing this information, journalism makes the public far more well-informed about the conflict beneath the violence, and can assist in resolving it. Reporters need to be aware of this crucial role that journalism can play in a time of conflict.

This handbook offers journalists an introduction to these skills and understanding. It is based on workshops presented by International Media Support (IMS) and IMPACS for experienced reporters and editors in conflict-threatened societies. Its intended function is to be a reminder for the workshop participants later in their work. For other journalists, this handbook can provide a starting point for new skills and new knowledge for reporting on conflict. This knowledge — called conflict sensitive journalism — can make a difference in societies affected by conflict.

Much of this handbook is derived from the important work of innovators in media training and peacebuilding, including Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, at Taplow Court and conflictandpeace.org and their Reporting The World and other publications; Fiona Lloyd and Peter du Toit's Reporting for Peace for Internews; the Institute for War and Peace Reporting; Robert Karl Manoff of the Centre for War, Peace and the News Media; Melissa Bauman at the Media Peace Centre in South Africa; and the original research of IMPACS — The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society.

'What causes conflict' at page 6, 'Understanding Violence' at page 7, 'How is Conflict Resolved' at page 10-11 and the checklist at page 16 are all excerpted and adapted from 'Peace Journalism, What is it? How to do it?' by Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch. The work can be found by visiting the website, www.reportingtheworld.org.uk click on 2003 events, then Peace Journalism Training. The manual is accessed from the bottom button on the right hand side. Example No. 1 on page 17 is excerpted from Jake Lynch: 'Reporting the World: The Findings. A practical checklist for the ethical reporting of conflicts in the 21st Century', produced by journalists, for journalists', page 72-73. The work can be found by visiting the website, www.reportingtheworld.org.uk and clicking the button saying 'Read the online version here'.

Thanks are also due to the participants in IMS Conflict Sensitive Reporting workshops in Sri Lanka and Nepal; to the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in Sri Lanka and the Nepal Press Institute; to Sunanda Deshapriya, Chiranjibi Khanal, and Binod Bhattari and others; and to IMS and IMPACS and partners for launching these initiatives.

Ross Howard

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1. Understanding conflict

Professional news reporters, whether being aware of it or not, are specialists in conflict. For reporters, change is news. And when there is change, there often is disagreement or conflict. There is conflict among those who like the change and those who do not, or those who want more change and those who oppose change. So journalists deal with conflict very often in their work. But many journalists know little about the idea of conflict. They do not know the root causes of conflict, or how conflicts end. They do not know the different kinds of conflict.

For more than 50 years diplomats, negotiators and social scientists have studied conflict and developed a sophisticated understanding of it, just like medicine, business or music. But few journalists have any training in the theory of conflict. Most journalists merely report on the conflict as it happens. By comparison, medical reporters do not just report on a person's illness. They also report on what caused the illness and what may cure it. News reporters can have the same skill when it comes to reporting conflict.

Having the skills to analyze conflict will enable a reporter to be a more effective professional journalist and a more aware individual. This is called Conflict Sensitive Journalism.

What is conflict?

Conflict is a situation where two or more individuals or groups try to pursue goals or ambitions which they believe they cannot share.

Not all conflict is violent. Conflict is normal when there is change. Some people want change, but others disagree. If their disagreement or their conflict is managed peacefully, it can be a positive process. But when conflict is not managed properly, it becomes violent. In violent conflict, people fear for their safety and survival. When we say conflict, we are usually referring to violent conflict.

What causes conflict?

Almost world-wide, it is predictable that conflict will arise where:

- Resources are scarce and not shared fairly, as in food, housing, jobs or land.
- There is little or no communication between the two groups.
- The groups have incorrect ideas and beliefs about each other.
- Unresolved grievances exist from the past.
- Power is unevenly distributed.

Consider the likely sources of conflict in your country. Consider what caused the conflict to become violent.



Understanding violence

Violent physical conflict is easily identified and described by journalists. Individuals or groups in conflict try to hurt or kill each other and there are victims. But there can be other kinds of violence which do great harm in a society and these are more difficult for reporters to see and to explain.

Cultural violence can be the way a group has been thinking about another group for many years. It can include talk, images or beliefs which glorify physical violence. These include:

- **Hate speech:** Different ethnic or cultural groups openly speak badly of each other. One group blames the other for difficulties or problems it is suffering. Violence is encouraged to eliminate the blamed group.
- **Xenophobia:** A people's or a country's hatred or fear of another country creates misperceptions and encourages policies which promote conflict with that country.
- **Myths and legends of war heroes:** A society whose popular songs and history books glorify one side's ancient victories can build hatred for the other side.
- **Religious justifications for war:** Extreme intolerance of other beliefs promotes conflict.
- **Gender discrimination:** To allow practices and laws against women that are not accepted against men is a form of violence.

Structural violence is harm which is built into the laws and traditional behaviour of a group or society. Harm is permitted or ignored. It can include:

- **Institutionalized racism or sexism:** Laws and practices which allow unequal treatment based on race or sex.
- **Colonialism:** A country's lack of self-determination. A foreign authority forcibly assumes control over all important decision-making processes.
- **Extreme exploitation:** Such as slavery.
- **Poverty:** The world's leading cause of violent conflict.
- **Corruption and nepotism:** Governmental decisions are influenced or decided by bribery, favouritism and family or tribal connections.
- **Structural segregation:** Laws which force people to live in separate groups or places against their will.

These kinds of violence are extremely important to identify when reporting and analyzing conflict. Often they are the real cause of direct physical violence. Ending the physical violence will not be enough. It will happen again if the cultural and structural violence is ignored.



Consider your country: is there cultural and structural violence? Is it reported in the media? Do the victims have a voice in the news?

2. Journalism and conflict

The power of the media

Almost all societies have developed ways to regulate conflict without violence. Usually, a fair-minded person — a village elder or a judge or an international tribunal — is given authority by the community to decide how to resolve the conflict. The decision is respected by everyone. If the decisions seem unfair and are not accepted, the conflict may become violent.

Many professionals, such as counselors, community leaders, diplomats, negotiators and scholars, have been thinking deeply about what it takes to end a violent conflict. These professionals have discovered that in any conflict — whether it is within a family, between neighbours, among groups within a country or across borders — certain things must occur for the conflict to end. Conflict does not end by itself.

One of the most important things to take place is communication. For two sides in a conflict to move towards a non-violent resolution, they must first talk. This is where good journalism comes in.

Journalism's unconscious roles:

Professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news. But it is often through good reporting that conflict is reduced.

These are several elements of conflict resolution that good journalism can deliver, automatically, as part of its daily work:

1. Channeling communication:

The news media is often the most important channel of communication that exists between sides in a conflict. Sometimes the media is used by one side to broadcast intimidating messages. But other times, the parties speak to each other through the media or through specific journalists.

2. Educating:

Each side needs to know about the other side's difficulty in moving towards reconciliation. Journalism which explores each side's particular difficulties, such as its politics or powerful interests can help educate the other side to avoid demands for simplistic and immediate solutions.

3. Confidence-building:

Lack of trust is a major factor contributing to conflict. The media can reduce suspicion by digging into hot issues and revealing them so there are no secrets to fear. Good journalism can also present news that shows resolution is possible by giving examples from other places and by explaining local efforts at reconciliation.

4. Correcting misperceptions:

By examining and reporting on the two sides' misperceptions of each other, the media encourages disputing sides to revise their views and move closer to reducing conflict.

5. Making them human:

Getting to know the other side, giving them names and faces, is an essential step. This is why negotiators put the two sides in the same room. Good journalism also does this by putting real people in the story and describing how the issue affects them.

6. Identifying underlying interests:

In a conflict both sides need to understand the bottom-line interests of the other. Good reporting does this by asking tough questions and seeking out the real meaning of what leaders say. Good reporting also looks beyond the leaders' interests and seeks the larger groups' interest.

7. Emotional outlet:

In conflict resolution, there must be outlets for each side to express their grievances or anger or they will explode in frustration and make things worse. The media can provide important outlets by allowing both sides to speak. Many disputes can be fought out in the media, instead of in the streets, and the conflict can be addressed before it turns violent.

8. Framing the conflict:

In a conflict, describing the problem in a different way can reduce tension and launch negotiations. In good journalism, editors and reporters

are always looking for a different angle, an alternative view, a new insight which will still attract an audience to the same story. Good journalism can help reframe conflicts for the two sides.

9. Face-saving, consensus-building:

When two parties try to resolve a conflict they must calm the fears of their supporters. By reporting what they say, the media allows leaders in a conflict to conduct face-saving and consensus-building, even reaching to refugees and exiles in far-away places.

10. Solution-building:

In a conflict, both sides must eventually present specific proposals to respond to grievances. On a daily basis, good reporting does this by asking the disputing parties for their solutions instead of just repeating their rhetoric of grievances. Good journalism is a constant process of seeking solutions.

11. Encouraging a balance of power:

Conflicting groups, regardless of inequalities, have to believe they will be given attention if they meet the other side in negotiations. Good journalism encourages negotiation because the reporting is impartial and balanced. It gives attention to all sides. It encourages a balance of power for the purpose of hearing grievances and seeking solutions.

*Good journalism is a
constant process of
seeking solutions.*

Understanding our influence

These 11 activities are only part of what goes on in reducing conflict between persons or groups. Journalism does these things, as part of its normal good reporting. But when we understand the effect of what we do, we can better appreciate how important our role is in a conflict. We must get our facts right and choose our words carefully.

It also helps us as reporters to be aware that these activities are going on in many closed-door negotiations or peace talks. Knowing this, we can report what we learn about the negotiations with greater understanding. In Sri Lanka, when negotiations first began, the negotiators were concerned that the media did not understand the process and would create misperceptions and destroy confidence.



Ask yourself: which two or three of these 11 essential elements are being practised by the media in your country? Has there been much reporting about solutions? Are journalists pressing leaders from both sides for details of their solutions? Are journalists reporting on the real, underlying issues?

How is conflict resolved?

It is important to know that there is more than one way to end conflict.

Think about this imaginary conflict. Two groups are in conflict over an orange. The orange tree is on one group's land. But the orange is on a branch hanging over the other group's land. Both groups want the one orange.

There are at least four ways for this conflict to end.

1. One party prevails:

- a. The two groups could fight violently and the stronger one wins the orange. The loser is angry and wants revenge.
- b. A judge settles the dispute in favour of one group. But the judge may be corrupt, slow or expensive. The loser is unsatisfied.
- c. Compensation. One group pays the other and keeps the orange. But this could be expensive.

2. Withdrawal:

- a. One or both groups simply walk away. But the conflict is unresolved and neither group is satisfied.
- b. One group destroys the orange, or gives it away. Destroying the orange could include violence. And both sides lose the orange.
- c. Both groups do nothing. But the valuable orange will rot, and is lost by both groups.

3. Compromise. A more useful way:

- a. Cut the orange, so each group gets at least some part of it.
- b. Peel the orange and each group takes the pieces one after the other. Now the orange is a different resource which can be shared, perhaps unequally, but satisfying both groups.
- c. Squeeze the orange into juice. This is a different way of seeing the orange. It is now a resource with a different value. The juice can be shared, perhaps unequally, but satisfying both groups.

4. Transcendence. Real resolution of conflict:

- a. Get more people to claim an interest in the orange, so no one group has a right to the whole orange. The local neighbours of the two groups in conflict may decide that the orange is a community resource, and they encourage the two sides to resolve the conflict without violence.
- b. Get another orange. The community of neighbours goes to the market or to the world and finds someone with a surplus who can share oranges with the two sides and ease the conflict.
- c. The two groups agree, perhaps with community encouragement, to bake an orange cake, sell it in the market and divide the money between the two groups. The orange now is seen differently. It is a resource by which the groups profit.
- d. The two groups plant the orange seeds, make an orange grove and together the groups become the prosperous orange supplier to the larger community. A perfect solution.

This is not to suggest that the neighbours in the community can just march in and tell the two groups in conflict what to do. But it is important to listen to the larger community's proposals for a solution and to seek community assistance in achieving a resolution.

What is the point of this analysis?

It is obvious: conflict should be looked at in more than one way.

- When the source of the conflict is seen as a resource which can be shared, the conflict is less likely to become violent.
- When the larger community takes an interest, there is more pressure not to use violence.
- When there are several alternative ways to resolve the conflict, violence is less attractive.

More alternatives means less conflict

One way of achieving more alternatives in a dispute is by bringing more people into the conflict. It produces more ideas for seeing the conflict differently. It helps discover different solutions to be shared. When two sides are deadlocked, other members of the community, such as religious leaders, the business community, the civil society, a friendly neighboring country, or international organisations, can bring different visions and alternative solutions.

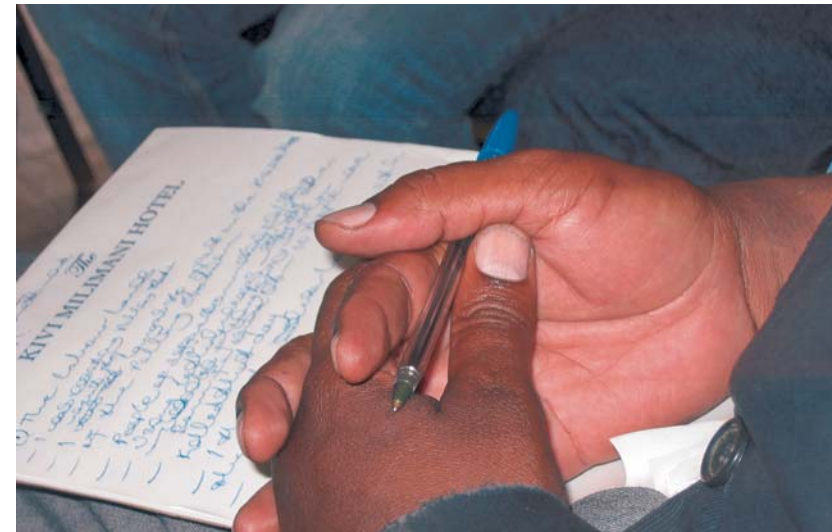
Conflict resolution can be highly complicated. After 30 years of war, the conflict between two groups in Mozambique was resolved in 1992.

- Fourteen different parties, six countries and six non-governmental organizations were involved.
- There were so many parties and ideas that it became difficult for either group to walk away.
- In the Mozambique peace talks, there were groups inside and outside the negotiations, helping the two sides communicate, prepare ideas and respond.
- Everyone started by finding a small agreement. Then they worked on bigger agreements.

Conflict analysis for journalists

What does conflict analysis mean for journalists?

- Journalists should seek out other parties and other points of view. They should not only repeat old grievances by the old elites.
- Journalists should examine what the parties are seeking and the possibility for withdrawal, compromise or transcendence. Journalists should write about these possibilities.
- With conflict analysis, journalists can understand what diplomats and negotiators are trying to do, and can report it more reliably.
- With conflict analysis, journalists can identify more sources to go to for information.



*By providing this information, journalism makes the public far more well-informed about the conflict beneath the violence, and can assist in **resolving** it.*

3. Good journalism, around the world

For citizens in a conflict to make well-informed decisions and perhaps resolve their conflict, they must have good journalism. Around the world, professional journalists have developed principals and basic standards by which they try to achieve good journalism. Unfortunately there are many places where journalists have to work under different rules imposed by governments or by powerful interests. But wherever professional journalists come together to freely consider what they do, and to guide themselves, they refer to these professional standards.

There are more than 50 professional journalists' associations around the world with similar codes of conduct or standards. Many can be found at www.uta.fi/ethicnet. One example is the International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org).



Good journalism. What it should not do:

- **Defamatory:**
Good journalism does not tell lies and twist the truth about people.
- **Derivative:**
Good journalism does not simply repeat what has been reported somewhere else. Copying others' news may repeat false information.
- **Malicious:**
Journalism is powerful. News reports can ruin reputations, put people in danger, or cause public panic. Good journalism is not used to intentionally harm other persons.
- **Corrupt:**
Good journalism does not accept bribes. It does no special favours for anyone. Good journalism is not for sale.

What good journalism should include:



1. Accuracy:

Getting the correct information is most important of all. Everything which is reported must be described accurately — the spelling of names, the facts as they happened, and the real meaning of what was said. Before they report it, good journalists seek the evidence and accurate facts.

A good journalist will rush to get the news first. But first, the journalist must get it right. People will not talk to journalists if they fear journalists will not repeat their words accurately, or will not describe things as they really are.

2. Impartiality (balance):

Almost every code of good journalism puts importance on impartiality, on not taking sides. To do this, a good journalist will seek to produce a report which is balanced. To be balanced is to include both sides. There are always two sides in any story involving conflict. Citizens need to know what the other side says, and how it will affect them.

Balance is as important in every story as accuracy. People will not talk to a journalist who only reports one side of the story.

Impartiality also means that the professional journalist is not an active leader in any political group or movement. Impartial journalism is an important defence for reporters in a time of conflict. Journalists should be respected because they take no sides.

3. Responsibility:

Journalists have obligations to the people they report about, and to the society to whom they report the news. Journalists have a responsibility to protect their sources. Many people will not tell journalists important news if they fear they will be revealed.

Good journalists also use only honest methods to obtain the news, which means they do not break the law.

Accuracy + Impartiality + Responsibility = Reliability

These are the basic standards that produce journalism which the people can trust. It is called reliable journalism. All reliable reporting should be accurate, impartial and responsible. It applies to every aspect of the job — assigning stories, editing copy or sound bites, writing headlines, directing, producing, or managing newsrooms.



At any time, good reporters ask themselves: does my work meet the test of reliable journalism? Does my report have accuracy, impartiality and responsibility in it?

Reliable journalism and democracy

It is reliable reporting which earns journalism a privileged place in many countries' constitutions and laws. Through the media, the people can exercise their right to free speech guaranteed in Article 19 of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Where there is free speech and reliable journalism, citizens can make well-informed decisions in their own best interest. That is an essential element of democracy.

Reliable, diverse and independent

But for democracy to properly flourish and bloom, the media must not only be reliable but also diverse. No single media outlet can do enough. It takes many media outlets to ensure that competing points of view and different reports are brought to the public's attention.

The reliable and diverse media must be independent. The media must be free of government or powerful interference that blocks the reporting of other voices and other interests. An independent media must be supported by laws and courts and independent regulators, who protect the media from interference.

An independent media must also discipline itself, and submit to laws and regulators which are honest and non-partisan.



4. Conflict sensitive journalism

Some journalists say it is not our job to take responsibility for what happens when we report the news. We just report the conflict the same way we report on a soccer match — we just describe it. But this is not enough for conflict sensitive journalism.

No bare facts

Many journalists today recognize that we are more than just professional spectators and distributors of the facts. We are aware that other people know how to create facts for us to report. They have a media strategy. They choose certain facts to tell the media, to use the media to influence the public's view of the conflict. Good journalists know there are no bare facts.

If we only report the bare facts about violent conflict, citizens will only understand the conflict in those terms. But if we search for news beyond the bare facts, and present more information to citizens, including possible solutions, they may see the conflict in different terms. If a car bomb went off yesterday we should not just report it and repeat what the usual leaders say about it. We should also report how it affected ordinary people's lives and seek their opinions about the conflict. We should also report on new attempts to end the conflict and provide information which exposes the bare facts.

The news we report can be destructive for a community, by promoting fear and violence. Or our news reports can be constructive, by making citizens better informed, and possibly safer, by also reporting on efforts to promote conflict reduction. This is conflict sensitive journalism.

A conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides, but is engaged in the search for solutions. Conflict sensitive journalists choose their words carefully.



A checklist for conflict sensitive journalism



- Avoid reporting a conflict as consisting of two opposing sides. Find other affected interests and include their stories, opinions and goals. Interview merchants affected by the general strike, workers who are unable to work, refugees from the countryside who want an end to violence etc.
- Avoid defining the conflict by always quoting the leaders who make familiar demands. Go beyond the elites. Report the words of ordinary people who may voice the opinions shared by many.
- Avoid only reporting what divides the sides in conflict. Ask the opposing sides questions which may reveal common ground. Report on interests or goals which they may share.
- Avoid always focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side. Treat all sides' suffering as equally newsworthy.
- Avoid words like devastated, tragedy and terrorized to describe what has been done to one group. These kinds of words put the reporter on one side. Do not use them yourself. Only quote someone else who uses these words.
- Avoid emotional and imprecise words. Assassination is the murder of a head of state and no-one else. Massacre is the deliberate killing of innocent, unarmed civilians. Soldiers and policemen are not massacred. Genocide means killing an entire people. Do not minimize suffering, but use strong language carefully.
- Avoid words like terrorist, extremist or fanatic. These words take sides, make the other side seem impossible to negotiate with. Call people what they call themselves.
- Avoid making an opinion into a fact. If someone claims something, state their name, so it is their opinion and not your fact.
- Avoid waiting for leaders on one side to offer solutions. Explore peace ideas wherever they come from. Put these ideas to the leaders and report their response.

As journalists, our most powerful tools are the words we use. And the pictures and sounds. We can use our tools to build understanding instead of fears and myths.

*Conflict sensitive journalists choose their words **carefully**.*

Examples of conflict sensitive journalism



Traditional reporting

Ethnic fighting once again engulfed Kenya's western Rift Valley on Sunday as witnesses and Red Cross officials reported brutal attacks by members of President Mwai Kibaki's Kikuyu tribe on other ethnic groups.

The violence spread to the Rift Valley town of Naivasha on Sunday, where the Red Cross said there were reports of people being burned alive in their homes. Kenya's main opposition party and the Red Cross said as many as 30 people were killed.

Ethnic killings continued in the nearby Rift Valley town of Nakuru, where another 47 people have died since the latest wave of violence began on Thursday, according to the opposition Orange Democratic Movement...



Conflict sensitive reporting

There was condemnation across the political divide after violence broke out again on Sunday in western Rift Valley.

In Nakuru 47 people have died since the latest wave of violence began on Thursday while in Naivasha as many as 30 people were killed on Sunday, police said.

Both ODM and PNU condemned the killings, believed to be the work of Kikuyu gangs.

The Kikuyu-dominated Kenya Youth Alliance distanced itself from the killings, saying it was the work of misguided and unemployed youths.

"Those were misguided youths out on blind revenge. We condemn their actions because two wrongs do not make a right," said John Katikati, the political leader of the alliance.

In Naivasha, where the Red Cross said there were reports of people being burned alive in their homes, the local Member of Parliament appealed for calm, saying those involved in the brutal killings would be apprehended and punished according to the law...

EXAMPLE #1

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- The news is all bad, it is violent news and it does not seek other sides or points of view. It declares the worst: "Ethnic fighting engulfed Kenya's western Rift Valley... brutal attacks by members of President Mwai Kibaki's Kikuyu tribe on other ethnic groups. Why rope in the president unless there is evidence he is personally involved?"
- It uses emotional and unnecessary words: "ethnic fighting", "brutal attacks".
- The traditional reporting takes sides: it quotes a political party on a matter they are likely to be biased and without counterchecking with authoritative sources such as the police.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The report goes further than violence and it reports people who condemn the violence.
- The news is quickly balanced: the Kikuyu Youth Alliance denies its members participated in the killings, but admits there were killings.
- The violence is not hidden or ignored. But it is stated in context.



EXAMPLE #2

Traditional reporting

It was a similar situation in Nakuru on Sunday, where ODM member the Rev. Mike Brawan said members of the Kikuyu tribe "are flushing out the non-Kikuyus from their houses."

He said Kikuyus are going house-to-house, attacking civilians, who are not members of the tribe, as well as looting and burning their property. Police, he said, "are not doing much."

Brawan said he saw homes burned and people hacked to death in the violence.

"They just die with a lot of pain," he said.

It is estimated – depending on the source – that between 500 and 1,000 people have been killed in the violence that followed the December 27 election in which Kibaki kept his post...

**Conflict sensitive reporting**

It was a similar situation in Nakuru on Sunday where Kikuyu youths, claiming to be acting in self-defence, were attacking people.

ODM member the Rev. Mike Brawan said the youths are going house-to-house, attacking civilians who are not members of their tribe, as well as looting and burning their property.

Police, he said, "are not doing much."

A local youth leader, Kamau Karani denied the claims, saying the youths are acting in self-defence, guarding Kikuyu houses from attack by other tribes.

"Police have been unable to maintain law and order. That's why the Kikuyu youths are defending themselves," said Mr. Karani.

Police said they were overstretched keeping an eye on rivals gangs in all the residential areas.

It is estimated – depending on the source – that between 500 and 1,000 people have been killed in the violence that followed the December 27 election in which President Kibaki was declared the winner.

See the difference?**Traditional reporting**

- The traditional reporting takes sides: it describes the event from the point of view of a member of an interested political party. It does not seek other views or sides of the story. It does not seek the views of the police or members of the Kikuyu community.
- It emphasizes the violence with words such as "flushing out", "hacked to death", and "just die with a lot of pain".
- It makes unsubstantiated claims: "people hacked to death". How many?

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The news is neutral; it balances responsibility for the violence by introducing other stakeholders in the story.
- It does not report emotion words like "hacked to death". It does not report deaths that cannot be substantiated.
- It reveals more possible explanation. The Kikuyu youths may have been acting on self-defence.

5. Newsroom cultures

Professionalism versus patriotism

No journalist can be completely objective. Journalists, like everyone, carry the values of their home country, their religion and their ethnic group. That is why professional journalists have standards for accuracy, impartiality and responsibility, to remove our personal values and bias.

But when there is a violent threat in a society the media sometimes takes sides. This happened in Nepal. The government declared a State of Emergency against the Maoist threat. The main media agreed and did not concern itself that the Emergency took away media freedoms. And the media used the government words to describe the Maoists as terrorists. Very quickly the media became a voice of the government against the Maoists. And it was more difficult for journalists to independently report on and analyze the government or the Maoists. Journalists censored themselves and lost impartiality.

In Sri Lanka the two main ethnic groups, the Sinhala and the Tamils, live together in the capital city but each side has completely separate media that rarely makes positive reports about the other side. The media creates suspicion, distrust and potential for conflict.

When a newsroom reports the news by looking at everything only from one side against the other side, it thus hinders the reporters from thinking independently. Reporters accept one side's word for what is happening on both sides. But if we do not talk to and report the other side, how will we know when it has changed? We will lose the values of reliable journalism and will no longer communicate and educate and dispel myths.

Reaching the other side

One way professional journalists can help bridge the barriers between the opposing sides is to search for stories about what is common to both sides. For example, it can be news about common environmental concerns, business prospects, health concerns or new farming techniques. And the stories report solutions that can be shared by both sides.

Another way of breaking the barriers is to write stories about trans-ethnic identities, or people who are national heroes. These are people who rise from one group or region to represent the whole country, in business, or international politics or education.

The most important way is to remove stereotypes and assumptions from our news. Stereotypes always report what is different about the other side, such as race or religion or caste, as if it is important. Such reports give the assumption that the other side always acts in certain ways and never changes. Stereotypes blame the other side's religion, caste or culture for whatever happens. Such reports are often wrong and create prejudice and conflict.

Always ask yourself: is race or religion or caste important in my report? If not, remove it.



Examples of conflict sensitive journalism



Traditional reporting

The demonstrators say it is because they are convinced Mr. Kibaki rigged the election.

"We want to send a very strong message to Kibaki," says one.

"Because we cannot get him, we are going to work on his tribe - which is the Kikuyu here.

"When Kibaki got into power, he began to assist Kikuyus. The rest of the Kenyans are left in poverty. So this fight is between the haves and have nots."....



Conflict sensitive reporting

The demonstrators say they are protesting because they believe that the election, which President Kibaki won, was rigged.

"We want to send a very strong message to Kibaki," said Kazi Moto, one of the demonstrators, threatening action against Kikuyus living in the area.

He claimed that when President Kibaki got into power he "began to assist Kikuyus" leaving other Kenyans "in poverty".

He said this is a fight between the rich and the poor.

Njenga wa Njenga, a Kikuyu farmer in the area said all he has acquired is through the sweat of his brow.

"I have never received any assistance from the government. It is crazy for anybody to think Kibaki goes around dishing money to Kikuyus. We work hard," he said.

Prof. Samson Samusa, a political scientist at Moi University said the unequal distribution of wealth in Kenya is historical and goes back to colonial times when....

EXAMPLE #1

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- The news is full of blame and accusations with no proof. It takes the demonstrators' side. It says President Kibaki rigged the election, and assists Kikuyus and not other tribes. How does he know?
- It uses emotional language: "work on his tribe", "left in poverty", and "the haves and have nots" without any explanation.
- The demonstrator quoted in length is not named, without telling the reader why he is not named.

Using anonymous sources is only justified when there is no other way of getting an important story and when the reporter is satisfied that the unnamed source is credible or genuine and has legitimate fears for not wanting to disclose his identity. Often, journalists need to use anonymous sources, especially to get inside views and information on what's happening in the government. The danger is that those sources can use the media to promote a certain point of view or to fly trial balloons, and unjustly attack rivals. Journalists need to be aware of that danger and treat the information given by such sources with extra caution and care.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The news does not pin down responsibility for the rigging of elections because there is no proof.
- It tames the emotional language.
- It tries to balance the comments of the demonstrator by seeking opposing views.
- It seeks to place the frustrations of the demonstrator in some perspective.

**EXAMPLE #2****Traditional reporting**

Local Government minister, Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, is said to be reluctant to let go of his docket.

Sources told the Standard that at least three Cabinet colleagues tried in vain to convince him at the weekend to take another ministry.

The ministry is one of those PNU was expected to relinquish to ODM.

Uhuru has also been mentioned as one of the leaders eyeing the Deputy Prime Minister's slot.

A source said: "Prof Saitoti, Ms Martha Karua and Mr. Kiraitu Murungi met Uhuru to convince him to accept the changes as agreed on by the two principals. But he was reluctant and threatened to lead his party out of the coalition."

The sources said Uhuru, who is also the Gatundu South MP, wondered why he was being pushed. On Sunday, he was among Cabinet ministers at Harambee House, where talks between President Kibaki and Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Raila Odinga, again failed to break the deadlock over the new Cabinet line up....

**Conflict sensitive reporting**

Local Government minister, Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, has denied that he is unwilling to give up his portfolio, which is one of those ministries PNU was expected to relinquish to ODM.

"I serve at the pleasure of the President. How can I refuse to give up my post?", he said in an interview. "The president can remove me at any time."

Mr. Kenyatta was reacting to reports that three Cabinet colleagues had tried in vain to convince him at the weekend to take another ministry.

He has also been mentioned as one of the leaders eyeing the Deputy Prime Minister's slot.

Mr. Toboa Jana, a PNU insider, told "The Standard" that Prof George Saitoti, Ms Martha Karua and Mr. Kiraitu Murungi had met Mr. Kenyatta to convince him to accept the changes as agreed on by the two principals.

EXAMPLE #2 continued

"But he was reluctant and threatened to lead his party out of the coalition," Mr. Jana said.

He said Mr. Kenyatta, who is also the Gatundu South MP, wondered why he was being pushed.

On Sunday, Mr. Kenyatta was among the Cabinet ministers at Harambee House, where talks between President Kibaki and Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Raila Odinga, again failed to break the deadlock over the new Cabinet line up....

See the difference?**Traditional reporting**

- The news is full of blame and accusations, without giving the other side of the story.
- It uses unnamed sources in a story that is controversial, without giving reasons why the sources sought anonymity. See comments on the use of unnamed sources in Example # 3
- It does not give Mr. Kenyatta an opportunity to respond to the accusations. It paints him as a hardliner.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The news begins with a denial rather than the charge because the charge is weak as it is sourced from a third party. It gives Mr. Kenyatta an opportunity to speak his mind on the issue.
- It seeks to name the sources. If the sources cannot be named a plausible reason must be given.



Check-list against prejudice

Examine this list, adapted from The Sunday Times of South Africa, for ways to guard against stories which encourage prejudice.

- Is this necessary news? What is the public interest in this report? Is it news only because it is about the other side?
- Even if the facts are correct, will this report encourage prejudice? Can it be reported differently?
- Are there enough different voices in the report? Did we ask enough different opinions from ordinary people and experts?
- Are there words and comments in the report which offend people or cause prejudice? Are these comments balanced by other comments?
- In crime news, are we reporting the race or culture of the offender and the victim? Is this information necessary and in the public interest? Why?



Newsroom diversity

Reliable journalism is accurate, balanced and responsible. Culture, race and religion should have no influence on our reporting. We are supposed to be colour-blind. And our newsrooms and offices should represent many colours of race, religion or culture. We should be diverse.

But often our newsrooms are not diverse. We have no reporters from "the other side", culture or race. We do not put reporters of different race, religion or culture together as a team, in order to counter-balance prejudices. We should.

We have no contacts with "the other side". We have no sources on the other side. We do not report from other parts of the country. We should.

We have very few female reporters. We do not report issues of importance to women. Our reporting does not represent the reality of our country. We treat women differently. We should treat women equally.

The diversity in a newsroom and in the news is an important measure of the media's role in conflict. The media can lead society by example, or can increase divisions in society.

A diversity checklist



- In our reporting, does the amount of news about the other side or other culture equal the other side's proportion in our society?
- Do positive reports about minorities only appear in certain sections of the news, such as sports?
- Who in the newsroom has good contacts or reliable sources on the other side?
- Are reporters recruited from minority communities and are they given a mentor and skills upgrading?
- Are there guidelines for achieving more diversity in the newsroom and in the news we report? Are the plans led by a respected person with authority to make diversity happen?

6. Code of conduct for Kenyan journalists

The Media Act, Chapter 3 of the Laws of Kenya enacted in 2007 provides for, among other things, the conduct and discipline of journalists and the media. The Second Schedule of the Act provides a code of conduct. The following extracts are relevant to reporting conflict situations:

Covering Ethnic, Religious and Sectarian Conflict

News, views or comments on ethnic, religious or sectarian dispute should be published or broadcast after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity and peace. [Peter Mwaura's comments: This principle is good and will help reinforce the message of conflict sensitive journalism, however, the problem is: Who is the judge? Sometimes journalists may feel they need to publish news that is legitimate in the interests of conflict sensitive journalism but is not, in the government's viewpoint, "conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity and peace". This code is liable to abuse by the government. Journalists sometimes need to tell stories that are "uncomfortable" or the government's interprets not to be "in the best interest of the public". However, the general message that journalists need to act responsibly and use their power wisely is good for conflict sensitive journalism].

- Provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided.
- News reports or commentaries should not be written or broadcast in a manner likely to inflame the passions, aggravate the tension or accentuate the strained relations between the communities concerned. Equally so, articles or broadcasts with the potential to exacerbate communal trouble should be avoided.

Accuracy and Fairness

- The fundamental objective of a journalist is to write a fair, accurate and an unbiased story on matters of public interest. All sides of the story shall be reported, wherever possible. Comments should be obtained from anyone who is mentioned in an unfavorable context.
- In general, provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided. Headings should reflect and justify the matter printed under them. Headings containing allegations made in statements should either identify the body or the source making them or at least carry quotation marks.
- Journalists should treat all subjects of news coverage with respect and dignity, showing particular compassion to victims of crime or tragedy.
- Journalists should seek to understand the diversity of their community and inform the public without bias or stereotype and present a diversity of expressions, opinions and ideas in context.
- Journalists and other media practitioners should present analytical reporting based on professional perspective, not personal bias.

Integrity

- Journalists should present news with integrity and decency, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest, and respect the dignity and intelligence of the audience as well as the subjects of news. They should –
 - (a) identify sources whenever possible. Confidential sources should be used only when it is clearly in public interest to gather or convey important information or when a person providing information might be harmed;
 - (b) clearly label opinion and commentary;
 - (c) use technological tools with skill and thoughtfulness, avoiding techniques that skew facts, distort reality, or sensationalize events.

Unnamed Sources

- Unnamed sources should not be used unless the pursuit of the truth will best be served by not naming the source who should be known by the editor and reporter. When material is used in a report from sources other than the reporter's these sources should be indicated in the story.

Obscenity, Taste and Tone in Reporting

- Publication of photographs showing mutilated bodies, bloody incidents and abhorrent scenes should be avoided unless the publication or broadcast of such photographs will serve the public interest.

Use of Pictures and Names

- As a general rule, the media should apply caution in the use of pictures and names and should avoid publication when there is a possibility of harming the persons concerned. Manipulation of pictures in a manner that distorts reality should be avoided. Pictures of grief, disaster and those that embarrass and promote sexism should be discouraged.

Acts of Violence

- The media should avoid presenting acts of violence, armed robberies, banditry and terrorist activities in a manner that glorifies such anti-social conduct. Also, newspapers should not allow their columns to be used for writings which tend to encourage or glorify social evils, warlike activities, ethnic, racial or religious hostilities.

Hate Speech

- Quoting persons making derogatory remarks based on ethnicity, race, creed, color and sex shall be avoided. Racist or negative ethnic terms should be avoided. Careful account should be taken of the possible effect upon the ethnic or racial group concerned, and on the population as a whole, and of the changes in public attitudes as to what is and what is not acceptable when using such terms.

*Few journalists have any training in the theory of conflict. Having the skills to **analyze conflict** will enable a reporter to be a more **effective professional** journalist.*

Ross Howard

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