



SPECIAL EDITION RWANDA

Conflict sensitive journalism

A handbook by Ross Howard

ims

INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA SUPPORT

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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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Unity in Diversity



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Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

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Preface

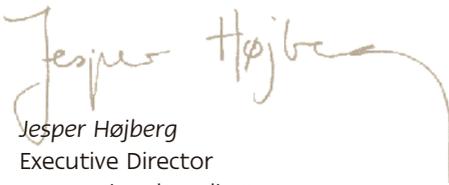
It was the tragic events in Rwanda and other conflicts in the 1990s, during which the media were manipulated and used as a tool to fuel violent conflict, that led to the establishment of International Media Support (IMS). IMS was set up in response to this alarming trend to help local media working in conflict-affected areas to remain operative and professional.

As a part of our work over the years we have carried out a number of missions to Rwanda and the Great Lakes region. Together with UNESCO, we felt it was important to provide a tool that journalists could use so that the media are never again used in such a destructive fashion and journalists could cover conflict and conflict-stressed areas with confidence.

This handbook on conflict sensitive journalism – special edition Rwanda – is part of UNESCO and IMS's response to the needs expressed during our missions to Rwanda. 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 Rwandan media practitioners covering conflict.

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 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

Context

The legacy of Radio-Télévision Libres des Mille Collines (RTLM) in Rwanda and the use of the media as a weapon during the 1994 genocide have been well documented. While this legacy continues to haunt the country and its media today, it also serves as a potent illustration and reminder of the power the media wield.

It is just as important, however, to remind ourselves that the media can also be used as an equally powerful force for positive change -- the kind of change that means more people have the possibility to participate in civic life and the kind of change that means a country can rebuild, not just physically, but in terms of confidence and trust.

This takes time. But this trust can only be rebuilt with the media playing the role it is meant to – to inform, to educate and to entertain, and to do all of these responsibly, but without obstruction.

The Rwandan media continue to work in a fragile environment, in a region where conflict unfortunately continues to be all too common. It is incumbent on all media practitioners, therefore, to be aware of the conflict-escalating tendencies that the media can have and to recognize that the solution is not self-censorship. Rather to learn techniques of solid fact-based, balanced reporting – something which is particularly important in conflict and post-conflict environments.

History should not be forgotten – or repeated. We must learn from our past, but we must also be careful that we do not let the past overshadow the future and what we are doing today, in the present. Encouraging the media to produce, disseminate and voice news and information enables and strengthens civil society and is greatly needed in the healing process. However, it must be done responsibly and accurately, and with a clear understanding of the role that journalists play not only in conflict, but in conflict resolution and peace building. It is with this in mind that IMS and UNESCO have published the *Conflict Sensitive Journalism – Special Edition Rwanda*.

Michelle Betz
Consultant
International Media Support

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

Journalist/Trainer specializing in media in conflict and democratization

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

EXAMPLE #1



Traditional reporting

Eastern DR Congo is once again on fire.

Fighting between government troops and rebels of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) led by so-called Tutsi renegade Gen. Laurent Nkunda has left death and mayhem in its wake.

By the start of the weekend, a ceasefire declared late on Wednesday was on the verge of collapse. Gen. Nkunda was camped at the gates of Goma threatening to storm that city unless, he said, the government troops stopped looting and massacring civilians.

Gen. Nkunda says he is fighting to protect his fellow ethnic Tutsi minority in eastern Congo. But this is despite having signed on to "a broad peace deal" in January. He now says that peace process was "dominated too much by Kabila's government".

As it is, the situation is dire.



Conflict sensitive reporting

As fighting continues in Eastern DRC, the United Nations is continuing its efforts to bring peace to the region.

According to the U.N. Office for Humanitarian Affairs, fighting between government troops and rebels of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) led by General Laurent Nkunda has left unknown numbers dead and tens of thousands of internally displaced people and refugees.

By the start of the weekend, a ceasefire declared late on Wednesday was fragile. Nkunda's forces had almost reached Goma and threatened to enter the city unless, he said, the government troops stopped the looting and killing of civilians.

Gen. Nkunda says he is fighting to protect his fellow ethnic Tutsi minority in eastern Congo. But this is despite having signed on to "a broad peace deal" in January. He now says that peace process was "dominated too much by Kabila's government".

The UN is continuing its efforts to bring all parties to the table for peace talks.

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: "a ceasefire...was on the verge of collapse" and "the situation is dire."
- The news is full of blame and accusations with no proof.
- The story uses emotional and unnecessary words: massacring, mayhem and looting.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The news is not all bad. It reports that the UN continues its efforts at peace.
- The ethnic identity is not reported immediately.
- Other sources have been used, namely UNOCHA.
- The violence is not hidden or ignored but rather avoids the use of overly emotional language.

EXAMPLE #2



Traditional reporting

Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe has sent in military support to the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to back Joseph Kabila's struggling FARDC forces against the rebel group National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). "Their role is real," said a CNDP spokesperson.

Commenting on the atrocities committed last week the spokesperson said : "They raped women, looted and maimed and mutilated families."

He also claimed that these brutal atrocities in Goma town were designed by the DR Congo government troops in a bid to put blame on the advancing rebel army (CNDP).

"Bad things happened in Goma before we ceased fire. When just four kilometers away and before government soldiers withdrew, they killed people who don't speak Kinyarwanda, and this was planned to be blamed on us to tarnish our image once we took over," the spokesperson said.



Conflict sensitive reporting

Rebel forces in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) say Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe has sent in military support to the East-ern DRC to back Joseph Kabila's struggling FARDC forces.

A Zimbabwe government spokesperson denies the claim.

The CNDP spokesperson also says the atrocities in Goma town were designed by the DR Congo government troops in a bid to put blame on the advancing rebel army (CNDP).

The United Nations says it is looking into the claim.

The current outbreak of violence began one week ago and it is left tens of thousands of people homeless.

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- *The story reports a claim by unnamed CNDP sources without proof.*
- *The story is full of blame and lacks proof – there is no evidence of Zimbabwe support.*
- *The story is one sided and takes sides. It tells the story from only one point of view and there is no effort to seek comment from either Zimbabwe or Kinshasa.*
- *The report does not seek out other interests or points of view.*

Conflict sensitive reporting

- *The report gives some explanation for the violence.*
- *The report seeks out other points of view.*
- *The report brings a human element to the story.*

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

EXAMPLE #1



Traditional reporting

Problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo are internal and have nothing to do with Rwanda, says a Rwandan spokesperson.

The current escalation of conflict in North Kivu is attributed to the presence of Ex-FAR/Interahamwe/FDLR and General Nkunda says he is protecting his people from continued persecution by these extremist genocidal forces. After renegade General Laurent Nkunda agreed to mix his fighters with the national army, the FDLR being an anti-Tutsi group, received support from leaders of the main ethnic groups: the Wanande, the Watembo, Wahunde and Wanyange.

"Certainly the Laurent Nkunda phenomena, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) is totally an internal problem and the DRC has got to find a way of solving this problem," she said.

The spokesperson emphasized that Rwandan troops were not in DR Congo saying that "there are no Rwandan troops in DR Congo but the allegations are there. We have mechanisms to address that, we have joint verification mechanisms between Rwanda and the DRC, they can be used to look into those issues."



Conflict sensitive reporting

Rwandan President Paul Kagame says the current problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo are internal and have nothing to do with Rwanda despite accusations by the UN to the contrary.

A UN spokesperson says that Rwandan forces have been assisting General Laurent Nkunda's rebel forces.

A Rwandan spokesperson emphasized that Rwandan troops were not in DR Congo saying that "there are no Rwandan troops in DR Congo but the allegations are there. We have mechanisms to address that, we have joint verification mechanisms between Rwanda and the DRC, they can be used to look into those issues."

UN officials have confirmed they will meet with both Rwandan and DRC officials later this week.

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- The story places blame at the outset.
- The story gives ethnic identity importance. It assumes that ethnic conflict is the cause. There is no proof of this.
- The source is not attributable and the information provided is not confirmed or verified by other sources.
- There is no seeking of possible solutions.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The story includes sources from more than "one side".
- Ethnic identity is not given any importance.
- The story looks to the future and a possible start to a solution (meetings with UN, Rwanda and DRC).



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. Media and Journalists' Code of Ethics in Rwanda

The community of Rwandan journalists believes that the free flow of information and public enlightenment is the foundation for liberty, democracy and development. Motivated by this, and drawing from a sad and shamefully partisan, and hate media that played a part in the 1994 genocide, the media fraternity resolve to adopt, promote and abide by principles designed to build a strong, independent, vibrant and responsible media. This media shall enjoy the greatest possible freedoms of expression, opinion, conscience and press as enshrined and guaranteed in the Rwandan Constitution of June 2003, especially Article 34, and the Law n° 18/2002 of 11 th may 2002 governing the press and in the African Charter on Human, and Peoples' Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly Article 19.

Journalists, editors, and publishers shall remain constantly aware of their responsibilities to the general public, serving the truth inherent within our culture, upholding and preserving the respect and prestige of the press while remaining accountable to their peers and listeners/viewers/readers by performing to their best abilities and belief.

This code of ethics is designed and adopted not as a formal set of rules per se nor does it constitute grounds for legal liability, but as a covenant to preserve the highest possible professional standards among journalists in their quest to perform a public function of news dissemination, information and exchange of ideas as well as serving as scrutinizers in the conduct of public affairs.

In the conduct of their profession, journalists shall:

Part One: Rules on News, Opinion and Publicity

- 1) Seek the truth, report and respect the right of the public to information: In performing their public duties of informing, educating and entertaining, the guiding principle for all journalists shall be serving the citizens' right to know the truth.
- 2) Be objective, accurate and disseminate honest news and information: bearing in mind the critical role of the mass media in our society which

calls for utmost confidence from the general public, journalists shall at all times ensure that the information disseminated is accurate, fair and objective without giving undue emphasis or knowing omissions. This means that journalists shall avoid any distortion, misrepresentation and falsification by verifying the authenticity of any information or material, including pictures.

- 3) Ensure that news is balanced, impartial and fair by giving all sides to an issue and all efforts be made to give an opportunity to subjects of news and information to respond to allegations or accusations made against them.
- 4) Make sure that headlines, captions, photos, video, audio, graphics and introductions are supported and reflected in the information. This is intended to avoid sensationalism.
- 5) Avoid rumors, amplifying or keeping it alive, speculation, staged news events, falsification of documents or suppression of essential information.
- 6) Distinguish news from analysis, comments, opinions and advertisements.
- 7) Be sensitive and compassionate when dealing with the production and publication of stories and photos involving tragedy and grief.
- 8) Respect deadlines or embargo set on press releases before their publication or airing.
- 9) Bylines in newspapers, and programmes on radios and televisions should bear the legal names of journalists, presenters and producers. The exception to this rule is when the publication of their names may compromise their security and well being.

Part Two: General Professional Conduct

- 10) Editors should ensure that letters to the editor bear the legal names and address of the publishers. The exception to this principle is where the disclosure of the names and address may harm his/her well-being. Such letters shall not attack individuals unfairly, but this exception does not include the censoring opinions of readers/viewers/listeners. Editing of such opinions should only be for the purpose of space and time constraints or the omission of harmful comment.
- 11) Always question the motive of, and identify sources. The only exception to this rule shall be in relation to information given in confidence. Before making any promises, always clarify conditions attached. Whenever such a pledge is made, keep the promise.

- 12) Use only fair methods to obtain news, photos and documents. Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of obtaining news and information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. The use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
- 13) Desist from inciting violence of any kind, including ethnic or religious hatred, tension and animosity.
- 14) Respect copyright rules and never plagiarize. Always credit sources.
- 15) Always distinguish between advocacy and news reporting.
- 16) Do the utmost to rectify any published information, which is later found to be harmfully inaccurate or misleading.
- 17) Avoid prejudiced or discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, ethnicity, language, religion, color of the skin, political, social, mental or physical disability including HIV and AIDS status.
- 18) Avoid identifying victims of rape and defilement unless the former has consented.
- 19) Exercise sensitivity when reporting on issues involving individuals under the age of 18. Desist from identifying names of minors or details that may lead to his/her identification except under special circumstances serving the interests of the child.
- 20) Avoid intrusion and inquiries into an individual's private life without the person's consent unless public interest overrides.
- 21) Make sure that advertisements are clearly marked as such without any confusion. And any advertisement, which is contrary to any aspect of this code of conduct should be avoided.
- 22) Respect the presumption of innocence for suspects and cases until concluded by competent courts or tribunals. This shall include avoiding implicating innocent persons not involved in the case but who may be directly related to the suspect or referring to his/her ethnicity, tribe, religion, sex, family or friends, unless their mention would serve public interest.
- 23) Avoid conflict of interests and be free of obligation other than the public's right to know.
- 24) Admit error, welcome fair criticism and the public's right to reply. Always apologize when a mistake is made.
- 25) Avoid stories or the use of photos or images that are obscene, indecent or which may compromise public morals or order.

Part Three: Right to Information and Defense of the Profession

- 26) Avoid the acceptance of bribes or favors of any form or any obligation that may compromise or damage the integrity of the profession.
- 27) Be independent, avoid unnecessary secrecy, expose wrongdoing, abuse of power and public office.
- 28) Abide by the same high professional standards as you hold others and expose unethical practices within the media industry.
- 29) Ensure self-respect.
- 30) Avoid bringing the profession in contempt by falsely attacking individuals or organizations with the express intention of promoting personal or organization fame.
- 31) Media organization should strive to be transparent in their ownership, management and operations. This means that owners and managers of media organizations should not be a secret.
- 32) Media organizations and employers should ensure the protection and defense of their journalists in the conduct of their duty.
- 33) Offer support and protection to fellow journalists whenever required. This relates to a situation when the journalist is a subject of harassment, and intimidation aimed at interfering with freedom of the press and right of the journalist to perform his/her functions.
- 34) Defend and preserve freedom of the press, speech, expression and free access to public information.
- 35) Strive for the unity and strength of media and journalists associations.

Part Four: Concluding Remark

- 36) Abide by, promote and respect the principles set forth in this code. Every journalist working in Rwanda shall strive to promote, defend and respect the highest professional code of conduct as set out and agreed in this code. All editors within electronic, print media and publishers shall ensure that their employees and contributors follow benchmarks herein.

This code was drawn up by a committee comprised of Edward Rwema (Radio Rwanda), Fulgence Kamali (Radio Flash), Sixte Mungwarakarama (Ingabo Magazine), John Sesonga, (Imvaho Nshya), Anastase Rwabuneza (Izuba Radio), Eugène Ruhinguka (HCP), Caritas Uwera (TVR) and Christopher Kayumba (EJC, UNR).

7. Annexes

Annex I

Consultation and Journalists Participation

The committee drafting media code of ethics believes that the greater involvement and participation of journalists and other stakeholders in the industry is crucial for the success and legitimization of the code. Because of this, the following process is suggested before adoption of the code:

- Translate the present draft into French and Kinyarwanda;
- Return translated documents to committee members who shall then meet to discuss and ensure the translated versions are in harmony with the original draft;
- Forward the draft to as many journalists as possible, including editors, directors of media houses (using joint journalist e-group). Any suggestions and amendments should then be sent to the drafting committee;
- Committee members meet to harmonize the document;
- Organize a seminar to explain, and discuss the draft;
- Call an assembly of all journalists to adopt the code.

Annex II

Enforcement mechanism

Experience elsewhere suggests that making codes of ethics is one thing and its success another. Available evidence shows that for such a code to stand the test of time, not only must journalists participate in its making, but also in its enforcement; especially that such a code is not and can't serve as a legal basis for the punishment of journalists or medium. Bearing this in mind, the following recommendations are made to this effect:

1. When finally adopted, the code be the basis and reference for all media houses in making their own in-house codes;
2. Media owners and employers should make sure that when recruiting new employees, appointment letters be accompanied with their code;
3. The High Council of the Press should accompany press cards with the copy of code;
4. Strive for and ensure the independence of the High Council of the Press (HCP), or any other impartial body that may be determined by journalists which will be answerable to the assembly of journalists, or the committee of editors, or both;
5. Ensure that any body (whether HCP or otherwise) that will be trusted with the enforcement of this code be comprised of individuals of very high moral standing and impeccable character, preferably retired professors, judges, lawyers, journalists and other citizens of integrity;
6. Finally, disciplinary measures, or sanctions to be meted out to offenders be decided by an assembly of journalists, a committee of editors or both.

*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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