



SPECIAL EDITION ZIMBABWE

Conflict sensitive journalism

A handbook by Ross Howard



Published by International Media Support 2009

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**.

Ross Howard

Handling latest news at the print shop where *The Independent* and the *Standard* are being printed.
Coverphoto: IMS



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Preface

In countries affected by conflict and severe human insecurity media has an important role to play as an active promoter of human rights and democratisation, as well as a facilitator of conflict reduction and resolution through the gathering and dissemination of non-partisan information.

Journalism sensitive to conflict empowers reporters to report conflicts professionally without feeding the flames – to report in depth, to cover all sides and to ventilate all issues related to the conflict hence providing the public with more comprehensive, neutral and accurate information on the conflicts.

In response to an appeal from our Zimbabwean partner organisations, Media Institute of Southern Africa in Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, underlining the imminent need for promoting the concept of conflict sensitive journalism among Zimbabwean journalists, IMS cooperated with MISA and ZUJ in organizing a series of workshops in April and May 2009 gathering a broad cross section of media practitioners from across the country.

This handbook in conflict sensitive journalism – special edition Zimbabwe – gathers the experience from these workshops and responds at the same time to the needs of contextualized training manuals and handbooks expressed during the workshops.

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 Zimbabwean media practitioners covering the conflict.

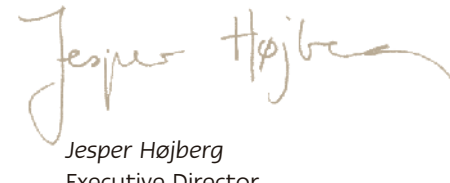
Vincent Kahiya, editor of the Zimbabwe Independent and journalist trainer, is responsible for writing the Zimbabwean sections of the handbook. IMS would like to express special thanks to Vincent Kahiya for his commitment to this important task.

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.

For, as expressed by one of the participants in the conflict sensitive journalism workshop:

"In Zimbabwe, we have conflicts everywhere. I have realized that it is important to look at both sides of the coin. Even if I do not agree with somebody, I should give him or her voice. Everyone should be allowed to be heard."



Jesper Højberg
Executive Director
International Media Support

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Context

Political leaders in Zimbabwe agreed in early 2009 to a power-sharing deal which has resulted in the formation of a Government of National Unity in which former opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai is now Prime Minister.

The formation of the GNU is optimistically seen as a major step toward resolving Zimbabwe's most serious political crisis. The crisis has resulted in the death of hundreds of people in politically-related violence, the displacement of thousands from their homes and the emigration of almost a quarter of the population.

Zimbabwe has since the turn of the millennium been a divided country in which the struggle for power and control of resources – especially land and mineral wealth – have become key epicenters of conflict.

In the reportage of the crisis it is apparent that media in Zimbabwe have been fractured almost along the same fault lines as those dividing political antagonists. The reporting of conflict in Zimbabwe has resultantly been dominated by hate speech, intolerance of minorities' views and rights, and instances of unethical amplification of conflict. The manner of reporting has been about 'us and them' as the media was easily co-opted into political camps that ventilate dogmas and propaganda.

The new unity government's Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee has recognized hate speech as a major impediment to national healing. Local media monitors the Zimbabwe Media Monitoring Project had this to say about the hate speech that characterized the election period in the first half of 2008:

"In Zimbabwe hate speech has been a cause of much social disharmony that needs to be stopped by exposing it for what it is. Hate speech is bigoted language that attacks or disparages a social group or member of such group. It is trite that vicious hate propaganda, or any other form of propaganda for that matter, has a vast ability to influence and control the thinking of ordinary people."

During the International Media Support sponsored series of workshops for Zimbabwean journalists in conflict sensitive journalism workshop there were lively discussions – although the nature of the engagement with the participants was different. The participants comprised both journalists from the government controlled media and senior reporters from the privately owned media as well as freelancers.

Some of the state media journalists were fascinating in their quest to justify their style of writing which is steeped in defending the government of President Mugabe. They also made useful disclosure regarding insertions into their stories of adjectives and phrases by senior editors to reflect the political slant of their media houses.

This was very useful in as far as it highlighted the need to train senior editorial staff at the state-owned media houses in conflict sensitive journalism. There was also a quest to justify use of hate speech and crude language by some journalists working in the private media. There are some among them who believe that President Mugabe and his government do not require any "sympathy" and therefore deserve crude treatment in the media.

The conflict sensitive journalism workshops demonstrated the ability of Zimbabwe journalists to not only grasp the significance and meaning of conflict sensitive journalism, but the ability to put it into practice during exercises undertaken during the workshops.

Zimbabwe is a country on the path to change and it is therefore incumbent on the media to augment the change process by giving people reporting that is accurate, impartial and responsible. That is good old journalism. But Zimbabwe journalists also need another skill: knowing how poor journalism can also lead to violence and using that knowledge to try to prevent it happening. In other words, conflict sensitive journalism.

Vincent Kahiya
Editor, the Zimbabwe Independent

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:

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

2. Withdrawal:

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

3. Compromise. A more useful way:

- Cut the orange, so each group gets at least some part of it.
- 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.
- 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.



A reporter takes notes in a training session for journalists. Photo: Anne Poulsen/IMS

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.



A poster advocating press freedom for journalists in Zimbabwe in connection with the World Press Freedom Day, 13 May. Photo: IMS

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

Vice President Joseph Msika has lambasted MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai describing him as a sell out and a puppet of imperialists who are bent on reversing the gains of the country's independence.

Speaking at the burial of his late grandson Thabani Msika who died on Wednesday, Vice President Joseph Msika reminded the people to safeguard the sacrifices made by hundreds of people who shed their blood for the liberation of Zimbabwe.

Cde Msika urged the people not to be fooled by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai whom he described as sell out who is being used to reverse the gains of the hard won independence in love for money.



Conflict sensitive reporting

Animosity between Zimbabwe's two main political parties intruded on a funeral service Wednesday. Vice president Joseph Msika, who attended the burial of his grandson Thabani Msika, chose the occasion to criticize Movement for Democratic Change leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

Msika said Tsvangirai's policies risk reversing the gains made in Zimbabwe since its independence. However, he provided no specific examples of policies or promises made by the MDC that would have such an effect.

For its part, the MDC issued a statement calling upon all parties to work together for the improvement of social and economic conditions in Zimbabwe.

EXAMPLE #1

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- The report contains only harsh condemnation, criticism and over the top hyperbole directed at a political opponent.
- There is no attempt at balance by, for instance, soliciting comment from the party and leader being attacked.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- It is possible to describe the language of Msika without repeating the loaded and derogatory terms he used to describe his opponent.
- Pointing out the lack of substantiation invites readers to be more inquisitive when such charges are leveled.
- Balance is provided by adding a comment from the MDC that is conciliatory and uses no combative language.



Traditional reporting

Information and Publicity Minister Tichaona Jokonya has branded journalists working in the country's private media weapons of mass destruction and willing tools of Western interests, effectively killing off whatever hopes the independent press had of a reprieve following the ouster of Jonathan Moyo earlier in the year.

In a speech, Jokonya claimed scribes in the privately-owned media were being paid by Western countries to rubbish President Robert Mugabe's government and needed to be monitored.

Journalists had become "tools or shall I say victims of the country's detractors . . . Some journalists have indeed become not public opinion formers but character assassins, malinformants to the point of having become embedded warmongers or, to use much-abused terminology, they have become weapons of mass destruction.

"In their service to the foreign interests they (journalists) apply strategies of blending half-truths and outright lies. These deliberate acts of disinformation create perceptions, which are neither helpful to the customers and indeed the generality of our people. These journalists masquerade as independent journalists despite the fact that we all know that they are paid by the enemies of the people through such payments as monthly incomes, medical aid assistance, indeed pensions funds, housing, car allowances, business trips. They become impeded house boys and girls," Jokonya said.



Conflict sensitive reporting

Zimbabwe journalists say they will have to work closely with Information and Publicity Minister Tichaona Jokonya to soften his views of the practice of journalism in this country.

The Zimbabwe Union of Journalists was reacting to recent comments by Jokonya in which he criticized severely some

EXAMPLE #2

EXAMPLE #2 continued

journalists. He was particularly critical of independent journalists and made unsubstantiated accusations of spreading false information.

ZUJ president Matthew Takaona said it takes criticism of journalism and journalists seriously, and expressed a willingness to meet with the minister to discuss poor practices and to seek ways to improve the quality of journalism in Zimbabwe.

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- The report pessimistically gives up on any hope of improving relations between government and journalists.
- It repeats verbatim the violence laden charges of "warmongers" and "weapons of mass destruction" leveled at journalists.
- It repeats accusations of lying and treasonous activity without apparently seeking any proof or evidence. It is utterly one sided in that it makes no attempt to balance the criticism with reaction from any journalist organization.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The report does not accept that journalist/government relations are hopeless and cannot be improved.
- It makes clear that the minister leveled criticism without repeating the loaded and insulting language he used.
- It offers hope for reconciliation by including a comment from the ZUJ suggesting a meeting and acknowledging that there are indeed poor practices.

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.



Newspapers are sold on street corners in Harare.
Photo: Anne Poulsen/IMS

Examples of conflict sensitive journalism



Traditional reporting

Police have launched investigations into the activities of a secretive group of former Rhodesian army officers who were holding clandestine meetings at the Memorable Order of Tin Hats Memorial Centre in Braeside, Harare, amid concerns that the group could be linked to military-style attacks being perpetrated on Zanu PF supporters by suspected MDC-T activists countrywide.

War veterans and Zanu PF youths in the area stormed MOTH Memorial Centre following a tip-off from members of the public before calling Braeside police to investigate activities there.

The place, a whites only bastion, which was accessed for the first time by a group of black people who do not work there last Wednesday afternoon, resembled an armory with an assortment of weapons including guns, bayonets, machetes, grenades and tear-gas canisters.

Among the memorabilia were various badges of several Rhodesian Army units, helmets, camouflage jackets and pictures of prominent Rhodesian settlers.

The meetings, held under the cover of darkness and secrecy, come in the wake of several unsolved violence cases that have bewildered security agents in the country.

Two Zanu PF supporters were recently murdered in cold blood by suspected MDC-T gunmen while several cases of arson targeting long-distance buses commuter omnibuses and passenger trains have gone unsolved for months.



Conflict sensitive reporting

Police have made no arrests after the regular meeting of a group of former Rhodesian army officers was disrupted last Wednesday afternoon.

The Memorable Order of Tin Hats has been meeting three Sundays a month in a space in a suburban shopping mall since

EXAMPLE #3

EXAMPLE #3 continued

before Zimbabwe's independence. The meeting room was entered by an uninvited group of Zanu PF youths and others.

Police say they are investigating the incident, but stressed that no one has been arrested. The group's meeting room contained numerous memorabilia of their former activities as army officers, including badges, helmets and pictures of former army officers.

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- The report uses language designed to cast suspicion, if not outright accusations, against the "MOTH" meeting: "secretive" "clandestine".
- It includes details of violence incidents while providing no link or connection to the MOTH group.
- It links, with no supporting evidence, the regular (since 1976, but not mentioned) meeting of a group, none of whom was arrested, to violent "military style" attacks.
- It contains no comment or reaction from the people whose meeting was interrupted.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- The report does not use loaded words to describe a meeting that has been regularly held for years and is well known in the community.
- It stresses the ultimate result of the entire incident: no arrests or charges. It leaves out the unsubstantiated allegations of the group's activities.
- There is no link to violent acts.
- It does not use a loaded word, "stormed," to describe the action of the people who entered the room uninvited (and which could itself inspire violence against the "war veterans and Zanu PF youth")



Traditional reporting

Zimbabweans should uphold the legacy bequeathed to them by their ancestors and fallen heroes to protect the country's heritage for the benefit of future generations, President Mugabe has said.

Addressing more than 5,000 students and youths attending the first-ever students and Youth Convention in Harare yesterday, Cde Mugabe said many people suffered and died for the country's independence.

"We were left a legacy to defend our country and its heritage by Mbuya Nehanda, Cde Tongogara, Cde Takawira, and Cde Nkomo, among others who have passed (on)."

"We need to keep this legacy, then pass it on to you (the youths) and you would then pass it on to your children. That legacy has to be passed to all the future generations. Don't let them down, don't drop that legacy. Don't don't don't! Rambai makatsigira." (...)

Cde Mugabe said the country's forefathers were not happy when the land was occupied. *"When we lost our land, our ancestors fought to their deaths. They were bitter, bitter, bitter, very bitter that the land had been taken. The country had been robbed, actually, raped by Britain."*

"They put up a strong fight for sovereignty, right of ownership of the country's resources, they fought, some died and were conquered. But they bequeathed to us the need to fight for our land."



Conflict sensitive reporting

President Mugabe has once again evoked the memory of his revolutionary comrades in arms during a political speech.

The president often reminds his audiences of former leaders in his speeches. Some critics have said this is to justify his government's policy of seizing land owned by white farmers, although the president seldom makes the direct connection in his speeches.

EXAMPLE #4

EXAMPLE #4 continued

"We were left a legacy to defend our country and its heritage by Mbuya Nehanda, Cde Tongogara, Cde Takawira, and Cde Nkomo, among others who have passed (on)."

The president was speaking to about 5,000 young people gathered at a Youth Convention in Harare.

He said, "we need to keep this legacy, then pass it on to you (the youths) and you would then pass it on to your children. That legacy has to be passed to all the future generations. Don't let them down, don't drop that legacy. Don't don't don't! Rambai makatsigira."

Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai said the president cannot justify seizing land without proper compensation and inviting condemnation from both within the country and from foreign governments.

See the difference?

Traditional reporting

- Using the memories of past heroes is a classic example of conflict insensitive speech, particularly when it is used to justify current political actions that lead directly to conflict.
- There is nothing wrong with a leader expressing his or her opinion, but there is a difference between reporting and simply reproducing a record of what was said.

Conflict sensitive reporting

- This story reminds readers of the context in which the speech is given, and its relationship to current policies and actions of the government, as well as the consequences.
- It also leaves out the inflammatory sections of the president's speech, and includes another point of view from the opposition.



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?



A journalist wearing a t-shirt advocating free media and a free mind. Photo: Anne Poulsen/IMS

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 Zimbabwean media practitioners

The purpose of this Code is to provide a set of common professional standards of conduct for media practitioners and media institutions in Zimbabwe.

Media practitioners and media institutions should abide by these standards and the public is entitled to expect that they will do so. There should be a remedy for those harmed by media conduct that violates these standards.

This Code will be applied and enforced by the Media Complaints Committee.

1. Interpretation

In this Code:

"media institution" means any institution in Zimbabwe, whether in the public or private sector, that disseminates news to the public through the medium of a newspaper and/or other written and electronic publication or through electronic broadcasting.

"media practitioner" means a reporter, editor, radio and television programme producer and presenter employed by a media institution or a freelance reporter or columnist who is a stringer or writes columns for a media institution.

2. Application

This Code will govern the conduct of media practitioners and media institutions that have agreed to be bound by this Code and to submit to the disciplinary jurisdiction of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe.

3. General standards

- a) Media practitioners must maintain the highest professional and ethical standards. They must carry out their functions of informing, educating and entertaining the public professionally and responsibly.
- b) Media practitioners must defend the principle of the freedom of the media to freely access, collect and disseminate information and to publish comments and criticisms. They must oppose censorship, suppression of news and the dissemination of propaganda.

4. Accuracy and fairness

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty and must take all reasonable steps to ensure that they disseminate accurate information and that they depict events fairly and without distortions.
- b) Media practitioners and media institutions must never publish information that they know to be false or maliciously make unfounded allegations about others that are intended to harm their reputations.
- c) When compiling reports media practitioners must check their facts and the editors and publishers of newspapers and other media must take proper care not to publish inaccurate material. Before a media institution publishes a report, the reporter and the editor must ensure that all the steps that a reasonable, competent media practitioner would take to check its accuracy have in fact been taken.
- d) Special care must be taken to check the accuracy of stories that may cause harm to individuals or organizations or to the public interest. Before publishing a story of alleged wrongdoing, all reasonable steps must be taken to ascertain the response of the alleged wrongdoer to the allegations. Any response from that person must be published together with the report setting out the allegations where possible.
- e) Media institutions must endeavor to provide full, fair and balanced reports of events and must not suppress essential information pertaining to those events. They must not distort information by exaggeration, by giving only

one side of a story, by placing improper emphasis on one aspect of a story, by reporting the facts out of the context in which they occurred or by suppressing relevant available facts. They must avoid using misleading headlines or billboard postings.

5. Correction of inaccuracy or distortion

- a) If a media institution discovers that it has published a report containing a significant inaccuracy or distortion of the facts, it must publish a correction at the earliest possible opportunity and with comparable prominence.
- b) If a media institution discovers that it has published an erroneous report that has caused harm to the reputation of a person or institution reputation, it must publish an apology promptly and with due prominence.
- c) A media institution must report fairly and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation against it.

6. Right of reply

Where a person or organization believes that a media report contains inaccurate information or has unfairly criticized the person or organization, the media institution concerned must give the person or organization a fair opportunity to reply so as to enable that person or organization to correct any inaccuracies and to respond to the criticism.

7. Comment

- a) A clear separation should be made between comment and opinion.
- b) A comment or expression of opinion must be a genuine and honest comment or expression of opinion relating to established fact.
- c) Comment or conjecture must not be presented in such a way as to create the impression that it is established fact.

8. Bribes and inducements

Media practitioners and media institutions must not publish or suppress a report or omit or alter vital facts in that report in return for payment of money or for any other gift or reward.

9. Pressure or influence

Media practitioners and media institutions must not suppress or distort information which the public has a right to know because of pressure or influence from their advertisers or others who have a corporate, political or advocacy interest in the media institution concerned.

10. Hatred or violence

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must not publish material that is intended or is likely to engender hostility or hatred towards persons on the grounds of their race, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, religion or political affiliation.
- b) Media institutions must take utmost care to avoid contributing to the spread of ethnic hatred or political violence.

11. Reporting of elections

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must report on elections in a fair and balanced manner.
- b) Before reporting a damaging allegation made against a candidate or a political party, a media practitioner should obtain, wherever possible, a comment from the candidate or party against whom the allegation has been made especially where the allegation has been made by an opposing candidate or an opposing political party.
- c) A media practitioner or media institution must not accept any gift, reward or inducement from a politician or candidate.

- d) As far as possible, a media practitioner or media institution should report the views of candidates and political parties directly and in their own words, rather than as they are described by others.
- e) A journalist must take care in reporting the findings of opinion polls. Any report should wherever possible include details about the methodology used in conducting the survey and by whom it was conducted.

12. Reporting of police investigations and criminal court cases

- a) In our law a person is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. The media must therefore refrain from publishing articles prejudging the outcome in criminal cases or seeking to influence the outcome of the cases.
- b) Media institutions are entitled to inform the public about the arrest of suspects by the police and the trial of persons accused of crimes. They should not, however, publish the names of suspects until the police have filed formal charges against them, unless it is in the public interest to do so before formal criminal charges are laid.
- c) Where a media institution has begun to report a criminal case, it must follow up and report subsequent developments in the case. For example, it is grossly unfair to report that a person has been charged with murder and then fail to report that the person was acquitted. The report of the subsequent developments must be given due prominence.

13. Privacy

- a) It is normally wrong for a media practitioner to intrude into and to report upon a person's private life without his or her consent.
- b) Reporting on a person's private life can only be justified when it is in the public interest to do so. This would include;
 - (i) detecting or exposing criminal conduct;
 - (ii) detecting or exposing seriously anti-social conduct;
 - (iii) protecting public health and safety;

- (iv) preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of that individual, such as where a person is doing something in private which he or she is publicly condemning.
- c) Media practitioners may probe and publish details about the private moral behavior of a public official where this conduct has a bearing upon his or her suitability as a public official.

14. Intrusions into grief or shock

- a) In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries should be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and tact.
- b) Media practitioners or photographers making enquiries at hospitals or similar institutions should normally identify themselves to a responsible official and obtain permission before entering non-public areas.

15. Interviewing or photographing children

- a) Media practitioners should not normally interview or photograph children under the age of sixteen in the absence of, or without the consent of, a parent or an adult who is responsible for the children.
- b) In interviewing and photographing children in difficult circumstances or with disabilities, special sensitivity and sympathy must be used.
- c) Children should not be approached or photographed while at school, crèche or similar institution without the permission of the appropriate authorities.

19. Surreptitious gathering of information

- a) Media practitioners should use open methods of gathering information in which they clearly identify themselves as media practitioners. Generally they should not obtain or seek to obtain information or pictures through surreptitious methods such as misrepresentation, deception, subterfuge or undercover techniques.

- b) Surreptitious methods of information gathering may only be used where open methods have failed to yield information in what is public interest. These methods may thus be employed where, for example, they will help to detect or expose criminal activity or will bring to light information that will protect the public against serious threats to public health or safety.

20. National security

- a) Media institutions must not prejudice the legitimate national security interests of Zimbabwe and place at risk members of the Defense Forces who are on active military duty.
- b) This provision does not prevent the media from exposing corruption in security or defense agencies or from commenting upon levels of expenditure on defense.

21. Plagiarism

Media practitioners must not engage in plagiarism. Plagiarism consists of making use of another person's words, pictures or ideas without permission and without proper acknowledgement and attribution of the source of those words, pictures or ideas.

22. Protection of sources

- a) Where a person has agreed to supply information only on condition that his or her identity remains confidential and the media practitioner agrees to this condition, the media practitioner must respect this undertaking and refuse to reveal the identity of the source.
- b) However, the media practitioner may tell the source that his or her identity might have to be revealed if it becomes clear in court that this information is needed to prevent or expose serious criminal conduct.

*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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Published in Denmark by IMS
November 2009

Design and production: Nanette Graphic Design
Print: De Facto A/S

Funded by International Media Support.

International Media Support (IMS) is a non-profit organisation working to support local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition. In more than 30 countries worldwide, IMS helps to strengthen professional journalism and ensure that media can operate in challenging circumstances.