

# **Journalistic Ethics and Professionalism**



## **Key Ethical Issues in Journalism**

**by**

**John Baptist Wasswa**




# Truth as a Guiding Principle

- Professional journalism stands on the foundation of “truth”
- Journalists have a professional responsibility to stick to the truth, they are bound by a professional code that is formed to uphold the truth.
- Trust however rests on the integrity of an individual in this case the journalist.


# Truth (2)



- Society trusts that the journalist/s will not betray this trust or become dishonest, however being human, this trust is sometimes betrayed.
  - This therefore explains why all professions have mechanisms to deal with the breach of trust and these are laid down in “Codes of Conduct” set up to provide some sort of oversight, reporting, punishment or rehabilitation for the errant
- 


# Codes of Ethics



- A code is a set of agreed principles that guide behaviour or professional conduct. All professions have codes.
  - In Uganda we have two codes for journalists.
  - The official code in the Press and Journalists Statute of 2000.
  - And the more elaborate code, drafted by the Independent Media Council of Uganda, following consultations with 42 media organisations.
- 

# Key ethical issues in the Codes




- Journalism practice involves daily encounters with a range of issues that present ethical dilemmas for journalists who have to contend with making right ethical decisions.
  - Because you do not move into the field with textbooks, the ethical principles help you make decisions on what you should and should not do.
  - Professional journalists should always respect and follow the principles laid out in codes, and which follow hereunder.
- 

# 1. Accuracy and Objectivity

- Objective 1: To enable participants to appreciate the virtue of correctness and factuality in all that the media does: from spellings, accuracy of facts and figures, headlines, contexts and content.
- Objective 2. To enable participants appreciate that in journalism practice, news must be presented objectively and opinion and comment expressed as such and not mixed with news.
- Expected outcome: Participants appreciate the importance of accuracy, the dangers of lapse thereof, and the principle of objectivity in news reporting.

## 2. Fair Play and Impartiality




- Objective: Here we seeks to empower participants with capacity to respect the dignity, privacy, rights and wellbeing of people encountered in the course of gathering and presenting news.
  - Expected Outcome: You will, by the end of this session, manifest good understanding of the need to be fair to people in the news business; and avoid impartiality in the presentation of news reports and opinions.
- 

# 3. Conflict of Interest



Objective: To enable you appreciate that many times your interests will conflict with the expectations of your journalistic work; to enable you identify a range of such conflicts, and to empower you with skills to manage those conflicts.

Expected outcome: that you will manifest good understanding of possible conflict situations and display skills to manage those conflicts of interest.






# 4 Moonlighting Journalists

- This section builds on knowledge and skills learned in the previous section to discuss the thorny issue of journalists who take on extra employment outside the news business.
- Because this practice is quite common today in Uganda, as elsewhere, it demands a discussion on the possible advantages, disadvantages and conflict of interest it may cause to the media houses and the image of the profession.

# 5. Plagiarism



- **Objective 1:** To highlight to participants the evil of plagiarism, which can be summarized as intellectual theft, and its extent in media business.
  - **Objective 2:** To equip you with skills to do researched journalism and to avoid plagiarism.
  - **Expected Outcome:** Participants manifest skills to write authentically, and to attribute properly and professionally referenced material that is not their own.
- 

# 6. Managing Sources




- Sources are the heart and soul of journalism. They sustain the business of good journalism. Sources, however, come with a catalogue of ethical problems that journalists and media houses have to deal with carefully.



# 6.1 Sources



- Issues to discuss here include:
  - Handling difficult sources;
  - keeping safe distance from source;
  - confidential sources;
  - promising confidentiality;
  - anonymous sources;
  - how to cultivate and nurture sources;
  - after-the -act requests for confidentiality.
- 



# Dealing with photography



# 7. Dealing with photography

- A good photograph is worth a thousand words, so goes the old journalistic adage. Photographs, however, can present many ethical issues.
- This section addresses some of the challenges that arise with photojournalism.





The John G. Crivello Agency

SPORTS FINAL

1947-11-11 Tuesday, 11/11/2012

# DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Report of a gunman who  
killed a woman's child  
and wounded her in  
the Boston Marathon  
bombing. The woman  
was hospitalized and  
is expected to die.



# MARATHON MASSACRE



● **Terror bombs rock Boston**

● **At least 3 dead and 140 injured**

**PAGES 2-11**




# Ethics of photojournalism

This section will specifically address the following:

- Photographic intrusion into privacy, and private grief
- Portrayal of minors and endangered persons.
- Undercover techniques by reporters
- Photographs that lie and the ethical dilemma of digital retouching
- Portrayal of women through photographs.
- Ethical imaging in the era of terrorism

# 8. Privacy



- This section addresses the question of how far media can go to report on the lives of private and public individuals.
  - Objective: To enable participants to identify private and public estates of individuals, related rights to privacy and what constitutes legitimate intrusion into privacy.
  - Expected Outcome: Participants will at the end of this session manifested good understanding of the ethical issues related to privacy and display skills to manage reporting on private lives, including family privacy in situations of sickness and grief
- 

# 8.1 Privacy Issues

- Right to privacy as a constitutional right
- Why the right to privacy
- What the Codes say
- What is private space and public space?
- Do public figures and celebrities have privacy?
- When is it legitimate to invade privacy
- Privacy during illness and bereavement

# 9. Good Taste and Common Decency


- The era of tabloid media, and the tabloidization of television brings images that by far exceed standards of good taste and common decency.
- 
- This section seeks to provoke a discussion on what is acceptable in the mind of right thinking members of society.
- We review both print and video images from local media to discuss issues of adult material that is distributed via mainstream media.
- This section also seeks to empower participants to critique the current media practices, the tabloidization of mainstream media, and to recommend corrective measures.

# 10. Paying for News, Junkets and Freebies

- Many practices have come to characterise the practice of journalism in Uganda. These include people paying for news to be included on the media agenda, journalists receiving monetary and material gifts, freebies and 'brown envelopes' disguised as facilitation.
- Little is done these days without a journalist being 'facilitated.' This section seeks to provoke vibrant debate among participants on the ethical and security concerns related to these practices.

# 11. Medical Reporting



- This section will deal specifically with skills to report medical advances, work in progress and breakthroughs.
  - It introduces to participants the ethics of reporting on medical issues and developments and to identify negative and misleading reporting practices.
  - It will also address claims of miracle cures by religious zealots, witchdoctor claims and the dangers and illegality of reporting these claims.
- 

# 12. Personal Involvement in campaigns, advocacy and crusades

- We are journalists, true. But we have another life outside journalism.
- What are dangers of getting involved in advocacy campaigns, crusades and political activism?
- What associations can be dangerous to a practicing journalist?
- How can we get safely involved in campaigns?

# 13. Dealing with advertisers

- Advertisements are the heart and soul of media business. Yet unchecked power of advertisers can be problematic to journalistic work.
- What are some of the evils of advertising?
- How do they affect journalistic autonomy in the era of commercialised media?
- How do we work around this?