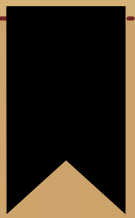


# **Journalistic Ethics and Professionalism**



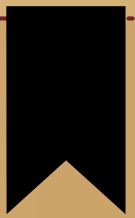
## **Introduction to Responsible Journalism and Professionalism**

**By**

**John Baptist Wasswa**



# A humble start with key questions




- How can we tell if journalists are acting responsibly?
- Why should journalists act responsibly anyway?
- How do people come to have responsibility at all?
- What responsibilities follow from the functions mas media have in society?



# More on origins of responsibility



- How does the power of the media entail responsibilities?
  - What open and implied promises do news media make to their audiences?
  - What responsibility do you individual journalists have when employed by a media houses?
- 

# Functions of media and associated responsibilities

- Consider the doctors and lawyers. What do they do in society? What responsibility does society expect them to perform?
- Now consider journalists. What functions may society legitimately expect journalists to perform?
- What can and should be the role and function of journalism in a democracy (like ours)
- These questions go to the heart of the ethics of journalism.

# Four important ethics questions

- Journalists, like you, must always ask these questions:

1) Exactly what is it that I am about?

2) If I perform well, what contribution can I make towards building a better society/

3) What is it that I am willing for others to expect of me?

4) For what will I expect responsibility?

# Responsibility vs Accountability

- Responsibility: We ask: To what social needs should we expect journalists to address ably?
- On Accountability, We'd say: How might society call on journalists to account for their performance of the responsibilities given to them?

Responsibility has to do with defining proper conduct. Accountability deals with compelling proper conduct.

# Responsibility vs Accountability

- Responsibility concerns identification; accountability concerns power.
- Responsibility is a practical issue, understood by examining the society's needs to know and the press' ability to inform.
- But Accountability is a political issue, understood by analysing the centres of power, eg. Govt, media organisations, public influence.

# Responsibility vs Accountability

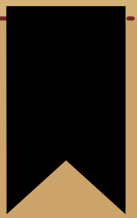
- Check even the way we talk, there are differences of emphasis:
- We talk about being responsible for... (this and that of all good ethics)
- And about being accountable to....( a govt., an editor, media owner etc)



# Responsibility vs Accountability

- Questions of responsibility focus on the nature and function of the press, on the criteria rational people might use to assess our performance as press.
- Questions of Accountability focus on the freedom of the press, and how someone might command the press to follow those criteria

# And therefore..



- Question of responsibility is prior to that of Accountability. We should agree on what we think the press should be responsible for before we can look for ways of compelling press proper performance.
- NB. Journalists tend to confuse these issues. When asked to explain performance, they often jump to issues of press freedom etc...



# The Grounds of Responsibility

- Background:
- As human beings, we are both individual and social. Escapably and Simultaneously. That is the stark reality.
- We are free agents living together, whose actions affect each other. We are also radically dependent on each other. No man is an island.
- These facts dictate, therefore, that we must be responsible to and for each other.

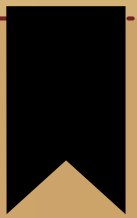
# Grounds of Responsibility

- Individual responsibility is only meaningful in the context of social existence. {If you were alone on your island, it would matter less if you dressed up, ate or even looked smart}.
- The roots of responsibility lie in the fact that we are both individual and social beings whose actions certainly affect others. [Brief discussion here].

# Grounds of Responsibility

- Therefore the very fact that we have the ability or the power to affect each other deeply, for good or for evil, requires that we act responsibly toward each other if society is to remain stable.
- The greater our power or capacity to affect others becomes, the heavier becomes our moral duty.
- The media has power, a lot of power to affect society. [ Brief discussion here on media power]

# Forms of Responsibility




- Within what kind of relationships do we come to take on specific responsibilities to others:
  1. Some responsibility is assigned
  2. Some is contracted (formally or informally)
  3. Other responsibility is self-imposed



# The Content of Press Responsibility



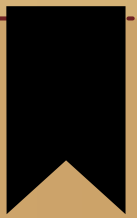
- We approach this at three levels
    - a) Looking at the functions or social roles appropriate to journalism
    - b) Looking at the principles that must guide you the journalists if you are to perform those functions well.
    - c) Looking at the kinds of actions you journalists should or should not take if you are to respect those principles.
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# Functions of the Press in Society

- **The Political Function:** informing citizens what their govt is doing or not doing; watching over centre of power. This makes the press an important part of the political process.
- The media acquires immense political power itself if it performs this function well, of keeping leaders on their toes.



# Press Functions (2)



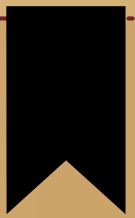
**The Educational role:** Reporting and promoting discussion of ideas to lead people in giving choices and options.

- **The Utility Function:** press acts as a one stop centre where audiences find all sorts of information. (Notice board role)

- **The Social or Cultural Function:** When the press holds up mirror to reflect the happenings in society: the good and the bad.



# Conclusion



- There are many people accusing the media of not being responsible enough. But we need to first ask what is responsibility? How do journalists come to have responsibility? What is responsible journalism?
- We have seen how media comes to command immense power, which must be exercised responsibly
- In the next session, we discuss whether journalism is a profession, and if journalists need to professionalise.