GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING ELECTIONS IN LIBERIA
Guidelines for Reporting Elections in Liberia
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As Liberians go to the polls in 2011 to elect a president, within the context of consolidating their evolving democracy, the ability of journalists, citizen journalists and the news media to provide timely and relevant elections information is a crucial component in ensuring free and fair elections.

However the media in Liberia is faced with many challenges in playing this role effectively. One key challenge is upholding professional standards while generating high quality stories which are in-depth, well researched and accurate and backed by the use of credible sources.

It is against this background that the African Elections Project seeks to build the professional capacity of Liberian journalists to effectively cover the upcoming Liberia elections by supporting the publication of these “Guidelines for Reporting Elections in Liberia” as a useful, simplified, well written reference guide for all journalists covering the Liberian elections.

It is particularly useful to note that the authors of the guide have included a section on ‘Reporting Elections in a Post-Conflict Era’. This is important because journalists play a key role in ensuring peace, and avoiding incitements to violence.

Also, in light of the significant role new and social media are playing in elections coverage in Africa, it is particularly refreshing to note that a chapter on ‘ICTs and Elections’ has been included in this media guide to provide more information on how ICTs can be applied in elections coverage to promote transparency in the electoral process.

The guide also reminds both experienced and upcoming journalists about the key tenets and ethical guidelines of their profession. Such a refresher is always needed to keep journalists on track. This will go a long way towards strengthening the journalism profession in Liberia, and the media as whole, in providing effective elections coverage and reportage.

The guide is recommended as a valuable reference and tool for good election coverage for practicing journalists and journalism educators in Liberia in their quest to adequately inform citizens about the electoral process and its outcomes.
About the African Elections Project (AEP)

The African Elections Project (www.africanelections.org) was established in 2008 with the vision of enhancing the ability of journalists, citizen journalists and the news media to provide more timely and relevant information and knowledge about elections, while monitoring specific and important aspects of governance in their countries. So far this Africa-wide project has covered ten (10) elections on the continent, namely in Ghana, Mauritania, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Togo, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire and Niger.

Broad based Objectives

- To consolidate the gains of democracy through actively promoting the free flow of election information and knowledge as a way of promoting free and fair elections;
- To strengthen the media and related civil society organizations in their role as enablers of good governance;
- To develop the capacity of journalists in elections coverage in order to improve on the quality and quantity of elections issues covered;
- To enhance the process of information and knowledge sharing of good practices and lessons among all stakeholders involved in the election monitoring process;
- To contribute to reducing electoral violence by encouraging the media to tell both sides of the election story;
- To act as an early warning system to alert stakeholders who may be falling into the trap of inflaming passions which can lead to violence;
- To develop a media elections result centre which will service the media with key content about the elections during the results stage;
- To develop capacity for election observation;
- To provide a central pool of relevant ICT tools for stakeholders involved in the electoral process;
- To create a space for dialogue between political parties and the electorate.

Building Blocks

- Training for senior editors, journalists and reporters;
- SMS application in elections coverage and monitoring;
- Election guide for the media;
- Information and knowledge online portal;
- Knowledge products for the media;
- Media monitoring incorporating early warning system.
The African Elections Project in Liberia

The African Elections Project in Liberia responds directly to the need for an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) - based platform to monitor election incidents of violence, irregularities and human rights abuses, spanning the period of pre-elections, during elections and post elections, thereby contributing to building peace and advancing human freedom in Liberia.

The project aims at facilitating the work of journalists and citizen journalists by actively using ICT tools in disseminating election information and knowledge and stimulating a vibrant online and offline dialogue between the media and civil society through forums on elections issues.

AEP Liberia Objectives

• To develop an early warning system to alert stakeholders about potential violence-related incidents;

• To facilitate the work of journalists and citizen journalists to actively use ICT tools in disseminating election information and knowledge;

• To facilitate a vibrant online and offline dialogue between the media and civil society on elections issues.

AEP Liberia Activities

• Elections Violence Incidence Monitoring Platform

• Elections Violence Incidence Monitoring Platform Orientation

• Elections Reporting Guide

AEP Liberia (www.africanelections/liberia.org) is coordinated by the International Institute of ICT Journalists (Penplusbytes) working hand in hand with key partners, and with strategic and financial support from Humanity United (www.humanityunited.org).
Chapter 1:

Democracy and Elections in Liberia
By: Joe Worlorbah Mulbah and Senyon Kieh

Nature of Democracy in Liberia

Since Liberia was founded in 1847, she has subscribed to the Republican form of government. Liberia is a democratic unitary sovereign state and is divided into 15 counties for administrative purposes.

In keeping with her 1986 revised constitution, power is inherent in the people. The government comprises three coordinate branches – the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive. The President, who is both the Head of Government and State, is elected for a term of six years and is disallowed under the Liberian Constitution from going beyond two terms in office.

In line with the Liberian Constitution, “no person holding office in one of three branches shall hold office in or exercise any of the powers assigned to either of the other two branches except as otherwise provided in this Constitution; and no person holding office in one of the said branches shall serve on any autonomous public agency” (Chapter 1, Article 3 of the Liberian Constitution).

All citizens at age 18 or above in Liberia are eligible to participate in electoral decision making at all levels of the nation’s governance process.

Liberia’s 15 political sub-divisions are widely known as counties. These counties are headed by Superintendents appointed by the President of Liberia. Every county in Liberia is equally represented in the legislature by two senators elected by the people resident in the county.

Of the two senators per county, one is a Senior Senator who assumes the title for acquiring the highest votes cast. The Senior Senator occupies his seat for the period of 9 years and is eligible for successive elections once he enjoys the confidence of his constituents. Every county in Liberia is divided into political districts each of which is entitled to a Representative in the legislature.
Demarcation for the political districts of Liberia is done per population density. The legislature under the Constitution sets the threshold, normally following the conduct of the census every ten years. The Liberian legislature comprises two houses - the Upper House which is the Senate, and the Lower House, which is the House of Representatives.

The 15 counties of Liberia comprise smaller groupings structured on the basis of socio-cultural similarity, known as clans and chiefdoms. Their inhabitants are locals who are given a voice in the governance system by electing clan and paramount chiefs to govern them. In most cases those who get elected as chiefs are those believed to understand the customs of the locals well, who will defend and protect their interests.

The Judiciary branch of government bears the duty of administering the country’s justice system and is to execute impartial judgment in the dispensation of justice. Judicial officers are assigned to all sectors of the country to administer the country’s justice system without discrimination.

By constitutional dictate, all senior judicial officers, including the Chief Justice, members of the Supreme Court and officers of subordinate courts are appointed by the President. Their terms of office and modus operandi are prescribed by law.

**Election Procedures**

**The franchise**

Article 89(b) of the Constitution of Liberia requires the establishment of an Electoral Commission. Details of its functions are outlined in the revised Elections Law of 1986 and the Electoral Reform Law of 2004. The recruitment and training of elections workers and the conduct of voters’ registration are usually the initial steps towards the conduct of elections in Liberia. The voters’ registration ensures that only eligible individuals, as required by law, are registered to participate in the voting process. Under the Liberian electoral law, only Liberians aged 18 and above can vote.

Despite this entitlement for all Liberians, the law prohibits those proven to suffer insanity from exercising their franchise. Someone who is also adjudged guilty and “sentenced for an offense disenfranchising him as a voter, when no longer disqualified and restored to citizenship, may have his name added to a registration roll by registration or by making a claim in accordance with the provisions of section 3.11 of this title.” (Page 17, the New Elections Law of Liberia).

Consistent with the elections law, the Liberian Electoral Commission is tasked to delineate on a map, the voting precincts in each constituency. There are to be polling places designated by the Commission in each constituency to serve the voting precincts.
In the interest of transparency in the electoral process, candidates for elective positions or political parties are provided the opportunity to nominate their representatives to the polling sites. These representatives at the close of the voting exercise must verify the results through their signatures. Additionally, the party representatives have the right to note any irregularity during the electioneering process.

**Independent candidates**

According to Article 79 of the Liberian Constitution, “no association, by whatever name called, shall function as a political party, nor shall any citizen be an independent candidate for election to public office.” This is however possible under the provision of Article 79(a), (b) and (c) of the Liberian Constitution. Among others as contained inter alia, if “the association or independent candidate and his organization meet the minimum registration requirements laid down by the Elections Commission and are registered with it.”

Under the election law of the Republic, registration requirements shall include filing with the Elections Commission a copy of the constitution of the association and guidelines of the independent candidate and his organization, a detailed statement of the names and addresses of the association and its officers or of the independent candidates and the officers of his organization, and fulfillment of the provisions of sub-sections (b), (c), (d) and (e).

Under (b) of Article 79 of the Constitution of Liberia, “the membership of the association or the independent candidate’s organization is open to every citizen of Liberia, irrespective of sex, religion or ethnic background, except as otherwise provided in this Constitution.”

The law on elections also requires elections workers to take an oath, where they must pledge an unbiased discharge of their responsibilities. Under section 2.26 of the Liberian Elections Law, elections officials are prohibited from belonging to political parties, nor shall an official of the Electoral Commission be candidate or hold official position in connection with a political party. Where this provision is violated, the officer involved “shall be considered to have automatically vacated his election office and shall be dealt with under the provision of this title.”

In cases where there are grievances, section 2.24 of the Elections Law provides that magistrates of elections have the power and jurisdiction to in the first instance hear and determine all elections offenses for which the penalty shall not be more than five hundred dollars ($500.00).
Qualifications and power for elective posts

All elective positions under Liberian laws are based on criteria to be met by interested individuals. These qualifications and powers vary in keeping with nature of the posts to be elected for.

a) The Presidency

Under Chapter VI Article 50 of the Liberian Constitution, the Executive Power of the Republic is vested in the President. The President therefore, is the Head of State, Head of Government and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Ascendancy to the presidency of Liberia is by universal adult suffrage of registered voters in the Republic.

It is established in article 50 of the Liberian Constitution that the President shall hold office for a six year term which is to commence at noon on the third working Monday in January of the year immediately following the elections. That same provision states that, “No person shall serve as President for more than two terms.”

Article 52 of the Liberian Constitution also spells out qualifications for the presidency. These include, that a candidate for the presidency must be “a natural born citizen of Liberia of not less than 35 years of age; the owner of unencumbered real property valued at twenty five thousand Liberian dollars and be resident in the Republic 10 years prior to his election, provided that the President and Vice President shall not come from the same county.”

There is enormous power enjoyed by the presidency by the prescription of law. These include the power of the President to nominate and, with the consent of the Senate, appoint the following officials of government in keeping with Article 54 of the constitution:

a) Cabinet Ministers, Deputy and Assistant Ministers
b) Ambassadors, Ministers and Minister Consuls
c) The Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court
d) Superintendents, other county officials and officials of other sub-divisions
e) Marshals, Deputy Marshals and Sheriffs.

Article 55 of the Constitution further enhances the appointing power of the President of Liberia. The article empowers the President to appoint and commission Notaries Public and Justices of the Peace, “who shall hold office for a term of two years but may be removed by the President for cause.” They shall be eligible for reappointment.
Responsibilities of the President also include, in keeping with Article 57 of the Constitution, the power to conduct the foreign affairs of the Republic and in that connection he/she is empowered to sign treaties, conventions and similar international agreements with the concurrence of the majority of each House of the legislature.

Also, the President is as well authorized under Article 59 of the Liberian Constitution to remit any public forfeiture and penalties, suspend any fines and sentences, grant reprieves and pardons, and restore civic rights after conviction for all public offenses, except impeachment.

**b) Vice Presidency**

The Vice President and President are elected on the same voting ticket. In this regard, a qualification for the President as spelt out under Article 52 applies to both the President and Vice President.

Under Article 63 (b) of the Constitution, the Vice President assumes the office of President whenever the office of the President becomes vacant, either by death, resignation or impeachment.

**c) Legislature**

The Legislature of Liberia has a primary function to enact laws and repeal existing ones. The Legislature of Liberia is divided into two houses - the Upper House known as the Senate and the Lower House known as the House of Representatives. Both houses must pass all legislation to become law in the Republic. The enacting style of lawmaking in both houses states thus: “It is enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Liberia in Legislature assembled” ... (Chapter V, Article 29).

Liberian citizens who meet the following qualifications are eligible to become members of the Legislature: Chapter V, Article 30 (a) - For the Senatorial position, a citizen must have attained the age of 30 years and for the House of Representatives (b) - Must be domiciled in the country or constituency to be represented not less than one year prior to the time of the election and be a taxpayer.

The Liberian Legislature assembles once a year in regular session, on the second working Monday in January. Procedurally, the Liberian President, shall “on his own initiative or upon receipt of a certificate signed by at least one-fourth of the total membership of each House, and by proclamation, extend a regular session of the Legislature beyond the date for adjournment or call a special or extraordinary session of that body to discuss or act upon matters of national emergency and concern (Chapter V, Article 32, b).
When such extension or call is at the request of the Legislature, such proclamation shall be issued not later than 48 hours after receipt of the certificate by the President. A quorum in the Legislature shall be by simple majority of each House for the transaction of business.

However, a lower number may adjourn from day to day and shall compel the attendance of absent members. When the House of Representatives and the Senate meet in a joint session, the Presiding Officer of the House of Representatives shall preside.

Regarding the power of the Legislature, it creates new counties and other political subdivisions, re-adjust existing county boundaries and makes provision for the security of the Republic.

The Legislature is also enjoined to provide for the common defense, to declare war and authorize the Executive to conclude peace; to raise and support the Armed Forces of Liberia, and to make appropriations, provided that no appropriations of money for use shall be for a longer term than one year; and to make rules for the governance of the Armed Forces of the Republic.

The Legislature also has the power to levy taxes, duties, imposts, excise and other revenues, to borrow money, issue currency, mint coins, and to make appropriations for the fiscal governance of the Republic.

d) Chieftaincy Elections

Regarding elections of chiefs in Liberia, it is crystal clear under Article 56(b) of the Liberian Constitution that “there shall be elections of Paramount, Clan and Town Chiefs by the registered voters in their respective localities, to serve for a term of six years.” The Chiefs may also be re-elected or removed by the President of Liberia for proved misconduct. With respect to qualifications of the Chiefs, the Liberian Legislature is empowered by law to enact laws for those qualifications.

e) Mayoral Elections

Article 54(d) of the Liberian Constitution empowers the President of Liberia to nominate and, with the consent of the Senate, appoint and commission City Mayors. This decision is still controversial since the 1986 Constitution is silent on the ascendancy of mayors to their portfolios.
Chapter 2:  

Key Principles in Elections Reporting  

The following are some key principles journalists must uphold in covering elections.

a) Accuracy  
Getting the correct information is the most important part of good journalism. Everything that is reported must be described accurately – the spelling of the candidates’ names, the words they use and the precise numbers and descriptions of people, places and things. Candidates and voters can be emotional during elections. Their words must be reported carefully to accurately reveal their meaning, and to explain the context without exaggerating partial meanings. In the news business, reporters will rush to get it first. But their greater priority is to first get it right. Voters will not talk to journalists if they fear journalists will not report their words accurately, or will not describe things as they really are.

b) 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 when their sources cannot be named. Many people will not tell journalists important news about political corruption if they fear their names will be revealed. Responsible journalists also use only honest methods to obtain the news, which means their work should be guided by internationally accepted professional standards.

c) Impartiality (Fair Balance)  
Almost every code of good journalism places importance on impartiality, or on not taking sides. To achieve impartiality, a good journalist will seek to produce a report that is balanced. To be balanced is to include both sides. When one political candidate makes an accusation or a promise in an election campaign speech, a professional reporter will seek a reaction from other candidates and include it in the report to create a balanced story. Looking for more than one opinion helps overcome the appearance of bias or favouring only one side. But the balanced report must also be fair. It may give more emphasis or more attention to one candidate over another in a news story because of the significance of the candidate’s words or actions at that event, or at that time. At some
other time, in some other story, the balance may change to fairly represent the
significance of some other side. It requires more work to achieve a fair balance in every
story, but it is essential in professional journalism. There are always at least two sides to
every story. Even if they work for one media that supports one party, professional
journalists must try to be unbiased and include balance in their reporting. Even if they
work for the state or government media, their stories should include news about the
opposition parties. This is balance. As much as possible, the balance should be fair.
Private media owners and state media should keep political comments and opinions
separate from the news. Many voters will not talk to reporters whom they fear will only
report one party’s views. Voters who distrust reporters will say what they think the
reporter wants to hear, but they will not always tell the truth. There is another meaning
to impartiality. Impartiality also means that the professional reporter is not a leader in
any political group or movement. If a journalist is known as a leading activist, his or her
reports will be considered biased and not credible even if they do have fair balance. A
journalist’s impartiality means that a reporter must not take an active role in any election
as a campaigner, offer financial or other support to a party or take gifts from a party.
Chapter 3:

Covering Elections in Liberia and Guidelines

The Liberian press commenced publication in 1826 with the Herald newspaper, a settler press, being the nation’s first newspaper. Initially, the Liberian press had a herculean task of providing coverage to its reading public without being harassed or molested.

Several newspapers were suppressed by past Liberian leaders for reporting accurately. But such acts of press repression have since ceased in modern Liberia.

This freedom of the press enjoyed today was not won on a silver platter. Several journalists were jailed and a few killed. Eventually, the press corps of Liberia gained strength from the organization of a union which has remained vocal.

The press in Liberia is free to report, being mindful of the abuse thereof. The press is protected by the State’s organic law as contained in Chapter III. Article 15 (a, b, c, d, and e).

Specifically, Article 15(a) and b of the Liberian Constitution provides protection for free speech and press. “Every person shall have the right to freedom of expression, being fully responsible for the abuse thereof. This right shall not be curtailed, restricted or enjoined by government save during an emergency declared in accordance with the Constitution.”

Article 15(b) of the nation’s organic law delves into the right that encompasses the right “to hold opinions without interference and the right to knowledge.” This right further includes “freedom of speech and of the press, academic freedom to receive and impart knowledge and information and the right of libraries to make such knowledge available.”

Current trend of elections coverage

The Liberian press today enjoys political reporting throughout the 15 counties of the state without molestation. Presently no journalist is in jail for fairly reporting, neither is a newspaper or radio station closed outside of a transparent court order.

In the Liberian context of electoral reporting, journalists are left to exercise their social responsibility as a guide to providing electoral coverage. In keeping with this principle,
journalists reporting on elections have the freedom to report electoral events as they see them. The reporting pattern of each media house, notwithstanding, must conform to that media house’s policy, except that no policy should be in conflict with established rules sanctioned by the Press Union of Liberia.

There are two categories of journalists who often cover elections in Liberia. These are the local press and international journalists on assignment to cover elections. Those of the local media need no authorization to travel in any part of the country and report on electoral activities on-going there.

However, for a foreign journalist to report on elections, the journalists desiring to perform the task should acknowledge the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism who in turn must accredit the journalist concerned. It is unlikely that a foreign journalist who disregards this process will gain adequate access to newsmakers. Besides, such a journalist runs the risk of being at odds with the governing authority.

As is usually the case in news gathering and dissemination, activities forming the news contents during elections come in two forms:

The first instance is those political party leaders, candidates and other interested individuals who issue press releases and sometimes organize press conferences which journalists attend and from which they report on the actions, plans and gains of politicians. In this process, some of the newsmakers exercise the liberty to select journalists or media institutions of their choice to cover the press conference.

On the other hand, the journalists go in search of the news pertaining to the elections and the actors and then report their findings. A limited resource base hampers critical elections coverage in Liberia. As the press in Liberia is mostly Monrovia based, whenever major electoral activities are scheduled outside Monrovia, few among the several active media outlets often attend the festival.

The key factor limiting a wide range of coverage in such a case is the inability of the media houses to provide transportation, lodging and feeding for their staff destined to cover the events. The worst in some cases come when politicians or political candidates have to underwrite the travel expenses of journalists, including transportation, lodging, feeding and sometimes per diem.
Elections Code of Conduct

Prior to the previous Presidential and General Elections in Liberia, there was no Elections Code of Conduct in the country. Most journalists were guided by the dictates of their ethics. Additionally, journalists were aided by a series of workshops organized by the University of Liberia and the Press Union of Liberia, with international support.

As at 31st July, 2010, the Press Union of Liberia had promulgated a special Elections Code of Conduct to guide the press corps throughout the length and breadth of the country. Workshops were held in several parts of the country to thoroughly explain the Elections Code of Conduct.

In a five page booklet produced by the Liberian Press Union and distributed to several journalists across the country, the union makes it crystal clear that an “election constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of multiparty and participatory democracy as well as the citizens’ rights to freely associate to determine who governs their ballot box” (Press Union of Liberia Elections Code of Conduct, p.1).

In furtherance of the Liberian media’s corresponding role and general responsibility to promote the enabling democratic conditions and peaceful atmosphere for the conduct of election, the Liberian Press Union has proclaimed 12 minimum norms and standards for the conduct of elections in Liberia. They include the following:

1. Investigate and report election activities in an accurate, balanced, fair and impartial manner;
2. Give fair coverage to all political parties, candidates, coalitions and alliances;
3. Not compromising professional ethics for material and/or financial gain and separating personal interests from professional activities;
4. Thoroughly understanding the electoral process and laws and disseminating them professionally while giving access to all citizens; and
5. Monitoring and reporting electoral violations and activities of National Elections Commission and other elections-related institutions involved in observing or supervising the process.

The Liberian Press Union’s Elections Code of Conduct also stresses:

6. Promoting tolerance, peace and reconciliation during and after the elections;
7. Making sure that poll results are scientifically verifiable and internationally acceptable; report elections results certified by election authorities;
8. Researching and scrutinizing the records of candidates and allowing the public to make their own judgment; deal with the issues rather than attacking personalities;
9. Disseminating voters/civic education messages in an accurate and reliable manner to encourage citizens' participation in the electoral process;

10. Journalists are enjoined to refrain from using language or materials that have the potential to inflame passions and aggravate tensions;

11. Journalists are to be rigorous against becoming channels to promote hate, discrimination, incite violence and threaten the freedom of others to participate peacefully in the elections, and do their utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions;

12. The Liberian Media Elections Code of Conduct also states that journalists shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, fair comment and criticism.

Concluding its Elections Code of Conduct, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) further states that in the spirit of her Code of Conduct, and consistent with the journalism creed and PUL constitution, for “any journalist or media institution found in violation of this document, the Press Union of Liberia will issue a statement condemning said journalist/institution.” (Press Union of Liberia Elections Code of Conduct, p.4).

The Code of Conduct further states that should the journalist/institution remain unrepentant, the media community shall declare said violator an undesirable element who should be ostracized. It further adds that the union shall also institute other measures to sanction violators in line with the values of the PUL.
Remember your newsroom fundamentals

• Is the story accurate? Are the facts and names correct and do I believe the information is true?
• Have I made every effort to confirm the information is true?
• Is the story impartial and balanced fairly? Does it include both sides and alternative views and does it present the news without giving any special favour to one party or candidate?
• Is this responsible journalism?
• Was the news obtained without bribes or illegal actions and does it protect sources and not violate the election and press laws?
• Is the story voter-focused? Does it have significant news for the voters?
• Does it present the concerns of voters to the politicians?
• Is this the whole picture? Do these words, photographs, television clips or audio-tapes give a true picture of the most important thing that happened at the event?
• Will this news story help to make the voters well-informed, so they can vote wisely, in their own best interest?
• Is this election free and fair? Is there other news about this election that should be reported?

Election reporting: is my story complete?

What Readers and audiences also deserve to know:

• How large is the crowd? Do not rely on the party officials’ count.
• Who was there?
• How far did they come?
• What part of the speech did they like the most?
• What is the reaction of individual listeners in the audience?
• What do they say about the speech?
• What do people outside on the street say?
• What is the reaction of other party leaders or candidates to the speech?
• Was there evidence of organized disruption? If so, by whom?
CHAPTER 4:

ICTs and Elections Coverage

By Kwami Ahiabenu II

General Background to ICT Journalism and Definitions

Introduction

Technology has always been the mechanism through which humankind has leveraged its efforts, both individually and collectively, to improve its quality of life. In our area, we can say the quill pen as a tool gave way to the pen, we moved on to the manual typewriter, currently we have a wide range of tools for our trade, with unlimited potential. There are a thousand and one examples of how journalists and their media houses are benefiting from investing in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Boosts in productivity, global access to information, learning, distribution of content, expression of creativity, innovation and new opportunities plus cost cutting can be stated as examples of these benefits. In a practical way, ICT tools can facilitate content creativity which is a core function of any journalist.

It becomes important that we take a look at the impact, challenges and prospects of technology broadly and ICTs specifically in the Journalism space.

According to Gary Hanson, since the early 1950s, computers have played a major role in journalism and mass communication. As early as 1956, computers were used to analyze political polling data and national election returns in the USA. In the beginning, only the largest media organizations could afford computer-based technology. Today, computers are present in virtually every news room in the USA. Globally, computers have now become part and parcel of most newsrooms.
**Elements of ICT Journalism in Elections**

1. ICT can be applied as a tool in day to day operations of journalism and media organizations.
2. ICT as a specialization: where journalists assume the title of ICT journalist with the main focus of collection and delivery of ICT content in mainstream and alternative media. This follows the line of specialist journalism such as economy/ business, sports, agriculture, etc. A popular variation of ICT Journalism is Online Journalism, which is applied online.
3. ICT Journalism invariably leads to innovation and change.
4. ICT Journalism works hand in hand with the theory of information and knowledge management.
5. The interplay of ICT and journalism provide unlimited possibilities.

**Impact of ICT on Journalism**

One is totally at a disadvantage when practicing journalism if one is not equipped with ICT skills and a tool set required to improve the level of the trade. Today, all over the world, ICT is now assuming increasing roles in the newsroom, and even some newsrooms which you least expect to have ICT tools are utilizing one tool or the other. The speed, immediacy, lower cost and global reach they provide make ICTs a very exciting tool for journalism.

The major impact is felt in the various ways ICT is contributing to the improvement of journalism. One school of thought however argues that ICT is also eroding the power of journalists as gatekeepers and their monopoly over information flow. Furthermore, the power of ICT is giving birth to a group of a new type of journalists - the so called ‘citizen journalists’ which is further fueling the debate about who qualifies as a “true journalist”.

**Using ICTs in Journalism**

There are a thousand and one opportunities for using ICT in Journalism. An attempt to draw up a list of ICT Journalism applications would be a futile exercise since this list would be endless. Journalists can make use of ICTs in four major areas:

a) Gathering and researching information to be used in news stories;
b) Producing content for all types of media both new and traditional;
c) Distributing news stories to a wide range of audience; and
d) Learning, training, change and new unlimited opportunities.
There is no doubt the use of ICTs has enabled latest news stories to be disseminated more quickly than before. That is, the news cycle has become shorter due to the availability of tools to get instant news stories out quickly aided by the use of technology. Furthermore, technology allows high quality news stories which could have taken ages to do within a shorter period of time. One could argue that without ICT tools some stories would have been impossible to produce.

Let us explore the usage of ICT in Journalism by looking at what is called front end and back end areas:

**News Processing - Front End**

The front end part of the equation, mostly relates to the media. For example, traditional media such as print or electronic, can repackage and publish content using ICT such as putting content online, via SMS on cell phones, digital radio, etc. The key point here is content originally created for traditional media is pushed onto new media creating a hybrid interface.

Another new phenomenon is new media where creation of news content is done solely for new media. For example, having a new media house such as an online newspaper without any link to an ‘offline’ hard copy newspaper; this version is known as exclusive electronic version. Journalists working in this environment call themselves full time online journalists.

Also at the front end is news aggregation where the unique factor is the creation of a central source of content. Here instead of engaging in the process of content generation, this central source takes content from numerous sources and makes them available at this central repository. A typical example is a news portal which aggregates content from different sources based on subject matter, geographical area, etc.

We can also state that organizations that provide the tools for getting content out are key operators in the front end. In this direction, the organizations do not generate or push out content but they are a vehicle for a media organization to reach out to their audiences. For example, a mobile phone company may not be generating or pushing out content but it provides the pipeline for news to get out via SMS technology. The role of this category of companies has become crucial since they are providing more channels for news organizations to serve their clients in new and exciting ways.

Another growing movement is “citizen journalism” or ‘grassroots journalism” where mostly technology enables and empowers so called “non journalists” (Citizen Joe) to have a strong voice in the mass media, mostly online. Central to the work of a “citizen
“Citizen journalist” is the ability to generate content and publish it without the constraints of newsroom bureaucracy, hierarchy and tradition. Fundamental to “citizen journalism” is the lack of professional ethics and traditions powered by the notion to “speak freely without any restrictions”.

**News Processing - Back End**

At the back end, where content is generated, ICT allows Journalists to collect, package and deliver content. Emphasis is placed on the technical component, where a specific technology is applied in the news production cycle. We have on the market today, a news production system that is enabled by information and communications technologies in response to changes on the media landscape. Think of this as a new factory with latest technology providing an efficient and effective means of production. Beyond the use of new technologies, ICT is also changing work culture and practices as well.

Furthermore, the demands of “informed audiences” mean that producing shallow content cannot serve their needs, their requirement of news demands more research, provision of detailed background and deep analysis. The use of ICT is a welcome tool to achieve excellence in the new wave of journalism.

**All Inclusive ICT Journalism?**

There are a lot of key words in this subject area as we are using ICT Journalism as an all-inclusive and catch all term which seeks to capture all related and relevant issues/subjects found in Information and Communication Technologies and Journalism linkage. Some of the key words include:

1. New Media
2. Media bloggers
3. Computer assisted editing
4. Technology in Electronic Media (digital radio and television broadcast)
5. Digital Newsroom Management System
6. Virtual Newsroom
7. Computer Assisted Journalism (Use of computer software applications (manipulation of databases, Geographic Information System, etc.)
8. Computer assisted reporting
9. Computer assisted investigative journalism
10. Online Journalism
11. Electronic Publishing
12. Online Research.
ICTs and Elections Coverage

ICTs provide a myriad of opportunities for journalists covering elections all over the world today. Almost all elections nowadays are increasingly using ICTs in their coverage. Overall ICTs are providing a lot of interesting tools for telling elections stories in a compelling manner. ICTs now have a very important and indispensable position in our newsrooms, providing us with powerful tools to improve on our level of journalism. Examples of ways in which ICTs are used are:

1. Online research
2. Polls and test of opinions
3. Virtual newsroom
4. Online interviews
5. Enriching your stories with news maps
6. Processing statistics,
7. Mobile phones in the newsroom
8. Interacting with your audiences.

Guidelines

Guideline 1: Online

All radio, TV and newspaper guidelines are applicable to online outputs including websites, blogs, podcasts, downloads, social networking, forums, message boards and blog comments, and any other online publishing platforms. The general rule of thumb should be, if it does not fit for radio, newspaper or TV it should not be online. Moderation of user content generation is strongly suggested in order to prevent libelous distortions or content that inflames violence among others. In the areas of linking to other websites this must be actively moderated to ensure a wide range of views and opinions. For example, your newsroom should link to political parties, tracking and indicating the availability of their websites. If and when such websites are available or unavailable it should be indicated. Online polls and test of opinions should provide information and statistics on how final outcomes are determined and results of such polls set within a proper timeframe.

Guideline 2: Emails

Emails, like phone-in and text messages, are an expression of opinion but not an indication of the weight of an opinion; they must therefore be selected impartially. Phone-in and text messages are sometimes organized by political parties or groups to advance their agenda. It is important to be alert to organized mass email campaigns
Guideline 3: SMS/Text Messages

Text messages are similar to emails, however a vigorous process of establishing the origins of such messages is strongly recommended before they are used. You can seek further clarification/verification by calling or texting the user back. Care must be taken with text messages coming from bulk SMS providers which do not allow for such checks. In case you need to edit text messages, it is important to ensure the original content is not distorted. Results of text votes must be presented as a sample of public opinion within the timeframe of such votes but not a representation of public opinion as a whole. It is important to issue a disclaimer about the fact that text messages do not reflect your newsroom’s opinion.

Guideline 4: Phone-ins

Phone-ins share some similarities with emails and text messages. The moderator must be willing and able to disconnect calls which are putting out false information, inciting violence and are providing distorted information. It is strongly recommended to have an interface that takes calls before putting them on air. Ultimately, delayed broadcasting equipment should be purchased and used. For sensitive issues, it is recommended that callers call in prior to the programme with their phone numbers so that the station can call them back and put them on air to ensure the confirmation of their identity. A database of callers matching calls to programmes can be kept but should not be used for any other purposes apart from using it as a reference point. Producers should watch out for calls without caller IDs and organized mass phone-ins as well.

Guideline 5: Social Media

Social media is now assuming an important role in the newsroom. From Facebook to twitter, newsrooms are increasingly relying on these tools to interact with their audience. Generally online guidelines are applicable here. Care should be taken to distinguish between official and unofficial social networking sites, since it is possible for someone to create an unofficial Facebook page for a political party. This page, not being official, poses a problem as information obtained from it is not trustworthy.
Guideline 6: Using online sources

The first and most important statement to avoid is “according to the internet”. The internet is made up of online spaces that can be traced to an individual or institutions. It is important to state the name of the website and the time you accessed it when you are using information from online sources. Some websites are notorious for housing a lot of false and unreliable information, so it is very important to verify information from online sources before making use of it. Being on the internet does not mean the information is true. Therefore you should take precautions not to reproduce or amplify false information.

Guideline 7: National ICTs Policy and Issues

National ICTs policies and issues are now assuming an important role in any country’s development agenda, placing these in the same basket as health, agriculture, education, etc. It therefore becomes very important to provide adequate and in-depth coverage of ICTs policy and issues focusing on how ICTs are contributing to national development. Build contacts and relationship with key ICTs stakeholders and policymakers to ensure that your coverage is not limited to events alone but includes features and in-depth articles.

Guideline 8: Citizen Journalism

Whereas citizen journalists can be everywhere, traditional journalists cannot be found everywhere when a news story breaks. The newsroom must therefore develop a policy to work hand-in-hand with citizen journalists. Also using outputs from citizen journalists must be guided by a policy that when outputs from citizen journalists are used they must be clearly indicated as such and rightly attributed to them.

Guideline 9: News Aggregation

Newsrooms generally can generate their own content or make use of news from other sources. News aggregation is the process of collecting and publishing news from other websites on your newsroom website. You must go through a careful process before using news from other websites since the website in question may not be using an editorial policy similar to yours. You must subject such news items to your editorial policy before using them. The rule should be ‘copy, process by taking it through your editorial policy and paste’ not ‘copy and paste’ it on your website. It is important to give full information on the source of the news you aggregated, by clearly indicating the full link for the article and not just the name of the news organization you took the article from.
Some websites have copyright content so ensure you have permission to use such content to avoid a legal tussle. There is a lot of news aggregation software, which automate the aggregation process. When you make use of such software, periodically review the content they are generating to ensure it conforms with your editorial policy.

**Guideline 10: Privacy and Copyright**

It is important to note that some materials on the internet are subject to copyright protection, therefore to avoid copyright infringement take steps to ask permission from copyright owners before making use of copyright information online. In addition to copyright, there are other protections offered to content producers such as Creative Commons, which provides free licenses and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix, use commercially, or any combination thereof. It is important to protect the privacy of our audience as we invariably collect information about them online, for example, when we require them to register on our news website. An editorial policy with a privacy component is now a must for the newsroom. In such policy we should protect the ability of our audience to control what information they reveal about themselves and how to control who can access such information.
Chapter 5:

20 Key Elections Reporting Guidelines

Journalists should perpetually be committed to following the ethics of the profession, and during elections this requirement becomes even more imperative. The 20 guidelines below have been carefully developed to encourage better elections reporting and ensure accuracy in elections reporting for the Liberian elections.

1. Provision of information

The core responsibility of the media in elections is the duty to inform the public about every aspect of the electoral process. The media must focus on issues of serious political discourse which are likely to inform voters’ decisions when voting.

2. Balance, and fairness

The media must be accessible to all stakeholders in the elections process in order to ensure balance of coverage. Just as any good story must have both sides told, so must elections stories, and the complexity of the world of elections and politics especially calls for the need to tell both sides of the story.

3. Accuracy

The media must state the fact of any incident or event in as accurate a manner as possible using credible sources. It is important not to publish a story that has not been verified.

4. News coverage

In covering elections, News must be differentiated from advertorials and editorials. The media must desist from taking financial or any material support from political actors in the quest for gathering News. Journalists should go out to seek information about the election process rather than wait for political parties to feed them with press releases.
5. **Protection against legal suits**

Covering elections can be a legal minefield if one does not take the appropriate steps in reporting. With this in mind, journalists must be conversant with the country’s laws and constitution when reporting on elections. Seek clarification if in doubt.

6. **Sourcing**

Sourcing has a direct relation to the credibility and reliability of a story; therefore as much as possible unnamed sources should not be used unless it is absolutely necessary. In exceptional cases one can use an unnamed source in order to protect the source or when the safety of that source is at stake.

7. **Corrections and replies**

The Media is obliged to provide actors in the election process an opportunity to respond to stories that are biased or unfairly written about them. Journalist should have a quick approach and response in handling complaints on political bias or complaints during elections reporting.

8. **Polls**

Polls and test of opinions should be reported carefully with full information given about the source of the poll, period it was conducted, who commissioned it, likely margin of error, sample size and full context of the polls.

9. **Electoral violence and Incitement**

The media can contribute to violence and conflict. In this regard the media must endeavor to develop an in- house editorial policy on hate speech, incitement to violence and conflict, and desist from glorifying violence.

10. **Direct Access programmes**

The media must ensure that they respect the terms and conditions of direct access during the campaign season especially for the state broadcaster.

11. **Discrimination and impartiality**

The media must be conscious about the diversity of Liberian society and not discriminate against any particular group, or person based on ethnicity, religion, sex, language and political or other opinions.
12. Bribery and corruption

Receiving gifts and financial favors from political actors to influence election stories is a serious breach of journalism ethics and must be avoided.

13. Conflict of interest

Media houses should require journalists and editors to disclose potential conflicts of interest.

14. Release of results

Only certified results from the Electoral Commission must be reported. However when the media chooses to announce provisional results the context must be properly situated, to avoid misleading the public.

15. Voters’ rights

Whilst a lot of emphasis is placed on political actors during elections, voters’ rights must also be respected by journalists and stories focused around voter issues.

16. Objectiveness

The state media has an obligation to provide factual information to the citizens since it is funded by tax payers’ money. As a rule of thumb both public and private media have a professional objective to be professional and non partisan.

17. State your position

When writing an elections-related opinion or editorial, the media house or journalist must clarify its position on the subject and state if its position is held by the individual journalist or the editorial team.

18. Investigative Reporting

Journalists must embed with key stakeholders of the electoral process in order to generate quality investigative elective stories.
19. Democratic Values

During elections the media must be aware of democratic values such as transparency and principles of good governance in all their reporting.

20. Making a difference in the elections process

The media can and should make a difference in the pre-, during and the post elections processes. The guiding principle here is that they should not allow the democratic process to be abused or hijacked by any group or person, by serving as a voice of reason, through the provision of impartial and balanced coverage of elections.
Guidelines for Reporting Elections in Liberia

Guidelines on reporting news

- Report the news truthfully, accurately and objectively.
- Present news in the correct context and in a balanced way, taking care not to change facts, for example, distorting them, leaving them out or summarising.
- Present things that are reasonably true as fact. Say clearly when a report is based on opinion, rumours or allegations.
- When not sure of the correctness of a report, check it out. If it is not possible to check, say this clearly in the report.
- Where you find that a report was incorrect on an important point, make a correction promptly and in a way that the correction gets the same attention from listeners.
- Warn in advance about showing extreme violence or sexual crimes.
- Do not broadcast the identity of victims of rape and other sexual violence without consent.
- Avoid explicit or graphic language that can disturb children or sensitive viewers unless it is in the public interest to show this.

Guidelines on comment

- You are free to comment on and criticise any actions or events of public importance.
- Comment should be an honest expression of opinion and shown in a way that shows it is comment, based on facts truly stated or fairly referred to.
- Say when a person has said they are not available for comment or could not reasonably be reached.

Guidelines on controversial issues of public importance

- Make reasonable efforts to present different points of view fairly in the same programme or in a follow-up programme as part of the same series, not too long after the original programme, and at about the same time slot.
- When someone has been criticised, give them a reasonable chance to reply, in the same programme or in a ‘right to reply’ programme.

Balance and fairness

- Ensure that all points of view are aired on an issue.
- Make active attempts to get views and responses as far afield as possible.
- Do not shy away from robust debate on controversial issues.
- Take care not to place events or statements in a particular ideological framework.
- Take note of the ‘weight of opinion’ and how a particular position can affect public opinion and actions.
Chapter 6:

Reporting elections in post-conflict era
By Alexander Sculthorpe

A) IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA IN POST-CONFLICT ELECTIONS

A free media is a crucial part of any functioning democracy, as a forum for debating public issues and criticizing government policy. (Lichtberg, 1990) The media’s role can be particularly influential in emerging democracies, and can have significant effects on peacebuilding efforts. As one observer notes: “In countries moving towards democratic government, a free and accountable media, one that monitors rights abuses and promotes divergent opinions, helps deter a return to violence. A biased or hatemongering media can sabotage almost any other peacebuilding effort.” (Howard, 2001, pg. 12)

While the state of the media plays a significant role in shaping the future of a post-conflict country, so too do elections. Elections in post-conflict countries are often considered a key ingredient in enhancing future state stability and good governance. In the case of the Liberian 2011 elections, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has described them as a defining event for Liberia, one which will: “…determine if Liberia truly gets on the course of democracy, enabling the country to achieve its development goals.” (AllAfrica, 2011) At the same time, elections also carry significant risk as they can serve to polarize societies which have been previously divided by a conflict. (Frère, 2008, pg.3)

The role of the media is therefore particularly critical during elections in post-conflict countries. As highlighted in a Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) seminar report on elections in post-conflict countries: “The importance of free yet responsible media in post-conflict electoral processes is undisputed. On the one hand, the right to free speech is fundamental and a free press has a vital control function in democratic societies. However, party-driven media playing on the fears and prejudices of the population can do untold damage in a nation that has only recently emerged from violent conflict.” (2008, p. 35)
B) ADDRESSING CHALLENGES OF POST-CONFLICT ELECTION REPORTING

Media coverage during elections is not only one of the most important roles the media plays in an emerging democracy, but also one of the most challenging. As scholar Marie-Soleil Frère notes: “Elections are a perilous period for journalists the world over, since they generate heightened political pressure, an increase in the number of manipulation attempts, and the need to work hastily. If newspapers also suffer from material and financial difficulties and a shortage of competent staff at a time when citizens expect the media to be ubiquitous, journalists’ work can soon be seen as incomplete or unbalanced.” (2010, p. 4) These obstacles are not specific to post-conflict countries, but are often more common and severe in countries which are recovering from recent violent conflict.

The chart below provides a comprehensive overview of the media’s role in each phase of election coverage. It also outlines those obstacles likely to be faced by the media during each phase of election coverage in post-conflict countries, while suggesting ways to address these challenges.
## Framework for the Media’s Role in Elections: Obstacles and Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Media’s Role</th>
<th>Outside the election period</th>
<th>Pre-election period</th>
<th>Electoral campaign</th>
<th>Election day</th>
<th>Announcement of provisional results (and tell citizens where detailed results can be found)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inform citizens (fully, honesty and rigorously)</strong></td>
<td>- The media’s intrinsic weaknesses: low educational attainment, economic frailty, lack of material and technical means</td>
<td>- Limited target audiences</td>
<td>- Understaffed editorial teams</td>
<td>- Announce overall and/or detailed results (and tell citizens where detailed results can be found)</td>
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<td>- Monitor the activities of public and private actors on behalf of citizens</td>
<td>- Strong political connections</td>
<td>- The media’s limited self-production capacities</td>
<td>- Shortage or absence of means of transport</td>
<td>- Consultation mechanisms of media professionals: adoption of joint positions in relations with the</td>
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<td>- Serve as a platform for society’s various components</td>
<td>- The executive’s grip on public media</td>
<td>- Lack of a journalistic tradition and skills as regards civic education</td>
<td>- Limited means of communication</td>
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<td>- Weak diffusion range: unequal access to the media</td>
<td>- Obstacles to access to information</td>
<td>- Violations of journalists’ rights and lack of security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Press freedom violations</td>
<td>- Factors leading to politicization: financial frailty (the lure of a reward), material shortages (transport and equipment), lack of training, media ownership structures</td>
<td>- Limited access to polling stations and the counting of votes</td>
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<td>- Inactive or politicized regulatory authorities</td>
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<td>- The media’s intrinsic limitations (periodicity)</td>
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<td><strong>Outside the election period</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Obstacles</strong></td>
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While this framework provides useful information in assisting the media to fulfill its role as effectively as possible, it is important to remember that even the most responsible and capable media coverage does not itself guarantee a free, fair, and peaceful election. While the media has a key role to play in post-conflict elections, in the end it is only one of several important actors.

As Frère concludes: “...one should not expect the media to achieve what is beyond their reach: to render transparent electoral processes which are not so; create competition in a tightly controlled context; put an end to virulent electoral campaigns with ethnic or regionalist tendencies; etc. However, one should demand from the media what is within their reach: to denounce ballot manipulations; promote expression by all in as balanced a manner as possible; ease tensions by banning discourses inciting violence; etc. These are tasks which they can perform if they work together, if they anticipate the elections, and if they organize themselves so as to cover them professionally.” (2010, p. 13)
C) THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PEACEBUILDING: CONFLICT-SENSITIVE JOURNALISM

“What has emerged is an expanded concept of journalism development, a sort of professionalism-plus approach, sometimes called conflict-sensitive journalism.” (Ross Howard, 2009)

It is clear that the media plays a critical role in post-conflict societies, for better or for worse, particularly during key moments such as elections. Some argue that the media’s role is so important not only because it serves the traditional role of acting as a democratic check, but also because in a conflict or fragile post-conflict situation, reliable and responsible reporting can also serve to establish communication among disputant parties, to correct misperceptions, to identify underlying interests, and even offer solutions. (Howard, 2009) Some scholars have noted that these types of activities ultimately serve a similar function to that of professional resolvers of conflict such as diplomats, mediators, and truce facilitators. As researchers Hannes Bauman and Melissa Siebert put it, “journalists mediate conflict whether they intend to or not.” (As quoted in Howard, 2009) Those who view media through this lens have developed a slightly different approach to media coverage: conflict-sensitive journalism.

Ross Howard, President of the journalism development consortium Media & Democracy Group, and author of several publications on conflict-sensitive journalism, explains the concept:

“Journalism trainers and media developers in fragile or emerging states have increasingly recognized that conventional training is insufficient in preparing journalists in such places to report on what is often seen and described as intractable conflict and inevitable violence. Something additional to conventional standards such as accuracy, and skills such as interviewing and editing, is needed to overcome the legacies of authoritarian government, corruption, poverty and an absence of media diversity, editorial independence and a media-supportive legal infrastructure.

What has emerged is an expanded concept of journalism development, a sort of professionalism-plus approach, sometimes called conflict-sensitive journalism. It involves stressing the core values of professional reporting, plus sensitizing journalists to their innate potential as unintended mediators in conflicted societies, and introducing them to a rudimentary analysis of conflict. It argues that journalism which repeats simplistic or stereotyped claims about violence without seeking deeper explanations will mislead citizens into believing violence is the only recourse in all conflicts.
Conflict sensitive journalism can inject context, an appreciation for root causes, and a new capacity to seek and analyze possible solutions, to the otherwise daily repeating of violent incidents as news. At best, when reported reliably, these elements can alter a community’s handling of its own conflicts.” (2009)

While Liberia is no longer a country in a state of violent conflict, there are signs that conflict-sensitive journalism is still a relevant concept to apply in the context of this still-fragile emerging democracy. One such indication stems from the December 2010 ‘Conference to Mitigate the Use of Violence in Liberia’s 2011 Electoral Contests’. The conference involved a wide range of participants including Ministers of the Government of Liberia, senior leadership of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), and civil society. At the conclusion of the conference, the parties issued a summative resolution in which they identified that the factors that contributed to the manifestation of violence during the 2005 Liberian elections, and were raising concerns for elections in 2011, included (among others): Irresponsible utterances of political party officials and supporters; Ethnic mobilization; Loyalties to former warlords and the existence of some of the command structures of warring factions used to mobilize the voting population; The presence of ex-combatants tend to be concentrated in urbanized areas where there is greater population concentration as well; Youth used as instrument of violence because of unemployment and lack of their access to economic opportunity; and a lack of media responsibility, accountability, and professionalism. (2010) Acknowledging that these contributory factors to election violence are still a concern, there is a case to be made that knowledge of conflict-sensitive journalism is relevant for journalists covering the upcoming Liberian elections.
The boxes below contain the essential elements of conflict-sensitive journalism, and a comparative text example.

**Traditional reporting**
Yoho City, YNS — The Prime Minister of Yoho has condemned a bomb blast in Yoho City by Atu terrorists which killed ten tourists yesterday.

The prime minister said he has created a special army squad to track down the perpetrators of the massacre.

Police say the explosion occurred when terrorists from an Atu assassination squad brought a huge bomb into the Tourist Office in the city square. The bomb was probably located in a suitcase, said police captain Joe Blow.

The terrorist-guerilla Atu Front early this morning issued a statement denying it planted the bomb. But government sources say eyewitnesses saw Atu Front leader Sam Green at the city square yesterday. It is believed he coordinated the attack ...

**Conflict sensitive reporting**
Yoho City, YNS — A mysterious explosion which killed 10 tourists was the work of an Atu separatist movement, the Prime Minister of Yoho claimed yesterday.

Police investigators are still examining the shattered city square where the blast occurred while tourists were getting off a tour bus at the Tourist Office yesterday.

The prime minister blamed the explosion on the self-styled Atu Front, which is fighting government forces in rural areas and demanding a republican government.

In a telephone interview Atu Front leader Sam Green denied any connection with the explosion and called it a tragedy.

The tour bus recently arrived from the nearby country of Butu, where a civil war is waging ...

**See the difference?**

**Traditional reporting**
- The news is full of blame and accusations with no proof. It takes the prime minister’s side. It says the attackers were Atu terrorists. How does he know?
- It uses emotional language: massacre, terrorists, assassination squad.
- It reports a claim by the police captain without proof. It reports unnamed government sources who say other unnamed people say they saw the Atu leader and blame him. There is no proof of this.

**Conflict sensitive reporting**
- It reports only what is known. The bomb is a mystery. It uses words carefully. It says the prime minister makes a claim. It says he blames Atu separatists.
- It calls the Atu separatists by the name they use. It seeks both sides’ explanation and comment.
- It does not report emotional words like massacre. It does not report police speculation and police claims, which do not include names of witnesses.
- It reveals more possible explanation. The bomb may have been on a bus from another country in conflict.

What to watch out for in conflict-sensitive reporting

- Almost all conflict emerges from a handful of causes, most notably inadequately shared resources such as food or housing, no communication between disputants, unresolved grievances and unevenly distributed power. Conflict turns violent when no common ground or shared interest can be established.

- Violence can emerge in several forms, including cultural practices such as widely-practiced hate speech and racial (or religious or gender) discrimination. The violence can also be institutionalized by legally sanctioned racism, sexism, colonialism, Americo-Liberia conflicts, nepotism and corruption.

- Conflict almost inevitably ends because of one-party dominance, withdrawal and irresolution, compromise, or real transformation of a dispute into a shared solution. Journalists play some of the roles of a mediator, providing resources – information – to communities to resolve conflict. Successful resolution almost invariably requires an expanded number of interests with new interests, trade-offs and alternatives.

- Journalism risks being manipulated by narrow interests and unchallenged mythologies, especially from traditional elites. A basic analysis of a conflict broadens journalists’ insights, perspectives and sources of information, which produces more diverse stories.

- In acknowledging their innate capacity as mediators, and applying basic conflict analysis, conflict-sensitive journalists apply more rigorous scrutiny to the words and images they apply in their reporting:

  - Avoiding emotional and imprecise words such as massacre and genocide, terrorist, fanatic and extremist. Call people what they call themselves. Avoid words like devastated, tragic and terrorized.

  - Defining conflicts as multi-faceted, and seeking commonalities as well as points of disagreement among disputants, and seeking alternative perspectives and solutions to the conflict.

  - Attributing claims and allegations, and avoiding unsubstantiated descriptions as facts.

  - Avoiding the unjustified use of racial or cultural identities in stories and the exclusion of gender diversity in seeking perspectives and comment.

Bibliography:


APPENDIX

Electoral Code of Press Union of Liberia (Media & Elections)

Code of Conduct

• Aware that election constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of multiparty and participatory democracy as well as the citizens’ rights to freely associate to determine who governs them through the ballot box;

• And aware of the media’s corresponding role and general responsibility to promote the enabling democratic conditions and peaceful atmosphere for the conduct of elections, we do hereby proclaim these minimum norms and standards for the conduct of elections in Liberia.

Codes

1. Investigate and report election activities in an accurate, balanced, fair and impartial manner.

2. Give fair coverage to all political parties, candidates, coalition and alliances.

3. Do not compromise professional ethics for material and/or financial gains and separate personal interests from professional activities.

4. Thoroughly understand the electoral process and laws and disseminate them professionally.

5. Monitor and report electoral violations and activities of National Elections Commission and other elections related institutions involved in observing or supervising the process.

6. Promote tolerance, peace and reconciliation during and after the elections.

7. Be sure that poll results are scientifically verifiable and internationally acceptable; report elections results certified by election authorities.

8. Research and scrutinize the records of candidates and allow the public to make their own judgment; deal with the issues as much as you can rather than attacking personalities.
9. Disseminate voters/civic education messages in an accurate and reliable manner to encourage citizens’ participation in the electoral process.

10. Journalists are to refrain from using languages or materials that have the potential to inflame passions and aggravate tensions.

11. Be rigorous against becoming channels to promote hate, discrimination, incite violence and threaten the freedom of others to participate peacefully in the election; and do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions.

12. Journalists shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news and right to fair comments and criticism.

• In the spirit of this code of conduct, and consistent with the journalism creed and PUL constitution, any journalist or media institution found in violation of this document, we agreed that the Press Union of Liberia will issue a statement condemning said journalist/institution. Should the journalist/institution remain unrepentant, the media community shall declare said violator an undesirable element – hence should be ostracized.

The Union shall also institute other measures to sanction violators in line with the values of the PUL.

*Adopted October 2005 by the membership and amended 31st July 2010 at the Corina Hotel in the City of Monrovia, Liberia*

*NB: Allegiance to a code is an important way of defining who is and is not a journalist.*
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The African Elections project is being coordinated by the International Institute for ICT Journalism www.penplusbytes.org