

THE MEDIA REFORM MANIFESTO

Series 1

Conflict and Election Reporting

- **Issues**
- **Guidelines**

**A Publication of the International Press Centre (IPC),
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This publication is the first in the series of a *Nigerian Media Reform Manifesto*, the main objective of which is to encourage greater emphasis on ethical and professional issues within the journalism profession.

Its production has been facilitated by two round tables that focused on Conflicts and Coverage of Elections and whose proceedings form the main content. The round tables were organized with the respective funding support of IDASA, Nigeria, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and LO/TCO, Sweden.

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IPC thanks as well its co-partners in the Media-for-Democracy group (Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER)) and many others who collectively ensured the success of this handbook.

It was edited by Lanre Arogundade, ***IPC Coordinator***, with the assistance of Tunde Aremu, the ***MIS Manager and Senior Programme Officer***.

INTRODUCTION

This Media Reform Manifesto is intended to serve as a handbook to assist journalists, media organizations and media groups in the onerous tasks of reporting, analyzing and commenting on conflicts generally and the coverage of elections in particular. It examines the ethical and professional issues inherent in the processes.

Much of the content deal with the review of the 2003 general elections in the country and guidelines for election coverage in general. This is partly so because election was here interpreted as a form of conflict that required meticulous handling on the part of the media more so when considered against the background of previous aborted attempts to organize a successful civilian-to-civilian transition. It was recalled in this context that the media was partly blamed for the transition failures.

Beyond the specific issue of the elections however, a consensus has gradually emerged that the Nigerian media, even after four years of civil rule, is still largely in transition and needs to address itself more seriously to ethical and professional issues that were taken for granted during the period of media repression under military rule.

Meanwhile, the quest for a Freedom of Information law and the removal of all anti-media laws from the statute books as well as the constitution of an independent self-regulatory body have combined to make it imperative for journalists and the media to continually examine their social responsibility in a society that is yet to overcome many of its conflicts.

It is hoped that this publication will contribute to the above process while it is expected that subsequent editions will address other critical areas of journalism practice.

Lanre Arogundade
Coordinator, IPC
September, 2003

THE MEDIA AND 2003 ELECTIONS

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

Election Monitoring, the Media and 2003 Experience

By
Edetaen Ojo

Introduction

The legal framework for media coverage of elections in Nigeria is contained in the Electoral Act 2002 and the National Broadcasting Code¹. The Code provides extensive guidelines for political coverage by broadcasting stations and contains a range of sanctions, which may be imposed on a station for any breach of the guidelines contained in it. These include the revocation of its licence if it commits a serious breach of either the technical or non-technical aspects of the Code, reprimand or warning, light or heavy fine, reduction of broadcast hours or suspension of licence, depending on the gravity of the offence.

The relevant provisions of the Electoral Act governing the use and conduct of the media during electioneering campaigns are contained in Section 29. The section provides as follows:

- (1) *A candidate and his party shall campaign for the election in accordance with such rules and regulations as may be determined by the Commission².*
- (2) *State apparatus including the media shall not be*

¹The National Broadcasting Code was issued as “the minimum standard to be observed by all operators of radio and television stations as well as satellite and cable redistribution services” in Nigeria by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) in 1993 pursuant to Section 20(1) of the National Broadcasting Commission Act and has subsequently been revised firstly in 1996 and recently early in 2003.

²The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

- employed to the advantage or disadvantage of any political party or candidate at any election.*
- (3) *Media time shall be allocated equally among the political parties at similar hours of the day.*
 - (4) *At any public electronic media, equal airtime shall be allotted to all political parties during prime times at similar hours each day, subject to the payment of appropriate fees.*
 - (5) *At any public print media, equal coverage and conspicuity shall be allotted to all political parties.*

Similar provisions are contained in Section 5.4.0 of the National Broadcasting Code, which regulates the coverage of electioneering campaigns. They include the following provisions:

Section 5.4.6 which states that “In adherence to the principle of pluralism of ideas and opinions, equal opportunity and air time shall be provided to all political parties or views, with particular regard to amount of time and belt during electioneering campaign period.”

Section 5.4.12, which provides that “in the interest of fairness and balance and to prevent the monetization of political broadcasts, any form of commercialization of political news or coverage is prohibited.”

Section 5.4.15, which stipulates “it shall be the duty of broadcast stations to highlight the activities of government. But it shall not be reduced to glamorizing government functionaries or resort to praise singing or denial of access to those with contrary views or political leaning.”

Section 5.4.19, which directs that “a station shall set up a committee to examine all complaints and appeals from political parties and the general public on political broadcasting during electioneering campaigns, and make appropriate decisions, including the granting of a right of reply.” It further provides that the committee's proceedings shall be forwarded to the Director-General of the NBC within 24 hours.

Section 8.7.2, which provides that a station is free to sell

airtime for the purpose of political campaigns provided that all messages are in the form of spot announcements or jingles not exceeding 60 seconds and that no station can be involved in the production of such announcements or jingles; no voices of members of staff of any station are used in political jingles; and all jingles conform to the standards of truth, decency, good taste and morality.

These provisions operate alongside internationally agreed standards and norms for election reporting³ as well as various journalists' codes of ethics. In addition to general standards of journalistic conduct contained in the Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists drawn up by the Nigerian Press Organisation (NPO)⁴, which emphasize the importance of factual, accurate, balanced and fair reporting as well as promoting the universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, and peace, paragraph 7 of the Code of Ethics specifically provides that:

A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.

To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event.

An essential ingredient of the democratic process is that all the contending parties and candidates in an election should be able to communicate their points of view fairly and equitably to the electorate so that the people can make informed choices during the elections.

This requires that besides the ruling political party or candidates who have the advantage of incumbency, parties and candidates in opposition should have access to the mass media.

³See, for instance, ARTICLE 19: Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies (London, August 1994).

⁴The Nigerian Press Organisation is made up of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ).

Fairness of Access to the Media for Political Parties and Candidates

Owing to the large number of political parties and candidates in the various elections, there was a legitimate logistic challenge to the media of how to fairly allocate time “equally among the political parties at similar hours of the day” for each of them to explain their programmes and policies to the electorate.

Regardless of this situation, however, it is difficult to excuse the overall lopsidedness of media coverage of the campaigns and elections. In the campaigns for the presidential elections, in particular, President Olusegun Obasanjo and his ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated the media throughout the period of the campaigns and elections.

There was a huge imbalance between the coverage received by the PDP/President Obasanjo and the other political parties and candidates both in terms of the amount of the coverage and the quality of coverage with the result that the PDP/President Obasanjo and the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)/its presidential candidate, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari appeared to have received more coverage than all the other parties and candidates put together. Next to President Obasanjo and the PDP, the ANPP and General Buhari, received the highest amount of media coverage.

But besides the volume of coverage they received, the PDP and the President were often shown in good light in most of the media reports while some of his opponents were frequently portrayed negatively. This is particularly true of General Buhari, widely regarded as the President's strongest rival, who received a lot of negative coverage arising from several issues including an earlier statement credited to him that no Muslim should vote for a Christian candidate as president; another statement also reportedly made by him during an interview on the Voice of America that the proposed National Identity Card Scheme was not in the interest of the North, his failure to appear in the presidential debates; the reported funding of his election campaigns by some Islamic countries; and the alleged wastefulness and corruption in the Petroleum Trust Fund, which he

presided over as Executive Chairman under the governments of the late Head of State, General Sani Abacha, and his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Constant reference was also made to the fact that he had previously been a military dictator and had been high-handed as Head of State in his dealings with the politicians whom his government overthrew, with the media and other sectors of the society. President Obasanjo's similar military antecedents were often conveniently forgotten or overlooked. General Buhari carried particularly heavy baggage over his government's promulgation of the controversial Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree No. 4 of 1984⁵. His statement during his campaigns that he had no regrets over the promulgation of the decree only served to anger many journalists and draw him more negative coverage.

Conversely, President Obasanjo's record of having banned the *Newbreed* magazine during his earlier rule as military Head of State, his establishment of the infamous Ita-Oko Detention Centre, and other sundry human rights abuses perpetrated by his regime were never at issue in the media. Likewise, while the Justice Party's presidential candidate, Reverend Chris Okotie, was frequently ridiculed in many newspapers stories and articles over his claim that he had been called by God to run for President, President Obasanjo's similar claim to divine inspiration was not a subject of media attention.

It is conceded that objective coverage of elections and campaigns is a difficult challenge as facts which are reported will often be to the detriment of one political party or candidate or to the advantage of the other party or candidate. An appearance of lack of objectivity or lack of accuracy may also be created by the fact that a story has been reported from a perspective different from the party or

⁵Two journalists, Mr. Tunde Thompson and Mr. Nduka Irabor, both of The Guardian newspaper, were jailed for one year under this decree in 1984 while the newspaper was also convicted by the Special Military Tribunal established under the decree and fined N50,000.00 for their reports on diplomatic postings.

contestant's point of view. What is of critical importance is that there should be a demonstration of good faith both on the part of the media and the ruling party or incumbent political office holder while the media should strive over a period or a number of reports to achieve balance and fairness.

Besides the PDP/President Obasanjo and the ANPP/General Buhari, other candidates and parties who received varying degrees of media coverage were Chief Emeka Ojukwu, presidential candidate of the All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA); Senator Jim Nwobodo, presidential candidate of the United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP); Senator Ike Nwachukwu, presidential candidate of the National Democratic Party (NDP); Reverend Chris Okotie, presidential candidate of the Justice Party (JP); Mrs. Sarah Jibril, presidential candidate of the Progressive Action Congress (PAC); Chief Gani Fawehinmi, presidential candidate of the National Conscience Party (NCP); Alhaji Balarabe Musa, presidential candidate of the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP); and Alhaji M.D. Yusuf, presidential candidate of Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ).

The campaigns by these candidates and their parties received some little coverage in the media. But the other parties and their presidential candidates were almost completely forgotten and got no more than occasional mentions. There was relatively little or no media focus on them and their campaigns and where some of them had media mentions, it was sometimes too negative or meant to ridicule them. An impression was thereby created that they were not serious candidates or parties.

While this lopsidedness in coverage was most apparent in the Federal Government-owned media, there were also manifestations of the tendency in some of the private media. Several factors were responsible for this situation.

Firstly, there was a tendency by those in power at both the federal and state levels to view the government-controlled broadcasting stations as the propaganda arms of their governments and, therefore, to use them to advance their partisan or personal interests while preventing access to these media by other

stakeholders, particularly by their opponents and opposition parties. As the ruling party at the federal level, the PDP controlled all the Federal Government-owned media organisations, particularly the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN).

Although both the NTA and the FRCN⁶ made commendable efforts to provide some coverage for other political parties and candidates, their coverage was far from equitable. The FRCN, for instance, issued House Rules on Political Coverage to its staff on January 28. Despite the fact that these were designed to ensure fair and balanced coverage of the political campaigns and elections, the station remained the mouthpiece of political leaders within the Federal Government, particularly President Obasanjo and the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Professor Jerry Gana.

Many of the provisions in the laws establishing both the NTA and the FRCN ensured their susceptibility to political control and influence and were exploited by government officials to maintain control over them. These provisions include those of sections 10, 11, and 12(2) and (4) of the NTA Act and Sections 10(1) and (2), and 11(3) and (4) of the FRCN Act.

The provisions impose a duty on the stations to broadcast government announcements. However, the stations were often unable to distinguish between government activities being carried out by public officer holders, which were newsworthy, and the activities of government officials that amounted only to election campaigns.

Campaign speeches by President Obasanjo and other government officials were routinely reported as government activities without commensurate airtime given to other political parties or candidates.

In fact, on January 28, 2003, newly registered political parties protested in Abuja an alleged blackout of their activities by

⁶See Nigerian Television Authority Act No. 24 of 1977 and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria Act No. 8 of 1979.

the Federal Government controlled radio and television stations. They also complained of exorbitant fees charged by the FRCN and NTA to cover their conventions⁷.

However, as alluded to earlier, the tendency of the ruling party to dominate the government-owned media was not limited to the Federal Government or the PDP alone, but was also evident in virtually all the states and cut across the different political parties in control in those states. Many opposition candidates were frequently denied access to such state media.

A number of politicians complained about the activities of various state-run broadcast stations, which they claimed were blacking out news of their political activities, especially campaigns while virtually singing the praises of the incumbent governors round the clock.

One such complaint came from Mr. Femi Falana, a lawyer and human rights activist who contested the governorship race for Ekiti State on the platform of the National Conscience Party (NCP). Mr. Falana petitioned the National Broadcasting Commission in February over the selective coverage of political activities in the state and complained of lack of coverage of his election campaign in the state by the Ekiti State Broadcasting Service (ESBS). He called on the NBC to prosecute the ESBS.

In a letter to Mr. Falana, NBC Director General, Dr. Silas Babajiya Yisa, apologized over the situation saying that the "Commission is as a matter of urgency investigating your complaint and will definitely initiate necessary follow-up actions after this process."

Dr. Yisa pointed out that "before now, the Commission had taken adequate steps to educate broadcast stations across the country on political broadcasts which it said should accommodate the principles of fairness and equity and promote pluralism of views and ideas."⁸

⁷See The Punch newspaper, Vol. 17, No. 18 of Wednesday, January 29, 2003, p. 8.

⁸See ThisDay newspaper, Vol. 9, No. 2872 of Tuesday, March 4, 2003, p. 2.

As part of its efforts to inculcate the principles of honesty, objectivity and goodwill, the Commission said it organized a national workshop for its staff and stakeholders in the industry on the need for objectivity in political reporting adding that every broadcast station in the country had been warned to operate strictly according to the guidelines on political coverage enunciated in the National Broadcasting Code.

But there were a number of complaints from other states over the unfair use of government-controlled broadcast stations. In Katsina State, for example, there were complaints that the Katsina State Governor, Alhaji Yar'Adua, had turned the Katsina State Radio and Television Station (KTRTV) to his campaign organisation.

One complaint came from an indigene of the state, Sada Sodangi, who asked the NBC to check the activities of the station so that the indigenes can get balanced programmes from it.

Mr. Sodangi said in a letter to the NBC: "Of the 30 political parties now in place, you will not hear or see anything about them except the governor's party which is the Peoples Democratic Party. If your opinions differ from that of the government even if you are a member of the PDP, you will neither be heard nor seen on the stations. An example or two here will buttress my assertion. On November 23, 2002, one of the All Nigeria Peoples Party's gubernatorial aspirants held a big rally in Bakori town and it was never reported at all. General Muhammadu Buhari's ANPP rally held here in Katsina, the state capital, was never reported even though the event took place at Katsina polo ground, a stone's throw from the headquarters of the KTRTV."⁹ A similar complaint was also made against the two stations by another indigene of the state, Mr. Umar Adamu Funtua¹⁰.

In Imo State, Dr. Ezekiel Izuogu, the protem chairman of Progressive Liberation Party (PLP) alleged that the PDP government of Chief Achike Udenwa was monopolizing the Imo Broadcasting

⁹See the New Nigerian newspaper, No. 11,746 of Wednesday, February 5, 2003, p. 8.

¹⁰See the Weekly Trust newspaper of March 8 to 14, 2003, p. 13.

Corporation (IBC) as he was not allowing other candidates to air their views on the state radio and television stations¹¹.

Similarly, Senator Rasheed Ladoja, who contested the governorship race in Oyo State under the PDP and later won the elections, was in January, locked out of the offices of the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), which was then controlled by the ruling party in the state, the Alliance for Democracy (AD).

Senator Ladoja had gone to the BCOS office as part of his campaign tour of broadcasting stations but was not received by any of the corporation's officials. The State Ministry of Information had similarly rejected his written request to be allowed to appear on a phone-in programme, *Eyi-Ara*, which is aired weekly on the station. The State Commissioner for Information and Youths Development, Chief Caleb Oyaniyi, said his Ministry refused Senator Ladoja's application because he wrote "nasty things" in his letter¹².

In Gombe State, Alhaji Danjuma Goje, the PDP gubernatorial candidate for the state, alleged that the ANPP government in the state dominated the Gombe State Media Corporation and that it has denied other political parties access to the station. He said the station had refused to accept or air jingles from the PDP, among other acts of denial of equal opportunity to all stakeholders as required by the National Broadcasting Code.

In a press statement signed by Mr. Isa Magaji Bangus, the public relations officer of the Alhaji Goje Campaign Organisation, the politician appealed to the NBC to investigate the Corporation's refusal to allow other parties and the candidates of other political parties access to the airwaves¹³.

In Ogun State, the PDP governorship candidate, Otunba Gbenga Daniel, also petitioned the NBC alleging that the AD government of Governor Segun Osoba, was monopolizing the state

¹¹ See ThisDay newspaper, Vol. 8, No. 2817 of Wednesday, January 8, 2003, p. 2.

¹² See The Punch newspaper, Vol. 17, No. 18 of Wednesday, January 29, 2003, p. 7.

¹³ See Daily Trust newspaper, Vol. 5, No. 58 of Wednesday, March 12, 2003, p. 18.

radio and television stations. Otunba said all the campaign advertisements he sent to the station were rejected while the state media refused to use any news item from his campaign tour¹⁴.

General Buhari, the ANPP presidential candidate, issued a public protest in March complaining that his campaign tour of Yola, the Adamawa State capital, on March 12 was blacked out by the FRCN and NTA, both federal stations. He said that the coverage of the presidential campaigns by both stations had been “one-sided and partial”, contrary to the demands of equity and fair play¹⁵.

A second factor responsible for the lopsidedness of the coverage received by the PDP/President Obasanjo in relation to the other political parties and candidates was the financial advantage which they wielded as the ruling party and its candidates had or controlled far more resources than their opponents. Because of the absence, both in law and in fact, of mechanisms for accounting on campaign finances, it was impossible to determine the source of these funds and, in particular, whether they were public funds. The issue is of critical importance because besides being in control at the Federal level, the PDP also controlled a majority of the states of the Federation and therefore had unlimited access to state resources. There was indeed a widespread perception that public funds, both at the Federal level and in the various states, were misappropriated and deployed for electoral campaigns by the chief executives.

In any event, because of the huge resources at their disposal and the absence of any controls on campaign finances, the PDP and its candidates were able to buy more air time and media space than all the other parties and candidates.

The situation was aggravated by the absence of any policy of providing free slots for electoral campaign broadcasts for all political parties to outline their programmes and introduce their candidates for the elections both at the federal and state levels. In the absence of such a media policy and as a result of their lack of

¹⁴See The Guardian newspaper, Vol. 19, No. 8879 of Friday, March 14, 2003, p. 7.

¹⁵See The Punch newspaper, Vol. 17, No. 18,778 of Monday, March 17, 2003, p. 3.

resources, many of the parties and candidates did not have even the minimum level of visibility necessary for contesting elections in a genuine democracy.

A third factor responsible for the lopsided coverage is that right from the inception of the political campaigns, especially in the presidential elections, the media actively promoted the notion that the elections were a straight fight between President Obasanjo, the PDP's presidential candidate, and the presidential candidate of the ANPP, General Buhari and thereby dismissed all the other candidates.

Following from this attitude, the media focused its attention on these two “serious” contenders to the detriment of the other candidates and parties in the elections. As indicated earlier, while the coverage of President Obasanjo was largely positive, media coverage of General Buhari was often negative.

ANPP's Assistant National Publicity Secretary for the North Central Zone, Mr. Ismaila A. Sani, protested the negative media coverage of General Buhari in March saying “Time and again, and almost on a daily basis, especially since his emergence as the ANPP presidential flag bearer, our sensibilities are assaulted and affronted by what appears to be deliberate and calculated negative reportage of Muhammadu Buhari by a section of the press. Both space and prominence are devoted to slanted stories and skewed comments often with scarcely concealed mission to disparage, blackmail and malign.^{16,}”

Alleging that the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper led the campaign, Sani said a content analysis of the stories, features, comments, cartoons and other publications carried on General Buhari since January 1, 2003 showed that the newspaper had waged a hate campaign against the ANPP presidential candidate.

He cited as an example of the alleged hate campaign the newspaper's March 11, 2003 editorial comment entitled “Buhari and the ID Scheme” which was repeated the following day.

¹⁶ See the Daily Trust newspaper, Vol. 5, No. 64 of Thursday, March 20, 2003, p. 7.

While the state-owned media were encumbered by the inconvenience of their ownership, the private media were largely free of such constraints. They generally provided greater access to the media for political parties and candidates in opposition than the state-owned media. However, the private media also suffered from two major disabilities. Firstly, their proprietors often had political and economic interests, which sometimes resulted in their aligning with particular political parties or specific candidates. Such 'proprietor' interests sometimes influenced the coverage by various privately owned media establishments either in the volume of coverage given to particular candidates or parties or in the nature of such coverage.

The second problem was that many of the privately owned media establishments saw the era as an opportunity to make money and improve their financial fortunes. They therefore issued rates for the coverage of various news items including press releases, press conferences, political rallies, etc. The result was that only rich political parties and candidates could afford to have their activities covered.

Compliance by the Media and the Political Authorities with Relevant Rules and Regulations

A major problem in ensuring equitable access to the media for political parties and candidates was the absence of an effective regulatory authority to enforce existing laws and regulations affecting the media, particularly the coverage of political activities. The National Broadcasting Commission appears incapable of enforcing its directives and the laws that it is supposed to apply.

Following a petition by the ANPP governorship candidate in Edo State, Senator Rowland Owie, the National Broadcasting Commission threatened on April 1 to sanction two stations for allegedly breaching the National Broadcasting Code on political advertisements by airing alleged offensive advertisements sponsored by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party in the state.

The stations, the Edo State Broadcasting Service (EBS-TV) and the Independent Television (ITV)¹⁷, both located in Benin City, the Edo State capital, broadcasted the adverts, which Senator Owie's lawyers complained were libellous.

The adverts had earlier been rejected by the management of the Nigerian Television Authority in Benin City on the ground that they were offensive and unethical. Newspaper reports said following the refusal by NTA Benin to air the adverts, the PDP in the state complained to the NTA headquarters in Abuja with the result that the General Manager of NTA Benin, Chief Egheobamien, was transferred to Lagos by a letter dated March 31.

The Benin Zonal Director of the NBC, Mr. Olufemi Ayeni, said the two media houses broke the rules on political advertisements by airing them and gave them until the afternoon of April 3 to take them off air, failing which the NBC would impose tough sanctions. He said despite a meeting by the NBC with the managements of the stations and their initial withdrawal of the offensive adverts, they resumed broadcasting them¹⁸.

The state secretary of the ANPP, Mr. Chris Nehikhare, threatened that the party would institute a suit against the two stations over the alleged libellous advertisements against its gubernatorial candidate, but had already petitioned the NBC over the refusal of the EBS to air jingles sent to it by the ANPP. Mr. Nehikhare said more than one week after the party presented the tapes for its jingles to EBS-TV, the station had refused to accept payment for airing the jingles and had not broadcast them¹⁹.

¹⁷The incumbent governor of Edo State, Chief Lucky Igbinedion controls both television stations and virtually has a monopoly of the media in the state. As chief executive of the state, he controls the state the EBS-TV, which is owned by the state government. His family also owns the ITV, which is therefore also under his control. Although he has no direct control over the third television station in the state, the Nigerian Television Authority, Benin, since it is controlled at the Federal level by the PDP to which he belongs, he is also able to exert political influence over it.

¹⁸See The Punch newspaper, Vol. 17, No. 18,790 of Wednesday, April 2, 2003, p. 12.

¹⁹See The Guardian newspaper, Vol. 19, No. 8,903 of Monday, April 7, 2003, p. 78.

In rejecting the jingles, the EBS management stated in a March 27, 2003 letter signed by its General Manager, Mr. T.S.B. Ebozoje, and addressed to the ANPP, that the jingles could not be aired until it got clearance from relevant authorities.

In December, the NBC had issued a stern warning to radio and television stations to respect its guidelines for coverage of the campaigns or face severe sanctions, including the revocation of their licences. The Commission said it had observed with growing concern the excessive and lopsided use of radio and television stations for political broadcasts by governments, ruling parties and political factions to the exclusion of other stakeholders, particularly political opponents and competing views. It also noted that there was a gross absence of professionalism and disrespect for ethical considerations by the broadcasting stations, leading to mischief and misinformation, which it described as key ingredients for the breakdown of law and order.

The Commission issued what it called a final warning to all the broadcast stations in the country and said it would no longer tolerate any abuse of the broadcasting laws by government functionaries. But it did not specify what measures it would take against them.

However, two months later, Dr. Yisa, the Commission's director-general, again expressed deep concern over the partisanship in the editorial content of broadcast stations in the country. He accused government-owned broadcast stations of being the major violators of the principles of fair and balanced reporting, saying "The Commission is deeply concerned about reports of pervading appropriation, particularly by state government machinery, of electronic media under their administrative and territorial control."²⁰

Dr. Yisa said the Commission had received reports from all over the country showing that governors, agents, parties and even factions of parties in the states have hijacked state-government owned stations and to a lesser extent privately owned media for

²⁰See The Punch newspaper, Vol. 17, No. 18,748 of Monday, February 3, 2003, p. 8.

unwholesome and wholesale misappropriation of the airwaves. He warned them against the practice and reminded them that the provisions of Section 1.5.1.b and c of the National Broadcasting Code should guide them.

Despite all the reports sent to the NBC by various political parties and candidates alleging that they were being denied access to the government controlled media and the NBC's claim that it was investigating the reports, there was never any indication of what its findings were or what sanctions it had taken against offending media organisations or government functionaries, following the reports.

Curiously, at the end of the elections, Dr. Yisa rated the media's performance in the coverage of the elections as high. He said since the NBC did not shut down any broadcast station before or during the elections, he was of the opinion that the media, especially the broadcasting sector, performed very well during the elections having regard to the difficult circumstances from which it was emerging.

Availability of Voter Enlightenment Information Through the Media

The media, particularly the broadcast media, are very important tools in enlightening the electorate about the importance of voting in elections as well as in providing the prospective voters with information about eligibility for voting, how, when and where to vote, the secrecy of the ballot, the political parties and their candidates. This is so because voters need to understand the issues in the elections, the programmes of the various political parties and the character of the candidates in the different elections. Explanations about the secrecy of the ballot were critical to establishing public confidence in the elections given the climate of fear and intimidation that prevailed before the elections. It was therefore necessary to reassure the electorate that their personal safety would be protected on election days.

Part of the responsibility for ensuring this lies with the political parties themselves and they may embark on political

advertising, special information programmes, and ensuring news coverage.

But because of the ability of the broadcast media, particularly radio, to reach a large number of people in virtually all strata of society, it remains one of the most effective tools for conducting this sort of voter education. This is of particular importance in a country like Nigeria, which has a very high level of illiteracy.

A highly commendable media event on the campaigns and elections was the televised presidential debates organized by the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) in collaboration with the Independent Debates Committee, the Nigerian Press Organisation, and the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO).

Following the publication in many newspapers of the schedule for the debates with a listing of all the 20 presidential candidates and their political parties, the voting public was able to get a comprehensive picture of the political landscape as it related to the presidential elections.

The debates, which were televised live on both state-owned and private media, and subsequently re-broadcast in the following days, also gave all the candidates who participated an opportunity to get a fair amount of media exposure on national television and to convey their messages or political programmes to the electorate. By allowing candidates to respond to specific questions or address issues rather than debate with each other, the possibility for a rancorous debate based on personal attacks was eliminated or, at least, minimized. Besides, listeners and viewers had an opportunity to assess the programmes of the various candidates and to compare them against one another.

There was also a commendable level of voter and civic education carried out by the mass media. While in some cases, such voter education messages were initiated by the media establishments themselves, both print and broadcast, in most of the cases, they were facilitated by various interest groups to motivate members of the public to participate fully in the electoral process. But the media provided ample time and space for this.

Interest groups which sponsored voter education messages throughout the period leading up to the elections include some government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and INEC; civil society organizations such as the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), the Catholic Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), and various corporate bodies.

Thousands of media messages were relayed on various radio and television stations across the country and in scores of newspapers and magazines to promote the ideals of tolerance, peaceful elections and good order during and after the elections. The messages emphasized the need for participation in all the election by people of voting age, encouraged youths to shun violence, political thuggery and all manner of violent activities. It advised politicians to protect the nascent democracy and desist from acts that may truncate the democratic process.

The messages were in various forms including jingles relayed in songs, drama sketches, or simply announcements. They were made in English and in several of the local languages.

Some of the messages also provided the media audiences with basic information about where, when and how to vote.

These messages had a great deal of impact in creating a heightened level of awareness about the process despite the uncertainties and confusion caused by the government, politicians and regulatory authorities.

Conclusions

It is clear that both the Federal Government and the various State Governments maintained a stranglehold on publicly funded media organizations, thereby preventing them from giving equitable coverage and allocating equal media time to all the political parties that contested elections. This was despite Section 29 of the Electoral Act 2002, which specifically stipulates that State apparatus, including the media, should not be employed to the advantage or

disadvantage of any political party or candidate at any election. Political parties and civil society organizations have a responsibility to facilitate the enforcement of this provision of the law.

It is also clear that the coverage of the campaigns and elections by the media was not equitable, as the media did not provide fair and balanced coverage to the political parties and candidates who contested the various elections. While some of the problems were technical and structural, and therefore beyond the control of the media, in other cases, the shortcomings were the result of a lack of sufficient professionalism in some sections of the media; a willingness, particularly in the case of the state-owned media, to allow themselves to be subjected to political interference; and the commercialization of political news contrary to the National Broadcasting Code and the Code of Ethics for Journalists.

Given the lessons of the elections, it is imperative that urgent remedial measures be taken to correct the inadequacies of media coverage of elections and campaigns in future. Such measures should be aimed at ensuring that the editorial policies of the publicly funded broadcast stations, particularly radio and television, both at the federal level and in all the 36 states, are reviewed to ensure that they do not deny political parties and candidates other than the incumbent party or candidate access to the media and to prevent their being used as part of the campaign tools of the ruling party.

(Edetaen Ojo is Executive Director, Media Rights Agenda - MRA)

CHAPTER 2

A FAIR ATTEMPT RATING THE PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF 2003 ELECTIONS

By
Wale Sokunbi

The important role of the press in nurturing democracy has been highlighted at various media workshops on the ideal role of the press in a democracy. Indeed as Chief James Ibori, Delta state governor and publisher of a daily newspaper stated at a forum organized by the Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ, in March 2002 "the very survival of democracy depends on how well the media plays the watchdog role assigned to it"

The question before us today is, how well did the media play this role in its coverage of Election 2003? Much has been said and written about the adequacy, effectiveness and fairness of the print media coverage of Election 2003. Some of these assessments, as we all know, have been negative.

But in rating the performance of this very important segment of the media, I will like us to consider certain parameters, designed as questions, to guide us to a fair understanding of how well the media performed the role expected of it in its pre-election, election and post election coverage of Election 2003.

Among these questions are: Did the press provide an even platform for the various parties and candidates to sell themselves and their programmes to the electorate? Did the media adequately co-ordinate the effort to educate the electorate on the choices placed before them in the electoral contest and their antecedents? How well did the press keep the electorate informed about all the aspirants, their parties, rallies and the thrust of their campaigns?

How well did the media handle reports on the controversy over the election dates, the preparedness of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC for the elections and education of voters about the actual electoral process? Beyond the electoral process, did the press give room for concerned individuals to air their views on the entire process? Coming to the actual reports of the elections, did the media give an accurate account of results of elections as declared by INEC? Did they publish the reactions of both winners and losers? Did they follow up/or investigate allegations and counter allegations by aggrieved losers? Did they report the steps taken by those who lost out to seek redress? Was the media mindful of the reactions of foreign observer groups?

Answers to these all-important questions will give a fair assessment of the print media's coverage of elections 2003.

A Media Review survey of nine newspapers, *ThisDay*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Daily Times*, *Champion* and *The Comet*, between January 10 and May 29, 2003, supports the view that the activities of presidential candidates were given considerable coverage, although two candidates - the then incumbent, now re-elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP and Mohammadu Buhari of the All Nigeria People's Party, ANPP had a lion's share of the coverage. The high number of presidential candidates - they were 20 in all - appeared to have proved a challenge for the press. Generally, coverage showed lack of exhaustive information on the candidates. There was no exhaustive analysis of their antecedents and capabilities.

It appeared that some presidential candidates were sought out for coverage of all their activities while the press either ignored or could not access information on the others. This gave birth to the media image of some contestants as "major contenders," while others appeared to have been written off even before the contest began. The campaign thrust of incumbent president Obasanjo, ANPP's Buhari, National Conscience Party's Chief Gani Fawehinmi, APGA's Chief Emeka Ojukwu and United Nigeria People's Party's Chief Jim Nwobodo were well identified.

Reverend Chris Okotie of Justice Party, M.D. Yusuf of Movement for Democracy and Justice and Senator Ike Nwachukwu of the National Democratic Party also got reasonable mention. Very little was published in the print media about presidential candidates like Major Moji Obasanjo of Masses Movement of Nigeria, Dr. Tunji Braithwaite of Nigeria Advance Party, Dr. Ferreira Jorge of Democratic Alliance, Barrister Fred Akhokhia of New Nigeria People's Party and Balarabe Musa of Peoples Redemption Party.

Even much less could be gotten in the press from other presidential candidates like Dr. Godwill Nnaji of Better Nigeria Progressive Party, Alhaji Yahaya Ezeemo Ndu of African Renaissance Party, Dr. Olapade Agoro of National Action Council and Chief Emmanuel Okereke of All People's Liberation Party. Several reasons have been adduced for this. As three editors of three daily newspapers - Azubukwe Ishekwenne of *The Punch*, Kunle Oyatomi of *Sunday Vanguard*, and Gbenga Omotoso of *The Comet* - put it in recent interviews in the April edition of *Media Review* magazine, coverage of the crowd of 20 presidential candidates was beautiful in theory, but very difficult in practice given the financial resources available to the print media, the inadequate personnel, the timing of the election and the fact that the little known candidates did not create time for the media but preferred to campaign directly to the electorate. This inability to provide adequate information on all candidates was a major flaw in the coverage of election 2003.

Providing more information about these candidates could have helped the electorate to better understand and appreciate their candidature. Beyond this, the coverage of one of the candidates, Buhari of the ANPP was, at a point, largely negative.

One other feature of the coverage of the run up to the election was that it tended to enthrone mudslinging as a campaign strategy as the leading candidates threw brickbats at one another on the pages of magazines and newspapers.

Another outstanding feature is the failure of the press to set an agenda for the reading public on the ideas and ideologies by which different candidates could be assessed. Not much of an attempt was made to differentiate one party or manifesto from the other, or the

superiority or otherwise of the programmes of the contestants and their workability.

Beyond the failure to set an agenda however, the press gave a good account of itself as a keeper of records of all the activities that made up the electoral process.

The press captured the pre-election campaigns, the anxieties on the election date, the aborted attempt to print fake ballot papers, what initially appeared to be the seeming non-preparedness of the Independent National Electoral Commission and the police for the task at hand, commentaries of concerned members of the public and instances of electoral violence and misdemeanours. Fears over multiple voting and excess votes prompted *Vanguard*, Monday April 7, to publish a list of voters per state on its front page. It appeared under the title "Summary of Registered Voters."

This was followed with several calls to registered voters to check their names as displayed where they registered.

The Guardian conducted and published a poll (April 9, 2003) to determine "the awareness and preference rating of the 30 political parties" and "to know the voting pattern of the respondents as regards their gubernatorial and presidential candidates of choice." The poll results appeared under the title "*Obasanjo leads, Buhari inches up in polls*." The poll, with regards to the presidential election, turned out to be a true reflection of the results of the actual election.

The Election

The print media gave a good account of election results on state-by-state and constituency-by-constituency basis.

Reactions of various persons and organizations to the elections were adequately mirrored. *Thisday*, April 22, in a front-page lead reported, "*Obasanjo maintains lead, Buhari threatens to reject result, AD concedes defeat*."

Buhari's rejection of the election results, and his threats, first to organize a "mass action" against the winner and his later decision to go to court were well reported in the print media. The media, on this issue, played a mediator's role, urging Buhari and

other aggrieved losers to go to the election tribunal.

Reactions of the foreign press and the reports of foreign observer groups like the European Union Observer Group that initially condemned the Nigerian media for 'failing to provide unbiased, fair and informative coverage of the political parties,' (*Thisday*, April 28, 2003) were well reported.

The position of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), which gave the electoral process a pass mark, was also well reported.

The media effectively captured the post election squabbles, which gave the nation some anxious moments.

The Guardian of April 23, reports Ojukwu as wanting the polls voided while *Thisday* of April 24 had the story: *Buhari, don't recognize Obasanjo after May 29*, *Tribune* April 25 had the story, *ANPP overrules Buhari* with twin riders *CAN wants him arrested* and *Atiku asks him to shut up*.

The effects of these post election bickering were also well documented, *Businessday* April 29, reports: *Nigerian Investors lose N26b to election*. Statements made by defeated candidates, which heightened uncertainty in the country, caused the loss, according to the paper.

In conclusion, media coverage of Election 2003 challenged the capability of the press to provide adequate coverage of the entire process.

Although limited resources and the sheer number of contestants limited the ability of the print media to help the electorate fully understand the candidature of all the contestants, the press nevertheless aided the electoral process with provision of information that drove the system along. In what can be described as a fair attempt, newspapers and magazines documented for posterity, the colour, tone, nuances, intrigues and resolution of elections 2003.

When a student sits for an examination he either scores an A, a B +, a C, a P or an F. The print media did not score an A in its coverage of Elections 2003. It did not score a B+. It did not have an ordinary Pass. Neither did it score F9.

I rate the performance of the print media in its coverage of Elections 2003 as average - a B. That is why the cover story of the May edition of *Media Review* magazine on the Coverage of Elections 2003 was titled - *A Pass Mark*.

(Wale Sokunbi (Mrs.) is Editor, Media Review Magazine)

CHAPTER 3

MEDIA AND 2003 ELECTIONS: My Experience in the Field

A discussion note by Prince Tony Momoh

1. **My understanding of the topic** *Media Performance During the 2003 Elections*. Three areas to note: Media, Performance, Elections

(a) **Media** Its role in the polity: part of governance by virtue of section 6.6.c and section 22 of the 1999 Constitution; people's watchdog by virtue of section 22 of the Constitution; weapon in the hands of those who own, establish and operate them by virtue of section 39 (2)

(b) **Performance**: the doing of a specified chore in fulfillment of the obligation to monitor governance by virtue of section 22 of the Constitution and the inherent power of the press to monitor, in a division of labour setting, in any polity. Therefore obligation to monitor is international, and ethical standards are implied, demanded and binding.

(c) **Elections**: the 2003 elections supervised by INEC under provisions of the Constitution. INEC is *Independent National Electoral Commission* created by section 153.1.f of the Constitution. Composition and functions are settled in Part 1 to the Third Schedule to the Constitution. It has power to conduct elections and must be *INDEPENDENT* doing so. The oath of office which all electoral commissioners, electoral and returning officers must subscribe to is one which bears **true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria** and not to any individual in government

(d) My role here is to speak in my capacity as an official of the ANPP. In that capacity, I was in the field; also in my capacity as

national chairman of the media and publicity committee of the ANPP Presidential Campaign Council, I had access to all publicity materials and publications of the party and of other parties during the elections, as handled by the press, both print and electronic. Also in my position, I was part and parcel of planning all the international press conferences of the ANPP and the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties, which exclude the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP.

Note: As a media man, I would like to go beyond my mandate and make my presentation not only from the political commitment angle, but also from the angle of an interested media man, and a legal practitioner.

2. **Media Structure and the obligation to monitor governance:** Who had to represent the people? The owner under section 39.2 or the media practitioner under section 22? The unarguable answer is the media practitioner who must do his/her work as a professional bound by his/her profession's code of conduct. He/she is either a member of the NUJ or the NGE, or even both. But if the NUJ and the NGE cannot look straight in the eyes of their presidents and chairmen and pat them on the back for being professional examples of credible performance, then we are in trouble. Can my presidents Remi Oyo of the Guild and Adeyemi of the NUJ look me in the eyes and assert that they gave the media a leadership that would earn the profession pass mark? If they can, then we have no reason to blame the media for being extremely partisan since the professional leadership showed their commitment to an agenda by their open association with the ruling party and the incumbent president during the preparation for elections, and the elections themselves. If they had encouraged investigation of the criticisms of the elections made by foreign observers, they would have discovered that the foreign observers were not agents of the opposition, but they wrote down very little of what happened because that was what they saw. I was in the field and I have access to the outcome of the execution of a premeditated plan to undermine the power of the people to decide what they want done after the tenure of

those in elective offices has expired.

3. **Have I any quarrel with the media professionals?** *No*, if he/she who pays the piper had to dictate the tune. *No*, if the despicable belief holds that you must chop where you work. *Yes*, if there is an obligation on the part of the media to be professional by abiding by the dictates of an operative code of conduct which since 1998 has been in use as endorsed by the Nigerian Press Organization comprised by the NPAN, the NGE and the NUJ.

4. **Have I any quarrel with the Media** that is the newspapers, magazines, radio and television that have an obligation to monitor governance? *Yes*, since they monetised such monitoring, I have nothing against adverts, but the insistence that payment must be made before what is arbitrarily classified as *political news* is published is carrying money-making too far. I also quarrel with the media because they seemed to be willing to publish anything without regard to the reputation of others insofar as payment was made to the advert department. I do not think that many among them know that political statements are not protected under the law of libel, and that any body that feels hurt has six years to bring an action. My final quarrel with the media is that owners and practitioners alike seem to forget or ignore the demand that the obligation to monitor governance is an obligation on the *media*, and should be seen as a condition for exercising the right under section 39.2 to *own, establish and operate a medium*.

5. **How did the gate-keepers fair?** Very well indeed. But *who are the gate-keepers?* They are those who represent certain interests within or outside the media houses, and ensure that what is favourable to them goes into the media and what is unfavourable is kept out. They therefore refuse to publish what is unfavourable to those they must protect, or even distort what has been sent by those they must keep a watch on.

6. **How did many of them fair with Buhari?** Very well indeed.

(a) They ensured that Buhari remained the Muslim fanatic who they say preached against any non-Muslim being voted for in the elections. This in spite of the fact that this had been denied, that the person who reported it was not a speaker of the language in which the statement was alleged to have been made; that the conference of catholic bishops had investigated this man and found him clean.

(b) They sustained the *meaning of mass action* that it is not democratic because it must be violent. But they have not criticized NLC threatening mass action if fuel prices are increased! Why? Because going on strike is democratic but demonstrating against national fraud is not!

(c) They see reference of Buhari to *Kennedy* and *Gandhi* as notice to Nigerians that President Obasanjo will be assassinated, and not that a name is not enough to assure you a place in government

(d) They see his endorsement of *Sharia as a way of life of the Muslim* as meaning only that if he came to power, Nigeria would be forced to embrace Sharia. They refuse to look at the Constitution, which does not grant the National Assembly power to make law to impose a religion or a way of worship on the country (sections 10 and 38).

7. **Where was I on April 12 and April 19?** At Auchi. While there, I received reports from the field. This field is Edo North Senatorial District. The reports I received can be said to be hearsay, but what of my confrontation with the army and the police? They snatched ballot boxes after voters had cast their votes and had left, and it was time for counting the votes. They were under the direction of PDP officials. And INEC officials cooperated fully. This fraud late turned out to be the execution of a script written at the highest level and executed all over the country.

9. This **ultimate in electoral abuse**, which has never happened on this scale in the history of Nigeria is what the Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Nigeria Union of Journalists, through their presidents,

described as free, fair and transparent! God Save Nigeria. God Save our Democracy.

Conclusion

Only gate-keepers will insist on publishing what is false even after the falsity has been shown beyond reasonable doubt. Only fraudulent people will be players in a football match where they are supposed to be referees.

(Prince Momoh, veteran journalist and former Information Minister is National Chairman, Media and Publicity, ANPP Presidential Campaign Council)

CHAPTER 4

The Lagos Resolution

The one-day round table on *The Media and 2003 Elections* held on Thursday 5th June, 2003 took place against the background of local and foreign criticisms of media performance in reporting the electoral process, especially the political parties, the candidates, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the actual voting exercise.

It also took place against the background of “the relevant provisions of the Electoral Act governing the use of the media during electioneering campaigns” as contained in Section 29 that provides as follows:

1. *A candidate and his party shall campaign for the election in accordance with such rules and regulations as may be determined by the constitution*
2. *State apparatus including the media shall not be employed to the advantage or disadvantage of any political party or candidate at any election*
3. *Media time shall be allocated equally among the political parties at similar hours of the day*
4. *At any public electronic media, equal airtime shall be allotted to all political parties during prime times at similar hours each day, subject to the payment of appropriate fees.*
5. *At any public print media, equal coverage and conspicuousness shall be allotted to all political parties*

It took place, as well, against the background of the provisions of section 22 of the 1999 constitution that states that *the press, the radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all time be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter*

and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

Finally, it took place against background of the Code of Ethics of Journalists, paragraph 7 of which states that:

- 1. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification, or patronage to suppress or publish information*
- 2. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event.*

The round table attracted participants from a broad spectrum of the society including the media, the political class, students and non-governmental groups. The discussions were led by a panel that included Prince Tony Momoh, former Information Minister; Mr. Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda; Mrs. Wale Sokunbi, Editor, *Media Review*; Mr. Tony Iyare, *Punch* newspaper columnist; Mr. Abayomi Ogundeji, Editor, *Sunday Comet* and Ms. Moyo Oyatogun, *MITV* while it was moderated by Mr. Gbemiga Ogunleye, Deputy Editor-In-Chief of *Punch* Newspapers.

Observations

After a critical analysis and examination of various issues and perspectives relating to the theme, participants observed as follows:

That the Media is a Stakeholder in the democratic process and as such it has a key role to play to consolidate democracy and democratic values. Indeed the future of democracy is intertwined with that of the media.

That the media has not totally fulfilled its obligations under the Electoral Act, the Constitution and the Code of Ethics.

That the media is faced with certain problems, which militated against its effective performance. Among them is the general decline

in economic standards of the state, which causes reeds and intellectual poverty.

That the media is also faced with the problem of decline in ethical standards of media practitioners, lack of adequate equipment, corporate and self censorship, commercialisation of news, ethnic coloration of issues and the lack of adequate focus on issues.

That the media has been biased by not giving adequate opportunity for the expression of alternative views as against that of the status quo.

That on the side of the government, the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, has performed below expectation in terms of allowing the media to perform its functions.

That most events during the elections were unreported and that this was informed partly by too much focus on the bigger political parties as against the smaller and newer ones as well as the erroneous impression that those emphasizing rigging of the elections were promoting threats to the democratic structures.

The way forward

To ensure that the media lives up to its constitutional, ethical and societal responsibilities and properly cover future elections along the principles of fairness, objectivity and balance, participants identified:

The need for journalists to promote ethics, respect alternative viewpoints and ensure that public interest serves as the guiding principle of media coverage of events including elections.

The need to check alleged increasing rate of corruption in the media with journalists shunning acts that are capable of undermining the integrity of journalists, the image of the journalism profession and the status of the media as the fourth estate of the realm.

The need for media proprietors to pay adequate and necessary attention to the welfare of journalists and other media staff to avoid putting them in a situation where they could be easily compromised.

PART 2

ELECTIONS AND CONFLICT REPORTING

CHAPTER 5

Guidelines for Journalists and Media

The following guidelines on election and conflict reporting were put together by a group of media experts gathered together at the instance of the International Press Centre, Lagos, Nigeria with the support of IDASA, Nigeria.

The media experts agreed that conflict could be a part of or a product of normal everyday occurrences of disagreements, strained relationships and tension generated by contending interests and opinions. As consequence, democratic election is by its nature a potential conflict situation. Thus the same guidelines given in the coverage of conflicts could also be applied to elections, as both are contests.

“Conflict” is thus defined under two broad categories:

- Using the common imagery of war, blood and violence, physical destruction of lives and property
- Normal everyday occurrences of disagreements, strained relationships and tensions generated by contending interests and opinions.

The duty and responsibility of the media defined in broad terms should include the following:

- Providing and or disseminating *truthful* information about conflict
- Avoidance of sensationalism
- Sensitizing the general populace about the horrors of the manifestation of violence in conflict situations.

- Maintaining balance and fairness in reports.
- Ensuring that profit-motive is not the yardstick for reporting, coverage and analysis of conflict
- Seeking to identify credible and objective potential solutions and not merely reporting and analyzing conflicts.
- Recognizing that conflict reporting is a specialized area that needs the creation of corps of Journalists who by basic and special training become “specialist” Conflict Reporters/Writers

SPECIFIC GUIDES

All journalists must be infinitely aware and always conscious that “truth” is subjective. The Journalist must look at the immediate and remote causes of any conflict, define the characters on all sides of the conflict, analyze their interests and contextualize all these using the yardstick of history.

Journalists must be dispassionate enough to suppress personal interests in any conflict to their purely professional duty of reporting, covering and analyzing issues around the conflict.

While it is recognizable that the journalist has rights of opinion and is also capable of emotional attachment to people, idea and sentiments, Nigerian media worker should imbibe the culture of consciously moderating the intrusion of his/her personality on the work at hand.

Usually the word “Balance” is defined on the assumption that there are only two sides to a conflict situation. The fact however is that there are always little grey areas to competing interests in any conflict. Journalists need to recognize and report these other sides as well for a truly balanced and fair coverage of a conflict. *A typical example is the usual dependence of Nigerian Journalists on the social and political elite as sources for news, views and analysis. But in so doing they forget the common man on the streets whose interests and viewpoints are not necessarily those of the bigwigs.*

Journalists should always remember that the elite of any society are usually very biased and extremists in their views on any conflict. Therefore, basing reports or analysis of conflicts only on the elite's views would only exacerbate matters since the conflict would only remain polarised on the opposing standpoints of the elite population.

Therefore the media establishment should as a matter of policy try to diversify its sources of reportage and analysis of conflict on three broad planks:

- Official (usually the opposing views of the elite section of the population)
- Popular (What the common man on the street feels about the interests at stake)
- Social Groups (representing a variety of views and interests not necessarily directly related to those in the centre of the conflict itself)

It is good for Journalists to report *all* that happened in a conflict situation. This “all” should however include casualties, attitudes, actions and reactions, statements and counterstatements from *all* sides involved in the conflict.

Journalists should report events *as they happened*: give the hard facts. The details of the presentation should be done, however, with restraint bothering on acute maturity in editorial judgement. If overt graphic description is likely to exacerbate tension in the public instead of dousing it, the Journalist should exercise caution.

Journalists should go beyond reporting the conflict itself. They should follow up with seeking and presenting a wide, balanced and fair cross-section of people's views on how best to resolve the conflict.

It is necessary for Editors to ensure multiplicity of views in detailing reporters to cover, analyze conflict situations. Editors should realize that known hardliners, extremists and committed activists (in any field) among their staff are not likely to give fair and balanced coverage/analysis of conflict situations, even if such

reporters are very competent on other editorial beats.

Since most conflict situation in Nigeria is recurrent, Journalists should not only limit themselves to providing historical cross-references to any eruption of conflict. They should also strive to unearth (and remind the public about the) various solutions to similar conflicts in the past. All tiers of Nigerian government are fond of setting up Panels, Tribunals and Commissions to resolve various conflicts. But the general public is hardly made aware of the Reports, White Papers and Recommendations emerging from such bodies. The Press should endeavour to link current conflict to similar ones in the past and proffer possible solutions based on the historical facts.

The Journalist should hold a definition of election to mean 'conflict' because it naturally involves competition. Therefore the Journalist should recognize that election is basically a conflict of interests and therefore should be able to articulate the various interests at stake before and during the election process. He or she should also be able to analyze how the various interests have coalesced in harmony or disharmony after the results of the elections have been announced.

The Journalist should understand that given the nation's many years of romance with military rule and the historical nature of ethnic/tribal tension, Nigerian politicians are still largely combatants and compete on personal and ethnic platforms not on issue/ideological divides as it is done in most other democratic nations.

The Journalist should endeavour to always emphasize issues/ideologies in reporting and analyzing and refuse to play the politics of personality clashes, as the average Nigerian politician would have it.

The Journalist should also observe ethics of the profession and eschew outright falsification/distortion of facts, blowing aspects of story out of proportion, creating headlines that conflict with the actual story and outright fabrication of stories, quotes, and events.

The various units of the Nigerian media can pursue this common agenda by collaborating on several fronts to evolve a system of public education by producing basic Election Guides in print and

electronic formats and treating matters such as:

How to cast vote

A compendium of the competing political parties, their programmes, their symbols.

The candidates for each election, in all the parties, their antecedents, their personal programmes.

In addition to collaborative work on public education, especially in the coverage of election campaigns, media establishments should initiate public service projects aimed at telling politicians what the “voiceless majority” need.

In view of the need to assist the Journalists in living up to expectations, the following are also recommended:

Media owners should provide conducive environment for their staff to function effectively, and wholly independently. Various examples abound of Journalists having to compromise professional standards and ethics largely because they have to depend on extraneous sources to discharge their duties.

Editors should be trained and act with the utmost sense of neutrality on all issues.

There is need therefore to ensure that sub-editors, copy-editors and all such in-house editorial staff in a media establishment are of high professional integrity.

IPC: OUR MISSION

The International Press Centre - IPC is a not-for-profit, non-governmental, independent media resource center.

It exists to provide capacity building for journalists, render professional services to media groups and organisations and support advocacy for freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, access to information, self regulation, media independence and pluralism in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

IPC's mission derives from the need to strengthen the media and the journalists in fulfilling their traditional and constitutional obligation of monitoring governance, serving as the society's watchdog and promoting democratic values.

Commissioned on October 9, 1999, it is a component of the Media-for-Democracy In Nigeria Project (MFD), established through the initiative of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Belgium, Article 19 (International Freedom of Expression Group), U.K, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), France and the West African Journalists Association (WAJA) with the support of the European Commission.

The Nigerian MFD partners - Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Independent Journalism Centre (IJC) and the Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER) constitute the Board of Directors.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

To partake in activities aimed at strengthening capacity and professionalism of the media and journalists.

To partake and support all necessary activities to promote freedom of expression and preserve media independence.

To facilitate the reform and upgrading of media Laws to bring them into conformity with international rights charters and conventions.

To provide fora for discourse on the role and responsibilities of the media in democratic dispensations.

To offer research and library services to the media, journalists and the public.

To improve the knowledge of journalists in information technology and Internet use.

To encourage the involvement of the media in conflict management and resolution.

To facilitate the participation of journalists in international media events, seminars and fellowships.

To address issues of ethics in the practice of journalism.

TOOLS/METHODOLOGY

Roundtable discussions, dialogues, workshops, seminars, conferences and lectures.

Training on Internet use, computer assisted reporting and newsroom management.

Networking, Internet chat and email discussion

groups.

Publication of books, journals and reports.
Press releases, bulletins, dispatches and alerts.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Seminars
Workshops
Internet Training Programmes for journalists
Lectures

FACILITIES

Conference hall - meetings, training, seminars, conferences
Cyber café - Internet training, email services, browsing, networking
Boardroom Monitoring, roundtable, meetings
Library journals, newspapers, magazines, periodicals
PCs, Tel/fax machines, audio/visual equipment

PATRONAGE

IPC enjoys the enthusiastic patronage of practising journalists, journalism students, mass communication teachers, media organisations and even members of the public who have been making use of the facilities especially the Internet access and the conference hall. Journalists are particularly eager to learn more about the role of the Internet in modern day journalism practice.

IPC has therefore been able to continuously create interactive fora between the press and the society; the media and the government; and the local and international media towards enhancing professionalism and strengthening the democratic institutions.

ROLE

Overall, IPC offers a wide spectrum of opportunity for the strengthening of professionalism in the Nigerian Press while promoting discourse on the media, democracy and good governance.

PARTNERING & NETWORKING

The IPC has been in partnership with other Nigerian NGOs and CSOs as well as international bodies. Some of the networks and partnerships in which the International Press Centre, Lagos, has been involved include OneWorld Africa (OWA), Electoral Reform Network (ERN), and Freedom of Information Coalition (FOIC).

ACCESSIBILITY

A unique advantage of IPC is its central location in Ogba area of Ikeja, Capital of Lagos State where over half of media houses and journalism training schools in Lagos are sited. This guarantees easy accessibility for its principal users media managers, editors, practising journalists and students as well as other corporate bodies and the public.