

Guidebook on Election Coverage for Media Correspondents in Kenya



Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA)



**The Kenyan Section of The International Commission of
Jurists**



Executive Summary

Correspondents play a critical role in gathering and disseminating news about major events in the country, including the general elections, given that they are based at the grassroots and in nearly all corners of the republic.

They also play an important role as part of the media in enhancing access to information held by government and other players in the society. Through their stories from the far flung corners of the country and in towns, they help in stimulating debate and dialogue on a variety of issues in this country.

Research has shown that correspondents generate over 70 per cent of the daily content, both in electronic and print media. It has therefore become important to look at this category of journalists critically with a view to addressing their concerns and enhance their capacity to do their work more effectively.

They also have input to make in all the major processes that go on in the country including enriching the media through proposals and ideas. There has never been an organized attempt to tap into this resource other than channels through which media organizations get stories from various parts of the country.

No conscious attempt has previously been made by media managers to engage the correspondents as an organized group. This has had the effect of consigning them to the periphery, continued exploitation, neglect, and disillusionment. Their potential has been stunted.

Correspondents operate within extremely poor and exploitative working conditions. There have been inadequate attempts at continuous training and skills upgrading for the correspondents to enhance their capacity to perform their duties. This has had a negative effect on their performance.

There are concerns regarding the creation of a facilitative framework for field based correspondents to enable them effectively work. The concerns, which include inadequate remuneration, lack of health and insurance cover, transport, communication tools and security, need to be addressed as part of a capacity building process.

Grassroots based journalists require training to benefit from ICTs in their work. There has been debate about mid career training and continuous skills development. The media industry should of necessity address these concerns urgently.

KCA would like to seek guarantees of its consistent inclusion, consultation, and significant representation as an independent entity in all media industry processes as a way of ensuring that it is part of the collective solution to challenges facing the media industry.

KCA and its membership are not without any initiative. KCA has made significant efforts in seek training opportunities and working with different organizations to empower its members. The association has been at the forefront of advocating for adherence to professional ethics. More efforts are still being made in these areas.

It is within this framework that this guidebook has been developed. Correspondents recognize that there are numerous challenges that they and the media face and that they have a responsibility to contribute towards addressing these, some of which are ethical.

This guidebook was developed during a training workshop for correspondents in Nanyuki in September 2007. The workshop which also served as a KCA Annual Plenary Assembly brought together about 100 correspondents from all parts of the country.

The workshop deliberations and recommendations contained in this guide book is a useful contribution to the media industry because it represents an attempt by a hitherto sidelined section of journalists to offer ideas on how to address problems they and by extension, the media industry faces.

The *Guidebook on Election Coverage for Media Correspondents in Kenya*, would not have been possible without the support of Article 19, and especially Ms Cece Fadope who has shown great interest in the media generally and Kenya correspondents generally as a useful group in the quest for the achievement of freedom of information.

KCA also extends special thanks to the Kenya Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ-K) whose management worked hard for the success of the process. Special thanks go to Ms Priscilla Nyokabi, who led the ICJ staff in working tirelessly to help organize the workshop, various consultative sessions and the final outcome.

KCA also recognizes the contribution of its leadership through the National Management Committee including the Secretary General Moses Radoli and the entire membership for supporting efforts to strengthen the association and contributing the useful views and suggestions that are captured in the guidebook.

We wish to thank all those who helped in one way or another including the facilitators who offered invaluable time and input to the process. We are sure this effort has added value to the media industry.

William Oloo Janak
Chair, Kenya Correspondents Association.

Guidebook on Election Coverage for Media Correspondents in Kenya

1. Accuracy, Impartiality and Fairness

- 1.1** It is the responsibility of media correspondents to ensure impartiality in the coverage of contestants.
- 1.2** The media correspondents must ensure that their election reports are factual and accurate, and they must strive to provide fair, balanced and impartial coverage.
- 1.3** The media correspondents must give reasonable *opportunity* to all parties to and sides of an issue.
- 1.4** The correspondents must strive to obtain comments from anyone who is mentioned in an unfavorable context and all claims must be tested against the evidence.
- 1.5** Everything that is reported must be described accurately.
- 1.6** The words of candidates must be reported correctly to accurately reveal their meaning, and explain the context without exaggerating partial meanings.
- 1.7** To achieve impartiality, a good correspondent will seek to produce a report that is balanced, that is, which includes both sides.
- 1.8** When one political candidate makes an accusation or a promise in an election campaign speech, a correspondent should seek reaction from other candidates and include their views in the report to create a balanced story.
- 1.9** Looking for more than one opinion, *voices or diverse views* helps overcome the appearance of bias or favouring only one side.
- 1.10** 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.
- 1.11** In ensuring impartiality, it is imperative that correspondents carry themselves in such a manner as not to appear compromised or favour any of the candidates.
- 1.12** Media correspondents must use their professional judgment in assessing and reporting all information to ensure balanced coverage for all contestants.
- 1.13** It is imperative that all information is counterchecked for accuracy and clarity before it is reported.

- 1.14** Media correspondents must ensure that stories filed for publishing are not oriented towards personality, party or ethnic positions as opposed to issue-oriented news.
- 1.15** Media correspondents must avoid using any manipulative techniques to distort a story to the advantage or disadvantage of any election contender. This includes avoiding any politically motivated authorship, deceptive camera angles or other unprofessional acts designed to put any person or policy in a negative light.
- 1.16** Press conferences and statements of political interest covered by correspondents should be subject to a right of reply from political parties or persons who are implicated or negatively portrayed in them.
- 1.17** Any candidate or political party which has been defamed or has suffered legal injury should be entitled to a correction or reply, depending on the degree of injury.

2. Sources

- 2.1** Unnamed sources should not be used unless the pursuit of the truth will best be served by not naming the sources that must be known by the Media correspondent and communicated to the editor.
- 2.2** When material is used in a report from sources other than the correspondent's, these sources should be indicated in the story.
- 2.3** Media correspondents must observe professional secrecy regarding sources of information obtained in confidence.
- 2.4** Media correspondents should also use honest methods to obtain news, meaning their work should be guided by internationally accepted professional *and ethical* standards.
- 2.5** Media correspondents should desist from using the shield of sources to disguise their personal opinions.

3. Discrimination

- 3.1** Correspondents must avoid using language or expressing sentiments that may further discrimination or violence on any grounds, including race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions and national or social origins.

3.2 Women and men contestants should be treated equally as news subjects and news sources.

3.3 Correspondents should not discriminate against disadvantaged or marginalized people and groups seeking to participate in political leadership.

4. Electoral Violence

4.1 Media correspondents must refrain from giving space to hate speeches or utterances that might incite violence or cause social turmoil.

4.2 Media correspondents must avoid presenting acts of political violence in a manner that glorifies such conduct.

4.3 Stories, views and comments relating to election violence should be reported after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner that is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity and peace.

4.4 Reliable correspondents are needed as a watchdog against violence and illegal activities in elections.

4.5 Correspondents must be on the watch out, report to authorities and write about issues of whether parties threaten voters or election officials.

4.6 Media correspondents should report to government authorities concerning all acts of violence, intimidation or harassment directed against media personnel or the property or premises of a media organization.

4.7 In every instance where there are attacks on the media organizations or media professionals, correspondents should focus on the incident and work together particularly through their professional bodies and unions to take appropriate action.

5. Pictures, graphics & cartoons

5.1 Pictures, graphics and cartoon of contestants, political parties or issues raised by political parties should have due regard to principles of accuracy, impartiality and fairness expressed above.

6. Media Responsibility

- 6.1** Reliable correspondents are needed as a watchdog against corruption and other illegal activities during elections.
- 6.2** It is the role of correspondents to report on problems, cases of possible violation of the rules as well as to inform/educate voters about issues and the political parties and candidates' policies.
- 6.3** Correspondents must endeavor and take initiative to be aware of the election rules, the operations of the Electoral Commission of Kenya and the voting process.
- 6.4** To effectively perform their duty towards promotion of media responsibility correspondents should be aware of and report on the following:

Voters' Rights

- a) Are all eligible voters on the voters' list or eligible to vote?
- b) Are all voters free to hear and discuss the parties and issues without fear?
- c) Do parties threaten voters or election officials or tell voters whom to vote for?
- d) Do parties or officials try to bribe voters with money, large gifts or promises of jobs?
- e) Do voters understand their role and the importance of voting, and do they know their choices?
- f) Do women and minorities feel safe in voting?

Candidates and Party Rights

- a. Are all qualified parties and candidates allowed to run in the election?
- b. Are candidates representing minorities, regions and different political opinions allowed to seek election?
- c. Are all parties allowed to hold public meetings without fear?
- d. Are the election rules and limits applied equally to all parties?
- e. Are the police protecting all parties as they campaign, distribute information and hold public meetings?
- f. Are the parties willing to disclose where they get their money?

- g. Are government officials neutral and not using government money and resources such as vehicles to favour one party?
- h. Is the political party that is in government making many announcements of new projects just when the election campaign begins.

The Election process

- a) Are voters' lists complete?
- b) Are voters left out of the lists able to get on the list by showing proper identification?
- c) Are the ballots easily understood by voters who cannot read?
- d) Do voters easily understand the voting instructions?
- e) Are there enough ballots, ballot boxes and officials to observe the voting and count the ballots
- f) Are there security arrangements to protect the people going to vote?
- g) Are there security arrangements to protect the ballot boxes so nobody can stuff them with false ballots?
- h) Is the Electoral Commission seen as impartial, independent and honest?
- i) Are there international and independent observers who are monitoring the election?
- j) Does the Electoral Commission respond quickly to complaints from the media, the voters and the political parties about all alleged violations of the election laws?
- k) Does the Electoral Commission investigate and stop violations of the election laws? Are violators penalized in any way?
- l) Are the media, non-governmental organizations and international observers able to monitor and report to the public about the election process without interference or fear?
- m) Is the state media providing reliable coverage of all the candidates and parties? Is the coverage accurate, impartial, responsible and fair?
- n) Do the private media – newspapers, radio and television – provide reliable and fair reporting?

o) Do the private media treat all parties advertising equally?

6.5 The following elements constitute what responsible a journalists is NOT and MUST BE AVOIDED by correspondents:

i.**Defamatory:** Media correspondents should not repeat inaccurate allegations and insults or twist the truth about a person.

ii.**Derivative:** Media correspondents should not merely repeat what has been reported elsewhere without checking the facts. This may just repeat false information.

iii.**Malicious:** Media correspondents, like all other journalists are powerful. They can ruin politicians' reputations, put party members in danger or cause public protest. Good correspondents should not misuse their power by twisting the news and using it as a personal weapon to deliberately harm anyone.

iv.**Corrupt:** Good correspondents do not accept bribes. Good correspondents do not seek special favours for any politician or party. Good correspondents are not for sale.

Annexure

Welfare and facilitation of correspondents

Summary of recommendations on welfare and facilitation for Correspondents

The Kenya Correspondents Association recognizes that the different media organizations may not adopt uniform labour/employment practices in their engagement of correspondents.

But KCA believe it is important for the media industry to appreciate the important contribution correspondents make to the industry and adopt labour practices that conform to basic provisions of the Kenyan law and internationally accepted practices that take cognizance of the basic human rights tenets with regard to the treatment of human beings as a resource.

KCA and its membership therefore make the following basic recommendations for consideration by the media industry as part of the process of creating a responsible and effective workforce. This also aimed at reducing reported cases of corruption and dependence on news sources by field based journalists for their daily survival.

The process of productive engagement with correspondents needs to proceed from the premise that they, like other workers, have a right to organize and associate through professional bodies, and in this case, the Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA).

We therefore call upon the management of all the media organizations and the entire Kenyan media industry to demonstrate in action and deed that they recognize the existence of the Kenya Correspondents Association and the right of journalists that fall within this category to join the association and participate in its activities.

KCA therefore proposes the following summary recommendations as critical to facilitating the work of correspondents in this country.

- A more transparent process of engaging correspondents with clear employment or contractual terms than has been the case before. In addition, where vacancies arise, they should be considered for formal and permanent employment.
- Improved retainer payments: Suggested minimum KES 20, 000 per month;
- Special allowances for coverage of elections and of other such special processes that may expose journalists to demands or risks than would otherwise be encountered in their daily work : these should include lunch, night out and risk allowance;
- The various media organizations should facilitate correspondents to acquire the requisite tools of work including digital cameras, laptops and tape recorders.

These should be given on the basis of need to each correspondent on loan and deductions made on their earnings over a period to recover the loans advanced.

- Prompt monthly payments for all dues to help correspondents meet their financial obligations in time to avoid embarrassments they often go through;
- Improved payments for all stories and special assignments, features and related material including photos, video tapes and any other items generated by the correspondents.
- Comprehensive health/life insurance cover for all contracted correspondents by the respective media organizations they work for.
- Transport allowance to all correspondents on duty and reimbursements for all expenditures beyond the normal provisions. There should be agreed minimums on this per month.
- There is need to facilitate communication from the field especially by buying scratch cards and arranging for internet connectivity for their laptops and computers ;
- Media organizations need to meet the costs of filing stories, sending tapes, pictures or other materials on email, courier etc, especially for the contracted correspondents.
- Facilitation to correspondents to open up offices in their places of work at the districts/provinces.
- Need to address the question of non payment for stories used and other dues by some media organizations.
- The media organizations and the correspondents need to discuss and agree on the issues of copyright and intellectual property rights to avoid exploitation.
- Media organizations need to address cases of intimidation, harassment or mistreatment of correspondents by some editors and bureau chiefs. This has been seen where some correspondents have been dismissed summarily without a chance to defend themselves or been threatened with a sack on flimsy or unjustified grounds. Others have been denied a chance to attend training workshops.
- Media organizations should encourage and offer support to efforts by correspondents, both individually and through the association, to go for further training, both short and long term. KCA calls for more engagement in this area to agree on the framework.
- KCA also calls for periodic dialogue sessions with the managers/editors and owners of the media organizations to review various issues affecting the correspondents and the media generally.