

Development Journalism: How Prepared are Tanzanian Journalists?

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Abstract

This paper analyses the level of competence of Tanzanian journalists to handle developmental issues. It proceeds from the thesis that development journalism is not reporting about events but processes, and not reporting about personalities but issues. The study finds evidence from a survey of 136 practising Tanzanian journalists to support the hypothesis that Tanzanian journalists are ill-prepared to meet the challenge of development journalism. It recommends that media institutions should hire better academically qualified persons and then give them professional journalism training as well as continuing training in their areas of specialization. This will equip the journalists for more coherent and comprehensive reporting and analysis of processes and issues for a developing society.

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Journalisme de développement: à quel degré les journalistes Tanzaniens sont-ils préparés?

Résumé

Cet article fait une analyse du niveau d'aptitude des journalistes tanzaniens à traiter des questions de développement. Il provient de la thèse selon laquelle le journalisme de développement ne fait pas un reportage des événements mais plutôt des questions. L'étude trouve la preuve à cela dans une étude faite sur 136 journalistes tanzaniens en cours d'emploi pour soutenir l'hypothèse d'après laquelle les journalistes tanzaniens ne sont pas bien préparés à surmonter le défi du journalisme de développement. Il recommande que les institutions des médias engagent des gens plus académiquement qualifiés et leur donnent une formation de journalisme professionnelle tout en continuant la formation dans leurs domaines de spécialisation. Ceci aiderait les journalistes à réaliser un reportage plus cohérent et complet et une étude des processus et des questions pour une société en développement.

Introduction

Tanzania, like almost all African countries, purports to practice development journalism geared towards mobilizing the people for national development. Development journalism was conceived in the early 1960s by a group of independent Asian journalists who believed that since national development depends very heavily upon economics, journalists should be better trained and educated to cover and report fully, impartially, and simply the many problems of a developing nation.

An all-inclusive definition of development journalism is not easy to provide. But Narinder Aggarwalla (1978) says that:

In its treatment, development news is not different from regular news or investigative reporting. It can deal with development issues at macro and micro levels and can take different forms at national and international levels. In covering the development news-beat, a journalist should critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation. Development journalism is the use of all journalistic skills to report development processes in an interesting fashion. It may require high skills and hard work but the reward of this kind of journalism can be tremendous.

From this definition, there is no doubt that development journalism bestows heavy responsibility on African journalists. Their responsibility is made heavier by the fact they are writing for and about nations or societies which are, or near, the beginning of their development or as sovereign entities. Their news must not be 'saleable commodity like any other' but must be 'responsible' news. Their news must serve as a stimulus to national pride and unity because, for the young nations, such pride and unity are very important for development to occur. Hilary Ngweni says that:

In such countries (African countries faced with disunity and tribalism) the first duty of the press is to encourage greater national unity, for without a minimum amount of national unity all other human values in society become impossible. Freedom and justice become meaningless. Life becomes insecure. Where there isn't enough unity, it is my view that the press should confine itself to the difficult task of helping to unify the nation and removing mistrust between communities or tribes (Quoted in Mytton, 1983).

Therefore, African journalists can only meet the challenge development journalism offers them if they are enlightened journalists. They must be well trained in both journalistic skills and the subject matter of their reports. But in addition, they must have a 'scientific outlook' which requires them to be knowledgeable in the social sciences and at least one technical subject.

This paper attempts to answer the question: Are Tanzanian journalists prepared to meet the challenges of development journalism? It is hypothesized that

Tanzanian journalists are ill-prepared to successfully meet the challenge of development journalism.

Methodology

One hundred and fifty questionnaires were sent to journalists working with the Party newspapers *Uhuru/Mzalendo*, the government-owned newspapers *Daily/Sunday News*, the Tanzania News Agency (*Shihata*), the Tanzania Information Services (*Maelezo*), Radio Tanzania, Dar-es-Salaam (RTD), a privately owned newspaper, *Business Time*, a newspaper owned by the Lutheran Church of Tanzania, *Lengo*, and the rural press unit of the Ministry of Education.

Of the questionnaires sent out, 136 were returned. Tabulation was done at the Tanzania School of Journalism with the assistance of five first year students of the diploma course in journalism.

Results

Seven per cent of all the respondents had no training in journalism while four per cent had trained up to certificate level. 75 per cent of the respondents had either diploma or post-graduate (Advanced) diploma in journalism. None of the respondents had a first degree in journalism. But five per cent of the respondents had M.A. in mass communication. Some of these had first non-professional degrees (not in journalism/mass communication) and others did not have first degrees.

In this paper, specialized training means training in a field other than journalism. Respondents who received specialized training before joining journalism constituted 44 per cent of the respondents. However, 56 per cent of the respondents who received specialized training before joining the media had received teacher training (Table 1).

Table 1: Areas of Specialized Training Before Joining the Media

Area of Training	Percentage
Teacher training	56
Health/Medicine	13
Economics	10
International Relations	7
Agriculture	5
Social Welfare	3
Accountancy/Finance	2
Librarianship	2
Secretarial Services	2
Total	100

Of the respondents who received specialized training before joining the media, 42 per cent received training at certificate level, 35 per cent received diploma, and 23 per cent received training at first degree level. All the respondents who received specialized training before joining the media admitted that their training helps them greatly in performing their journalistic duties.

Only 29 per cent of the respondents received specialized training after joining the media. The majority of them had specialized training in political economy, followed by international relations (Table 2). All respondents who received specialized training after joining the media also admitted that their training helps them in performing their journalistic duties.

Table 2: Areas of Specialized Training After Joining the Media

Area of Training	Percentage
Political Economy	42
International Relations	21
Economics	18
Social Welfare	10
Ideology	5
Rural Communication	2
Health/Medicine	2
Total	100

All respondents in the three categories – those who received specialized training before joining the media, those who received specialized training after joining the media, and those who did not receive specialized training – wish that they could undertake further specialized training. 32 per cent of the respondents want to specialize in law, followed by social welfare (Table 3).

Table 3: Preference for Specialization

Area of Training	Percentage
Law	32
Social Welfare	17
Community Development	15
Industrial Studies	12
Health/Medicine	8
Accountancy/Finance	6
Economics	4
International Relations	3
Mass Communications	3
Total	100

All the respondents agreed that it is not only important but also useful for journalists to train in areas other than journalism. 71 per cent of the respondents said that they had at one point been given assignments in which they wished they had received specialized training, 21 per cent did not encounter such an experience, while 8 per cent did not respond to the question.

Assignments that made most of the respondents wish they had specialized training were in the fields of health/medicine, followed by court reporting. Economics and accountancy/finance took the third and fourth positions, respectively (Table 4).

Table 4: Problematic subjects

Area of Coverage	Percentage
Health/Medicine	26
Court Reporting	22
Economics	10
Accountancy/Finance	10
Environment	6
Parliamentary Reporting	5
Women and Development	5
Rural Development	4
Labour	4
Statistics	4
Population	2
Co-operation	2
Total	100

The study shows that 65 per cent of the respondents who first had non-professional degrees did not go for further studies in any of the subjects they studied at the undergraduate level. However, all those who received first non-professional degrees expressed interest in going for further studies in one of the subjects they studied at the undergraduate level.

Discussion

Journalism in Tanzania, like in most African countries, is still dominated by men. 85 per cent of the respondents were male while the rest were female. The few women journalists have not received specialized training to effectively cater for women's interests and development in the country. Almost all female journalists who responded to the questionnaires wished they had received specialized training in 'women and development or women's affairs'. Women are the majority in Tanzania and are said to be the main working force, especially in rural areas. Therefore, an enlightened female population will go a long way in speeding

up development in the country. Male journalists can only reinforce the efforts of their female colleagues.

It is pleasing to note that the majority of the journalists in the country are young. This means that in the near future the old generation (45-55 years) of journalists that trained under the western concepts of news values will no longer be active in the profession. The 41 per cent of the respondents aged between 36 and 45 might be said to have received a little of the two worlds – western concept and development journalism – whereas those who are aged between 21 and 35, who form the majority of the journalists in the country (48 per cent), started practising journalism when the concept of development journalism had gained currency in the Third World.

However, the level of optimism is reduced when one analyses their training. That 75 per cent of the respondents had either diplomas or post-graduate diplomas tells much about the progress that has been made in journalism training in this country after independence. This paper does not analyse the quality of journalism training received by the respondents. Suffice it to say that the quality of journalism training, especially in development journalism, in sub-Saharan Africa, and even in Eastern European countries where some of the journalists trained, leaves much to be desired.

The study shows that 56 per cent of those who received specialized training before joining the media had received teacher training. This result has greatly been influenced by the inclusion of those journalists working in the rural press unit of the Ministry of Education. All of them trained and worked as teachers before they were transferred to the unit. Most of those who received specialized training in health/medicine belonged to the older generation of journalists (36-45 age group). All of them do not work as reporters because they are manning the different desks in the editorial department and, as Table 2 shows, none of the respondents received specialized training in health/medicine after joining the media. The combination of these two factors account for health/medicine being the leading problematic subject covered by our reporters.

The importance of healthy people to the development of Africa is universally accepted. Tanzania declared diseases as one of the three major enemies of the nation and efforts have been, and continue to be, made to educate the people on health issues in an attempt to eradicate disease. But how can our journalists write convincingly on health and medical issues when they do not know even the basics of the subject?

Most of those who received specialized training in economics, political economy and international relations either before or after joining the media were university graduates. But most of these are now in executive positions in the media and therefore no longer write 'or only do so very rarely' because of 'other pressing national duties.' The study further shows that 65 per cent of the graduate journalists have not had the chance of going for further studies in any of the subjects they studied at the undergraduate level.

Is it not interesting that agriculture, the backbone of our economy, and rural development have almost no room in the training of our journalists? Only 5 per cent of the respondents received specialized training in agriculture before joining the media. All of them trained and worked as agricultural assistants in the Ministry of Agriculture before joining the media. None of the respondents received training in agriculture after joining the media, whereas only two per cent received specialized training in rural communication, all of whom came from the Ministry of Education.

All respondents indicated their willingness to receive specialized training in one subject or the other. That most of them wanted to specialize in law (Table 3) shows that either law is one of the problematic subjects in reporting (Table 4), or that most of the journalists are attracted to the legal profession. Most of those who leave the media to study law never return, although, if they returned to the media and wrote on legal issues, they could be of great help to society. The popularity of 'Law and You' column in the *Sunday News* and '*Sheria vs Haki Zako*' (Law and Your Rights) in *Uhuru* newspaper is a good testimony to this fact.

It is encouraging to note that most of the respondents expressed interest in specialized training in social welfare and community development. But this also shows a weakness in our journalism training. Our journalists are required to investigate and critically analyse the many social problems in our society. Yet almost all of them are not adequately equipped to deal with such subjects. That most of them want to study social welfare and community development is a realization on their part that although these subjects are very useful for them in performing their duties, they do not know them.

Conclusion

Most of our journalists have basic journalistic skills and knowledge but they lack the 'scientific outlook.' They are not knowledgeable in the social sciences, and only a few of them are knowledgeable in at least one technical subject. They are not knowledgeable in social sciences because the majority of them are '0 level' leavers. It is commonly accepted that '0 level' education is not enough to equip one with the ability to understand, analyse and interpret complex socio-economic and political issues facing our society today. No wonder then that our journalists report events rather than processes of the events, and personalities rather than issues raised by these personalities. Development journalism is not reporting about events but processes; it is not reporting about personalities but interpreting and analyzing issues.

Our media institutions put too much emphasis on journalism training and its specialized disciplines and ignore training in other social sciences and technical subjects. Graduate journalists are not given the chance to go for further studies in one of the subjects they studied at an under-graduate level. Also, most of them move quickly into administrative positions in the editorial department and aban-

don writing/reporting. What then is to be done to prepare our journalists to meet the challenge of development journalism?

Media institutions in Tanzania should stop employing '0 level' graduates and start employing at least 'A level' graduates. But it will be better if more university graduates were encouraged to join the media and be systematically prepared for development journalism. On the present tendency of the media to employ '0 level' graduates, Msagati and Nkya (1986) pose a very valid question: 'Having in mind that the Tanzanian society is becoming more and more complex and that the number of educated people is also increasing, can these Form IV leaver communicators be of much use to the society in educating them?'

Media institutions should put emphasis on specialized training in both social sciences and technical subjects. Our journalists will be more knowledgeable than they are now if they were allowed to attend diploma and certificate courses in such areas as social welfare, community development, and even health, medicine and agriculture for those with the right subject backgrounds.

Again Msagati and Nkya (*op. cit.*) rightly observe that, to execute their duties properly, journalists must have not only proper professional orientation but also high education in the liberal arts or field of specialization. They observe: 'When one knows the subject matter, one is in a better position to transmit this knowledge to others than one who has training in communication skills but has no idea about the subject matter to be digested and communicated to others'.

Capable graduate journalists should be encouraged to write frequently and the tendency to put them in administrative positions only a few years after joining the profession must be discouraged. Their higher formal education notwithstanding, graduate journalists need the experience as reporters and writers before being benched.

In concluding this paper, therefore, we hold that although Tanzania purports to practice development journalism, its journalists are not adequately prepared for it. Most of the journalists have basic journalistic skills and knowledge but they lack the 'scientific outlook.' Because of this they mostly report about events and personalities rather than the process of the events and issues raised by the personalities and the people in general. This, as we said earlier, is not development journalism.

References

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