

WHAT COMMUNITY RADIO JOURNALISM INVOLVES

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER ...

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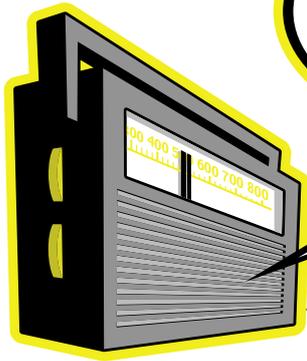
This chapter explores how to report effectively and ethically for your community radio station.

It highlights how you should:

- find a way to serve and reflect your community through your news bulletins
- keep a list of issues that are important to the community and regularly cover news about those issues (don't simply copy the news of commercial stations)
- have a careful plan for a smooth-running newsroom
- deal with possible ethical problems before they happen (in other words, have a clear policy for dealing with potential ethical issues)
- have a clear policy on incorporating gender into your newsroom (community stations must start doing more to push gender issues forward).

WHAT COMMUNITY RADIO JOURNALISM INVOLVES

NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS



THE JOB OF A JOURNALIST

The community radio sector is one of the fastest growing media sectors in South Africa. Community radio has made its presence felt throughout the country, reaching both urban and rural areas and representing and broadcasting on behalf of a multitude of language groups.

However, quite a number of stations are at a loss when it comes to news and current affairs on their stations – they either lack access to news sources or feel that they cannot compete with the news provided by commercial and public service stations (such as the SABC).

Whether you're working in commercial or community radio, the work of the journalists should remain mostly the same:

- gathering information
- broadcasting that information to the public
- making people aware of events – both local and abroad
- communicating through interviews, programmes and written stories
- being the eyes and ears of the public
- educating the station's audience
- treating all sides fairly
- being on top of the news
- finding out the truth and investigating.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

One feature that makes everything run more smoothly in a news organisation is a clearly defined news policy. You and your staff need to ask yourselves the following questions:

- What are our news priorities?
- Who is our audience?
- What are their main concerns?
- Is there a particular slant we need to give to certain topics? For example, you may concentrate on police successes in our area.
- Are there any particular issues important to our community that we need to highlight in our bulletins? You might, for example, make it a priority to report on child abuse or small business initiatives in the area.

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

Station A decided that black economic empowerment and local small-business success stories were to be a major focus of its work, and so it actively sought out good business stories in its community. Station B decided that crime was a problem in its community, but that instead of focusing on the crimes that were being committed, it could focus on police successes against crime, and thereby turn crime into a 'good news' story.

Answering these questions will help form the basis of your news policy, which you need to write up and regularly refer to.

**ACTIVITY!**

To help decide on the news priorities – the most important issues – for your station, work through the following questions and exercises.

1. You have a choice of brainstorming or drawing in this exercise. What does your typical listener look like? What are their interests, aspirations, leisure activities? Do they have families?
2. Write a list – and profile – of the community-based organisations in your area. Would you say the issues they represent reflect the concerns of the community? What issues are people mobilising around most in your area?
3. What issues do you think are important, but are not getting much attention?
4. How could you cover these issues in the news?

Draw up a guide for staff in the newsroom that covers the issues that are important to your organisation.

- What angle would you like them to focus on (for example, police successes in crime stories; convictions in child abuse cases...)?
- What terminology should they be using?
- Which organisations and professional and government bodies should they cultivate as sources?

How do you use your news policy effectively?

- Decide which are the priority issues you want to cover in your area.
- When you start implementing the news policy, make sure that at least one story of your news priorities is included each day until staff become used to looking for those kinds of stories.
- Interview people who work in the field and draw on community expertise.
- When you interview people about national issues (such as electrification, provision of water or policing), make sure you ask them about specific issues that your community is facing.

It might also be very useful to draw up a short style guide for newsreaders and writers. This is a short list that provides writers and news readers with guidelines as to common grammar used in the bulletins and which words you prefer using – you might want them to use 'military government' instead of 'junta', for example, or you might not want them to prefix names with an honorific like Mister and Miss.



NOKUPHILA FM UPDATE!

Nokuphila FM has roped in various community players to provide it with news. None of the people are paid, but they provide ready news to the station and are thrilled to hear their voices on air. In the morning, for example, the news writer stops in at the local police station on her way to work to gather the overnight news. For the other news bulletins, they either go to the police station or have the police call them. The same applies to the ambulance and clinic services. For their economic news, they talk to the people who run the local market, as well as the local small-business organisation for the money news of the day.

THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY RADIO NEWS

Most community radio stations, as well as news managers at community stations, are sometimes unsure as to how to approach the news content for the station. Some stations see it as a dreary obligation thrust upon them because of their licence stipulation; others see it as an interruption to the music or a way to signal the start of a new show, while others think of it as an exciting challenge to tell the community about itself.

Don't think of community radio news (or news for community radio stations) as a way to compete with the news broadcasts of commercial stations.

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

The news priorities of radio stations are generally shaped by its audience, so let's see how different stations handle a story like the annual Budget Speech by the Finance Minister.

A commercial radio station will cover the Budget by, perhaps, looking at the broader economic principles underlying the Budget and the various tax breaks (or not) for different income groups.

The needs of a community radio station might be different. You might want to look at the impact the Budget will have on food prices, or what the Budget means for pensioners.

sound bytes

very short
extract from a
programme

The 'burden' of news

In the past, the 'burden' of news, as it were, was taken off the shoulders of many community radio stations by independent organisations that provided news bulletins, including text and sound bytes, or stations picked up the news via satellite. Now that many of these outfits have folded, the challenge is for community stations to finally make the news community-orientated and community-driven. Traditional news values do apply, but there are also specific issues that make community radio news different. Community radio news is unique as it:

- reflects the concerns of the community and various members.
- highlights news happenings in your area – whether these are tragic or joyous.
- acts as a barometer for listeners to measure how important issues (such as the Budget speech or petrol increases) will affect them.

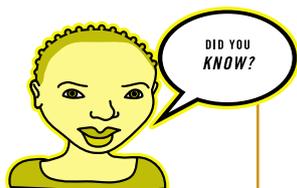
This does not mean, however, that the news must be uncritical – you might not want to have uncritical coverage on a spate of witch-burnings or vigilante attacks in your area. Therefore, the news must both reflect the concerns of the community, but also be able to take the debate forward – through the interviews you conduct, for example.

THE PRACTICALITIES OF COVERING THE NEWS

You have to take a number of considerations into account when you start setting your news schedule.

- What are your news priorities?
- What issues do you want to make talking points in your community?
- What are your peak news times?

It's important to determine your peak news times because this will not only guide the newsroom as to when to 'freshen' stories (➤➤ see page 59) – but also help determine by when you need to have priority stories ready.



DID YOU KNOW?

Traditionally, newsrooms work around the following clock: Between 07h00 and 09h00 is peak morning time; 12h00–13h00 is the midday peak news time; and 17h00–18h00 is the peak 'drive time' (although drive-time shows sometimes start from about 16h30).



ACTIVITY!

Work out your peak news times.

1. Draw up a list of all the different groups of people in your community and who are most likely to listen to your news bulletin.
2. List what news would be important for the various groups.
3. Now write down the times of the day from 06h00 until 18h00.
4. List what each of these groups will be doing during the 12 hours from 06h00 to 18h00.
5. The 12-hour stretch should represent your news day – now decide which are your peak news times. Who will be listening at those times? What kind of news, then, has to be reflected in these peak time slots?

HANDY HINT!

Having a drive-time show can be a way for you to twin the news with chat shows – by having the DJs use the news and the day's news events as the springboard for discussion and debate.

But, make sure the time slots are suited to your audience. One community station in a rural area had a drive-time show in the afternoon, because the station manager had copied the format of commercial radio stations in the towns and cities which all had popular drive-time shows. However, in this village there were no cars, no bustle and no drive-time of people coming back from work!

Working the clock

When you are compiling news bulletins for an hourly audience, it's best to know how to **'work the clock'**. Working the clock is an easy way of dividing your hour between one bulletin and the next; as well as setting deadlines for yourself. Now imagine that you are looking at the clock face:



- At the top of the hour – the 12 o'clock position – your bulletin will be aired live, with the newsreader in the studio.
- By quarter-past the hour – after you've finished reading the news – you must have assigned all stories and have started editing stories that have come in for the next bulletin. You should also have said which stories from the previous bulletin you want rewritten and updated for the next bulletin.
- By half-past the hour you should close the bulletin and have edited all stories. The newsreader should also now receive a printed copy of the news.
- At a quarter-to the hour the newsreader should be ready in the studio. All sound clips you will be using should also have been loaded in sequence. If you are crossing live to a reporter on the scene of a breaking story, you should also call the reporter at this time to finalise all details with him/her.

Freshening stories

You will need to rewrite your news stories to keep them sounding fresh. Sometimes, there will be no significant new information for a long time, but the importance of the story will demand that it stays in the bulletin. You might also not have access to enough resources and staff to constantly update stories. Other times, the story will indeed have new developments and you will have to update them regularly.

To help **'freshen'** your news item, find new angles for the story by:

- breaking the big story into different stories – with one story per news broadcast
- talking to role players
- rewording headlines
- rewriting the first sentence of your lead story and/or second story – and, in fact, most of your bulletin if you can.
- writing two angles to a story: write the first angle and then immediately write a second one
- bringing back the big news stories of the morning in the afternoon wrap-ups
- getting **vox pops** on big stories
- getting analysts' opinions – but make sure that the **'expert'** talks in simple language.

vox pops

interviews with people on the street (from the Latin, meaning **'voice of the people'**)



throw it forward

highlight what may happen later in the day or week.

ACTIVITY!

Rewrite a story and throw it forward:

Task 1

The following story appeared in this morning's paper and you want to run it in your bulletins. Rewrite the story as a radio story:

Damage amounting to a few thousand rand was caused when a hand grenade was thrown at a house in Salt River, Cape Town, last night, said Western Cape police.

Captain Jacques Wiese said, according to members of the bomb disposal unit, the M26 grenade detonated on a stoep in front of the house in Coleridge Road shortly after 10pm.

The floor, the front door, ceiling and the roof of the enclosed stoep and gutters were damaged.

Wiese said the owner of the house, who was at home at the time, was not injured.

The neighbour is presently on bail, awaiting trial on a charge of housebreaking.

Wiese said the motive for the attack was not known.

'No eyewitnesses have come forward to provide the police with information,' he said. – Sapa

(Source: www.iol.co.za)

Task 2

You want to run the story for your midday bulletins as well, and need to update it.

1. Make a list of two sources to whom you can speak for the update.
2. Rewrite the story for the 13h00 bulletin.
3. What angle can you take on the story if you want to rerun it in your newswrap at 17h00?

Did you consider...?

- The story is too long to be read on radio. The story and the sentences will have to be shortened so that you can read it on air without running out of breath.
- The story is all in the past tense. You need to make it present tense.
- The story talks about what happened 'last night'. For radio, you need to tell us what is happening now. So, you will have to change the angle. For example, the beginning of the story could read: 'A man has escaped unharmed after a hand-grenade attack on his house. The attack happened last night.' Or, you could also write: 'Police are appealing for eyewitnesses to come forward after a grenade attack on a Cape Town house.'

Writing up your stories

Reporting is when you provide listeners with the facts, and leave them to make the decision on right and wrong. For example: 'The Free Eggs Party has lost the by-election.'

You **editorialise** when you start putting your opinion into the story, and using turns of phrase that clearly detract from the facts of the story, and that lean on your personal opinion or bias. For example, ‘The unappealing Free Eggs Party has lost the by-election, as is to be expected from a party that really hasn’t got a clue of what it is doing.’

Be very careful about editorialising – especially when caught in very emotionally charged, or conflict-ridden situations.

Sometimes, your story may unintentionally mislead the readers. This can happen because you may have:

- distorted or misrepresented certain points to make the story appear more important than it is
- left out an important fact or comment, and thus changed the story (material omissions)
- changed the importance of the story by simplifying it too much when you try to condense it into a news story (summarisation)
- exaggerated a situation because you think it will make a better programme. (Be careful not to fall prey to this – sensationalism won’t make a better story.)

Live crossings and reporting from the scene

If you have a really big story or a big breaking story (like a major accident or disaster), you may cross live to a reporter on the scene. Don’t try a live crossing with an inexperienced or nervous reporter. Reporters, especially, need to stay calm and collected at all times.

filing

submitting
a story for
broadcast

When reporters are filing from the scene

- Reporters should file a scene-setter (previewing the event) before leaving the office.
- The editor should brief them on whom to interview while in the field.
- At press conferences, journalists must record the proceedings as well as make notes (this will make it easier for them to write a story on the scene by referring to their notes rather than replaying the entire tape to check just one detail!).
- At the press conference, reporters should corner the newsmaker afterwards and ask him/her pertinent questions that you want answered.
- Journalists must call the office before filing the story, alerting you that a story is on its way, as well as what the story angle will be.
- Even though they’re in a rush, reporters should write their story in longhand – even their name! (This will make it easier to read, and ensure that there are fewer reading errors.)

HANDY HINT!

Questions and answers from the scene – tips for journalists reporting live:

- Discuss the Q&A (questions and answers) with your office, including the angle and the length of the interview.
- Decide on questions and what your responses will be before you go on air. Ideally, you should have a briefing with your editor/newsreader 15 minutes before airtime, when you suggest questions they should ask you, and also discuss your likely responses.
- File a written back-up report if you’re not using a reliable telephone line.

ethical
conforming
to accepted
standards of
conduct or
morality

EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS



Reporters need specific training in certain areas of journalism in order to be responsible and to keep within the law. These include:

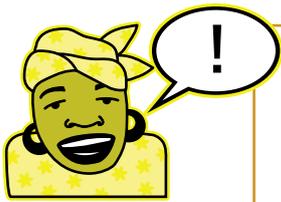
- how to handle interviewees with sensitivity and respect
- gender sensitivity
- interviewing children.

The media (and this includes programme makers) are all bound by ethics. Although these are not written in stone – like the Hippocratic Oath for doctors – you are nonetheless still bound by ethical considerations that will not only increase the public’s regard for you as a programme maker but will also help you stay clear of being sued. (Various journalists and broadcasting unions all have a code of ethics which they expect their members to adhere to.) Here we’ll point out some common situations that may lead to your credibility being compromised if handled wrongly.

THINK ABOUT IT!

You’re the news editor and you have to make decisions on the following scenarios in your community. What will you do in each situation?

1. An election in KwaZulu-Natal is marred by intimidation, but is otherwise seemingly free and fair. One of the opposition parties makes a huge inroad into the region, and is tipped to take the province, thereby upsetting the balance of power in the area. Several warlords threaten bloodshed if the opposition party is allowed to govern. The government refuses to release the election results with the other poll outcomes – and goes into caucus with various political parties. Your sources say the government is prepared to ignore the election result for the sake of peace. But very reliable sources also tell you that there is no doubt that the opposition party won the ballot.
2. A suspected child molester has just been caught after a high-profile manhunt. Police say they suspect the man is somebody they’ve been looking for for a long time. And, because of your close ties with the police, the officer gives you a tip-off – they suspect the man of being involved in at least 30 other cases. What do you do with the information?
3. A very prominent figure is sentenced to jail for fraud. You have a very good relationship with this person and his family and you’re confident you’ll land an exclusive interview with them. However, when you approach the person with the idea, he hints at the fact that he’ll only talk to you if he’s paid. What will you do?



Did you consider...?

Story 1

- By not releasing the results, the government is acting unconstitutionally.
- This could be one of the biggest stories your station will ever run, and it will be a scoop for you.
- If you don't run the story, a rival organisation will get hold of it, and run it.
- The government has a duty to protect its citizens. You need to ask them what they're doing to ensure the safety of the people, as well as what they're doing to the warlords who are threatening bloodshed.
- Running the story could worsen tensions in the area. Have you thought of ways to calm things down? For example, you could run announcements on air calling for peace and calm; maybe get the warlords on air to call on their supporters to restrain themselves; or source people in the community (such as women's groups, church organisations and respected figures) who can call for calm and start a debate on how the community can move forward beyond these tensions.

Story 2

- You can only name a suspect after he or she has been charged with a crime. In sexual offences, like rape and child molestation, you can generally only name the suspect after his second appearance, after he has pleaded to the charges.
- Everybody is presumed innocent until proven guilty.
- If police have enough evidence to charge the suspect in the other cases, they should do so.
- By mentioning the other cases, you are linking the suspect to them, and he might never actually ever be charged for them.

Story 3

- No credible news organisation pays for information. Magazines and tabloids sometimes do, but that falls under a different journalistic practice.
- If you are paying a criminal for information, you are really rewarding him for committing the crime.

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

What are your ethical considerations and obligations as a programme maker?

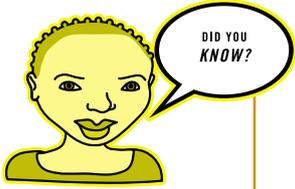
You strive to:

- Produce programmes that are fair and balanced.
- Tell the truth – and if you're unsure of your facts, check them and make certain first: don't try to fudge facts.
- Report sensitively on matters regarding children.
- Be honour-bound: if you give someone your word that you will not reveal their identity, you are bound by this.

Also remember:

- Never be swayed by threats – or by people who are excessively nice to you because they want to use you to tell only their side of the story.
- Don't omit or downplay facts because they don't fit in with the story you want to tell – or those that challenge your own view.
- Never be enticed by freebies and junkets such as free trips by advertisers, and public relations officers who invite you away for a weekend, in return for your making a programme on them.

to fudge facts
to obscure the
truth



DID YOU KNOW?

Ethically, you are bound by on- and off-the-record remarks. On-the-record remarks make up the normal interview that will be broadcast. However, sometimes during an interview on a sensitive or controversial issue the interviewee might say that the remarks are `off-the-record´. This means that you cannot quote them on what they´re about to tell you. If you do, not only will your credibility be destroyed and few people will be willing to talk to you again, but you also open yourself up to lawsuits.

It´s very important to ask the interviewee when the off-the-record remarks have ended – consider everything else as on the record.

LET’S MAKE IT CLEAR!

A private game reserve in your area might hear that you are investigating a story on how they exploit their workers. Instead of threatening you, they might offer you a free weekend at the game reserve so that you can do a story on the popularity of their elephant viewing. Having accepted their hospitality, it will then be very difficult for you to continue writing your original story. Also, if you air a critical story as a follow-up, the reserve’s owners will make it public that you accepted gifts from them, and your integrity will be in question.

Free gifts are often a minefield for community journalists. Because community stations rely largely on volunteers, gifts are sometimes seen as a perk because volunteers are not paid a salary.

HANDY HINT!

A good way to deal with free gifts is to have a newsroom policy to which everybody is bound. Keep a register of gifts where all reporters (and editors!) must declare free gifts from companies and individuals. Also, have a policy whereby all gifts over a certain value (for example, R50) must be returned or donated to charity. (And you must tell the gift-giver that their gift has been given to charity.)

If your news is sponsored, make it clear that there is a definite line between advertising and the editorial department. Have a separate billboard announcement with the sponsorship announcement at the beginning of the bulletin – but don’t have one of the newsreaders read it. Your newsreader reading adverts from news sponsors, or saying `This news is brought to you courtesy of...´, damages your news credibility and integrity.

billboard announcement
identifying the programme or station in a very recognisable way

HANDLING INTERVIEWEES WITH SENSITIVITY AND RESPECT

When reporting on sensitive matters, journalists should give interviewees and survivors the option of informed consent. This means that people giving consent should be made aware of the consequences of the report – both good and bad. If necessary, let them talk to a counsellor or an expert in the field who can help them to think through their choices.

This is especially true when issues of sexual violence against women (such as rape) or stigma (such as HIV/AIDS, for example) are involved. It´s not enough that people agree to interviews and to being identified in these issues and examples. Very often, people might feel they will see justice comes from speaking out, without being aware of the repercussions.

Then, if there are negative consequences to the interview (an HIV-positive person may be rejected from his or her community, for example), they'll blame you for running the report.

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

For example, a woman who comes out about being raped might have follow-up stories written about her, tearing her reputation to shreds and implying that she deserved the attack because she's had a number of boyfriends in the past.

REPORTING ON GENDER FAIRLY

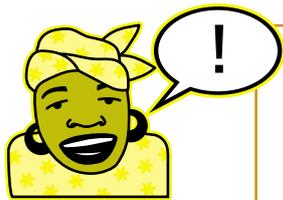
(Parts of this section are drawn from material published as 'Taking Gender out of the Ghetto' from *Gender in Media Training: A Southern African Toolkit*, edited by Colleen Lowe Morna.)

Gender and issues around gender often receive a lot of lip-service in the community radio sector, but very little commitment or resources. Also, very often when people talk about gender, they mean women. However, gender includes everybody. For reporting to become better and less discriminatory, it's important that gender is taken out of the ghetto and be made part of good reporting practice.

THINK ABOUT IT!

It's very important to keep the following in mind:

- Focusing on gender is not a threat to reporters and editors: it should be seen as a challenge to better reporting.
- Gender training for journalists should emphasise the basics of accurate, clear and fair reporting as a tool to tell less discriminatory stories.
- Reporting on gender – and especially women – often concerns stereotypes, and unchallenged and unchallenging representations.
- Gender includes stereotypes about both men and women.



derogatory

insulting or demeaning

However, there is often clear prejudice and derogatory representation and treatment in media reports when women are the subject. Very often this happens when women are in powerful positions, or when they are survivors of sexual assault, are sex workers, or are activists in these areas. Gender influences reporting through overt stereotypes, as well as innuendo.

overt

stereotypes

caricatures of types of people

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

For example, in an interview with researcher and gender activist Lisa Vetten in a Johannesburg weekend newspaper, instead of focusing on her work with violence against women, the reporter showed stereotypical views. He focused on the fact that Vetten was not a lesbian and went to great pains to emphasise that though Vetten was a committed feminist who worked with domestic violence, she did not beat up her male partner at home. He also repeatedly made references to the fact that Vetten wasn't a 'man-hater'.

A second example is even more shocking, and concerned the reports on the rape of then ANC MP, Nomboniso Gasa, on Robben Island. With the exception of the coverage in the Mail & Guardian Newspaper, most

of the coverage showed race and gender stereotypes – often leading to offensive conclusions. One interview was by a journalist who interviewed Gasa at her home a couple of weeks after the incident. However, the report did not quote Gasa at all – although she had been consistently articulate about her experience from the beginning. Instead, her story was told by her husband, an older white man – who was represented as the person who could ‘rationally’ explain her experience. The story also focused on her husband’s pain and trauma since the attack. The only time Gasa was referred to was when she got a fright in an adjoining room, and let out an ‘animal-like’ scream.

A report on soccer boss Nastasia Tsihclas referred to Tsihclas as ‘The Iron Lady’, as if a powerful and successful woman is a freak of nature.

On another occasion, two reporters wrote on the Director-General for Finance, Maria Ramos. One reporter produced a solid news profile focusing on her skill and the respect she commands in the world’s financial centres. The other report stated that she looked like a secretary. Would any reporter ever say Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel’s dress sense made him look like a gardener or car guard?

How do we remedy biased gender reporting?

One of the ways to improve reporting on gender is to make it a newsroom issue. Similarly, gender training will contribute to better reporting, and also emphasise that the tools of journalism – accuracy, fairness, balance and sticking to the facts – will help to get less offensive and fewer gender-biased stories into the news bulletins. A simple checklist will make it easier to start thinking of gender as a news priority.



CHECKLIST

Gender sensitivity in eight easy steps:

1. The principles of good journalism (especially fairness and accuracy) are one of the greatest guarantees for better, more gender-sensitive copy.
2. As in other stories – but something that is consistently ignored where women are concerned – journalists should stick to the facts of a story. This should be especially true when reporting on abuse against women and stories on women in powerful positions. The innuendos and slurs common in these reports would never be tolerated in other news stories.
3. We must acknowledge that everybody comes to a story with their own gender ‘baggage’ and preconceptions (as with so many other issues), but that shouldn’t take away from aiming for clear writing and overall excellence in journalism.
4. When covering gender-particular crimes (such as rape, sexual harassment and child abuse – which affect women and girls overwhelmingly and disproportionately), the principles of basic crime reporting apply. Accusations of blame should be removed from all copy – as should questioning the truth of the victim’s story. Ask yourself: would you put the same questions to somebody who’s been hijacked or whose house has been burgled?
5. News journalism is about writing a straight story – without editorialising or adding unnecessary adjectives or descriptions. Yet news reporting on women is riddled with adjectives and descriptions about the body and appearance, and notions of ‘good behaviour’.

soft news

news that focuses on emotion rather than on fact

hard news

news that focuses on fact rather than emotion

6. Very often news values and news priorities are defined along gender lines. Commonly, women make soft news, while men make hard news (as protagonists, commentators and figures in authority).
7. Challenge stereotypes in gender roles. Why are there so few stories on men and parenting? Why are women so seldom quoted when reporters need an expert opinion? We need to recognise that we work in a highly prejudiced environment and context. This means that very often women have to be actively cultivated as commentators. Often, journalists will bypass senior women and access their male subordinates for comment and analysis.
8. Like other issues that news organisations take seriously, issues of gender should be included in the editorial guidelines and style guide. This should be part of the organisation’s ethos and guidelines – and not be left to the goodwill of individuals.



NOKUPHILA FM UPDATE!

Nokuphila FM has innovative approaches to proving its commitment to gender equality. Firstly, it has a set quota for women to be trained. Very often women are marginalised for training opportunities at stations.

Secondly, Nokuphila FM has had to find practical ways in which to deal with the huge amount of violence against women in our country. (South Africa has by far the highest figures for rape in the world.) So it has a security guard working the early-morning shifts and never allows a woman to be alone at the station on the early-morning shifts because of the likelihood of her being attacked.

Finally, a number of women were interested in covering sport – especially soccer. However, many of these women had been attacked or threatened when they went to the stadiums to report on games. So, instead of robbing the journalist of the opportunity of doing her job, the newsroom now made sure that the women were always accompanied by a colleague to the games. These may not be ideal solutions, but they do show how stations are trying to find solutions to the problems faced by women in this country.

minors

people under the age of 18

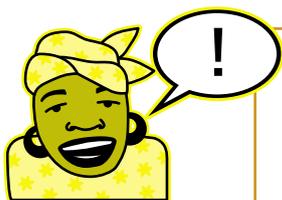
REPORTING ETHICALLY ON CHILDREN

All the ethical guidelines that apply to general reporting, also apply to reporting on children. In addition to these, there are very strict laws regarding the treatment of children (referred to as minors) in the media. But children’s rights are often violated in media coverage – often because the courts don’t come down on errant reporters, or more often because the children in question are poor and will probably not be able to take action against media offenders.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Story 1

Your station has been carrying reports on the gruesome rape of a six-year-old girl. You haven’t named the survivor, but now the girl’s family says that they want to come forward and speak to you about the trauma they’ve suffered as a family. They would like you to interview them at their home, as long as the little girl doesn’t form part of the interview. What would you do?



Story 2

Your Cape Town correspondent has been covering a very high-profile urban terror case. A local community leader has been charged with murder – and only the leader’s former right-hand man and his (the right-hand man) 17-year-old son were witnesses to the murder. The witness and his family went into the witness protection programme, but decided to leave it last week, because it was too strenuous on the family. The witness (the father) was shot and killed within two days of leaving the protection programme, and the son subsequently went into hiding. Now the mother is willing to talk to you on what life was like in the witness protection programme, as well as to make a public appeal for her son to come home. You know that this will be a scoop for your station. What do you do?

Principles to guide you

There are a few guiding principles with regard to children, as well as strict legal requirements with which you need to be familiar.

The situation in Story 1 on page 67 is based on a real-life situation in which the girl was raped by her playmates who were about 10 years old. When the alleged perpetrators appeared in court, some newspapers didn’t carry their names, but carried pictures of them leaving court. This amounts to identifying an accused minor. A minor – usually about 17 years old – is charged with a crime and is not named. Then, during the course of the trial, he or she turns 18. From the day of the 18th birthday, reporters are permitted to name the accused.

Did you consider...?**Story 1**

- You’re not allowed to identify victims who are minors. Even the parents may not give permission for their child to be identified. (You can only do this with the permission of the court.)
- You’re not allowed to name any survivor of sexual assault (it doesn’t matter if she’s six years old, or 60.) However, you can name adult women survivors – but only if they’ve given you express permission.
- If you identify the parents of the child – by naming them or describing them in such a way so they’re identifiable – you are, by implication, naming the child.

Story 2

- You’re not allowed to identify any one in a witness protection programme. Only once they leave the programme, may they be identified.
- Just as you cannot identify a child victim of crime, so too, you cannot identify a child witness to crime.
- You also may not reveal the identify of children who’ve committed crimes.
- Again, in this instance, a parent cannot give consent to have his or her child identified. Only the courts can do this.

Children's rights

Children and young people have very specific rights to privacy and protection from exploitation and intimidation. They, in fact, have all the rights of adults. In addition, they also have the right to be protected from harm. Reporting on children and young people carries this added dimension and restriction, especially in the current era when there is no limit on how many newspapers, radio stations and Internet services can run the story.

In some instances, the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatisation. When in doubt, a reporter should err on the side of caution and the right of the child to be protected from harm. Because these situations are not always clear-cut, reporters are encouraged to consult with staff from the United Nations' agency on children, UNICEF, or others, in determining the best interests of the child.

UNICEF'S principles for reporting on children

UNICEF has made the following recommendations when reporting on children:

1. The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.
2. In interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is given to children's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution.
3. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.
4. The best interests of an individual child are to be protected over any other consideration, including the promotion of child rights.
5. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, the child's right to have his or her views taken into account is to be measured against his or her age and maturity.
6. Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about the political, social and cultural outcome of any reportage.
7. Change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
 - a. a current or former child soldier, whether or not he or she is accused of violence or atrocities,
 - b. a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation,
 - c. a perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse,
 - d. HIV-positive, living with AIDS or has died from AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent,
 - e. charged or convicted of a crime.
8. Do not publish a story or an image that might put the child, siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.
9. Do not further stigmatise any child. Avoid categorisations or descriptions that expose a child to negative comebacks – including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.
10. Provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.

atrocities

killings or injuries that are unjust or illegal

perpetrator

someone who commits an atrocity

11. In certain cases, using a child's identity – his or her name and/or recognisable image – is in the child's best interests. However, when the child's identity is used, he or she must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatisation or reprisals. Some examples of these special cases are:
- when a child initiates contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise his or her right to freedom of expression and his or her right to have his or her opinion heard,
 - when a child is part of a sustained programme of activism or social mobilisation and wants to be so identified,
 - when a child is engaged in a psychosocial programme and claims his or her name and identity as part of healthy development.

Principles for interviewing children

- Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.
- Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.
- Do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history. In other words, no staging.
- Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.
- Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both.
- Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might appear locally and globally. This permission should be obtained in the child's language and in consultation with an adult the child trusts.
- Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story without outside pressure, including the interviewer. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or negatively affected by showing his or her home, community or general whereabouts.

(Source: 'Principles and guidelines for the ethical reporting on children and young people under 18 years old' – UNICEF working document, February 2002.)



WRAP UP!

Writing news and actuality programmes is a challenge. A community radio station needs to have:

- **journalists who are well informed about their role in reporting**
- **sensitivity and recognition of human rights**
- **a thorough understanding of the legal side of reporting**
- **clear news and ethics policies**
- **reporters who are skilled (or at least willing to practise!) in writing and freshening stories.**

