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A TRAINING MANUAL
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53, Mambolo Street, Zone 2, Wuse, Abuja.
www.thecjid.org
info@thecjid.org
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Project/Editorial Director: Dapo Olorunyomi
Acting Executive Director, CJID: Tobi Oluwatola
Deputy Director, Journalism, CJID: Busola Ajibola
Editors: Philip Olayoku and Stephanie O. Adams-Douglas
Creative and Production Director: Ololade Bamidele
Cover and Interior Designer: Benjamin Eniefiok Ukoh


For general information on The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development, please contact us through: info@thecjid.org. An online version of this handbook is published on: https://thecjid.org/publications/

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The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) is a media innovation and development think- (and do) tank founded in 2014, to strengthen the West African media to promote democratic accountability, in the service of inclusive and sustainable development. The Centre uses the tools of civic technology, investigative journalism, and research to deepen the discourse on sustainable development and tackle misinformation and disinformation in the media, and society.
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Finally we must thank you, the reader, for electing to read this manual. We acknowledge your interest in protecting the freedom of the press and we hope that in the pages of the manual you would find the inspiration as well as the guidance you require to support the free press. The health of democracies around the world depends on your success in this endeavour.

Tobi Oluwatola, PhD
Acting Executive Director (CJID)
The twin categories of press freedom and human rights are some of the most critical points of reflection in the discourse on democracy and governance. Whereas both categories represent conditions for the very possibility of democracy in a society, it is through the structure of rights that we express our commitment to the fundamental question of human dignity. Seen in this way, rights represent one major indicator of how we measure the progress of freedom and self-governance in a society. The news media, on the other hand, is how we provide the civic oversight, the measuring rod, the presentation of governance priorities, and the regimes of standardization that give democracy its meaning and human rights their consequence. This is why they both earn significant locations in the making of constitutions, the grundnorm of every democratic state.

CJID’s Manual on Press Freedom therefore represents a significant milestone, not just in helping us understand the crucial link between press freedom and human rights better, but also as the first attempt to help lay out a systematic way to study these two divides as one academic experience. For this reason, it is safe to hazard that this manual will become a major influence in the making of a new Nigerian press cadre, as well as a band of fresh legal, human rights, and democracy corps in our country.

If this were all that this Manual on Press Freedom helped to achieve, its case would have been perfectly made, but it goes further: helping explain why the press deserves a codified freedom in the constitution of states, as an important guarantee on how to make democracies work for the human person and for institutions. This manual, in its excellently packaged six modules, eloquently advances the claim that, by constantly raising awareness of the progress made on accountability to the exercise of power, as well as on the grounds lost in the contention between citizens and states (or violent non-state actors), and on the work that remains regarding the certainties of rights and liberties of citizens, the news
media firmly establishes its stake as a pre-eminent and an inestimable element in democracy-building. Invariably, as Sola Olorunyomi and Philip Olayoku demonstrate in their rich introductory tour de force, we are talking of how the interface of both the press and human rights help foster development, freedom, and how citizens acquire or lose voices in the exercise of political participation and in the articulation of power.

In this important publication, activists and academics will rejoice at possessing one of the most essential tools for implementing their dauntless battles to protect rights in every department of our nation’s life. Tunde Akanni sets the game up nicely by historicizing the travails of the nation’s press, and its journey to freedom and unfreedom. As a teaching aid, this will represent for journalists, and scholars, a veritable representation of history, but there is a marginal investigatory value beyond serving as an effective documentation of violations of press freedom, and the exertions of defenders of media freedom - this book is also an essential guide on how to develop campaigns against abuses.

The question has always been asked about how the totality of our media assets can become a massive resource for promoting democracy, civic liberties, and the rights of citizens. This Manual on Press Freedom already offers a helpful hint through Jide Jimoh’s and Saheed Owonikoko’s contributions, on how this might be done. The point of departure, we are encouraged to accept, is not merely an awareness of just how expansive that media system is, but its organic and dynamic location in the bowels of our grundnorm, and other supplemental instruments.

Some of the sensitively rendered promises of CJID’s Manual on Press Freedom come by way of deliberately crafted ironies. For instance, against the splash of a rich and pulsating Nigerian media ecosystem, Ugo Aniga’s intervention on the value of the Freedom of Information Act, FOIA, is stunning in two important regards. First, the point about the FOIA being a mechanism against the excessive power of a monstrous state that controls information, is balanced by the implications of rupturing the peace of the polity, if we fail to curtail the potential excesses portended, as in our peculiar case, by overarching federal powers.
So, the question confronts us: what is the real definition of what we would call the Nigerian media ecosystem? Data have it as a patchwork of over 200 government-owned TV stations, 43 privately-owned TV stations, 185 government owned radio stations, 97 privately-owned stations, and over 100 private newspapers. Also, 51 multi-channel satellite distribution outlets, 27 campus broadcast stations, hundreds of digital news sites and bloggers, and hundreds of news aggregators, Instagram, and YouTube actors.

The power of this press goes back to history. The print press started in 1859, radio in 1933, television in 1959, national wire services in 1976, and transition to the digital started in 1996. By July 2019, there were 122.7 million active internet users, according to the Nigerian Communications Commission. Mobile phones are often used to access the web. Most Internet users are young, educated, and urban. Around 24 million Nigerians were active on social media by January 2019, comprising 12% of the population. WhatsApp is used by 85% of social media users, followed by Facebook at 78%.

Yet, for this sprawling asset, as a system, to become a power package for democracy, you need a tradition of thriving investigative journalism to serve as the arrowhead for how the news media can transform to become a material force for freedom and accountability. This is how best to welcome Onwuka Okereke’s contribution in the Manual, which appropriately promotes the ‘statutory value’ of investigative journalism, and how, as a mechanism for promoting accountability, it could help foster an understanding of press freedom as a constitutional responsibility.

Nigeria’s landscape of freedom and unfreedom is a field of endless contention. Even while data affirms the reality of growing state-imposed restraints against the press, officials are never done in their counterclaims that the country’s press enjoys unfettered freedom. However, the easiest resolution of debates like this is to be found in the behaviour of states and leaders.

Thus, in his 2019 National Day address, President Muhammadu Buhari said: “Our attention is increasingly being focused on cyber-crimes and
the abuse of technology through hate speech and other divisive material being propagated on social media. Whilst we uphold the constitutional rights of our people to freedom of expression and association, where the purported exercise of these rights infringes on the rights of other citizens or threatens to undermine our National Security, we will take firm and decisive action.”

Eventually, coming in the environment of that year, we witnessed the dramatic, though not unexpected, re-emergence of a censoring Nigeria Press Council Amendment Act of 2019. That year alone would later highlight the philosophical significance of the administration’s vision towards the press. What happened that year alone, in parliament, was the unrestrained excitement of party leaders, who jumped over each other to brace the already firm grip on press freedom via the introduction of four additional bills (the famous Social Media Bill; another to amend the extant Cyber Crimes Act; and two Hate Speech Bills. These would, the state hopes, join more than a dozen obnoxious laws already in existence and targeted at further restraining the freedom of the press in the country.

Some of the most chilling laws, already in existence, include the Anti-Terrorism Act, the National Broadcasting Commission Act; the vestiges of criminal defamation statutes in the Criminal Crimes Act and the Penal Code Act; the Official Secrets Act; and the Obscene Publications Act. Together, these statutes and the four intending laws, help define a policing ecology that smothers the freedom of the press and fundamental liberties, and here is how to understand the import of Emeka Njoku’s contribution to CJID’s Manual on Press Freedom.

National security has become the tedious shield that state officials bear to repress journalistic freedom, and Emeka Njoku is spot on for zeroing in on the Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011 (as amended) to discuss how certain provisions of the law does nothing but imperil press freedom. In the 163-year history of the Nigerian press, the 15 years from 1984 to 1999 under military dictatorship were perhaps the most ferocious and constraining, from the perspective of press freedom. However, since the return of democratic rule via the Fourth Republic in 1999, the three years between 2018 and 2021 stood out as a sore thumb. In that period, no fewer than
192 verified attacks were carried out against the press, representing an average of 48 attacks per year, and an annual death of at least one person out of every 27 attacks. Transcending the average, Abuja had three times more deaths than any of the 36 other states. Till date, 2019 still had the highest number of attacks at 68, which is 20% of the total recorded attacks. According to the pressattack.ng, which documented these abuses, the top three forms of attacks were physical assaults, arrests, and threats. But bad days do not endure, and on a cheerful note, things appeared to get better between 2019-2021, as the number of recorded attacks dropped considerably by 55% and arrests declining by 68%, from 22 to 7. For a historical trends, security personnel, unknown assailants and state actors continue to be the worst violators, although security personnel carried out most of the attacks, twice as more as those by unknown assailants.

In all, Philip Olayoku and Stephanie Adams-Douglas deserve accolades for their decent work of bringing these pieces together in a manual that is certain to reshape the way we rethink, understand, and hopefully commit to fighting for press freedom. Coming at a time of expanding knowledge that the deterioration of the political and social orders in Nigeria underpins the important and urgent work needed to rebuild the democratic compact and make citizen’s investment worth the while, one can add that rebuilding the Nigerian press ecosystem for value must therefore be the centrepiece of a comprehensive strategy and program of democratic renewal and consolidation.

For a worthy companion on this journey, the remarks of Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the American Declaration of Independence, who later became president of the country in 1787, remains evergreen: “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

**Dapo Olorunyomi**

Chief Executive Officer, CJID