



Conflict sensitive journalism

HANDBOOK | SPECIAL EDITION MYANMAR

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Cover photo: A Buddhist monk reads a journal at a roadside shop in Yangon, Myanmar.

Photo: AP/POLFOTO

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"Who is the judge? Sometimes journalists may feel they need to publish news that is legitimate in the interests of conflict sensitive journalism but is not, in the government's viewpoint, 'conducive to the creation of an atmosphere confidential to national harmony, amity and peace.' Journalists sometimes need to tell stories that are 'uncomfortable' or the government interprets not to be 'in the best interest of the public.' However, the general message that journalists need to act responsibly and use their power wisely is good for conflict sensitive journalism."

Peter Mwaura

Former Director, School of Journalism, University of Nairobi

Foreword

The government of Myanmar, led by President U Thein Sein, launched a new peace initiative in early 2012 and held talks with all major armed opposition groups as part of a process of leading the country towards democracy. The talks resulted in the signing of ceasefire agreements with a number of armed groups.

Alongside the peace initiative, the government also initiated steps towards establishing an independent media through necessary legal and policy reforms. The opening of space for free media complements the reforms underway in Myanmar, as the media can play an important role in informing and educating the people of the political processes underway. It is in this context that building a professional media and strengthening the media's capacity to report on sensitive conflict transformation processes is of importance.

Myanmar has a short history of a free media. Until August 2012 all publications were censored and journalists had to work within boundaries that were defined by the government. Therefore, it is not surprising that many journalists in Myanmar do not have experience working in a free media environment. The absence of a free media also means there are few journalists with the necessary skills and knowledge of journalism to make an independent media flourish.

International Media Support (IMS) has been working to facilitate improvements in Myanmar's media environment for many years. In January 2012, it began implementing a comprehensive media development programme, entailing a wide range of activities including working to support policy reforms, capacity building of media and journalists.

As a part of this initiative, between November 2012 and June 2013 IMS, in collaboration with the Myanmar Peace Centre, implemented 20 conflict sensitive journalism (CSJ) training workshops in Yangon and media hubs in different parts of the country, including in regions with large ethnic populations. The training introduced the concepts of conflict sensitive journalism to over 400 participants at three-day workshops. Mizzima provided the logistical support, while IMS provided the requisite trainers and resources.

This handbook is designed to serve as a practical, everyday guide for journalists. It is an adaptation of similar country-specific handbooks published by IMS for different countries, and is a volume that has been continuously updated to bring together experiences in different countries. The content is based on Conflict Sensitive Journalism, a handbook by Ross Howard, published by IMS in 2003. This Myanmar handbook follows the original structure of the 2003 handbook, using local examples where appropriate.

IMS is pleased to present this handbook in the hope that it may serve as a useful tool for journalists in their practice of conflict sensitive journalism in Myanmar.

Introduction

Myanmar is a country of diverse peoples and cultures. In 2012 the country had an estimated population of 60 million, including 135¹ ethnic groups. The country became independent in 1948, but has experienced internal conflict ever since.² Myanmar has experienced different modes of governance, including socialist rule and direct rule by military officials. The main opposition party, National League for Democracy (NLD), did not contest the 2010 parliamentary election.³ However, opposition parties did contest a by-election held in 2012, in which the NLD won 43 of 44 seats the party contested.⁴

The country's main political conflict between the pro-democracy forces and military rulers has been moving towards resolution after the election. But, Myanmar also has a number of internal conflicts that have remained unresolved throughout history. These conflicts involve inter-state/regional conflicts over the sharing of resources and demand for greater inclusiveness in governance.

Often, internal conflicts have been linked to identity struggles among and between different ethnic groups and the central government, and many of them are deeply rooted in historical, economic, cultural, structural, social and/or political grievances. Many of the sides in conflict in Myanmar also control organised combatants that have in the past engaged in pitched battles with the military.

Conflicts in Myanmar date from the time of independence. The oldest one – between the Karen people and the central government – dates back to 1949. Conflicts between other ethnic population groups and the government began taking root thereafter and became deeper after the installation of one-party rule in 1962. This was when the country's previously vibrant media sector was gradually shackled and censorship became the norm. These restrictions on the press and media subdued debate, causing conflicts to further deepen.

Political developments in Myanmar in the late 1980s and early 1990s then exasperated the chasm between the country's ruling military and the general public. The government maintained a tight control on publications.

In 2007, at the height of the Saffron Revolution, it even pulled the plug on the Internet. However, reforms in the political sphere and media began in late 2010, including a relaxation of censorship, which was later abolished in 2012.

Several ceasefire talks have been underway in the course of 2013 and on. These talks largely focus on ending armed hostilities and on those directly affected, such as combatants and internally displaced persons, while there remains little discussion, particularly in the media, on the root causes of conflict. This is where media can play a role in explaining the conflicts and facilitating debate and discussion on ways to address the main causes of the different conflicts in the country. The government had, at the time of writing, signed ceasefire agreements with all but two groups – the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and Ta'ang (Palaung) National Liberation Army (TNLA) – leading to a decline in military activities.⁵

However, Myanmar also has newer conflicts linked with political ideology and exclusionary politics, many of which began to particularly surface after the country embraced democratic reforms that provided people the space to organise and express their views. Most of the conflicts in Myanmar have been violent, including the new conflicts that surfaced after the political reforms began. A particular focal point of the post-2012 violence concerns the Rohinghas, a Muslim population predominantly located in Rakhine State that the government refers to as 'Bengali'.⁶ The outbreak of violence in largely Buddhist Rakhine State subsequently spread to other parts of the country and involved the wider Muslim population, resulting in a large number of deaths, displacement and segregation of the two populations. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), in November 2012 about 110,000 people had been displaced from Rakhine State alone.⁷

As a result, while 2013 saw hope that a new era of democratic politics would lead the country towards peace and prosperity, there were also fears that Myanmar could remain captive to its own history of unresolved grievances among its peoples.

Greek historian Thucydides reduced the impetus for human action to three seminal factors: fear, honour and self-interest.⁸ It is not, by any means, a formula uniquely applicable to Myanmar, but still serves as a

general barometer to gauge and understand the actions of people and societies, across time and distance. All three factors – fear, honour and self-interest – can be traced in the different conflicts in Myanmar. Traces of this were even evident in attacks directed towards a beauty pageant winner based on racial slander and unfounded relations with families of the previous military government⁹, to a lack of commitment and action in transforming Yangon's inefficient city bus system.

The media in Myanmar is a product of this social context. This historical experience helps to explain the shortcomings that have been seen in its ability to cover – completely, accurately and impartially – the complex conflicts in the country.

Furthermore, Myanmar journalists have had little or no experience or training in journalism and on reporting conflicts. The media environment of the yesteryears did not provide journalists with the opportunities to develop skills in reporting conflicts, including ethnic, religious and sectarian strife. The reach of the media also remains a limiting factor in its ability to influence public opinion. A 2012 report by IMS on the media landscape in the country found, "Media organisations [in Myanmar] have no capacity to dispatch journalists to remote areas to obtain stories for their publications. Even if they had physical access to a particular remote area, they often do not have the professional capacity to grasp the story and relay it to the public."¹⁰

Therefore, the approach and techniques of reporting conflicts sensitively, as opposed to a journalism that used to be dictated by those in power, can contribute towards enriching public debate on ways to resolve conflicts in the country. Conflict sensitive journalism may also help in mitigating the impact of the simmering communal and sectarian conflicts Myanmar has witnessed post-2010 and assist the country in its transition to a full-fledged and peaceful democracy.

Ultimately, Myanmar is a country of multiple social identities and therefore it is difficult to wish away the conflict fault lines. Yet, neither can these identities be ignored, because conflict resolution is about negotiations and compromises, which can be possible only when issues are discussed and debated fairly and impartially in the public sphere. We believe CSJ can assist in laying a foundation for the impartial, fact-based debate.

1. Understanding conflict

Professional news reporters need to understand conflict. In ways, irrespective of whether they are aware of it or not, they are specialists in conflict. For reporters, change is news. And when there is change, there is often disagreement or conflict. There is conflict among those who like the change and those who do not, or those that want more change and those who oppose change. So, journalists deal with conflict in the course of their work.

However, journalists may not fully understand conflicts, their root causes or how conflicts end. And few may have any training in the theory of conflict. Most journalists merely report on the conflict as it happens on day-to-day basis. By comparison, medical reporters do not just report on a person's illness, they also report on what caused the illness and what may cure it. News reporters can do the same when it comes to reporting conflict.

Having the necessary skills to analyse conflict will enable a reporter to be a more effective professional journalist and an individual who has greater awareness. Journalism practiced with an understanding and awareness of conflicts is called conflict sensitive journalism (CSJ).

Kinds of conflict

Author Ross Howard defines conflict as "a situation where two or more individuals or groups try to pursue goals or ambitions which they believe they cannot share." These conflicts take place in all societies. And because conflicts take place in society, they are social conflicts. As Louis Kriesberg describes, "A social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the beliefs that they have incompatible objectives."¹¹

Yet, not all conflict is violent. Conflict is normal when there is change. Some people want change, but others could disagree. The process can be positive if the disagreements are managed properly. Conflict that is not managed properly can become violent. When we say conflict, we are usually referring to violent conflict.

Conflicts in Myanmar are not unique. Some of the same forces that drive violent/destructive conflict elsewhere also underline conflicts in Myanmar. These include conflicts related to:

- Scarcity of resources and their unequal distribution
- Misunderstanding or lack of adequate communication between and knowledge about different groups
- Unresolved historical grievances, and
- Uneven distribution of power

Group exercise: Think about and discuss the sources of conflict in Myanmar. Consider what caused the conflicts to become violent.



Understanding violence

Journalists can easily identify and write about violent physical conflicts. In such conflicts individuals or groups try to hurt or kill each other, and there are victims. Much of this is visible. But, there are other kinds of violence that can do as much or even more harm. These are often more difficult for reporters to explain. Media in Myanmar have written about and reported on such conflicts, but not always have they explained conflicts in society that are not visible but which can, if left unaddressed, result in violence. For example, there are certain restrictions for women in higher education in Myanmar that have largely been accepted – and often not reported. Moreover, women are also required to obtain higher grades than boys for seeking admission in certain disciplines in colleges.¹²

Cultural violence

One form of the invisible violence or violence that is not often seen by journalists is called cultural violence. It can be a way a group has been thinking about another group for many years and can include talk, images or beliefs that glorify physical violence. These include:

- **Hate speech:** Different ethnic or cultural groups speak badly of one another. One group blames the other for difficulties or problems being suffered. Violence is sometimes encouraged to eliminate the blamed group.

- **Xenophobia:** A people's or a country's hatred or fear of another country creates misperceptions and encourages policies that promote conflict with that country.
- **Myths and legends:** A society's oral and written histories glorify only one side's ancient foundations and victories and can build hatred of the other side.
- **Religion:** Intolerance of other beliefs can promote conflict.
- **Gender discrimination:** Practices and laws in society against women and the third gender that are not accepted against men is also a form of violence.

Structural violence

Structural violence is harm that is built into the laws and traditional behaviour of a group or society. The harm it causes is often permitted or ignored. It can include:

- **Institutionalised racism or sexism:** Laws and practices that allow for unequal treatment based on race or sex.
- **Colonialism:** A country's lack of self-determination where a foreign authority forcibly assumes control over all decision-making processes.
- **Extreme exploitation:** Slavery, which has now been abolished in most countries, can manifest itself in other forms such as forced labour. Exploitation, for example, could be taking place in employment practices, particularly of young children and women.
- **Poverty:** This is the world's leading cause of violent conflict.
- **Corruption and nepotism:** Government decisions are influenced or decided by bribery, favouritism and family or tribal/ethnic connections.
- **Segregation:** Laws that force people to live in separate groups or in separate locations, often against their will. One example of this is forcing people to live in temporary camps and settlements.

HATE SPEECH

Hate speech has traditionally been defined as that which denigrates people based on the group to which they belong. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights defines hate speech as any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. Some women's rights activists also find denigrating speech belonging to this category, and the same would apply to speech that would incite hatred or violence based on sexual orientation.

According to the Centre for International Media Assistance and the National Endowment for Democracy, speech that directly threatens or incites violence is one key marker. "You can say a lot of nasty things; you have a right to hate, and to express it," said Joelle Fiss, a senior associate at Human Rights First. "But you can't do something that would incite violent behaviour among others."

Following World War II, international law recognised speech that incites others to genocide as a crime against humanity, similar to other war crimes. But even in extreme circumstances, judging whether speech reaches that level is complex. Furthermore, hate speech may not be direct. In countries such as Kenya or Rwanda, which have suffered mass violence fueled by virulent hate speech, the language used was often coded or indirect. Often it could be said in vernacular language, using metaphors.

Adapted from Jane Sasseen. October 2013. A Clash of Cultures: Hate Speech, Taboos, Blasphemy and the Role of News Media. A Report to the Centre for International Media Assistance. Page 17

These forms of violence are important to identify when reporting and analysing conflict. Often they are the real cause of direct physical violence. Ending the physical violence will not be enough because it can recur if the cultural and structural violence is ignored or left unaddressed. Participants who have taken part in CSJ trainings organised by IMS in Myanmar have also spoken of examples of words that incite hate used in the country. Journalists need to take special care to ensure they do not propagate hate and incite violence through their stories.



Group work: Is there cultural and structural violence in Myanmar? Does the media report this violence? Do the victims have a voice in the news and reports? What are the possible stories that could be written on the different forms of violence that are not visible?

2. Journalism and conflict

The power of the media

Almost all societies have developed ways to regulate conflict without violence. Usually communities give authority to persons considered as fair – village elders, judges (judiciary systems) or an international tribunal – to decide how to resolve the conflict. Generally, everyone respects the decision. However, conflicts may continue or even become violent if the decisions seem unfair and are not accepted.

What does it take to end conflict? Research has shown that certain things must occur to end conflict, irrespective of the type of conflict – within a family, between neighbours, among groups within a country or across borders. Put simply, conflict does not end by itself.

One of the most important things that could help reducing conflicts is communication. For two sides to move towards a non-violent resolution, they must first talk. This is where good journalism comes in.

Journalism's unconscious roles

Professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. Rather, they seek to present accurate and impartial news. And as a result of this good, responsible reporting, conflict can be reduced. There are several elements of conflict resolution that good journalism can deliver, automatically, as part of its daily work:

- 1. Channelling communication:** The news media is often the most important channel of communication that exists between sides in a conflict. Sometimes one side may use the media to broadcast intimidating or violent messages. But other times, parties speak to each other through the media or through specific journalists. For example, when parties need to state their demands they tell the media. Other parties can then learn about this information from different newspapers, radio and television stations, and now also the Internet. In the same manner, one party can provoke the other through the media,

a result that could lead to a break in talks or truces and recommence violence.

2. **Educating:** Each side needs to know about the other side's difficulty in moving towards reconciliation. Journalism that explores the particular difficulties of each side, such as politics or powerful interests, can help educate the other side to avoid demands for simplistic and immediate solutions.
3. **Confidence building:** Lack of trust is a major factor contributing to conflict. The media can reduce suspicion by digging into 'hot' issues and revealing them so that there are no secrets to fear. Good journalism can also present news that shows resolution is possible by giving examples from other places and by explaining local efforts at reconciliation.
4. **Correcting misperceptions:** By examining and reporting on the two sides' misperceptions of each other, the media encourages disputing sides to revise their views and move closer to reducing conflict.
5. **Making news human:** Getting to know the other side, giving them names and faces, is an essential step. This is why negotiators put the two sides in the same room. Good journalism also does this by putting real people in the story and describing how the issues affect them.
6. **Identifying underlying interests:** In a conflict both sides need to understand the bottom-line interests of the other. Good reporting does this by asking tough questions and seeking out the real meaning of what leaders say. Good reporting also looks beyond the leaders' interests and seeks the larger groups' interests.
7. **Emotional outlet:** In conflict resolution, there must be outlets for each side to express their grievances or anger or they will explode in frustration and make things worse. Media can provide important outlets by allowing both sides to speak. Many disputes can be fought out in the media, instead of in the streets, allowing conflicts to be addressed before they turn violent.

8. **Framing the conflict:** In a conflict, describing the problem in a different way can reduce tension and launch negotiations. In good journalism, editors and reporters are always looking for a different angle, an alternative view or a new insight that will still attract an audience to the same story. Good journalism can help reframe conflicts for the two sides.
9. **Face-saving, consensus building:** When two parties try to resolve a conflict they must calm the fears of their supporters. By reporting what they say, the media allows leaders in a conflict to conduct face-saving and consensus building actions, even reaching to refugees and exiles in far-away places.
10. **Solution building:** In a conflict, both sides must eventually present specific proposals to respond to grievances. On a daily basis, good reporting does this by asking the disputing parties for their solutions instead of just repeating their rhetoric of grievances. For example, asking sides in a conflict what would it take for them to join the peace process, could provide other sides with an idea of what needs to be done to facilitate resolution.
11. **Encouraging a balance of power:** Conflicting groups, regardless of inequalities, have to believe they will be given attention if they meet the other side in negotiations. Good journalism encourages negotiation because the reporting is impartial and balanced. It gives attention to all sides. It encourages a balance of power for the purpose of hearing grievances and seeking solutions.

Group work: Think about good and bad examples in Myanmar media coverage based on the ideas discussed above.



*Good journalism is a **constant process** of seeking solutions.*

Understanding the influence of journalists on conflict

Professional journalism is about doing all the things above as a part of normal good reporting. When we understand the effect of what we do, we can better appreciate how important our role is in a conflict. This is why we must get our facts right and choose our words carefully.

It also helps us as reporters to be aware that these activities are going on in many closed-door negotiations or peace talks. Knowing this, we can report what we learn about the negotiations with greater understanding. In Sri Lanka, when negotiations first began, negotiators were concerned that the media did not understand the process and would create misperceptions and destroy confidence. In fact, Sri Lankan media was later accused of committing this very mistake, mainly by becoming a part of the conflict.

In Nepal there were multiple platforms for negotiations, at some the media had access, while others were held in camera. On many instances the talks in closed-door sessions were instrumental in leading to formal agreements. Peace negotiators sometimes keep media out of their meetings fearing that misreporting could disrupt the peace negotiations. However, with good reporting media can gain access to information even if they are not allowed to sit in such meetings.

Group work: Do media in Myanmar practice some of the 11 elements discussed above? Has there been much reporting about solutions? Are journalists pressing leaders from both sides for details of their solutions or are they only reporting the rhetoric? Are journalists reporting on real, underlying issues?

How is conflict resolved?

It is important to know that there is more than one way to end conflict. Think about this imaginary conflict. Two groups are in conflict over an orange. The orange tree is on one group's land. But the orange is on a branch hanging over the other group's land. Both groups want the one orange. How many ways are there to resolve this conflict?

There are at least four ways for this conflict to end:

1. One party prevails

- a. The two groups could fight violently and the stronger one wins the orange. The loser is angry and wants revenge.
- b. A judge settles the dispute in favour of one group. But the judge may be corrupt, slow and the process could be expensive. The loser is unsatisfied.
- c. Compensation. One group pays the other and keeps the orange. But this could be expensive.

2. Withdrawal

- a. One or both groups simply walk away. But the conflict is unresolved and neither group is satisfied.
- b. One group destroys the orange, or gives it away. Destroying the orange could include violence. And both sides lose the orange.
- c. Both groups do nothing. But the valuable orange will rot, and is lost by both groups.

3. Compromise

- a. Cut the orange, so each group gets at least some part of it.
- b. Peel the orange and each group takes the pieces one after the other. Now the orange is a different resource that can be shared, perhaps unequally, but satisfying both groups.
- c. Squeeze the orange into juice. This is a different way of seeing the orange. It is now a resource with a different value. The juice can be shared, perhaps unequally, but satisfying both groups.

4. Transcendence

- a. Get more people to claim an interest in the orange, so no one group has a right to the whole orange. The local neighbours of the two groups in conflict may decide that the orange is a community resource, and they encourage the two sides to resolve the conflict without violence.
- b. Get another orange. The community of neighbours goes to the market or to the world and finds someone with a surplus who can share oranges with the two sides and ease the conflict.
- c. The two groups agree, perhaps with community encouragement, to bake an orange cake, sell it in the market and divide the money between the two groups. The orange is now seen differently. It is a resource by which the groups profit.
- d. The two groups plant the orange seeds, make an orange grove and together the groups become a prosperous orange supplier to the larger community.

The options above are not meant to suggest that neighbours in the community can just march in and tell the two groups in conflict what to do. But it is important to listen to the larger community's proposals for a solution and to seek community assistance in achieving a resolution. In major conflicts, the larger community is the people living in the society or country. In Nepal, for example, the rebelling Maoists had been demanding a constitution written by an elected Constituent Assembly and the abolishment of the monarchy. Over time, this demand became acceptable to large sections of the populace, and also the political parties who had initially rejected it. Agreement on this eventually led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in November 2006 putting an end to the violence that had begun in 1996.

What is the point of the analysis above?

- First, that conflict should be looked at in more than one way.
- When the source of conflict is seen as a resource that can be shared, the conflict is less likely to become violent.
- When the larger community takes an interest, there is more pressure not to use violence.
- When there are several alternative ways to resolve the conflict, violence is less attractive.

More alternatives means less conflict

One way of achieving more alternatives in a dispute is by bringing more people into the discourse on the conflict. This produces more ideas for looking at the conflict differently and helps to find different solutions to be shared. When two sides are deadlocked, other members of the community, such as religious leaders, the business community, civil society, friendly neighbouring countries or international organisations can bring different visions and alternative solutions.

Conflict resolution can be highly complicated. After 30 years of war, the conflict between two groups in Mozambique was resolved in 1992. The conflict had the following characteristics:

- Fourteen different parties, six countries and six non-governmental organisations were involved.
- Because there were so many parties and ideas it became difficult for either group to walk away (from negotiations).

- In the Mozambique peace talks, there were groups inside and outside the negotiations, helping the two sides communicate, prepare ideas and respond.
- Everyone started by finding a small agreement. Then they worked on bigger agreements.

Conflict resolution can also take a long time. In Nepal the CPA was signed between the conflicting sides in November 2006. The agreement was signed after multiple failed attempts to negotiate a peace pact. Negotiations continued even after the signing of the CPA leading first to a new Interim Constitution. Next, an election was held to elect a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution. The Constituent Assembly failed to prepare a constitution because of a different type of conflict: the political parties failed to come to agreement on how the state would be organised and also on ways of carving Nepal into autonomous federations. Nepal held its second Constituent Assembly election in November 2013 to again try to resolve the existing political conflicts through the democratic process. And while the process had yet to produce results as of July 2014, it had established a practice of negotiating to find solutions – and this has helped in putting an end to the violence there was in the country before and in the first few years after 2006.

Conflict analysis for journalists

Conflict analysis is a discipline that people can spend a lifetime to try to understand. But as journalists we do not have that luxury. Nor can we remain ignorant of some basic principles because we report conflicts on a day-to-day basis.

What does conflict analysis mean for journalists?

- Journalists should seek out other parties and other points of view. They should not only repeat old grievances by the old elites.
- Journalists should examine what the parties are seeking and the possibility for withdrawal, compromise or transcendence. Journalists should write about these possibilities.
- With conflict analysis, journalists can understand what diplomats and negotiators are trying to do, and can report it more reliably.

- With conflict analysis, journalists can identify more sources to go to for information.

By providing information obtained through this approach, journalism can make the public far more well-informed about the conflict beneath the violence, and can assist in the process of finding solutions.

3. Good journalism around the world

Citizens in a conflict must have good journalism to help them make well-informed decisions and perhaps resolve their conflict. Around the world, professional journalists have developed principles and basic standards by which they try to achieve good journalism. Unfortunately, there are many places where journalists have to work under different rules imposed by governments or by powerful interests. But wherever professional journalists come together to freely consider what they do, and to guide themselves, they refer to these professional standards.

There are more than 50 professional journalists' associations around the world with similar codes of conduct or standards. One example is the International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org) (See: Annex 4).

Good journalism. What it should not do:



- **Defamatory:** Good journalism does not tell lies and twist the truth about people.
- **Derivative:** Good journalism does not simply repeat what has been reported somewhere else. Also, copying others' news may serve to repeat false information.
- **Malicious:** Journalism is powerful. News reports can ruin reputations, put people in danger, or cause public panic. Good journalism is not used to intentionally harm other persons.
- **Corrupt:** Good journalism does not accept bribes. It does no special favours for anyone. Good journalism is not for sale.

What good journalism should include:



- **Accuracy:** Getting the correct information is most important of all. Everything that is reported must be described accurately. This includes the spelling of names, the facts as they happened, and the real

meaning of what was said. Before they report it, good journalists seek the evidence and accurate facts.

A good journalist will rush to get the news first. But first, the journalist must get it right. People will not talk to journalists if they fear journalists will not repeat their words accurately, or will not describe things as they really are.

- **Impartiality (balance):** Almost every code of journalism puts importance on impartiality, on not taking sides. To do this, a good journalist will seek to produce a report that is balanced. To be balanced is to include both (or more) sides. There are always two or more sides in any story involving conflict. Citizens need to know what the other sides say, and how that will affect them.

Balance is as important in every story as is accuracy. People will not talk to a journalist who only reports one side of the story.

Impartiality also means that the professional journalist is not an active leader in any political group or movement. Impartial journalism is an important defence for reporters in a time of conflict. Journalists should be respected because they take no sides.

- **Responsibility:** Journalists have obligations to the people they report about, and to the society to whom they report the news. Journalists have a responsibility to protect their sources. Many people will not tell journalists important news if they fear they will be revealed. Good journalists use honest methods to obtain the news, which means they do not break the law.

Politicians (both democrats and authoritarian rulers) often talk about responsibility of media and journalists (see: Box). Sometimes politicians tend to interpret responsibility as doing what they think is responsible. But for journalists, reporting responsibly means what is discussed in the paragraph above.

MEDIA AND RESPONSIBILITY

"We will not be able to defend the rights and freedoms of the people. But at the same time, this press has to be aware not just of its great power and influence, but of the great responsibility that it bears for the building of a new nation that is centered on the will of the people."

"Greater freedom demands greater responsibility. It is one of my greatest concerns that people not look upon democracy as a system that gives unlimited rights to them but does not demand equal responsibility back."

Aung San Suu Kyi, 9 March 2014 <http://www.ewcmedia.org/yangon2014/2014/03/12suu-kyi-media-freedom/>

Accurate, impartial and responsible journalism is reliable.

Reliability = Accuracy + Impartiality + Responsibility (AIR)

These are the basic standards that produce journalism that people can trust. This is called reliable journalism. All reliable reporting should be accurate, impartial and responsible. It applies to every aspect of the job – assigning stories, editing copy or sound bites, writing headlines, directing and producing.

Reliable journalism and democracy

It is reliable reporting that earns journalism a privileged place in many countries' constitutions and laws. Through the media, people can exercise their right to free speech guaranteed in Article 19 of the International Declaration of Human Rights.¹³ Where there is free speech and reliable journalism, citizens can make well-informed decisions in their own best interest. That is an essential element of democracy.



Checklist: Ask yourself 'does my work meet the test of reliable journalism?' 'Is my work accurate, impartial and responsible?'

Reliable, diverse and independent

For a democracy to flourish media must not only be reliable but also diverse. No single media outlet can do enough. It takes many media outlets to ensure that competing points of view and different reports are brought to the public's attention.

Reliable and diverse media must be independent. The media must be free of government or powerful interference that blocks the reporting of other voices and other interests. Laws, corporate ownership, commercial interests, courts and regulators must support independent media and protect them from interference.

Independent media must also discipline itself, and submit to laws and regulators that are honest and non-partisan.

In 2011/12 Myanmar began the process of creating a media environment that can support reliable, diverse and independent journalism. A process is underway to draft new laws for media and a unified Code of Conduct for journalists was launched by the Myanmar Interim Press Council in May 2014.¹⁴

4. Conflict sensitive journalism

Some journalists say it is not our job to take responsibility for what happens when we report the news. We just report the conflict the same way we report on a football match – we just describe it. But, this is not enough in conflict sensitive journalism.

No bare facts

Many journalists today recognise that we are more than just professional spectators and distributors of the facts. We are aware that other people know how to create facts for us to report and how spin doctors strategically 'insert' their views and agendas into the news of the day. They choose certain facts to tell the media, to use the media to influence the public's view of conflict. Good journalists know that there are no bare facts.

If we only report the bare facts about violent conflict, citizens will only understand the conflict in those terms. But, if we search for news beyond the bare facts and present more information to citizens, including possible solutions, they may see the conflict in different terms. If a car bomb went off yesterday we should not just report it and repeat what the usual leaders say about it. We should report how it affected ordinary people's lives and seek their opinions about the conflict. We should also report on new attempts to end the conflict and provide information that exposes the bare facts.

People are killed in violent conflicts. As good reporters we need to report not only the dead and injured on both sides, but also try to find out and write about the causes of the conflict, how it is affecting the lives of others and what possible solutions may exist.

The news we report can be destructive for a community, if we promote fear and violence. Or our news reports can be constructive, by making citizens better informed, and possibly safer, by also reporting on efforts to promote conflict reduction. This is conflict sensitive journalism.

A conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides but is engaged in the search for solutions. Conflict sensitive journalists also choose their words carefully.



Checklist for conflict sensitive journalism

1. Avoid reporting a conflict as consisting of two opposing sides. Find other affected interests and include their stories, opinions and goals. Interview shopkeepers and consumers affected by general strikes, workers who are unable to work, refugees from the countryside who want an end to the violence, etc.
2. Avoid defining the conflict by always quoting the leaders who make familiar demands. Go beyond the elites. Report the words of ordinary people, who may voice opinions shared by many; opinions that could even be different than those of leaders.
3. Avoid only reporting what divides the sides in conflict. Ask the opposing sides questions that may reveal common ground. Report on interests or goals that they may share.
4. Avoid always focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side. Treat all sides' suffering as equally newsworthy.
5. Avoid words like "devastated", "tragedy" and "terrorised" to describe what has been done to one group. These kinds of words put the reporter on one side. Do not use them yourself. Only quote someone else who uses these words.
6. Avoid emotional and imprecise words. Assassination is the murder of a head of state and no one else. Massacre is the deliberate killing of innocent, unarmed civilians. Soldiers and policemen are not massacred. Genocide means killing an entire people. Do not minimise suffering, but use strong language carefully.

7. Avoid words like terrorist, extremist or fanatic. These words take sides and make the other side seem impossible to negotiate with. Refer to people by what they call themselves.
8. Avoid making an opinion into a fact. If someone claims something, state their name, so it is their opinion and not your fact.
9. Avoid waiting for leaders on one side to offer solutions. Explore peace ideas wherever they come from. Put these ideas to the leaders and report their responses.

As journalists, our most powerful tools are the words we use, along with the pictures and sounds. We can use our tools to build understanding instead of fear and myths.

LABELS AND LABELING

The following is an example of the pain labels can cause to those labeled:

Many of Rakhine's Muslim population were listed as Bengali in the last census.

"We are labeled 'Bengali, Bengali' all the time. Evidence that we were born here, that we have been staying here, is crucial to us," Hla Mint told AFP.

The speaker was referring to the situation there where 'Bengali' has been a word used to refer to Rohingyas, even by official documents. The long-held animosity between Buddhist and Muslim communities in the Rakhine had erupted into bloodshed in 2012 leaving scores dead and displacing 140,000 people – mainly among the Rohingya. The following summarises the views of the Rakhine people about Rohingyas.

"There is no such thing as the Rohingya ethnicity... it is just a term. Ethnic Rakhines know their intention. It is a political aim," said Shwe Maung, a senior member of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party.

Excerpted from a AFP story on the census headlined, 'Myanmar Census: Risk or Reward for Rohingya Refugees'. 9 March 2014

*Newspapers on sale at a roadside shop
in Yangon, Myanmar. Photo: IMS*



Traditional reporting versus conflict sensitive journalism

EXAMPLE #1



Traditional reporting

Skopje, UPI – Peace talks aimed at ending the conflict in Macedonia lay in ruins last night after the massacre of eight policemen by Albanian rebels who mutilated the bodies.

The atrocity took place at the mountain village of Vecje, where a police patrol was attacked with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, said a spokesman. Six other men were wounded and three vehicles destroyed.

The bodies were cut with knives after they died, he said, and one man's head had been smashed in.

The attack was believed to be the work of the National Liberal Army terrorists from the hills near Tetevo. Ali Ahmeti, a political leader of the NLA, said that his men may have fired "in self-defence." ...



Conflicts sensitive journalism

Skopje, UPI – There was condemnation across the political spectrum in Macedonia after a police patrol suffered the loss of eight men.

Both the main parties representing the country's minority Albanians distanced themselves from the killings, believed to be the work of the self-styled National Liberation Army.

Ali Ahmeti, a political leader of the NLA, denied that his men had attacked the patrol, saying they may have fired "in self-defence."

But the Macedonian government said it had done nothing to provoke the machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades which destroyed three trucks.

A spokesman added that the bodies appeared to have been cut with knives and one man's skull caved in ...

See the difference?

Traditional reporting



- The news is bad. It is violent news and it does not seek other sides or points of view. It declares the worst: "peace talks...lay in ruins."
- It uses emotional and unnecessary words: massacre, mutilated, atrocity. It emphasizes the violence with words such as "mutilated bodies."
- It takes sides, describing the event from the point of view of the army spokesman. He says the patrol was attacked.

Conflict sensitive reporting



- The report goes further than violence and it reports people who condemn the violence.
- The news is balanced quickly: the NLA denies it attacked the patrol, but admits there was a battle.
- The other side is given the name it calls itself: the National Liberation Army.
- The violence is not hidden or ignored. But it is stated as a claim and not as a fact.

EXAMPLE #2



Traditional reporting

Yoho City, YNS – *The Prime Minister of Yoho has condemned a bomb blast in Yoho City by Atu terrorists that killed ten tourists yesterday.*

The prime minister said he has created a special army squad to track down the perpetrators of the massacre.

Police say the explosion occurred when terrorists from an Atu assassination squad brought a huge bomb into the Tourist Office in the city square. The bomb was probably located in a suitcase, said police captain Joe Blow. The terrorist-guerrilla Atu Front early this morning issued a statement denying it planted the bomb. But government sources say eyewitnesses saw Atu Front leader Sam Green at the city square yesterday. It is believed he coordinated the attack ...



Conflict sensitive reporting

Yoho City, YNS – *A mysterious explosion that killed 10 tourists was the work of an Atu separatist movement, the Prime minister of Yoho claimed yesterday.*

Police investigators are still examining the shattered city square where the blast occurred while tourists were getting off a tour bus at the Tourist Office yesterday.

The prime minister blamed the explosion on the self-styled Atu Front, which is fighting government forces in rural areas and demanding a republican government.

In a telephone interview Atu Front leader Sam Green denied any connection with the explosion and called it a tragedy.

The tour bus recently arrived from the nearby country of Butu, where a civil war is raging ...

See the difference?

Traditional reporting



- The news is full of blame and accusations with no proof. It takes the prime minister's side. It says the attackers were Atu terrorists. How does he know?
- It uses emotional language: massacre, terrorists, and assassination squad.
- It reports a claim by the police captain without proof. It reports unnamed government sources who say other unnamed people say they saw the Atu leader and blame him. There is no proof of this.

Conflict sensitive journalism



- It reports only what is known. The bomb is a mystery. It uses words carefully. It says the prime minister makes a claim. It says he blames Atu separatists.
- It calls the Atu separatists by the name they use. It seeks both sides' explanation and comment.
- It does not report emotional words like massacre. It does not report police speculation and police claims, which do not include names of witnesses.
- It reveals another possible explanation. The bomb may have been on a bus from another country in conflict.

Group work: The following news stories appeared on websites and report on fighting in Kachin State between the Kachin Independence Army and the Myanmar military. Review and discuss the stories below for conflict-sensitivity (Note: The stories are not reporting the same event but are related to the same conflict).

Heavy fighting on last day of census in Burma's northern Kachin state¹⁵

On the last day of the first census in Burma in decades, heavy fighting broke out between the government and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in southern Kachin state near the China border.

According to Kachin Independence Army officers, the armed-wing of KIO, fighting started on Thursday after government forces launched a military offensive against battalion 27 to try and re-capture its lucrative Bang Hkam gate close to the Burma-China border in southern Kachin state.

The Bang Hkam gate, near the Shweli River in Manwin village tract in Mansi Township, Bhamo district, is one of the main border routes for the timber trade to China's Nongdao camp. The area has been controlled by the KIA since the conflict restarted in June 2011.

More than 1,000 government troops from Light Infantry Division 88 and Military Operation Command 16 (MOC-16) have been involved in the current fighting, Maj. Zau Ba, KIA commander for Battalion 27, told the Kachin News Group (KNG).

On the first day of clashes, a KIO administrative office in Bang Hkung Yang village was captured by government forces, confirmed Lashi La Seng, head of KIO administration for battalion 27 area.

Four KIA soldiers were injured and more than 30 government soldiers were killed in the fighting during two-day clash, Commander Zau Ba said.

At the time of press KNG has not been able to independently confirm this information.

Three mortar shells fired from the Manwin government military, struck the KIO-controlled Lagat Yang IDP. No casualties or injuries have been reported, said Pastor Lahkang Awng Lum who provides assistance to IPS in the area.

IDPs flee to China¹⁶

Thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) have fled to the nearby China Nongdao Township in Yunnan province. They were forced out of their homes by new fighting that broke out near the Bang Hkam gate, close to the Burma-China border in southern Kachin state, said KIO officials.

The entire population of Lagat Yang camp, numbering over a 1,000, and over 10 ethnic Shan villages, were completely displaced by clashes, said Lashi La Seng, KIO battalion 27 administrative officer.

The fighting, from April 10 to 12, happened near the Shweli River in Manwin village tract in Mansi Township, Bhamo district.

The KIO has counted over 2,000 IDPs currently sheltering around Kawng Chang in Nongdao. An additional 1,000 displaced people are believed to be in China, near the border.

With the help of local Kachin Baptist and Roman Catholic churches, hundreds of IDPs have been safely transported to the nearby Nam Hkam Township in Shan state by trucks and motorcycles, said Pastor Lahkang Awng Lum, from Manwin Kachin Baptist Church.

IDPs are in desperate need of food and shelter as most were only able to leave with the clothes on their backs, said the pastor. There wasn't room to accommodate IDPs at the overcrowded, displaced people's camps in Manwin.

Burma's Kachin conflict escalates, drawing concern from UN¹⁷

BANGKOK — Ethnic rebel troops in Burma's northern Kachin state are the last insurgent groups to hold off signing a cease-fire with the government.

In recent weeks, fighting has spiked, sending a few thousand civilians fleeing. At the same time, the U.N. and other groups are raising concerns over reports that Burmese soldiers in the conflict are raping civilians.

This week, the U.N. joined international rights groups in calling on the Burmese government to investigate war crimes and sexual violence committed by the Burmese military.

The U.N. Security Council on Friday is expected to discuss a report in which Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calls on the Burmese government to fully investigate the allegations of sexual violence perpetrated by the army.

The outcry comes amidst fighting in rebel-controlled areas in Kachin state, where observers estimate at least 3,000 people have fled fighting between the Burmese military and the rebel Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

The medical aid group *Free Burma Rangers* has been sending medics and documentation teams to war-torn areas for more than a decade.

A team leader, who asked not to be named to avoid retribution from the government, said his team interviewed a teenage rape victim who had fled a village attacked by the army.

"You can lose your family members, you can lose your life, you can be tortured to death, you can definitely lose your possessions, you can be afraid you might get raped, and you might get killed. These are all real things that are happening and for some people it's not a maybe anymore, it's happened already. So I think what's happening is evil should and should be stopped," the FBR team leader said.

The Free Burma Rangers documentation team claimed they also found evidence of torture in recently attacked villages.

Burma government spokesperson Ye Htut told VOA the army attacks in the rebel areas were in retaliation for the death of a high-ranking officer who was killed while off-duty.

The spokesperson pledged the government of Burma, also known as Myanmar, will take action against soldiers found to be committing crimes.

"I can guarantee you that the government and the Myanmar military are practicing zero tolerance on torturing civilians and using rape as a weapon. So if they provide the evidence on this issue, we are ready to take action against whoever was responsible for this crime,» said Ye Htut.

KIA General Gun Maw, speaking to VOA in Washington this week, expressed concern that the ongoing fighting could jeopardise peace talks scheduled to take place next month.

He said that as a member of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, he normally goes to Rangoon to attend the NCCT meetings, but he will have to reconsider those plans should the fighting become more severe.

During his visit to Washington, he requested the U.S. send representatives to attend the peace talks, but the State Department has yet to respond.

Representatives from the Chinese government have played a mediating role in the past.

The site of the most recent clashes in southern Kachin state is a busy transit point near the Chinese border with popular illegal logging and trade routes, a gas pipeline and government-controlled opium fields.

Analysts said the clashes put the Burmese government in a better bargaining position for future peace talks, and also serve to undermine the alliance between the KIA and neighbouring ethnic armies.

5. Newsroom cultures

Professionalism versus patriotism

No journalist can be completely objective. Journalists, like everyone else, carry the values of their home country, their religion and their ethnic group. That is why professional journalists have standards for accuracy, impartiality and responsibility, to remove our personal values and bias.

But, when there is a violent threat in a society the media sometimes takes sides. This happened in Nepal. The government declared a State of Emergency and mobilised the army to fight the Maoists who were leading an insurgency to topple monarchy and the democratic system that was in place. Initially, major media companies largely agreed and did not concern themselves with the fact that the Emergency took away media freedoms. And many media used the words that the government used to describe the Maoists: "terrorists", for example, which is a term loaded with meaning. In some ways it is similar to saying, "We use the word Bengali because the government also does."¹⁸

This is not, however, a problem only for poorer, less developed countries. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, media in the United States largely failed in their coverage of the complexities of the issues involved, along with turning a relative blind eye to legislation that would impinge on the rights of American citizens. And in America's wars that have followed, the main media companies have largely echoed the government views.

Very quickly, in all instances discussed above, the media became narrow in focus because they were mainly reporting the voice of the government or their interest groups. At the same time, it became more difficult for journalists to independently report on and analyse opposing sides. Journalists in Nepal, for example, then began censoring their own work and/or began to take (political) sides and lost impartiality.

In Sri Lanka, the two main ethnic groups, the Sinhala and the Tamils, live together in the capital city. But each side has completely separate media that rarely make positive reports about the other side.¹⁹ The partisan cov-

erage of the Tamil and Sinhala media has been widely documented. Such media create suspicion, distrust and potential for conflict.



Examples of Sinhala and Tamil newspaper reportage of the same event: The first story says, "Five students in Trinco died when a bomb which they were fixing exploded." The second story says, "Five Tamil students shot dead last night in Trinco – five injured; two seriously."

When a newsroom reports the news by looking at everything only from one side against the other it hinders reporters from thinking independently. Reporters accept one side's word for what is happening. But, if we do not talk to and report the other side, how will we know when something has changed? We will lose the values of reliable journalism and will no longer communicate, educate and dispel myths.



Reaching the other side

One way professional journalists can help bridge the barriers between opposing sides is to search for stories about what is common to both sides. For example, it can be news about common environmental concerns, business prospects, health concerns or new farming techniques. And the stories can also report solutions that can be shared by both sides.

Another way of breaking the barriers is to write stories about trans-ethnic identities, or people who are national heroes. These are people who come from one group or region to represent the whole country in, for example, sport, business, international politics or education.

The most important way is to remove stereotypes and assumptions from our news. Stereotypes always reinforce what is different about the other side, such as race or religion or caste, as if it is important. Such reports assume that the other side always acts in certain ways and never changes. Stereotypes blame the other side's religion, caste or culture for whatever happens. Such reports are often wrong and create prejudice and conflict.

Always ask yourself: is race, religion or caste important in my report. If not, remove it.

*Newspapers on sale at a roadside shop
in Yangon, Myanmar. Photo: IMS*

EXAMPLE #3 (Traditional reporting vs. conflict sensitive journalism)



Traditional reporting

Yoho City, YNS – *New battles in the city's ethnic gang war left seven youth dead and a warehouse destroyed on Tuesday night.*

Gunfire and Molotov cocktails were exchanged between rival gangs of Yoho and Atu young men for nearly 20 minutes in what one policeman called "an ethnic shoot-out."

One resident said a young Atu man screamed, "We'll kill you all," as he threw a petrol bomb into a car full of young Yoho men parked outside the warehouse.

The young man was shot dead by a Yoho man firing from a window of the warehouse, said another resident.

Other Atu gang members were seen throwing petrol bombs into the warehouse windows and the building was destroyed by fire. The two gangs have been waging an ethnic war in the area for several weeks, police officials said ...



Conflict sensitive journalism

Yoho City, YNS – *The illegal narcotics trade plaguing the city triggered a gunfight on Tuesday night between two groups over drug dealing in a downtown area.*

The shoot-out that killed seven people involved young men recruited by rival narcotics dealers trying to control the area, according to local residents.

Four of the dead were Yoho youths hired to guard a warehouse that residents believe was a drug distribution center, said Jane Brown, chairperson of the East-Side Citizens' Association.

Other drug dealers trying to take over the Eastside have recruited unemployed young Atu men and have armed them with guns, said Ms. Brown.

The police have refused to deal with the drug trade that makes our street into a battleground. We need a police station, money for treatment centers and ...

See the difference?

Traditional reporting



- The report begins with vivid details of violence and blames it on ethnic groups. It repeatedly names people's ethnic group.
- The report uses the opinion of an unnamed policeman as a fact.
- The report gives more details of the violence, but no explanation for the violence.
- The report does not seek out other interests or points of view.

Conflict sensitive journalism



- The report carefully avoids ethnic identity in the lead because it is not the most important thing.
- The report shows the violence, but explains drug dealers are the real cause.
- The report reveals ethnic identities, but shows they are victims.
- The report seeks out other sources of information, with solutions.
- The report shows the failure of the police to provide solutions.

EXAMPLE #4



Traditional reporting

Yoho City, YNS – Another Atu tailor shop was fire-bombed yesterday in the continuing wave of ethnic hatred in the city.

The Atu shop at 21 Main Street was burned to the ground and the owner's family narrowly escaped death after the attack.

Nearly half of the tailor shops in the city are owned by Atu residents. At least nine shops have suffered vandalism and attacks in the past three months.

The recent attacks are linked to the wave of tension between Atu and Yoho residents in the city, reflecting the civil war between Atu separatists and the government in the northern part of the country.



Conflict sensitive journalism

Yoho City, YNS – A 52-year-old man who sells sewing equipment has been arrested in connection with the fire-bombing of a tailor shop in the city.

The man is accused of telling shop owners to buy his equipment for their shops and threatening them if they did not.

The man was charged with extortion yesterday, nearly two weeks after an Atu shop on Main St. was set on fire at night and destroyed. Police are investigating to see if the man is connected to other recent fires at Atu or other tailor shops.

At least nine Atu shops have been attacked recently. Atu shop owners claimed they were victims of Yoho prejudice.

See the difference?

Traditional reporting



- The report gives ethnic identity importance. It assumes that ethnic conflict is the cause. There is no proof.
- The report does not seek out any other sources or opinions. It gives no sources.

Conflict sensitive journalism



- The ethnic identity is not reported immediately, because it is not important.
- The report reveals it was extortion and not ethnic conflict.



Checklist against prejudice

Journalists need to make a conscious effort to check if their stories are prejudiced. This list, adapted from The Sunday Times of South Africa, can help to guard against stories that encourage prejudice. Ask yourself:

- Is this necessary news? What is the public interest in this report?
- Is it news only because it is about the other side?
- Even if the facts are correct, will this report encourage prejudice? Can it be reported differently?
- Are there enough different voices in the report? Did we ask enough different opinions from ordinary people and experts?
- Are there words and comments in the report that offend people or cause prejudice? Are these comments balanced by other comments?
- In crime news, are we reporting the race or culture of the offender and the victim? Is this information necessary and in the public interest? Why?

Newsroom diversity

Reliable journalism is accurate, balanced and responsible. Culture, race and religion should have no influence on our reporting. We are supposed to be colour-blind. And our newsrooms and offices should represent the many colours of race, gender, religion, ethnicity and culture. We need to be diverse if we are to represent the society we come from.

But, often our newsrooms are not diverse. We have no reporters from "the other side," culture or ethnicity. We do not put reporters of different race, religion or culture together as a team in order to counter-balance prejudices. We should, because that brings diverse voices and ideas into our newsrooms.

If we are not diverse we would have no contacts with "the other side" and no sources on the other side, and therefore we would not have stories of other sides from different parts of the country. We should.

We, generally, also have very few female reporters and do not report issues of importance to women. So, our reporting does not represent

the reality of our country. We treat women differently. We must treat women equally.

The diversity in a newsroom and in the news is an important measure of the media's role in conflict. Media can lead society by example, or can increase divisions in society. Diverse media can also show society how working together can be good for the country.

Diversity checklist



- Does the amount of news about the other side or other culture equal the other side's proportion in our society?
- Do positive reports about minorities only appear in certain sections of the news, such as sports or cultural events?
- Who in the newsroom has good contacts or reliable sources on the other side?
- Are reporters recruited from minority communities and are they trained, mentored/coached for upgrading skills?
- Are there guidelines for achieving more diversity in the newsroom and in the news we report? Are the plans led by a respected person with authority to make diversity happen?

6. Conflict sensitive journalism in Myanmar²⁰

Most, if not all of the content in this manual is applicable for journalism in most countries. This section expands on some of the ideas discussed in the manual in the context of Myanmar.

Accuracy, impartiality and responsibility help us to do journalism that is acceptable to all sides. If we are not seen as impartial, we could put our media and ourselves at risk.

A journalist's primary responsibility is to report fairly, accurately and impartially on changes that are taking place around them, and in doing so they need to do it in the public interest. We can best report in the public interest by including all sides in the reports, continuously looking beyond the obvious and visible, while taking care to provide aggrieved parties with adequate opportunity to voice their concerns.

The right use of language is also important, particularly because it is often not what is said that could be problematic but how something is said. For example, referring to Rohinghas as Bengalis without stating that that the 'government does not recognise Rohinghas but refers to them as Bengalis could easily put the journalist on the side of the government to a Rohingya/Bengali audience. This would be an example of using language that one group or groups use to refer to 'the Other'. In such situations, a journalist should always attribute the information and not use the labels that one side uses to refer to 'the Other' in a manner that infers the journalist also accepts the label.

Journalists must also be wary of myths and propaganda and must take care not to report such sentiments as fact. For example, Rohinghas/Bengalis in Myanmar are generally accused of purposefully having higher birth rates to outnumber and eventually dominate other populations.²¹ Is there a truth behind this belief? Journalists can do research and actually find out if this is something done on purpose or if it is possibly related to other factors such as poverty and the need to have large families in order to have people to work on farms and other vocations in rural areas. Also, journalists should be asking if the statement above is true for all people belonging to the group and if there are exceptions – people who have

smaller families – and write about their findings. Generally, there could be different reasons for certain groups to have larger families. These could be religious, economic or otherwise. Most importantly, journalists should stop and ask themselves if the allegation about higher birth rates is an attempt to justify violence against the victims?

Our job as journalists is to provide accurate and unbiased information. As a result, we must refrain from glorifying violence and reproducing prejudice towards people and groups based on ethnicity, race, gender and religion.

There is a tendency of media to over-simplify conflict and take the path towards sensationalism. What this leads to is provocative language and alarming headlines. Headings should reflect and justify content, taking care that they do not reduce a complex conflict to a simple two-sided affair. The headline 'Punks vs. Monks: Rockers Speak Out Against Genocide in Myanmar'²² appeared on various Internet sites in 2013. Not only did the headline not indicate what was in the content, but the article also did not say whether it was a claim made by someone or some group that the journalists had decided to use. Furthermore, the use of language could also be problematic to some. 'Punk' is a term that has negative connotations, and its use puts that label on artists who are likely not worthless.²³ Moreover, some groups could also find the use of the term 'genocide' out of place.

Points for discussion

- Is this cartoon abetting conflict sensitive journalism?
- Is it confined to fact-based depictions, or is it facilitating the spread of unconfirmed rumours?
- In an already highly charged local climate conducive to violence, is this cartoon further fanning the emotions of parties involved?
- Is this cartoon helping the different sides to better understand one another?



It is also not uncommon for Myanmar media to rely excessively on unnamed

sources to tell their stories. Even though having unnamed sources is acceptable in journalism (in specific circumstances), journalists should make it a rule to name sources whenever possible. The use of unnamed sources should be an exception, because doing so makes those responsible for providing the information unaccountable. Where sources are not named, the reporter should have at least discussed the matter with the editor to justify why it was done. This procedure is done in most news organisations that practice professional journalism.

Verification of sources is one way to ensure that the journalist is obtaining and using them correctly. This is particularly important in Myanmar, where there have been instances of information taken from social media without adequate verification and subsequently been reproduced or reposted.²⁴ While social media can serve as a source of important tips for journalists, not all information obtained from the Internet is accurate or contains verified facts.

Annexes

Annex 1: Sample stories carried out by trainees following CSJ training

The following are some of the stories that were done by trainees following their CSJ training in Myanmar. The stories illustrate how reporters can go beyond reporting facts and contextualise issues. These can be used by trainers for discussion sessions.

Example 1: Uprooted lives at Myitsone

By Htwe Awng, Htein Nan Larein, Ye Myint Tun, Aung Min Oo, and Tin Oo

Small boats with outboard motors travel tirelessly upstream on the Irrawaddy heading to the gold mining area in Swanprabum along the Maikha River. Maikha and Malikha, the two main tributaries of the mighty Irrawaddy, meet at Myitsone from where the Irrawaddy begins its 1,250 km journey to the sea.

A decade ago, we could drink water directly from the Irrawaddy. Now the water is murky and resembles milk tea, says a villager who was idling on the banks.

Plantations in Tanpheye village, along the road to Myitsone, have been damaged or ruined by the heavy equipment used for gold mining. The loose debris eventually finds its way into the river.

Tanpheye at Myitsone used to get a large number of visitors before the bulldozers moved in. That is changing because only a few people remain in the settlement to serve food and drinks to whoever happens to stop by.

The village will be the site of one of seven dams the government plans to build. Two of the dams are planned on the Malikha, four on Maikha and one on the confluence of the two rivers.

Most of the villagers have already been moved to new settlements as part of the resettlement plan. However, many of them feel constricted in the new surroundings and some said many want to return to the old houses where they had more room for children to play and move around.

Many adults from the new settlement go to the river to pan for gold every day. Those that are lucky can make up to 3,000 kyat (US\$3) a day, that is if they are not spotted and chased off by the authorities.

"Digging and panning for gold is prohibited so we have to work in constant fear. But we have no other livelihood options, which is why we have to come here," said a villager who did not disclose his name. "We flee when we see men in uniform. But we go back because we don't have skills for doing other types of work," he added.

The villagers now live in Aung Myin Thar Model Village where they were forcefully resettled when construction on the Myitsone Dam project began. Most of these villagers had farmland, which they do not have in their new homes. They said the soil is rocky and barren and unfit for cultivation. The fields and plantations around the village are owned by businessmen from Myitkyina and finding work there is not easy.

"We have no work and no farmland at Aung Myin Thar," said Yue Nuu, who was among those villagers we met on the riverbank near Myistone. "We have been coming here to find something by which to make an income for three years now."

The villagers were compensated for the displacement, but most of them have already spent the money they were given.

"The compensation we received had to be spent on mending leaky roofs built by them (the contractors). Our houses are surrounded by wet swampy ground during the rainy season," said Yue Nuu. "Since there is no work (at the new village), all of us want to go back home (to the old village)".

She adds, "Not only me, all of us would go back if the government were to allow us."

The villagers from Tanphey were relocated in early May of 2011. The land where the model village was built had been flooded when the Kyeinkhayan Dam collapsed, covering the fields with debris. Asia World Company – the company building the dam – bulldozed the land to build the new village. The land has very little topsoil needed for agriculture.

"We cannot grow anything here and have to go to the forests to find wild vegetables. It is very difficult for the elderly who cannot easily move around," said Hla Buu, a resident of the model village. Back at Tanpheye everything was available and we also had some good land. Here we have to buy everything."

Their added daily expenditure includes transport to the places where they can find work and that adds up to about 3,000 kyat.

"We have to spend extra money for daily conveyance. I don't know how to explain the hardships and inconveniences as there are many," said Khaun Nan, who does slash-and-burn farming in Myitsone.

After relocation, the villagers are also experiencing changes in lifestyles and family structures.

"Many people have died after we came here (to the new village). Some died of easily curable illnesses and diseases. Others died of depression and hopelessness," said a 60-year-old woman. "If we go to the old village we could be arrested, and without work we cannot have money for treatment and medicines," he added.

Following the country's move towards democracy, on 30 September 2011 President Thein Sein suspended all work on the Myitsone Dam. The contractors moved the heavy machinery and equipment back to China in early 2013, but the villagers from Tanpheye have not been allowed to return.

According to a June 2009 report in the state-run New Light of Myanmar, when complete the dams are to generate 6,000 MW of electricity, bringing in US\$ 500 million annually.

The Myitsone projects will comprise seven in total when complete and will flood 48,000 hectares (about 120,000 acres), an area almost equal the size of Singapore. Flooding will directly affect about 18,000 people from 49 villages.

The Kachin State Peace and Development Committee Chairman, Commander of Northern Command, Minister of Electrical Power, Minister

of Telecommunications, Vice-Chairman of China's CPI Corporation and officials from Asia World had met the local people when the project began in 2009.

The villagers had explained that they could not move because their livelihoods depended on farming. Yet, the visitors had assured them, saying they could cultivate their lands after the project was completed.

However, 22 people from the model village were arrested in March 2012 when they returned to the old village to cultivate their lands. They were released only after they pledged not to go back.

According to villagers, school dropouts have also increased at the new settlement because children have been forced to seek work to complement family incomes. This information could not be confirmed independently.

"In the past, children could earn something easily to meet school expenses by working for a few hours. That is no longer possible because of the distance and the control on panning," said a schoolteacher at the model village.

On 14 March, World Rivers Day, the villagers from the model village petitioned the government demanding that they be allowed to return to their old homes.

"If we have to stay here forever, I will die disappointed by the miserable situation, worrying about the future of my children," says Hal Buu. "Back home (at the old village) we could survive with only a machete, life was much easier there."

Example 2: Nothing shall prevent appointment of men to positions that are suitable for men only

By Nyo Thu Nwe

Soe Soe Nwe always wanted to be a doctor who could save lives. She passed her matriculation examination in 2010 only to realise that she would not be able to live her dream because the medical institute's admission office had raised the cut-off marks for enrolment of girls that academic year.

The mark was 30 points higher than that required for boys. She is now a third year student in dentistry.

"I am doing well and everything is okay, but here we only have a few girls. Our teachers say dentists must be strong physically as we would have to extract teeth," she said. "I don't think it is a reasonable excuse to discriminate between male and female students," she added.

Under Myanmar's education system, admissions in leading institutions of medicine, dentistry, engineering, marine sciences and business is determined by the scores students get in their matriculation exams.

Each institute has a strict number of new students it can admit each year, and that number determines the cut-off mark.

Girls like Soe Soe Nwe have no issues with the system but are forced to raise questions when the cut off marks for girls are higher than those for boys. This is a system of discrimination that has become acceptable in Myanmar but a new generation of girls are also starting to ask questions.

In a society where males generally have a domineering role, the discrimination in education helps extend the status quo.

When we asked Han Htoo Lwin, a student of dentistry, he said, "There is gender discrimination in university admissions but not in our college. Both male and female students can do everything, the regulations should now be changed."

However, the thinking among some female medical students is different. "More male doctors are needed in hospitals. Female doctors cannot cope with the stress in the profession. Male doctors are also more suitable for night duty."

A female MP in parliament raised the gender gap in representation at its sixth session. The lower house currently has 4.3 per cent women members and the cabinet has members who are deputy ministers. MP Daw Khin Saw Wai then moved a motion asking parliament to make ways for inducting more women.

The motion was defeated by the argument that certain ministries had more women staff compared to men.

Though this is possibly true, the number of women tapers in higher positions. Even in lower level openings the conditions put on women are stricter compared to those placed on men.

Some job advertisements require female job seekers to be single and produce documents to prove they are not married.

Myanmar's 2008 constitution guarantees equal opportunity to all citizens regardless of race, creed and gender. But, there is a line in the constitution that defeats the purpose of this article. According to Daw Nyo Nyo Thin, Yangon Region Legislative Assembly member, it says; "However, nothing in this section shall prevent appointment of men to positions that are suitable for men only."

Annex 2: Suggested agenda for conflict sensitive journalism training

The following is an outline of the issues covered as a part of the CSJ training in Myanmar and is recommended for similar trainings. Trainers are also advised to use more local examples to ensure that trainees understand issues as intended.

Part one:

1. Understanding conflict: Introduce conflicts and discuss local conflicts with trainees. Some of the local conflicts that trainees suggest could result in story ideas that the trainees could pursue.
2. Conflict in Myanmar: This can be a brain-storming session that can help the trainer understand the context and also the understanding of trainees about conflicts. The following key words could be used to prompt the discussions:
 - Political
 - Environmental
 - Ethnic
 - Religious
 - Resource-related
 - Poverty
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Labour-related
3. Story ideas and practical feedback: This session can build on #2 and help in assisting trainees to start thinking about potential stories early in the training. Trainers can encourage them to discuss and refine ideas.

Part two:

4. Good journalism versus bad journalism: This session generally focuses on professionalism in journalism as well as good and bad journalism as discussed in this manual.
5. Staying safe – Personal safety when covering conflicts: Safety can be integrated in all trainings on journalism and it is particularly impor-

tant for countries in transition and in conflicts. Depending on the time available, trainers can adjust the length of the safety section.

6. Revisiting participant story ideas: Holding discussions on story ideas can help break the monotony of lectures. It also helps trainees to broaden their thinking about sources, story-angles and focus.
7. Re-writing of stories: Trainees can be assigned to follow up on their story ideas and deliver drafts of what they are thinking of writing about. Trainers can allow some time for trainees who are able to line up interviews to follow up on their stories. For effective management, it might be useful to organise trainees in small story groups to ensure that everyone participates in the process.

Part three:

8. Conflict sensitive journalism checklist: This discussion is based on the CSJ manual, using as many local examples as possible.
9. Discussion of hate-speech and words and phrases that are used despite their potential to spread hate.
10. Ethics and objectivity: This session can again draw from professional journalism and could include examples and discussions on ethics and codes and the debate over objectivity vs. fairness in journalism.

Annex 3: Basic journalism

News writing²⁵

Not all journalists in all countries may have a uniform understanding of journalism. This is particularly so for countries emerging from long conflicts, or those without experience with free and independent media. This section summarises the basics of journalism and newswriting.

News stories are written with a focus on information. They try to answer the basic questions relating to an event. Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How? News stories are organised with the aim of conveying the most important information first, while less important details follow in order of importance. The structure is usually represented by an inverted pyramid – with the most important information being delivered in the first few paragraphs. Generally:

- The lead, or the first sentence of a news story, provides the most important information, with as many of the 5Ws answered as possible. If the lead does not have information addressing the 5Ws, it is invariably provided in the next paragraph – together with the How.
- News paragraphs are concise – one idea, one sentence and one paragraph.

News stories have direct quotations, or things that the sources said, as they said it. Quotations help to keep the story moving forward.

News stories have no place for the opinion of the reporter.

Feature stories²⁶

Feature stories aim to do much more than hard news stories. They convey facts, but they also tell the stories of the people involved. Typically, a lead or the first sentence of a feature story should set the scene, or describe a place or tell a story. But whatever the approach to storytelling, the first sentence or lead must grab the reader's attention and make them want to read on. In other words, it should build a sense of anticipation about the rest of the story – the reader must feel that the story is a must read. Thereafter a feature story must:

- Set the scene for the story and bring the people and places in it to life. Good descriptions prompt readers to create mental images in their minds. Any time you accomplish that, you're engaging the reader in your story.

- Good quotes are absolutely essential in feature stories. Ideally, a feature story should include only the most colourful and interesting quotes. Everything else should be paraphrased.
- Anecdotes are very short stories within the feature story. They can be incredibly effective in illustrating key points or in bringing people and incidents to life, and they are often used to construct feature leads.
- Background information is vital. All the well-written descriptions and colourful quotes in the world will not suffice if you do not have solid information (facts) or evidence. Use facts to clearly and unequivocally make your points.

News features²⁷

A news feature is a story related to a current event or situation that is of interest to readers and combines feature writing techniques with elements of hard news reporting. Generally:

- News features should appeal to a broad, general newspaper readership.
- The lead could be a topical question or a statistic that alludes to your most important point.
- Seek to educate readers or give them tips and information that they can apply to their daily lives, taking care that it does not read like an advertisement or press release.
- A news feature could include detailed in-depth analysis and extensive diverse comments from various stakeholders which could not be done in a short and hurried news story.
- Can end by 1) informing readers where they can get further information 2) returning to the key question, or 3) providing a climax or, in some cases, even asking a key question.

Opinion pieces²⁸

The nature of an opinion/editorial piece requires it to present an argument: that something is or is not so, is or is not worthy, why somebody should or should not do something, etc. If you are not arguing any of the above, an Op/Ed can also predict the outcome of certain events: what will occur if a political figure does or does not take action on an issue, or who could win an election and why, for example. Generally:

- Opinion pieces must have a thesis. This sentence determines if you have a point to argue or not. Do not argue something that is already "known".
- Typically, Op/Eds are not long. So, make your argument, but keep it concise.
- Write on current issues. Timeliness is important.
- Try to construct a short, compelling introductory sentence that encapsulates the idea of the piece and instantly engages the reader.
- Offer proof to support your opinion, adding rarely known facts when possible and appropriate.
- Do not be afraid to have a strong opinion and show your own personality in the piece.
- Write a strong, conclusive last sentence or paragraph.

Note: These are very basic guidelines on the different narratives of journalism. Trainers should hold discussions and elaborate on the points.

Annex 4: IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists²⁹

This document sets a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events. Other organisations can also set their own codes.

- Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
- In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right to fair comment and criticism.
- The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
- The journalist shall only use fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
- The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
- The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
- The journalist shall be alert to the danger of discrimination being furthered by media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discriminations based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national and social origins.
- The journalist shall regard as grave professional offenses the following: plagiarism; malicious misinterpretation; calumny; libel; slander; unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.

- Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognize in matters of professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of any kind of interference by governments or others.

Additional Reference List

Electronic

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- The Irrawaddy: www.irrawaddy.org
- Mizzima: www.mizzima.com
- Reporters Without Borders: <http://en.rsf.org/burma.html>
- The World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

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Footnotes

- 1 *Census 1983. At the time of publication the results of the latest census (2014) were not yet known.*
- 2 *Burma (as it was then known) won its independence from Britain in 1948. This publication uses the official name Myanmar while referring to the country.*
- 3 *Thereafter the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) and Amyothar Hluttaw (upper house) elected three vice-presidents. The members of parliament then picked a president from the three vice-presidents.*
- 4 *In total, 46 seats were contested in the by-election.*
- 5 *Details of the conflicts in Myanmar are available at <http://bnionline.net/images/2013/pdf/Deciphering-Myanmar's-Peace-Process-For-Web.pdf>.*
- 6 *The Rohingyas are also not included in the 135 official ethnic groups.*
- 7 *BNI. Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide 2013. (<http://bnionline.net/images/2013/pdf/Deciphering-Myanmar's-Peace-Process-For-Web.pdf>)*
- 8 *Thomas G. Ryan. Identity Dilemmas: The Consequence of Identity in Protracted Conflict. handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA553002*
- 9 *<http://www.dvb.no/news/chinese-controversy-surrounds-miss-universe-myanmar-burma/33376>*
- 10 *International Media Support. January 2012. Change is in the Air: 'An assessment of media development challenges and opportunities'. Page 23*
- 11 *Louis Kriesberg, 1998. Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.*

- 12 An example of this type of discrimination had appeared in Mizzima (Burmese) in 2013. <http://www.mizzimaburmese.com/2013-10-20-16-57-18/item/17428-2014-01-10-04-17-32>
- 13 Article 19 says, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."
- 14 The Myanmar government has since passed certain legislation incorporating media reform. See, for example: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/media-03052014163116.html>.
- 15 <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2644-heavy-fighting-on-last-day-of-census-in-burma-s-northern-kachin-state.html> (viewed 30 April 2014)
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 <http://www.voanews.com/content/burmas-kachin-conflict-escalates-drawing-concern-from-un/1900995.html> (viewed on 30 April 2014)
- 18 This is what a participant at the CSJ training in Yangon said.
- 19 The Sri Lankan civil war came to a violent close in 2009. That also marked another turning point in terms of media freedoms and questions have been asked of the media's reliability, particularly accuracy, impartiality and responsibility.
- 20 Any reference to a specific Myanmar media outlet is in no way intended to discredit the respective media group. All media companies – in Myanmar and throughout the world – make mistakes and struggle with elements of conflict sensitive journalism. The examples given are simply to remind us all what to look out for and how to be better professional journalists.
- 21 <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/myanmar/131011/rohingya-demographics-population-boom-myth>

- 22 http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/guest_bloggers/7241/punks_vs_monks_rockers_speak_out_against_genocide_in_myanmar
- 23 The Oxford Dictionary defines 'punk' as an informal North American word used to refer to 'a worthless person' (often used as a general term of abuse). Other meanings are 'a criminal or thug'; in U.S. prison slang, 'a passive male homosexual', and 'an inexperienced young person'. Another meaning relates to musicians, amongst others.
- 24 A recent example of this is the role of social media in the July 2014 communal violence in Mandalay, which at one point led to the government blocking access to Facebook.
- 25 Adapted from Lori Kurtzman.
- 26 Adapted from Tony Rogers.
- 27 Adapted from NewsUSA.
- 28 Adapted from John Timpone and Andy Mollison.

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