

Peace Journalism in East Africa

This concise edited collection explores the practice of peace journalism in East Africa, focusing specifically on the unique political and economic contexts of Uganda and Kenya.

The book offers a refreshing path toward transformative journalism in East Africa through imbibing pan-African institutional methodological approaches and the African philosophies of *Utu* (humanity), *Umoja* (unity), and *Harambee* (collective responsibility) as news values. Contributions from key academics demonstrate how media practices that are supportive of peace can prevent the escalation of conflict and promote its nonviolent resolution. The chapters cumulatively represent a rich repertoire of experiences and cases that skillfully tell the story of the connections between media and peacebuilding in East Africa, while also avoiding romanticizing peace journalism as an end to itself or using it as an excuse for censorship.

This cutting-edge research book is a valuable resource for academics in journalism, media studies, communication, peace and conflict studies, and sociology.

Fredrick Ogenga is Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies; Founding Director, Center for Media, Democracy, Peace, and Security, Rongo University; and President of the Peacemaker Corps Foundation Kenya. Ogenga is championing a pan-African journalistic institutional approach for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.



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Peace Journalism in East Africa

A Manual for Media Practitioners

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Introduction

Fredrick Ogenga

This publication is the outcome of the “East Africa Regional Peace Journalism Training Workshop” for journalists covering conflict and peacebuilding in East Africa. Organized by Rongo University’s Center for Media, Democracy, Peace, and Security (CMDPS) in partnership with the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the two-day event brought together journalists from five East African countries – Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda – to develop their capacity for reporting on conflict-related issues in an objective manner based on the tenets of the theory and practice of peace journalism.

The workshop also served as a forum for facilitating discussions and networking between journalists and scholars from diverse East African countries working on peace and conflict at local, national, and regional levels. Participants also learned more about the APN-SSRC, including the opportunities it provides to support research and networking activities between scholars and practitioners across Africa. They also learned about how to effectively use peace-promoting approaches, tools, and platforms for covering and reporting stories on conflict and peacebuilding.

This book brings together and captures the presentations, discussions, and outcomes of the workshop. The chapters that follow are based on the presentations by the lead speakers at the workshop. They explore the various dimensions of violent conflict, particularly the way it is reported in the media and how such reports affect society. This analysis comes against the background of the role some media reports have played in the outbreak of violence across East Africa, particularly in fanning the embers of election-related violence or mass anxiety and fear following terrorist attacks. For example, media coverage of Kenya’s disputed 2007 elections contributed to the escalation of the conflict resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and destruction

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of property. Apart from the adverse impact on the image of Kenya as a peaceful and prosperous nation, reports of communal and political conflict or the threat of violence in other East African states have undermined local, national, and regional efforts at peacebuilding. It is against this background that some media scholars and practitioners underscore the importance of paying more attention to the need for “peace journalism” as a strategy for peacemaking and peacebuilding.

These experts are of the view that sensitivity to peace and the non-violent prevention and resolution of conflict are best captured within the conceptual framework of “peace journalism” that, in addition to its emphasis on accurate reporting on matters of public interest, employs a variety of techniques to de-escalate social tensions. Peace journalism is not reporting that is wholly or even primarily oriented toward peace at all costs; it does not sacrifice truth and justice for a “law and order” type of peace as defined by the state. Peace journalism brings together certain elements that are essential to promoting peace in East African countries. The enabling elements of this form of journalism include sensitivity, agility, caution, factual information, and self-reflectivity in relation to what media practitioners put into the content of news reports and editorials.

Due to the reality that East African countries vary with respect to the nature of conflicts and the degree of media freedom, these elements may not be practically applicable across the board but will depend on the relevant circumstances. For instance, covering a civil war will differ from reporting on terrorism or political or election-related conflict. However, these elements and the values embedded in peace journalism will help foster a culture of peace and nonviolent conflict resolution across the region. It will also facilitate the creation of a media space within which practitioners, scholars, and other stakeholders can learn from and support one another. This approach to information and knowledge dissemination will foster new insights and help develop innovative journalism.

This publication provides insights and knowledge aimed at strengthening the capacity of media practitioners for improved and ethically sound coverage of conflict and peacebuilding in East Africa, with the goal of improving the prospects for peace and development. It is expected that it will become a manual for those seeking to understand and imbibe the values of peace journalism and reflect them in their day-to-day activities and conflict reporting in ways that bring the fourth estate – journalism – into the mainstream of peacebuilding in East Africa.

In the first chapter, “The Peace Journalism Approach,” Steven Youngblood provides an overview and operational definition of peace journalism, outlining its evolution, principles, and giving examples of peace journalism in print media. Making the case for peace journalism, the chapter urges media practitioners to avoid the use of inflammatory language when covering elections and conflicts. To better prepare journalists for peace-centered reporting during conflict situations, the author encourages them to hold in-house peace and election reporting training for reporters covering upcoming elections in Africa. The chapter explores the importance of word choice and news framing as important aspects in the promotion of peace journalism in Africa.

The second chapter, “Peace Journalism in the LRA Conflict” by Gloria Laker, explores the role of peace journalism in ending the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency (1988–2006) in northern Uganda, drawing on Laker’s own experience as a war reporter. She provides a compelling case study about how a radio station founded by the Ugandan military called “Radio Freedom” morphed into the much larger and more impactful Mega FM radio station, helping to end the LRA conflict by directly reaching out to enemy combatants and persuading them to surrender with an assurance of amnesty. The chapter shows in practical terms how a radio station used its broadcasts to help sow the seeds of peace in northern Uganda, for which it has been widely credited.

The point of departure is the third and fourth chapters by Fredrick Ogenga. In Chapter 3, “Thinking about Community Radio and Beyond for Conflict Management in The North Rift: A Concept Paper,” Ogenga problematizes the emerging conflict trend in counties in the North Rift, Kenya, fueled by many issues among them natural resource pressure due to climate change and destruction of the Mau water tower. He points out the urgent need to address these emerging conflict trends in a creative manner that allows grassroots community participation and ownership and, at the same time, utilizing traditional and new media technology arguing that the media has the advantage of wide reach and technical capacity to change attitudes and perceptions for peace and security especially when it considers local contexts and nuances which calls for African ways of seeing for peacebuilding (African Peace Journalism).

Chapter 4 is titled “Hybrid Peace Journalism: Institutional Philosophical Approaches to Peace and Security in Africa.” Chapter 3 therefore gives a conceptual overview of a Hybrid (African) Peace Journalism (HPJ) in the context of emerging terrorist threats in Kenya. He explains

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how his unique approach to peace journalism eclectically combines elements from Western peace journalism and African *gnosis* (lenses) in conflict-sensitive reporting. HPJ is based on development journalism that portrays Africa in a positive light. Hinged upon *Utu* (humanity), *Umoja* (unity), and *Harambee* (collective responsibility) as core African values, this approach also offers a counternarrative to Western-style journalism that tends to focus on sensationalized and largely negative versions of Africa-related news. The chapter also includes information on the several HPJ-related programs at Rongo University, including a master's degree in media, democracy, peace, and security; the Salah Farah Visiting Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship on Media and Terrorism; and the Campus Peace Ambassadors club run by undergraduates studying journalism.

Chapter 5, "Re-Situating Vernacular Media: A Tool for Peace Building among the Abakuria in Kenya" by John Oluoch, examines the place of indigenous languages in media outlets located in rural areas. Focusing on the Abakuria community, the chapter calls for deeper analyses of the suitability of local languages for broadcasts aimed at resolving inter-ethnic conflicts in rural settings. The author is critical of the use of local languages on media platforms for resolving ethnic conflict. It concludes that even though community-based radio stations broadcasting in such languages appear to be the most reliable sources of news and information among the Abakuria, like in many other parts of Kenya, their potential as tools for intra-ethnic conflict mitigation and that of fueling violence cannot be taken for granted.

Victor Bwire's chapter, "Media and Peace in Kenya: Do Journalists Need Different Skills?" interrogates the crisis of credibility facing the Kenyan media. Arguing that the media has lost public trust due to its partisanship, bias, and poor ethical practices, Bwire claims that public trust can be regained if journalists are given better training so that they adhere to objectivity, ethics, and high professional standards in their reporting and gain a greater awareness of their role and influence in society. Like other chapters in this book, he calls for conflict-sensitive in-house training on how to cover controversial or highly contested issues without using language or content that is likely to incite the other side or vice versa.

In Chapter 7, "Peace Journalism and Human Rights," Jacinta Mwendu Maweu argues that the media's subordination to the interests of political and economic elites prevents it from practicing a "peace and human rights approach" to journalism. These elites, who more often double up as media owners, are the main perpetrators of human rights violations and undermine media freedom to avoid scrutiny and accountability at

the expense of more vulnerable citizens. She claims that the media's power is in its ability to set the news agenda and frame issues objectively. Such a role enables it to promote human rights by keeping the public informed and engaged. This, however, requires a credible and independent press committed to the truth. Taken as a whole, the chapter authors of *East Africa Peace Journalism* offer a compelling case for peace journalism and a practical guide on how peace journalism may best be implemented in an East African setting.

traditional journalism might typically report about these issues only when they foment direct violence (e.g., Christian attacks on Muslims) or sensational confrontation (e.g., creationists vs. biologists at a school board meeting). By reporting contextually, peace journalists can move beyond these superficial narratives by analyzing how religion, science, language, and art are used to explain or legitimize direct or structural violence.

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be implemented to solve conflict, crime, and violence in this region to create a good environment for investments.

In this chapter, we argue that the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace, and Security, Rongo University, in concert with partners such as the Kenya School of Government, with its crime and violence prevention infrastructure, and others recommend a combined methodology of using community radio and social media for conflict resolution through pan-African journalism. The community radio and social media approach has the local content advantage (local language) and individual drive through user-generated content and thus allows for greater success and ownership. Due to the technical capabilities of both technologies, there is also wider reach and a great potential in solving emerging conflicts, crime, and violence through distress calls, resource mobilization, and community sensitization for posterity.

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news about terrorism or conflict. The argument is that since the media is central in political communication and is often used by terrorists for propaganda purposes, the same media can be used to forestall terrorism by spreading messages of hope, peace, love, and unity. HPJ is inspired by the latter and also assumes that conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa are preconditions for economic development, good governance, job creation, poverty alleviation, and investment in better health and education systems. As has been noted, these are the hallmarks of the “Africa Rising” narrative and Kenya’s Vision 2030.

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that society needs information and the exchange of ideas and opinions in the public sphere. The media, they say, must be free to play its role in fulfilling that obligation. Arguing that the media promotes peace suggests to those in the media the sense of an ideologically committed journalism.

Some media organizations have argued that the very practice of good professional journalism is itself a form of conflict resolution. In conflict-affected settings, the provision of reliable information is crucial and is often difficult to provide. The provision of accurate information about a conflict is therefore a priority for all agencies and developing and maintaining a culture of professional journalism is important.

As has been noted, the media can be a crucial weapon in stoking and fanning conflicts and wars. On the other hand, the media can be a constructive tool in helping resolve conflicts and bringing about peace. The quest for the media to be involved in conflict resolution has developed tension between the need for the media to remain objective without taking sides and the need to be passionate about the cause of peace. Many have called on the media to assume the mantle of championing the cause of peace by delving into the underlying causes of conflicts. Taking such a path will lead to better analyses of the objectives of all the actors in a conflict and finding ways to resolve the conflict. Whereas conflict is an extreme form of communication, the media can play a vital role in allowing a peace process to develop and thereafter flourish by enabling underlying conflicts to be expressed and argued in a nonviolent manner.

To achieve this requires the creation of a suitable media space within society through the establishment of an appropriate media framework and practices landscape. In light of the proliferation of mass media technology, a responsive media policy is needed. This will allow the media to play a constructive role in tackling conflict without losing its primary role. Any attempt to prevent violent conflict from breaking out requires the presence of an effective and responsive media that is within reach of community members. This is where the importance of local radio stations in rural communities, as in the case of the Abakuria, becomes clear.

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- 6 Article 4, *Constitution of Kenya*.
- 7 Article 12, *Constitution of Kenya*.
- 8 Article 15, *Constitution of Kenya*.
- 9 Article 21, *Constitution of Kenya*.
- 10 Article 25, *Constitution of Kenya*.
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what is happening. Such reporting would also help in holding perpetrators to account.

Notes

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