Covering Children: Guidelines for Journalists

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Introduction

- Half of all Nigerian children experience physical violence. 1 in 4 girls, and 1 in 10 boys experience sexual violence. 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 5 boys experience emotional violence by parents, caregivers or adult relatives (Violence Against Children in Nigeria Summary Report, 2014).
- About 2,300 under-five year olds die daily in Nigeria.
- 10.5 million children lack access to the school system in Nigeria.
- Wholesale commercial procurement of poor adolescent girls for the purposes of breeding and trafficking of infants is becoming a common practice (Awosika et al., 2008).
- The voices of children are absent in media reports, while coverage of their issues are generally sensational.
- The media can moderate the challenges children face by accurately reporting their issues and educating society.

Goal

- To develop guidelines for appropriately reporting on issues related to children, while ensuring the coverage of children is:
  - Critical rather than sensational in advocating for their rights.
  - In-depth, with more accurate portrayal of issues for raising public awareness.
  - Considerate of children as valued members of society by moderating the effect of dangerous cultural practices.
  - Enabling, supportive, considerate media, which allows children’s voices on issues vital to their rights and development to be heard.

Guidelines for Journalists

Chapter One
The Nigerian Child: Presents the general situation of being a child in Nigeria through personal narratives of the lives of some children.

Chapter Two
Children in the Nigerian media: An examination of the framing of children in the news reports in Nigeria.

Chapter Three
Recommendations for covering children in the media: General rules, serving as guiding principles for reporting on children.

Measure

- Content analysis of published articles one year after the guidelines have been printed, distributed and committed to use by journalists covering children in Nigeria.
- Comparative analysis of the pre and post guidelines articles to ascertain the level of change in how children’s issues are reported.

Conclusions

- It is hoped that these guidelines will be made available to all newsrooms in Nigeria and popularised through regional familiarisation workshops for editors and correspondents.
- The introduction of these guidelines to the Nigerian media will serve as a foundation to renegotiating the coverage of children.

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A man apprehended in Southwest Nigeria for chaining his son. The boy was starved for a month for stealing meat.

Children in a makeshift school in Northwest Nigeria.

(A) An aid worker rescuing an abandoned child accused of being a witch (B) Same child after rehabilitation in Eastern Nigeria.