

MEDIA GUIDELINES ON
**REPORTING
CHILDREN**



MEDIA COUNCIL OF TANZANIA
(MCT)

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The daily challenge for media practitioners has been particularly felt in covering children and their rights. Children need special care and protection because of their vulnerability. Nevertheless, when reporting children stories, the media practitioners have often portrayed children negatively, thus, putting them at risk of retribution or stigmatisation.

It is in writing about children that the media can persuade and remind the policy makers and the public, that children, just like adults, are human beings, who deserve to be recognized, given dignity, respect and, above all, protected. Therefore, having an informed, sensitive and professional journalism is essential in any media for improving children's reporting while guaranteeing their physical and emotional safety.

In achieving that goal, the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) sets out principles, values and guidelines to raise awareness of children's rights among media practitioners. The guidelines also aim to enable the practitioners to report efficiently on stories affecting children; in a more responsive and professional manner, applying ethical principles, educating people and influencing public decisions on issues affecting the welfare of the child.

"The best guidelines are not dos and don'ts but provide a framework for thinking through ethical issues" Child Rights IFJ (2002)

The Media Council of Tanzania believes that these guidelines will not only look at dos or don'ts but also enable the media practitioners to be the voice of children, investigate their abuse, raise awareness amongst the public and policy makers, change attitudes and ultimately stop child rights violations.

SECTION 1: RESOLUTION

We, the Journalists, Media Professionals, Photographers, Columnists, Bloggers, Radio and Television Presenters and Video Photographers;

Considering that:

- The media has the resources and capability to put children's rights on the news agenda,
- In reporting, the focus must be on the best interests of the child,
- Children deserve a forum to express their views on issues that affect them,
- Children have the right to be protected from injury, or any kind of harm,
- Basically, children have the same needs, dignity and rights as adults.

Therefore, the media practitioners shall;

- STRIVE to maintain high ethical standards of reporting;
- PUBLISH stories and PRODUCE special informative programmes on the issues of child safety that will always remind and motivate the public to fight for children's rights; support their development, survival and protect them from any information or images that promote sexual harassment, violence, drug abuse and conflict.
- REFRAIN from reporting or using illustrations, cartoons, pictures or graphics that put children at risk of abuse;
- AVOID using discriminatory words, that may cause stigmatisation and trauma to children;
- AVOID categorizations or descriptions that expose a child

to negative reprisals - including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.

- OBTAIN consent from the children themselves and their parents, guardians or caretakers, before interviewing or photographing children;
- BE patient and considerate when interviewing children, using words or language they understand more easily;
- AVOID disseminating child pornography;
- RESPECT all children regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability or economic status, and whether living in rural or urban areas;
- SEEK children's views, encourage their access to media and promote their right to be heard and to participate in decision-making on issues that concern them;
- PROTECT children's identities when reporting about sensitive issues that may make them recognizable. Always ensure the safety and privacy of children, whether victims of crime, witnesses or offenders;
- CONSIDER consequences of publishing stories about children; conceal their identity unless it is in their best interest or public interest to expose them.

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS

- Child: a person under the age of eighteen (18). This is in accordance with the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977, the Children's Act of 2009 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and other international treaties.
- Guardian: A person who looks after a child or designated by contract or court order to be given the responsibility of looking after and maintaining the child's property and rights.
- Parent: a biological father or mother, stepfather/mother, adoptive or any other person responsible for the child's welfare.
- Media Practitioners: for the purposes of this guide, the media professionals refer to those who serve in the traditional media (newspapers, radio, television) and social media. These are individual journalists, editors, columnists, bloggers, cartoonists, photographers, radio and television presenters and program producers.

SECTION 3: BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD

// In all actions concerning the child undertaken by any person or authority the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.” The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, (1999).

Therefore, in writing about children, media practitioners must ensure that under any circumstances, the child’s rights to survival and development, privacy, protection, freedom of thought and expression are fully accommodated.

The bottom line is that children generally depend on adults for food, shelter, care, protection and their well-being. Media practitioners should thus monitor, investigate and publish/broadcast children’s stories from different angles, analyzing their social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

a. Children living in institutions:

These are children living in the care of accredited institutions such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, juvenile detention centres and even under police custody.

- ❖ How many are at orphanages? In detention centres? Are they officially registered? Are they supervised by skilled workers or professionals? Is there any mechanism to monitor or investigate and report abuse? Are there enough resources? From the Government? Civil Society Organizations (NGOs)? What happens when these children grow up and turn 18?

b. Homeless children:

These are children who lack permanent housing facilities due to conflicts or violence within the family, natural disasters,

unsafe living conditions and wars.

- ❖ How does your story describe these children? Do you consider their ideas/views in writing their stories? How do you address their safety and interests? What is the role of the parents/guardians? Government Institutions? What are the community or public perspectives?

c. Children in crime:

These are children who are in conflict with the law.

- ❖ In writing the story, what image do you portray? How do you handle the disclosure of their identity? How is the legal system in the country? How are they perceived by the society? The law enforcers? Are there any rehabilitation programs?

d. Child labour:

These are children who are employed or forced to work hard to meet their needs or to support their siblings or families. They are employed in harmful and menial jobs like miners, domestic workers, street beggars and, worse, sex workers.

- ❖ Carefully examine the worst forms of child labor: car wash, street vendors, beggars, mining and farm workers. How do the state organs, families and communities deal with this issue? Does the society understand the consequences of child labour?

e. Children with disabilities:

This group refers to children, who are mentally or physically disabled, who need special protection to ensure their dignity and promotion to self-reliance, for them to be active and participate in community activities.

- ❖ These children are more vulnerable to all forms of

abuse. How does the society perceive them? How are the government systems supporting them? How do they access social services such as health and education, transport and others? Can their voice be heard? Are they given any financial assistance?

f. Neglected children:

They are those who are physically and emotionally neglected due to failure to provide protection, education, shelter, security, supervision, care, love and even food. These children may come from either poor or well to do families, orphans or extended families.

- ❖ Often, parents from poor families are forced to work far away from home, so they leave their children alone at home. Meanwhile, some well to do parents abandon their responsibilities by substituting parental care with material things such as the television, games or social media. Orphans and step children are often abused without proper/adequate care and security.
- ❖ Have you ever discussed those issues in your media? Why is that happening? How does family law work? How do the media practitioners support the neglected children? Children born out of marriage?

g. Displaced children:

These are children whose families have left them behind for various reasons including fleeing violence, wars, famine or natural disasters.

- ❖ How does the Government support them? How about the society? Are there reliable and effective systems and policies to protect and serve them?

h. Immigrant Children:

These are children who live in camps with their immigrant parents, who were not born in the country of their refuge.

- ❖ What is the country of refuge doing to protect these children? Do they have the opportunity to go to school? Access to health care, food, clothing and shelter? Are they protected against all forms of abuse?

i. Children in conflict zones:

Refers to children under the age of 18 who are participating in the war or forced to join the army as child soldiers.

- ❖ Are there withdrawal/rehabilitation programmes for transformation?
- ❖ Are they protected from the effects of war— before, during and after the war? How do you protect the identities of children who have witnessed atrocities? Do you give them dignity or do you portray them as silent victims?

j. Children living with HIV:

Refers to children who are living with HIV or suffering from AIDS.

- ❖ How are they protected against all forms of discrimination? How are they treated in institutions, schools, hospitals? Communities?
- ❖ In most cases it takes time before parents disclose the truth to the children born with HIV. How do the children feel after they know of their status? What does the HIV, AIDS policy/law say?

SECTION 4: CHILD RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ACHILD RIGHTS:

- (i) Right to Life: It refers to the protection and development of the child's life in terms of:
 - Disease prevention and access to treatment, vaccination and growth tracking
 - Nutrition
 - Clothing
 - Safe housing
 - Clean and safe water
 - Hygiene
- (ii) Right to Development: A child's mental development, which includes:
 - Formal and informal education
 - The appropriate cultures, traditions and customs of his/her community
 - Spiritual matters (his/her creator) & talent(s)
- (iii) Right to Protection. Ensuring that the child is protected against:
 - Harassment and discrimination
 - Violence (physical, sexual and emotional)
 - Exploitation, including child labor
 - Female genital mutilation, child marriage and sexual violence
 - Risky environment
 - Being abandoned or left without guardian
- (iv) Right to Participation. This means ensuring that:
 - Children are given the opportunity to express their ideas

- That their views are taken into account especially in decisions that affect their lives
- The child should be involved at all levels—the family, the community and the nation

CHILD RESPONSIBILITIES

The child has rights, but also responsibilities. What is the child's responsibility?

- (i) Working for family solidarity
- (ii) Respect his or her parents, guardians, elders and adults at all times and will support them when needed
- (iii) To serve his community and nation to the best of his ability physically and mentally according to his age and capability.
- (iv) To maintain and strengthen social and national cohesion
- (v) To maintain and strengthen the good in the culture of the community and the nation as a whole;

SECTION 5: ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES

The following guidelines are intended to support the good intentions of media practitioners in their efforts to promote the highest standards of professionalism in serving the public interest impartially, accurately and critically without compromising the interests and well-being of the child:

(i) Truth

- Focus on the facts. The distortion of facts in any manner, ostensibly to make the news interesting and increase sales/viewers, is unacceptable.
- No staging: Do not lead children to tell you stories or do something that is not part of their own story.

(ii) Accuracy

- Review the information provided by the children and take great care to ensure that your review is done without endangering your informants;
- Report as accurately as possible, based on the time or space allocated to the story, and seek reliable sources.
- Collect the information honestly, interpret and report on children's issues guided by the rights of the child as defined in the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (1977), the Law of the Child Act (2009), the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), Tanzania Disability Act of 2010, the Law of Marriage Act (1971), and other regional and international human rights treaties.
- Verify the accuracy of what the child has said, either with other children or an adult, but preferably with both.

(iii) Fairness

- Be fair, transparent, factual, direct and friendly when obtaining information, photographs and documents. Obtain all of them with the knowledge and consent of the children or the responsible adult, guardian or caretaker.
- Give the guardians/parents of the child the right to respond or correct any errors or omissions to anything before reporting; allow them to respond to accusations leveled against the child.
- Avoid reporting information that will adversely affect the child's life.
- Correct immediately any errors, misleading information or distortion about children's stories.
- Give the child a voice; the right and opportunity to express their views through the media without inducement or influence of any kind.

(iv) Objectivity

- Encourage creative thinking. Facilitate the children to articulate their views on issues that affect their lives.
- Ask simple and direct questions for the child to understand.
- Stories about child abuse should not be exaggerated or sensationalized, avoid use of propaganda or obscene language.
- Promote values, morals and traditions that are socially acceptable by the community.

(v) Privacy and Confidentiality

- Get permission from the child/parent/caretaker or guardian for all interviews, or when you want to take video, pictures or record their voices. The permission or consent should be in writing.

- Ensure that the child and the guardian are not influenced in any way and that they voluntarily understand and accept to be part of the story which may be disseminated through publication or broadcasting.
- For better understanding, use child-friendly language.
- Any story published about a child's privacy without consent may not be justified simply because of the reputation, criminal record or position of his or her parents.
- Avoid posting, publishing or showcasing images that interfere with the child's innocence or information that violates their dignity.
- Create a calm and friendly atmosphere before the interview. Reassure the child that you will not disclose his or her identity when publishing the story.

(vi) Accountability

- Promote a culture of transparency and accountability especially when receiving, managing and disseminating stories about the child;
- Undue influence should not be used to obtain interviews with a child, parent or guardian.
- Facilitate the effective production of child-friendly programs and articles.
- Encourage, nurture and support the children to write, prepare, produce and disseminate programs and their own stories.
- Encourage media owners to set aside material, space/ time for children's programs and articles.
- Support the establishment of committees on the rights and welfare of the child in the community.

(vii) Interview

- Evaluate risk before interview. Focus on the child's best interests and prepare the environment where the interview will take place and how it will be conducted.

- At first, meet the child without a camera or notebook, let them get to know you, feel at ease.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and its application, treat children with respect as you would have done to an adult.
- Prior to the interview, discuss and assure the child / parent/guardian about safety during the interview.
- When in doubt as to whether a child will be at risk during an interview, report it as an information that affects all children in general, rather than just one child.
- Avoid posting, publishing or showcasing images that interfere with the child's innocence, or information that violates their dignity.
- Use the Parental Guide (PG) on sensitive television programs, including cartoons depicting violence and foul language.
- Be sensitive; not all stories are harmless or relevant to the child.
- Avoid interviewing or photographing a child under the age of 18 in the absence of a parent or the guardian who is responsible for the child.
- Do no harm to any child; avoid questions that infringe on the child's right to privacy, or are sensitive to personal circumstances, and don't relay stereotypes.
- At the school, do not interview or photograph a child under the age of 18 without the presence of the principal; seek the consent of the school authority.

(viii) Discrimination

- Do not discriminate against children on the basis of their gender, race, age, religion, language, social status, cultural or economic status, education and physical abilities.
- In reporting, consider as many different perspectives as possible, pertaining to children's, economic, cultural and social contexts.

- Avoid discrimination against children with mental and physical disabilities. Take some extra steps to promote and protect their dignity, self-reliance and encourage them to participate in community development activities.

(ix) Stereotyping

- Avoid the use of stereotyping - giving labels to children from certain backgrounds. Challenge negative perceptions based on culture, race, ethnicity and gender. Give girls and boys equal treatment in the stories.

(x) Stigma

- Consider the possible consequences of publishing stories about children and avoid stigmatization.
- Conceal the identity of a child who is a survivor of sexual abuse or assault, exploitation, prosecution, or convicted of a crime;
- Avoid questions, attitudes, opinions or comments that are judgmental and insensitive to cultural values, that place a child at risk of humiliation, or that reactivate grief and pain from previous traumas.

(xi) Identification

Hide the identity of the child; avoid giving unnecessary information about the child when he or she is a survivor of or has committed a crime.

- Introduce yourself immediately to the child, parents/guardians or government officials in the area and request their assistance;
- Reveal the child's identity only if it is in the best interest of the child. Note, the child must be protected from harm and supported against stigma or harassment.
- Ensure that the child is not at risk or harmed by identifying their residence, community or location.
- Verify the credentials of any organization claiming to speak on behalf of or for the children;

- Protect the identity of the child or parents/guardians except where it appears to be in the best interests of the child.
- Do not publish any story or photographs that may endanger a child, his or her siblings or peers, even if their identity was altered, concealed or unused.
- In film, video and radio interviews, consider the choice of visual or audio background and how they can affect a child's life.

(xii) Mitigate Harm

- In the event that a child tells a sad story, do not show empathy, as by doing so one may rekindle the painful memories of the past.
- Before posting, publishing or broadcasting the story, make sure it meets the highest standards of journalism in terms of balance, fairness and accuracy so that no child or parent/guardian should regret contributing to the production of their information.

(xiii) Social Media

New forms of communication such as the Internet, Twitter, Blogs, Skype, Tik Tok, Snap chat, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook have caused concern around the world. Pedophiles and child molesters have been using the Internet to lure children and for posting child pornography.

- Safeguard the children by fact checking the information posted on social media as a way to protect them from abuse.
- Advocate for the constant use of a hotline-telephone number to report child abuse.
- Challenge the advertising/sponsorship of children's programs by tobacco and alcohol producing companies.
- Advocate against insensitive videos, cartoons and adverts for children.
- Avoid promoting sexualized images of the child.

(xiv) Personal Benefits

- Avoid making any payment to children through parents, guardians or caretakers unless it is in the best interests of the child.

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