

For Better? Or For Worse?

**Impact of the Code of Conduct on
Journalism Ethics in Kenya**

A Study by the African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWC)

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Preface

Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) supports media initiatives that aim at increasing the quality of media reporting and exchange of information both nationally and on a regional level. FES also facilitates dialogue between the media and government to promote initiatives that encourage the development of independent, pluralistic, self-regulatory and ethical media.

In collaboration with media partners, FES has been assisting in the establishment of a system of self-regulation. This resulted in 2001 in the development of *The Code of Conduct and Practice for Journalism in Kenya* and which is currently being updated to include new developments. It also culminated in the formation of the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) by the Media Industry Steering Committee (MISC) to enforce the Code.

It is hoped that the results of this baseline survey will serve as a signpost for media owners, practitioners, and other stakeholders on areas that need improvement if the Code is to serve the purpose for which it was formulated.

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Rosemary Okello

African Woman and Child Feature Service

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Foreword

The study was conducted by the African Woman and Child Feature Service, with support from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. This study was motivated by the need to assess and understand the degree and level to which Kenyan journalists use the media code of conduct. It involved all mass media categories in the country. The study sample drew from across mainstream and alternative press, as well as print and broadcast media categories. Additionally, views on the various issues under investigation were solicited from media trainers, correspondents, media non-governmental organizations and editors through focus group discussions to help strengthen and buttress survey results from the survey.

The results of the study point to a scenario where most respondents agree that knowledge levels on ethical principles that guide the practice of journalism have grown after the introduction of the code, however, not the same can be said about the quality of journalism. They even agree that the present code is a useful tool for guiding journalism practice in the country. However, unfortunately, that is where it all ends.

In the newsrooms, there is little effort to enforce the code, much in the same way that the house style book is emphasized. Media houses only talk about ethical concerns when faced with libel cases. The results suggest that many of the fresh journalists getting into the profession have not had access to a copy of the code. In fact, most have not seen it.

Views from editors, correspondents, media trainers and media non governmental organizations suggest that the greatest responsibility lies with media owners who should create the necessary environment in which the code can function. To ask journalists to use the code without prescribing similar measures for media owners is putting the cart before the horse.

Rosemary Okello

African Woman and Child Feature Service

1.0 Chapter One

1.1. Introduction

A free and independent media is one of the hallmarks of democracy for any country. The freedom to report on various issues is however always under threat especially from governmental authorities, which seek to exercise control mostly in the form of regulation. Intentions by government to regulate the media, though noble, most times end up squeezing the very space in which media should operate.

In 2001, the new Media Council of Kenya, with support from the media owners (MOA) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, introduced a code of conduct for journalism in Kenya. The major goal was to ensure that the country's media is free from governmental interference. A self-regulatory mechanism guided by the code and enforced by a non-statutory media council were key to this endeavor. The code of conduct was to serve as a foundation for the practice of ethical journalism in the country.

The code that was adopted sets out 23 articles to guide journalists in their day-to-day work. Issues covered range from accuracy and fairness, handling sources, language use, to privacy. The expectation was that the introduction of the code and a non-statutory media council to enforce it would serve to institutionalize the various ethical concerns that define responsible journalism.

A code of conduct for journalists represents what many have dubbed the first commandment or imperative for journalists; communicate unto others only what you would have them communicate unto you or communicate only to willing others those things and employing those techniques which you would be willing for others to use in communication with you. (Merril 1989)

The practice of journalism basically thrives on the big, juicy stories. However it survives, ultimately, on proportion. The code of conduct was thus meant to help instill this vital sense of proportion in the practice of journalism in Kenya.

During most of the Media Council/Friedrich Ebert Foundation monthly public forums held in the course of 2005, a certain sense of disenchantment among the public in regard to media performance in Kenya was strongly evident. Issues of trust and credibility of the media kept recurring. The many disenchanted voices in the audience insistently questioned why they should continue listening to journalists whose interpretation of reality is often so wrong. The FM stations, they observed, might be entertaining and interesting to listen to, but what they say is not useful.

In a sense, these voices of concern served to provide due impetus for the present study. Journalism is, or at least should be, about the people. It is the people who are adversely affected by unethical journalistic behavior.

The public media forums clearly revealed that ordinary people who are the consumers of media products can help promote better journalistic morals by demonstrating that they are aware of, and take great exception to, unethical journalistic practices. Kasoma (1994) says, a community will have the journalists they deserve. This was confirmed by further research.

1.2. Research Questions

Principally, the study sought to generate answers to the following basic questions regarding the code and the reality around its usage by journalists in Kenya;

1. Who has access to the code?
2. Has use of the code enhanced levels of knowledge and awareness of the cardinal principles of ethical journalism among journalists in Kenya?
3. What are the perceptions of journalists and their editors regarding the code?
4. Has there been any tangible impact in the level of journalism since the inception of the code?
5. What suggestions are there, from editors, correspondents and various cadres of journalists to build awareness of the code and to ensure that it is mainstreamed in media houses?

2.0 Chapter Two

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Introduction

Although the findings of the study are presented in greater detail in a later section of this report, it is worthwhile for purposes of generating wider and more informed debate, to put issues in a broader context by way of examining views and perspectives put forth by others on the subject of journalism ethics especially in Africa.

Additionally, it makes sense to examine ethical issues in journalism from the standpoint of a conceptual framework that provides useful background for understanding and addressing issues, questions and dilemmas raised especially by the findings of this study.

It is also essential to underscore the various socioeconomic factors that define media environments especially in a globalizing and commercializing reality, and how this relates to ethical issues in the profession. A comparative analysis of media experiences and environments especially in relation to the issue of journalistic ethics also helps expand the scope of our understanding of the key variables under study.

2.1.2. Why a code of professional ethics?

Journalism may not be as old as other traditional professions like law and medicine, it should however, like the others be guided by a code of ethics. A code of conduct, as Isaac Fritz Andoh (1994) suggests, is intended to protect the general interest of the people whom that particular profession serves. Its code of ethics should therefore be designed in a way that the end results benefit the people.

Although media codes of conduct are still not very popular in Africa, a few African countries, have formulated journalistic codes of ethics. The existence of a code, does not however automatically translate to moral and ethical journalism. Mwaura says, in those countries with a national code, few journalists have ever read it, and worse still, few of those who have read it abide by it. **(Kasoma: 1996)**

He gives the example of the Namibian code, which is silent on the cancer of African journalism – bribery. In Kenya, Wahome Mutahi, as quoted by Mwaura says, the development of a national code was more or less a reaction to a parliamentary motion calling for stiffer penalties for libel. It was not a genuine concern by journalists about the profession as such.

The greatest need for media codes of conduct in Africa came after the liberalization wave of the nineties, partly because of the new challenges and responsibilities that were brought about by this new situation.

2.1.3. Media liberalization in Africa

The nineties were monumental for the media in Kenya, as they were for many other media systems across the African continent. Africa had emerged from the eighties with a certain collective determination to create change in the manner in which its people were governed, the freedoms they enjoyed in speaking and sharing ideas on issues of public concern and generally the level and degree of freedom that the various national media systems enjoyed across the continent.

This transforming wind of democratization touched the media everywhere on the continent in fundamental ways. From a wholly state controlled system, much of the media was now in the hands of private investors.

2.1.4. The challenges of media liberalization and media ethics

However, liberalisation of the airwaves in most countries in Africa, also brought with it new challenges, and responsibilities. The greatest concern was of course in regard to media ethics. In a paper titled *Unprofessional and Unethical Journalism*, Nyamnjoh, laments the unorthodox practices of the media in West Africa after the newfound freedom. He says, journalists are misbehaving in the name of freedom.

Nyamnjoh adds; “In the current democratic process, West African journalists (both official and private) have been accused of professional impropriety, not only by government and other prominent political actors, but also by the general public and even by fellow professionals at home and abroad.”

In Sierra Leone, emerging from turmoil, a journalist summed up this new trend of journalism by describing it as cheap propaganda, rather than reporting issues as they affect the common man. Elsewhere, the ethical shortcomings of the press in Mali have been well summed up by Sangho, who as quoted by Nyamnjoh, describes it as lack of professionalism, client–patron relationship, disseminating unverified news or partisan news, attacks on the honor and dignity of citizens, incitement to revolt against public authority, abuse and libel.

Blay-Amihere, Alabi and Karikari (Nyamnjoh:1999), accuse the press in West Africa of journalistic hooliganism, of observing a conniving silence over certain happenings, while being irresponsible and reckless in reporting others, thus bringing their states to the brink of war.

In Cameroon (Nyamnjoh:1999) says; “the press has been called all sorts of names, from cocktail, bread and butter or survival journalism on the one hand to guerilla journalism, junk journalism or gutter journalism on the other.”

He adds:

“The private press is seen to be leaning too much towards commentary and opinion. The press in Cameroon has been accused, and rightly so of sensationalism and of frightening rather than reassuring its readership. He quotes Zachee Nzoh-Ngandembou a veteran journalist who says: In Cameroon, every newspaper you read frightens you. It predicts doom and prescribes hellfire.”

Apart from the use of bad language, Blay- Amihere, Alabi and Karikari also say that the most recurrent criticism of the private press in this regard is the tendency to rush into publication after hearing only one side of the story, and almost often very distortedly for that matter. Newspapers are known to be sponsored by some individuals and interest groups to blackmail certain institutions, individuals or interest groups.

Media tradition across Africa especially after the liberalization wave that characterized the nineties is such that journalists operate under immense pressure, mostly from those whom they work for, that they cannot report objectively on all sides of an issue in the most attentive and self-critical manner, suppressing personal prejudices and sticking to the facts. Blay-Amihere and Karikari (1996) say:

“Although journalists know that the public is entitled to be properly informed, they have not succeeded in rising beyond distortions, half-truths, deliberate omissions and outright falsehoods, causing moral torture to many.”

Diana Senghor (Nyamnjoh:1999) says, in the name of freedom, and the right to inform, various media have abused certain human rights and it is hardly surprising that between 1992 and 1996 hundreds of legal actions have been instituted in the West African region against the press, mostly on charges of undermining the dignity and respect of the individual.

In Kenya, Eunice Mathu, publisher of *Parents*, a monthly magazine, has expressed concern regarding the spiraling number of libel cases facing the media, and asks the country's media to be more professional to tame the bad trend.

In Ghana, many cases of ethical violations against social responsibility and public interest, professional integrity, respect for human rights and the search for truth have been well documented by Komsoon (Nyamnjoh:1999) Most of the violations have resulted in legal suits brought against publishers, editors and reporters by ministers of state and parliamentarians and some media practitioners have served prison terms for libel. This scenario as Nyamnjoh observes is true for many parts of Africa. He quotes Francis Kasoma who says:

“Bemused citizens have watched with mixed feelings; some in utter disbelief as the liberated press makes all kinds of allegations against their leaders, others have hailed the muckraking journalists as heroes whose shocking revelations and attacks on those in power they hope would bring some sanity into African politics, and flabbergasted politicians have vowed to do everything in their power to restrict press freedom once again.”

2.1.5. The need for journalism ethics

Kasoma says journalism ethics is concerned with making sound moral decisions in journalistic performance, and it assumes the presence of societal morality. Morality, he adds, has to do with actions guided by generally acceptable human values and responsibilities.

In pressing the case for ethical journalism in Africa, Kasoma suggests that African journalists badly need a system of principles and values to ensure that their work attains a high level of ethical predictability. This he says may mean, adopting and/or adapting some ethical principles and values that journalists outside Africa use. It may also mean working into the journalistic practice and ethical theory typically African principles and values. Whatever African journalists choose, they have to make ethical norms they choose their own and be responsible for their professional actions.

There still are many challenges in Africa that mitigate the development of an ethical culture in journalism. Most African journalists, Pratt has shown, prefer utilitarian and situational ethics respectively. In Nigeria, Nwosu has warned of the possibility of the state stepping in and enforcing journalistic codes of conduct to ensure a disciplined press corps and decent media practices.

Uche, on the other hand gives an analysis of how neo-colonialism has influenced the ideological base of the mass media profession in Africa, making it impossible to develop national communication policies with a strong ideological base upon which to formulate media policies and professional ethics that would reflect national policies of culture, politics and economy.

There are many accusations against the press in Africa. Journalists have been branded liars. Politicians have accused the press of doctoring the truth. Dr. Patrick Lumumba of the then Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) accused the press of not asking questions, checking facts or doing the reading that would enable them to comprehend basic facts.

There cannot be any doubt therefore that the journalistic enterprise throughout Africa needs to develop an ethical basis from which to work. This, according to Kasoma (1994), would put an end to journalists being dubbed liars and puppets of the state or any other sectarian authority, and accord them some respectability and pride.

“An ethical base to journalism would also help to restore public confidence and credibility to a profession that has largely, and often justifiably, been identified with oppressive and exploitative governments”.
(Kasoma 1994: pp11)

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2.1.6. Journalistic codes of conduct in Africa

In regard to the popularity of journalistic codes of conduct in Africa, Okigbo (Kasoma:1996) agrees that ethical codes are not yet very popular in Africa. According to Bertrand (1989) most nations in which the press is highly developed and where there is no dictatorial regime now possess a press code. The press in most African countries is just but starting to assume some form of sophistication.

According to the normative theory, journalistic ethics stem from the journalists background and value systems and reflect their society's political and social system. Thus, the countries which have effective codes, also have strong positions in favor of decency in reporting, says Okigbo.

Okigbo further suggests that national codes reflect the sociopolitical and cultural values and problems of the societies where they obtain. The South African Media Council's code of conduct cautions against falsehood, distortion, exaggeration and expressly requires that; reports, photographs, or sketches relative to matters involving indecency or obscenity shall be presented with due sensitivity towards the prevailing moral climate. In particular, the press and television services shall avoid the publication of obscene and lascivious matter.

Even after the democratic wave of the nineties, most governments in Africa have still shown strong intentions to control the media through various laws and state institutions. Mwaura (1994) suggests that if African journalists observed professional ethics, governments, individuals, groups and organizations and other pressure groups would find it more difficult to intervene and interfere with the practices of the profession.

2.1.7. Media ownership and media ethics

Alfonso Gumucio (AWACC:2004) says the mainstream media are far from representing the genuine voices of the people; on the contrary, they represent the power of money. He suggests that it is this power of money that makes it difficult for the individual journalist to perform professionally and adhere to standards. Alfonso says:

“Journalists in the mainstream media have never before faced such a degraded environment in which commercial interests form strong alliances with political interests. Many journalists end up playing the game of corporate interests and manage their profession as any other business. Those that want to act according to professional ethics have a hard time, unable to research and write on topics that may not please their bosses. For a young reporter, the filters that stand between him and the readers or listeners are enormous; personal integrity has become a synonym for trouble maker.”

Kasoma (1994) warns that African journalists are not the only ones who seriously need an infusion of morality into their professional performance. The corporate media houses need it too. Good intentions and actions by individual journalists are not enough to bring moral sanity to journalistic institutions in Africa. Media houses, he suggests must show their commitment to ethical journalism through the enactment of policies, principles and values. This is possible if managers, who are often not journalists, are inclined to consider the morality of the actions of their organizations.

To expect that the principles of ethical journalism would thrive among African journalists, without equal measures being prescribed for media managers and owners, is like putting the cart before the horse. McBride (1987) has suggested that the first issue to be addressed is management's levels of moral reasoning. For many media managers in Africa, the morality of the actions of their corporate bodies is not in question. They measure success in terms of whether their institution is meeting objectives such as making money and keeping close ties with those in power (Kasoma 1994, pp12)

Consequently, if media houses act ethically and promote ethical journalism, individual journalists would have an added incentive to promote journalism ethics.

2.1.8. Media's new age and journalism ethics

In examining press coverage of the Clinton–Lewinsky saga in the United States, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel (1999) identify various structural factors, which defined and dictated the nature of media coverage in the United States media. We make reference to the findings of this study, because in a very fundamental way, it provides a context for interpreting the results of our present study on usage levels of the code of conduct in Kenya.

Bill Kovach and Rosentiel's thoughts and reflections over the Clinton–Lewinsky press coverage make us ponder again the words of the late Prof Francis Kasoma's on media ethics. Kasoma (1996) strongly believed that journalism ethics is not enforceable by law or codes but is an attitude of the mind, a conviction that manifests itself in behavior.

Although it may not be possible to capture all the findings generated by this study, we shall however make reference to a few key points. Writing in a forward to Tom Rosentiel and Bill Kovach's book; *Warp Speed; America in the Age of Mixed Media*, David Halberstam, says:

“Traditionally, when reporters do their best work, they are almost always unpopular: they tend to be ahead of the societal curve and more often than not they are the bearers of news that jars conventional sensibilities and attitudes. So it was during much of the civil rights story, so it was during Vietnam and so it was for much of the early goings-on during Watergate. What is disturbing about the bad odour journalism of today is that, I think, many of the critics are right, and the people who have been performing as journalists in the past one year have in fact seriously trivialized the profession, often doing what is fashionable instead of what is right.”

For Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel, two of America's best journalists cum media watchers, the Clinton-Lewinsky story provided a new prism under which to examine the dynamics of a changing media culture and how it has impacted journalism ethics. This changing media culture they have referred to as the mixed media culture. The environment under which this culture thrives is described as Warp Speed.

They explore the new culture of news saying very strongly that journalists are increasingly under pressure to find the big story to package as a form of entertainment, thus turning news stories into television dramas and history into a kind of Truman show. They question the argument culture that seems to overwhelm traditional news reporting, the increasing power of sources over journalists, as well as a never-ending news cycle that has left little room for verification.

2.1.9. Argument is overwhelming reporting

The study's most important finding was the extraordinary degree to which reporting and opinion and speculation were now intermingled in mainstream journalism. They report that; a snap short of network news, news paper reporting and cable news that typified what an American might see showed that a remarkable 41% of all the reportage in the first six days of the saga was not factual reporting at all.

Journalists were mainly offering their own analysis, opinion, speculation or judgments- essentially commentary and punditry.

The press, they argue, has encouraged this by creating a new class of activist pundits; loose credentialed personalities who often thrive on being provocateurs. These people are treated as authorities, but they are actually neither news sources nor journalists. They also have no responsibility for impartiality or even accuracy. But the simple fact that they appear on these shows lends them and their assertions – whether solid facts or base rumor and innuendo – weight comparable to all other forms of journalism.

The reality is that argument culture is undermining the reporting culture, and news organizations are helping encourage the process as they increase the range of programming and material they produce to chase a fragmenting audience.

Most of the journalists interviewed for this study acknowledged that they often cross lines on talk shows that they would never even approach in their regular reporting. The provocative, opinion-laden culture of the talk show has altered the values of print journalism and television generally, creating a culture of assertion.

This argument culture, Kovach and Rosentiel suggest, “only but adds to the basic commercial reality facing journalism, in which an increasing number of news outlets are competing for smaller pieces of the audience pie. It thus adds up to the news outlets to have something provocative, something new, to push the envelope to reach out to new audiences and find younger voices.”

2.1.10. The increasing power of information sources

The second fundamental aspect of the findings by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel is in regard to sources. The new media culture, they argue, is characterized by a reversal of roles and a shift in the balance of power between the journalist and the information source.

Sources are gaining power over journalists. They increasingly dictate the terms of the interaction and the conditions and time frame in which information is used, and set ground rules for their anonymity. This shift in leverage is obviously to the advantage of those who manipulate the press, and is partly a function of the intensifying economic competition among a proliferating number of news outlets, as well as a function of the growing sophistication of the art of media manipulation.

The Clinton-Lewinsky saga witnessed enormous media manipulation by unreliable information sources. Indeed, the findings reveal that most media outlets had no choice but to mostly rely on single anonymous sources most of the time.

“Just as significant as the enormous reliance on single anonymous sources was, so was the remarkably vague manner in which the press described the anonymous sources it was relying on.”

2.1.11. A never-ending news cycle and the pressure on journalists

The Clinton-Lewinsky story also brought to the fore one fundamental reality about the new media culture: the growing problem of incompleteness of news. Stories come in piecemeal, an allegation now, followed by the counter allegation a few hours later.

Kovach and Rosentiel argue that in the continuous news cycle, the press never rests to sum up, or even say to themselves, this is what we know at the end of the day. It is forever pushing forward, grasping for the latest twist of the day or dollop. Stories appear more confusing, more contradictory. Separating fact and allegation becomes more daunting.

2.1.12. Way forward for journalism ethics in Africa

According to Kasoma, the future of journalism ethics in Africa depends to a great extent on unions and associations of journalists, rather than on individuals. However, union of journalists and other professional associations will only be effective if they are independent of governmental ties.

Kasoma implores African journalists to adapt the Kantian idea of ethics where by, ethical value derives from a person’s motive for doing their duty. African journalists have a moral duty to their society to tell the truth. African journalism can benefit by adopting this sense-of-duty approach.

Gender and media specialist Lyn Wanyeki has spoken against the elitist voices dominating the media agenda today, and questioned the absence of the voices of the grassroots people. Danladi Musa (Kasoma:1996) talks of a media agenda that predominantly privileges the voices of the rich in society. Kasoma, however, suggests that a communal approach to journalism in Africa can help tame some of these endemic ethical problems. Journalists should serve all the citizens of a nation equally – the powerful and the lowly, the rich, the poor, the healthy, the sick, the young and the old, men and women.

3.0 Chapter Three

3.1. Research Methodology

3.1.1. Introduction

This section presents the methodological techniques used in the study. It defines the scope, describes the sample/population of interest, sampling procedures, data collection techniques, evaluation instruments used and the framework of analysis.

3.1.2. Scope of study

The study was carried out across all mass media categories in the country, that is to say, print, broadcast radio and television, mainstream and alternative. Additionally, effort was made to reach correspondents in provincial towns, as well as media non-governmental organizations and trainers in media training institutions.

The media establishments chosen for the study were selected on the basis of the following criteria;

- Mainstream/alternative
- Print/broadcast

3.1.3. Sample design

A survey sample of 65 respondents was drawn purposely for this study from among journalists in the print, broadcast, and alternative media. This also included correspondents from rural areas and provincial towns. The purposive method was adopted to avoid precluding relevant respondents. An element of random selection was however embraced to minimize bias.

Focus group discussions were held with editors selected from print, broadcast and the alternative press, media non-governmental organizations, correspondents and media trainers drawn from key training institutions.

3.1.4. Data collection strategies

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed. A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantifiable data on areas of interest from survey respondents. The use of qualitative

techniques such as the FGDs and one-on-one interviews were quite essential in extracting important information that could not be tapped using quantitative techniques. Guide notes were used to guide group discussions.

3.1.5. Data analysis

The data collected from all the response categories/population of interest were cleaned and collapsed for analysis, triangulation and synthesis. Survey data was coded, processed and tabulated for analysis and interpreted using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data derived from FGDs and key informant interviews were analyzed along thematic matrices, interpreted and then integrated with other data to enrich the results. The analysis made a deliberate attempt to derive succinct themes and categories in order to answer the projects' guide questions.

3.1.6. Problems and limitations

A key problem encountered during the study was mainly logistical. The study team was not able to reach out to correspondents in far flung districts of the country, partly due to time as well as resource limitations.

4.0 Chapter Four

4.1. Empirical Findings from the Study

4.1.1. Introduction:

This section of the report presents the empirical findings of the study. A survey biased research method was employed to elicit data from 65 respondents. These data were then crosschecked and buttressed with other data obtained from key informants and FGD meetings (see methodology section). The latter yielded much of the detailed nuances on professional views regarding usage and impact of journalism code of conduct by journalists in Kenya.

The first part of the section, gives a description of the distribution of respondents across media categories. This is followed by a thematic presentation of the pertinent questions that have informed the study as indicated in the first chapter.

The section ends with a conclusion drawn from the analyzed data and recommendations that the consulting team deems as good practices and strategies for mainstreaming the usage of the code of conduct in the practice of journalism in Kenya.

4.1.2. Distribution of respondents across mass media categories

Respondents were drawn from three major mass media categories. These are print media, television and radio. Table 1.0 below presents the profiling along media categories.

Mass media category	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Print media	25	38.5
Radio	27	41.5
Television	11	16.9
Others	1	1.5

Table 1.1: Distribution of along broad media categories: Mainstream and alternative media

Broad Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mainstream media	49	75.4
Alternative press	12	18.5
Others	4	6.2

Table 1.2: Distribution of correspondents by location of work: Urban or rural based

Location of work	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Urban	62	95.4
Rural	3	4.6
Total	65	100.0

Table 1.3: Distribution of Respondents by number of years in practice

Duration	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1-12 months	13	20.0
2-3 years	23	35.4
4-8 years	19	29.2
Over ten years	10	15.4
Total	65	100.0

4.1.3. Accessibility and availability of the codebook

Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that they owned a copy of the code of conduct, while forty percent did not. However, just eighteen percent of those with a copy had acquired it from their employers. Other sources mentioned by respondents include training institutions, seminars and colleagues.

This study also sought to establish whether media houses made copies of the code of conduct available in newsrooms for easy reference. A majority of the responses indicated that they had not seen the codebook in their newsrooms or simply did not know whether it was there. See table below;

Table 1.4: Presence of code in newsrooms

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	15	23.1
No	34	52.8
I dont know	13	20.0
No answer	2	3.1

Table 1.5: Source of code acquisition

Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Colleagues	9	13.8
Employer	12	18.5
Workshops	3	4.6
College	5	7.7
Others	8	12.3

Discussions with correspondents revealed that some of them had not seen the code of conduct book, yet they comprised the largest category of journalists in the country. Most of them especially from the mainstream media indicated that the code had been distributed to them only once in 2002, and there had not been any effort to send more copies, despite the fact that their number was always growing.

It was suggested that there was a need to define and streamline channels of distributing the codebook to ensure that those who need it had adequate access. They further observed that the presence of journalists in media houses was always changing hence the need to ensure that fresh journalists had access.

It was also noted that media training institutions in the country did not have adequate access to copies of the code for trainee journalists.

Most new journalists joining the newsroom did not have access to code of conduct booklets. Some of the fresh journalists took along time before getting to see the code of conduct booklet.

4.1.4. Ownership of the code

Ownership of the code was highest among print journalists as compared to the other categories. Over half the number of respondents from radio did not own the code. See table below;

Table 1.6: Ownership of code across media categories		
Media category	Ownership-Yes	Ownership-No
Print only	35.9	42.3
Television	25.6	3.8
Radio	33.3	53.8
Television and Radio	2.6	

An overwhelming 63% of the respondents said they did not know whether their colleagues owned copies of the code conduct. On whether they would like to own a copy of the code, majority of the respondents expressed a strong desire to get one for their reference. Eighty percent expressed the need to own a copy while just six percent indicated that they did not need it.

4.1.5. Usage of the code

During the discussion with editors, the sentiment that media houses tended to put more emphasis on the house style rules/book more than they did the code of conduct was expressed. Media houses only woke up to the reality of the code and its usefulness whenever they were faced with libel cases. Most of the editors associated the unpopularity of the code among journalists to this practice.

Although some media houses conducted libel training sessions for journalists, such forums were however very few and far spread in between to have any impact on usage levels of the code.

Editors indicated that although they recognized that the code was important; they just never used it. One editor even pointed out that in the last six months, she could not remember seeing any of her colleagues make reference to the code. Partly they attributed this poor usage of the code to the lack of an enforcement mechanism within media houses that would ensure that journalists used the code.

Editors observed that there had been much hype about the code in the wake of its launch. However, soon after, the fire dissipated and no one seemed bothered about it again. They suggested that awareness creation efforts should have continued to ensure the code was not forgotten, and that such efforts would have enhanced its usage overtime.

The results of the survey however suggested that over 84% of respondents who owned a copy of the code had read it. Just about 15% had not read the code. See table below;

Response	Ownership-Yes	Ownership-No
Yes	55	84.6
No	10	15.4

The study also sought to establish whether there was a correlation between the number of years one had served and usage of the code. As indicated in table 1.8, journalists who had served for two years and above comprised the largest proportion in this regard.

Table 1.8: Cross tabulation: Duration of practice and whether respondent has read the code

Duration in practice	Read code (%)	Not read code (%)
1-12 months	16.4	40
2-3 years	36.4	30.0
4-8 years	30.9	20.0
Over 10 years	16.4	

4.1.6. Frequency of reference to the code

Although an overwhelming majority of the respondents thought the code was a useful tool for guiding journalistic practice in the country, just 12% of them indicated they made very frequent reference to it. An overwhelming majority indicated that they only made occasional reference to the code. See table below;

Table 1.9: Frequency of reference to the code

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very often	8	12.3
Once in a while	39	60.0
Not at all	18	27.7

Most of the respondents nevertheless indicated that the code was a useful tool in their journalistic endeavors. As table below indicates, 93.8% were convinced of the importance of the code while just 4.6% thought otherwise.

Table 2.0: Respondents views regarding usefulness of the code

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	61	93.8
No	3	4.6
No response	1	1.5

Ninety-five of the respondents also agreed that the code was a useful tool for raising the standards of the profession in the country. See table below:

Table 2.1: Usefulness of the code in improving journalism in Kenya

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree/Yes	62	95.4
Disagree/No	3	4.6
No response	0	0

4.1.7. Knowledge levels of the principles of journalism ethics

As to whether the introduction of the code had led to increased knowledge of the cardinal principles of journalism ethics, less than half the respondents indicated that they were fairly familiar with the cardinal principles of the code. See table below;

Table 2.2: Familiarity with cardinal principles of the code of ethics

Familiarity with cardinal principles of the code	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very familiar	16	24.6
Fairly familiar	29	44.6
Not much	16	24.6
Not at all	4	6.2
Total	65	100.0

On the whole, respondents who had been in journalism practice for a period ranging four to eight years were more familiar with the core principles of the code than those who had practised for just about a year.

Table 2.3: Years in service and familiarity with cardinal principles of the code

Period in service	Very familiar	Fairly familiar	Not much
1-12 months	12.5	13.8	7.7
2-3 years	25.0	37.9	37.5
4-8 years	37.5	31.0	25.0
Over ten years	25.0	17.2	6.3

As to whether the code had led to increased knowledge of ethical issues in journalism in general, most of the respondents were positive that knowledge levels had certainly gone up after the code's introduction. See table below;

Table 2.4: Whether frequent use of code can increase knowledge of journalism ethics

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	53	81.5
No	5	7.7
I don't know	4	6.2

However, despite the fact that most of the respondents felt that knowledge levels had generally increased, slightly less than half thought the high knowledge levels had translated into quality journalism. Only 40% indicated that the level of journalism in the country had actually changed after introduction of the code in 2001.

This view was also expressed in most of the focus group discussions with editors, media non-governmental organizations, and correspondents as well as media trainers. Representatives from media non-governmental organizations were of the view that it took more than just the presence of the code and reading it to change the level of journalism in the country. They observed that some of the mistakes witnessed in the media these days were so outlandish that it required a different type of effort to change the quality of journalism in the country (*See recommendations section*)

Table 2.5: Opinion on change of journalism since launch of code in 2001

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	26	40
No	20	30.8
Don't know	17	26.2
No response	2	3.1

5.0 Chapter Five

5.1. Suggestions on way forward

Views from editors, correspondents, media trainers and representatives from media non-governmental organizations

- Media owners should take the responsibility of ensuring that journalists have access to the code. New journalists joining media houses should be provided with copies of the code of conduct booklet.
- Short courses on media ethics should be planned for and organized regularly with the assistance of media experts from media training institutions and media non governmental organizations, to ensure that journalists are familiar with the ethical principles contained in the code.
- Other relevant publications on the subject of journalism ethics should be developed for use especially in media training institutions across the country so as to ensure that trainee journalists have enough reference material during their training. Currently, there are a few publications that speak to the subject of media ethics.
- Regular interaction between reporters and editors especially on issues regarding ethics should be part of the newsroom routine. Such interaction can facilitate friendly discussions over the various ethical concerns that touch the journalism profession today.
- Since reporters are always on the move, it is suggested that each computer/workstation in the newsroom should have a version of the code for quick reference whenever journalists are at their work stations. Media houses too should make it a point to upload the contents of the code onto their websites for quick reference by their staff.
- The impact of the code has been reduced due to the irresponsibility of individual journalists. Media houses should develop strategies for enforcing use of the code, in the same manner that they enforce use of the house style book.
- The increasing number of media outlets especially in the broadcasting sector as well as the attendant cutthroat competition among media outlets, has led to utter disregard of the basic rules of reportage by most of the players. Indeed, most of the FM stations are hiring people who are not trained. This has worsened the situation. It would make sense if this issue was addressed with more vigor at the

level of the Media Owners Association, with a view to ensuring that emerging media outlets give due attention to ethical issues in the profession.

- For the code of conduct for journalists to have any tangible impact, media owners have to support it as a matter of priority. To insist that journalists use the code without insisting on a similar measure for media owners is like putting the cart before the horse. The challenge is for media owners to create the necessary atmosphere in which the code can apply.
- The Media Council of Kenya should take a leading role in promoting ethical journalism. Editors, correspondents and representatives from media NGOs felt that the Media Council was interacting more with media owners than it did with ordinary journalists. Many felt that the Media Council had remained disinterested in the plight of journalists and that most of them, in fact, did not know about its existence.
- It was also suggested that printing of the code of conduct book be regularized to ensure that enough copies are made available for all who need them. Media houses, it was suggested could also use their own printing facilities to ensure enough copies were available for their staff.
- Similarly, it was suggested that the channels through which the code is distributed should be regularized so that those who need it know exactly where to get it.
- Fresh correspondents being contracted by media houses should be inducted to the code as a matter of priority. In this regard, provincial training workshops spearheaded by media non-governmental organizations would be ideal.
- Training institutions can provide the best ground for popularizing the code of conduct. Training is important in ensuring that media people follow the code since it will have been imbibed in ways other than just reference to the code.
- There has been a poor sense of ownership of the code by all the parties concerned. In fact, the problem seems to lie at the very origination of the code. The present code came about as result of efforts by media owners at a time when the previous government threatened to introduce stringent measures to curb the media. Consequently, the present code came into existence, only as a stop gap measure. There is a need to create a proper atmosphere for a renewed sense of ownership of the code by practitioners and media owners if it is to function well. A quick suggestion on way forward would be for media owners and other stakeholders to discuss ways of strengthening the sense of ownership.
- Media houses should emphasize contractual agreements that require journalists to adhere to the code of conduct. The Media Council should be empowered with more capacity to deal with those who do not do so.

- The present code should be reviewed to accommodate new developments on the media scene. For instance, the ethical dilemmas posed by innovations like online journalism and online advertising.
- The code alone cannot do it. There has to be a context that is facilitative. For instance, journalists should embrace a greater sense of national duty. Similarly, remuneration of journalists should be standardized. Presently, quacks and disk jockeys earn more than professional journalists who often go to great lengths to bring in the story.

Table 2.6: Summarized version of survey responses regarding way forward

Recommendation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Organize regular discussion fora/ training on the code	18	27.7
Enhance access to code in rural areas	3	4.6
Greater involvement of journalists in writing of code	1	1.5
Make code available	14	21.5
Enact stringent measures against those who break	4	6.2

5.2. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the various focus group discussions conducted in the course of the study it was apparent that the sense of ownership of the code among stakeholders is simply not there. Yet for the code to have any impact, all those concerned must develop a sense of owning it. This is the only way they can create an atmosphere that would be conducive for its operation. Individual journalists would also feel more obliged to read, internalize and practice its contents.

Although most of the respondents indicated that knowledge levels on ethical issues in journalism had increased since the introduction of the code, little of the same however can be said of the practice of journalism. It is clear that the increased level of knowledge on ethical issues has not translated into better and ethical journalism.

Most of the respondents indicated that they are keen to own a copy of the code. They only do not have a clear idea whom they should go to for a copy. The suggestion here is that it should be clear who is in charge of distribution of the code. Channels of distribution of the code should be clearly analyzed and narrowed so that all are aware who the responsible parties should be.

Additionally, it is clear that most respondents favored forums through which they could learn more about the cardinal principles of ethics as embodied in the code of conduct booklet. Such forums as was suggested for instance by correspondents should be held more often so that ethical concerns receive due attention by all concerned.

The survey results also showed more print journalists were in ownership of the code than any other category of journalists. Radio journalists seemed to be the worst performers in this regard. If one was to relate this to the scenario on the ground, it is mostly radio performance that most recent complaints have centered around. By way of recommendation, there is an urgent need to have the code available to radio journalists in the future

On a positive note, most of the respondents thought that the code was a useful tool in the expansion of knowledge on journalism ethics as well as improvement of journalism practice in general. Given this reality, it would be worthwhile to develop programmes that build on this by way of harnessing the goodwill that already exists in the many practitioners to popularize use of the code at the level of the newsroom, media owners, Media Council of Kenya, media training institutions as well as media non governmental organizations.

Journalism training institutions offer good prospects for inculcating the principles embodied in the code. Presently, however, very few journalism-training institutions in the country have access to the code. Most trainee journalists thus graduate without having read the code of conduct book.

Strategies should be developed to ensure that training institutions have enough copies of the codebook. The case of backstreet journalism training schools in major towns around the country is more wanting. If people are well trained, the code might not be useful after all, as proper training would do a lot to help us deal with most of the problems that the code addresses.

The Media Council of Kenya's recent inclusion of the code on its website has increased. Media owners can also facilitate access by using their facilities to print enough copies for their staff.

Correspondents produce 70% of the content that goes into daily news, as well as comprising the largest proportion of journalists in the country, yet they seem to be the most neglected group. By way of suggestion, more efforts should be made to reach them through induction courses on media ethics and the contents of the code of conduct and ethics book.

Frequent interaction between gatekeepers and reporters especially on ethical concerns should be the norm rather than the exception if more journalists are to be encouraged to use the code.

The greatest responsibility however lies with media owners who have to create the necessary environment within which the code can operate. Without their positive involvement, no tangible impact can be felt.

Appendix One

Africa Woman and Child Feature Service (AWC) 2005 An Assessment Of Usage Levels And Accessibility Of The Media Code Of Conduct By Journalists In Kenya

Journalist's Questionnaire

1.0 Basic Information

1. Name of respondent (optional) _____
2. Gender of respondent _____
3. Name of media house/station you work for _____
4. Where are you based _____
5. To which category do you belong?
 - 1) Print journalism
 - 2) Broadcast- Television
 - 3) Broadcast- Radio
 - 4) Alternative press

6. How would you classify your media house?

1) Mainstream

2) Alternative

3) Other (Specify) _____

7. How long have you served as reporter/correspondent?

1) 1 month to 12 months

2) 2 to 3 years

3) 4 to 8 years

4) Over ten years

1.1 Accessibility of the journalists' ethical code of conduct

8. Do you own a copy of the journalist's code of conduct?

1) Yes

2) No

9. If your response for 8 is yes, how did you get it?

10. Are copies of the code available in your newsroom for regular use by journalists?

1) Yes

2) No

3) I don't know

11. Would you want to own a copy of the code?

1) Yes

2) No

3) I don't know

12. Do your colleagues own copies of the code of conduct?

1) Yes

2) No

3) I don't know

1.2 Usage Levels

13. Have you ever read the code?

1) Yes

2) No

14. How often do you make reference to the code?

- 1) Very often
- 2) Once in a while
- 3) Not at all

15. Do you think the code is a useful tool in your journalistic work?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) I don't know

1.3 Knowledge and awareness/perceptions and attitudes

16. How familiar are you with the cardinal principles in the code?

- 1) Very familiar
- 2) Familiar
- 3) Not much
- 4) Not at all

17. Can the use of the code help improve the quality of journalism in Kenya?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) I don't know

18. Can frequent use of the code increase a journalist's knowledge of ethical issues in the profession?

1) Yes

2) No

3) I don't know

19. Has use of the code helped you increase your knowledge of ethics in journalism?

1) Yes

2) No

3) I don't know

20. Has there been a change in our journalism since the introduction of the code in 2001?

1) Yes

2) No

3) I don't know

2.3 Way forward

22. Suggest what should be done to strengthen use of the code among journalists

Appendix Two

Africa Woman and Child Feature Service (AWC) 2005

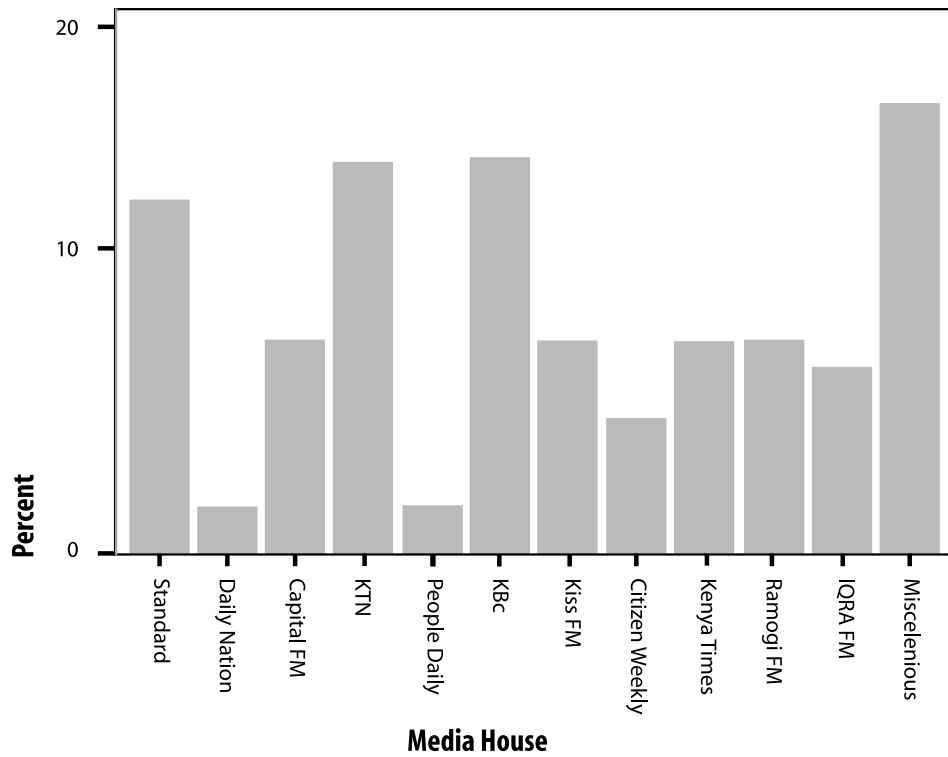
An Assessment Of Usage Levels and Accessibility Of The Media Code Of Conduct By Journalists In Kenya

Focus group discussion guide for editors/media trainers and media NGOs

1. Introduction
 - Introductions guided by the consultant.
 - Brief background, purpose and goals of project
2. Their views on the accessibility/availability of the journalist's code of ethics to journalists in Kenya.
3. Their views on whether the code has had any impact on the state of journalism in Kenya since its introduction in 2001
4. Their observations on whether journalists make use of the code?
5. Their recommendations on what should be done to mainstream use of the code in media houses in Kenya

Appendix Three

Respondents By Media House



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Notes

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