

# GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL LANGUAGE BROADCASTING

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
1. CORE JOURNALISTIC VALUES AND ETHICS	
1.1 Accuracy	
1.2 Objectivity	
1.3 Fairness	
1.4 Comprehensiveness	
1.5 Right of Reply	
1.6 Promoting Peace	
1.7 Incitement	
1.8 Covering Persons with Disability	
2. LOCAL LANGUAGES NEWS	
2.1 "Citizen Reporters"	
2.2 Language Proficiency	
2.3 News gathering and presentation	
2.4 News Translation	
2.5 Translation Guide	
2.6 Cultural/operational advisory for news Translators	
3. LOCAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING	
3.1 Defining values	
3.2 Decency	
3.3 Cultural rites	
3.4 Morality and Social Values	
3.5 Crime, Law and Order	
3.6 Broadcasts and the Law	

3.7	Portrayal of Violence, Cruelty and Horror	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
3.8	Children’s Programmes	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
3.9	Music	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
4.	LOCAL LANGUAGE BROADCASTING AND ELECTIONS					...	...	...	...
4.1	Voter Education	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
4.2	Culture and Decorum	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
4.3	News Coverage during elections	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
4.4	Paid Airtime	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
4.5	Elections Team	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
4.6	Personal Opinion	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
5.	CONFLICT OF INTEREST	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	....

## FOREWORD

Experts estimate that overwhelming majorities of Africans, about 90% speak and transact their daily lives in their own languages.

It is these languages that they are most easily able to express themselves, articulate their interest, make communion with their ancestors, swear and castigate their offenders, in short, express their inner-most feelings and ideas with the greatest subtlety.

From a policy perspective, this means media pluralism and diversity make sense only if the majorities of the people are given the opportunity to participate in national dialogue through broadcasting in their local languages. These Guidelines are therefore offered to guide broadcaster to harness the benefit of linguistic pluralism and diversity. The work is premised on the knowledge that local language broadcasting fulfils the citizen's sovereign entitlement to freedom of expression and right to information.

The Guidelines distill research in journalism, linguistics, translation and media ethics and provide practical suggestions for improving local language broadcasting. a group of media experts, professional translators and language experts drafted the Guidelines based on the felt needs identified at a consultative forum with broadcasters. I wish to commend in a special way, Mr. Clever Nyathi, Head of Governance Unit, UNDP, Ms. Hilda Mensah, Programme Officer, UNDP and Mr. George Sarpong, Executive Secretary, NMC. It was the tenacity of the three that weathered the uncertain storms and made this wonderful contribution to media and peace building possible. I thank my colleagues on the Commission, especially members of the Media Committee chaired by the venerable journalist, Mr. C.S. Buabeng, for providing guidance and direction.

Members of the Team of Experts, leaders of the Ghana Independent Broadcaster Association (GIBA) especially the President, Haruna Alhassan (who is also a Member of the (NMC) and the Executive Secretary, Gerald Ankrah deserve praise.

The Ghana Federation of the Disabled once again demonstrated their commitment to the welfare of persons with disability by helping to draft the provisions on media coverage of persons with disability. I also wish to recognise the contribution of the broadcasting professionals who participated in the stakeholder meetings. This work is the product of their experience and insight.

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We also commend the Ghana Independent Broadcasting Association, the Ghana Community Radio Network, the Ghana Journalists Association and the owners and executives of all radio stations in Ghana for their support, cooperation and active participation in the development of these Guidelines.

Many individuals also deserve commendation for this work. Mr. George Sarpong, Executive Secretary of the National Media Commission, conceptualized the work, developed the project and saw to its full implementation with technical input from Clever Nyathi, Head of Governance Unit, UNDP and Ozonnia Ojielo , UNDP, Kenya.

The Experts who drafted the document were: Dr. Doris Dartey, Media Consultant, Mr. Gilbert Tietaah, Media Expert and Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, George Sarpong, Executive Secretary, NMC, Lawyer and Media Expert, Alhaji Ishaq Alhassan, Lawyer, Teacher and Peace Building Expert, Mr. Jones Aplerh, Ministry of Interior, Lawyer Building Expert, Mr. Anthony Aggrey, Professional Translator, Lecturer Ghana Institute of Languages, Mr. Lawrence Selikem, Journalism Translation Expert and Ms. Hilda Mensah, UNDP.

The provision on “COVERING PERSONS WITH DISABILITY” was drafted by Julia Awoti (VSO intern at NMC with special interest in media and disability), in conjunction with the information and Advocacy Officers of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD).

Mr. Alex Bannerman, Deputy Executive Secretary, and Mr. Kofi Nyantakyi, Private Secretary, NMC, coordinated the consultations.

The consultations were under the direction of Mr. C. S. Buaben, former Deputy Editor of the Daily Graphic and Chairman of the Media Committee of the National Media Commission. Mr. Buaben also edited the Guidelines.

The leadership of the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, especially, the President, Mr. Haruna Alhassan, the Executive Secretary, Mr. Gerald Ankrah, and the Ashanti Regional Representative, Mrs. Agyeman, demonstrated leadership in this process.

## **UNDP**

UNDP supported the work with technical expertise and financial resources.

## **1. CORE JOURNALISTIC VALUES AND ETHICS**

The core journalistic principles underpinning local language broadcasting are accuracy, objectivity, fairness, comprehensiveness, right of reply, sensitivity to the vulnerable, prohibition against incitement and the need to promote peace.

### **1.1 Accuracy**

Local language broadcasters shall at all times strive to present accurate and verifiable information to the public. This demands strenuous effort to ascertain the facts of any given event, issue or occurrence before presentation to the public. Accuracy is achieved where the broadcast material provides ascertainable information about the people involved in an issue, the date, time and perspectives of the key stakeholders involved in the event. Great care must be taken not to blur the distinction between truth and fiction. Statements and information that could be ambiguous and/or misleading should be avoided.

### **1.2 Objectivity**

Objectivity requires the capacity to suppress a broadcaster's own prejudices in order to examine given facts from varied perspectives. In local language broadcasting, this demands deliberate suspension of the broadcaster's linguistic and cultural subjectivity in order to look at the verifiable facts and present them to the public. Objectivity is enhanced when local language broadcasters take note of the subtlety of language and recognise that language, in addition to carrying meaning, also carries connotations, attitudes and feelings.

### **1.3 Fairness**

Fairness demands that all sides to a story are given equal opportunity for presentation. It requires an honest treatment of all sides taking into account their special needs and concerns. Fairness demands that journalists actively seek out those who are affected or

are likely to be affected - directly or indirectly - by a story. The principle of fairness is undermined where the perspective of an interested party which with diligent effort could have been obtained is ignored. Another element of fairness is the need to offer persons whose interests were inadvertently ignored or misrepresented in a story the opportunity to state their case at their earliest opportunity. In practical terms, this demands speaking to everybody about whom a story is concerned. It also demands carrying rejoinder when attention is drawn to a misrepresentation or any material considered unfair by an interested party.

#### **1.4 Comprehensiveness**

Comprehensiveness requires that information is presented in full without any attempt at manipulation. Comprehensiveness fulfils the citizen's right to information. This is essential to enable citizens to take informed decisions. Comprehensiveness demands that the listener is given the facts as well as the truth about the facts.

#### **1.5 Right of Reply**

Where a right of reply is established, or retraction or correction warranted, it should be aired as soon as practically possible, and given the prominence that is comparable to the subject of the original error.

#### **1.6 Promoting Peace**

Peace is the bedrock of progress and development. Local language broadcasting must therefore aim at promoting peace. This demands active and purposive search for ideas that promote peace and national cohesion.

1.6.1 Local Language broadcasts must endeavour to identify the critical issues that can trigger conflict and encourage dispassionate discussion. Such issues may include questions of marginalization, identity politics based on religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation.



1.6.2 Views which have the potential to promote violent conflict, especially political, social, cultural, racial, ethnic and religious, should be handled with great sensitivity.

1.6.3 In covering conflict, analysis of the causes and issues involved must be balanced with efforts towards promoting peace. Institutions and individuals involved in efforts at resolving the conflict must be given opportunities to highlight efforts at peace building.

## **1.7 Incitement**

Local language broadcast **MUST NOT**, under any circumstance, carry content that can incite people. Content which can incite people may include the following:

1.7.1 words that have a direct tendency to cause acts of violence by the group to whom the comment concerns.

1.7.2 words that can result in a breach of the peace, a fight or a riot.

1.7.3 threatening, demeaning, or dehumanizing expressions against groups or individuals.

1.7.4 words that are likely to stir hatred against a group or individuals.

1.7.5 Invectives attacking individuals or groups because of their race, ethnic background, religion, gender or political affiliation.

## **1.8 Covering Persons with Disability**

Persons with disabilities are a distinct group whose needs, capacities and aspirations require special attention. Effort must be made to cover persons with disability

positively with the view to helping proper social understanding of their needs, concerns and aspirations by mainstreaming their views in local language programmes. Local language broadcasters must familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Persons with Disability Act, 2006, (Act 715). The Law defines a Person with a Disability as an individual with a physical, mental or sensory impairment, including a visual, hearing or speech or functional disability which gives rise to cultural or social barriers that substantially limit one or more of major life activities of the individual.

- 1.8.1 Local language broadcasters should avoid the use of derogatory names to describe people with disability. Broadcasters may work with local disability organizations to agree on appropriate terminology for disability issues in their local languages.
- 1.8.2 The local language broadcasters must endeavour to mainstream disability issues. This may include interviewing persons with disabilities in news and topical reporting, portraying them as part of the public and not limiting them to issues that concern disability. Persons with Disability are also part of the general public with the right to participate in national activities.
- 1.8.3 Local language broadcasters should promote positive attitudes towards children, youth, women and men with disability and support the human rights of Persons with Disability.
- 1.8.4 Media houses should endeavour to make their premises are accessible to people with disabilities.

## **2. LOCAL LANGUAGES NEWS**

### **2.1 "Citizen Reporters"**

The competition engendered by the plurality of local language broadcast news sources understandably imposes pressures on stations for scoops/exclusives. Nevertheless, local language stations must be restrained in their use of volunteered accounts from persons they cannot positively identify. Much of such accounts are often laced with emotive and partisan sentiments. Where there is little opportunity to exercise editorial gatekeeping discretion over their use - such as when the report is a live eye-witness account - the station should make a firm disclaimer before and after putting such volunteer, "citizen reports" on air. For example, the station may use words to the following effect: "These are allegations that we cannot, at this moment independently collaborate."

### **2.2 Language Proficiency**

Broadcasting stations should ensure at all times that their reporters, news readers and presenters speak and write the local language in which they broadcast with high proficiency. It is not enough for a broadcaster to be able to speak the language. He/she should be able to write it. This will help the broadcaster understand the nuances of the language and to present it with sensitivity and intellectual confidence.

### **2.3 News gathering and presentation**

2.3.2 Local language news must (like foreign language news) be systematically gathered, analyzed, written, edited and presented. Spontaneous presentation or translation of news is not permitted in broadcasting.

- 2.3.3 Spontaneous composition and performance are creative elements in oral literature. An artist's capacity to compose and deliver on the spur of the moment is one of the key skills of traditional poets, dirge and praise singers. But this is a specialized form of art performed in defined circumstances. It is not suitable for news bulletins.
- 2.3.4 Proverbs, anecdotes and other linguistic devices that have the potential to embellish news stories are not permitted in local language news.
- 2.3.5 As far as is practicable, local language news must be gathered and presented in the language intended for broadcasting.

## **2.4 News Translation**

Where the content of a local language broadcast is a translation from an account originally written or spoken in another language, the resultant translation must be faithful to the denotation and context of the original utilization. Local language news must be subjected to the news production process in full (writing, editing, proofreading etc.) to ensure that the final product is an accurate and authoritative representation of the meaning conveyed in the original communication.

## **2.5 Translation Guide**

- 2.5.1 As much as possible translators must endeavour to avoid literal translation, unless such a translation makes sense. The translator must think of what ideas the source language sought to convey and express the idea in the target language without embellishment.

- 2.5.2 Where the ideas being conveyed cannot be expressed clearly in the target language, the translator may paraphrase it. In other words, he/she may translate by explaining the idea.
- 2.5.3 If a word in the source language has become common usage in the target language, the translator may use it.
- 2.5.4 News translators must master the most common expressions and have them at their finger tips.
- 2.5.5 In the act of translation, the translator must
- choose the plain word over the fancy (unless the context demands the fancy)
  - select the familiar instead of the unfamiliar
  - never use a long word when a short one will do as well
  - prefer the simple sentence to the complicated
  - vary sentence lengths
  - use short paragraphs
  - cut out needless word, sentences, and paragraphs
  - write clearly
  - write to be understood, not to impress
  - revise and rewrite

## 2.6 Cultural/Operational advisory for news Translators

- Experts consider local language translations of the major religious books to be of the highest standards. News translators may read translated religious materials and other publications of the Bureau of Ghana Languages for style and rendition.
  
- Language expresses the culture of a people. Translators must therefore learn about the culture, festivals, history, traditions, and economic activities of native speakers of the target language.
  
- Radio and TV. stations should develop their own Style guides for local language news translation.
  
- News and programme translators working in a given locality may form a network to meet periodically to review their work, exchange ideas and agree on the translation of specific concepts, terms and expressions.
  
- Local language news translators must endeavour to obtain very good dictionaries for both the source language and the target language. For purposes of translation, dictionaries that show the etymology (origin of words) are encouraged. Where the explanation contained in the source language appears inadequate, the etymology may be of help.

### **3. LOCAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING**

#### **3.1 Defining Values**

The constitutional imperatives for unity and national cohesion outlined in the Directive Principles of State Policy lead to certain defining values for local language programming. These include the need to engender dialogue for equitable development; the provision of voice and empowerment to the people; and the need to affirm and strengthen cultural expression by leveraging indigenous knowledge through the application of core journalism values and principles.

- 3.2.1 Production of local language programmes must be guided by the highest ideals of decency. Lewdness, sexual suggestiveness and pornography are not to be employed in local language programmes. Obscene and vulgar language, expressions and presentations should not be used.
- 3.2.2 Treatment of sex in all programmes or as part of entertainment should be handled in a manner not to offend the moral dignity, decency and sensibilities of the audience.
- 3.2.3 Documentaries or programmes dealing with a variety of sexual themes shall not make public and explicit what should be private and exclusive.
- 3.2.4 Where a story involves actual sexual relations, it should be presented without undue exploitation of its sexual aspects.
- 3.2.5 In representing sexual activity in televised or filmed drama, producers should consider whether the degree of explicitness is justified by the context in which it occurs.
- 3.2.6 Actual sexual intercourse between humans should at no time be transmitted.

### **3.3 Cultural rites**

Ghanaian cultural rites and practices of value should be promoted with accuracy.

Material originated from languages other than the local language of a particular station shall conform to the same standards and guidelines set for -produced programmes, advertisements and other broadcast materials.

### **3.4 Morality and Social Values**

3.4.1 Undesirable aspects of human nature, such as cruelty, greed, lust, selfishness and vindictiveness should not be glamorized.

3.4.2 Drunkenness and robbery should not be allowed in programmes except as destructive habits to be avoided or denounced.

3.4.3 The use of narcotic substances should only be presented to educate the public on their harmful effects.

3.4.4 Sex-related crimes, such as prostitution, rape, bestiality, incest etc., should be portrayed as destructive practices to be avoided or denounced.

3.4.5 Liquor consumption and smoking should be shown only when consistent with plot and character development.

3.4.6 Suicide should not be treated as an acceptable solution to human problems.

### **3.5 Crime, Law and Order**

3.5.1 Language or scenes likely to encourage or incite crime, glorify war or lead to disorder should be avoided.

3.5.2 Criminal tendencies should be presented as undesirable.

3.5.3 The treatment of the commission of crime in a frivolous and permissive manner should be avoided.



- 3.5.4 The presentation of techniques of crime, in such detail as to invite imitation, should be avoided.
- 3.5.5 Law enforcement should be upheld at all times in a manner that affirms that law and order are the universally-accepted norms of society.

### **3.6 Broadcasts and the Law**

Broadcasters should satisfy themselves that the contents of all programmes are consistent with the laws of Ghana.

### **3.7 Portrayal of Violence, Cruelty and Horror**

- 3.7.1 Local language broadcasting should, at all times, uphold respect for human dignity and the sanctity of the environment.
- 3.7.2 All forms of domestic violence should be presented as undesirable.
- 3.7.3 Excessive or detailed portrayal of physical suffering and pain or images of human and animal parts should be avoided.
- 3.7.4 Sexual violence and violence directed at older people or children should be reported with particular sensitivity.
- 3.7.5 In representing violent crimes, programmes should not glamorize the criminal or soften their image in a manner which may diminish the ugliness and severity of crime.
- 3.7.6 In reconstructing a crime involving care should be taken not to over-emphasize the dramatic aspects of the incident nor discuss the weapons used in unnecessary detail.
- 3.7.7 Violence should neither be portrayed in drama as an end in itself nor for the purposes of entertainment.

- 3.7.8 Care should be taken not to project violence into places regarded as places of safety such hospitals ,place of worship and homes.
- 3.7.9 Violence crimes should not be presented to the extent that they will have a "copycat" effect.
- 3.7.10 Television stations should avoid repeated exposure of their audiences to violence, which has the capacity to desensitize them and make them indifferent to the plight of victims.
- 3.7.11 The degradation of women as objects of violence should not be encouraged.

### **3.8 Children's Programmes**

- 3.8.1 It is the duty of the media to protect the identity, privacy and reputation of children.
- 3.8.2 Where they are involved in court (criminal) proceedings their identity should not be revealed.
- 3.8.3 In any other instances the media should satisfy themselves that their publication will not have adverse effect on the child.
- 3.8.4 Materials likely to affect adversely the sensitivities and sensibilities of children should be avoided.
- 3.8.5 Programmes which contravene social values, show disrespect for law and order, and/or depart from honourable life-styles should be avoided.
- 3.8.6 Programmes with "adult" content eg. sexually-explicit scenes or language should not be broadcast when children are likely to be watching or listening.
- 3.8.7 Blasphemous language of any kind should be avoided.
- 3.8.8 Children should be protected from ethnic or other complexes resulting from careless or deliberate comparisons or information.

3.8.9 Violence and crime should not be glamorized. They should rather be portrayed as punishable.

3.8.10 Foreign folklore and values should be identified as such and treated with caution to prevent their undue influence on our values.

3.8.11 Ghanaian culture, folklore and values should be promoted. Popular superstitions should be handled with discretion.

### **3.9 Music**

3.9.1 In the choice of music for all applications in broadcasting, emphasis shall be placed on African music, particularly Ghanaian music. Ghanaian and African music shall constitute a minimum of fifty (50%) per cent of all music broadcast by any radio or television station in any particular week. Care should also be taken to have a fair representation of local ethnic talent.

3.9.2 The provision covering good taste and decency, morality and social values, shall also apply to music, particularly lyrics and visual presentation.

## **4. LOCAL LANGUAGE**

### **4.1 Voter Education**

Local language broadcast stations have the singular capacity to overcome the barriers imposed by illiteracy and cost on newspaper, the internet, and even English language broadcaster. This means that for Ghana's elections to be a true reflection of the democratic wishes of the people, local language stations must assume a leadership role in voter education. Their political programmes in an election year must seek to help the

electorate know about the parties and candidates and their respective policy platforms. They must also enable the electorate understand the voting processes and why their informed choice matters to the political efficacy of Ghana's democracy.

#### **4.2 Culture and Decorum**

Local language stations have a singular opportunity to influence, if not define, the language of our politics according to the cultural values that characterise us as Ghanaians. They can do this by exercising a sensitivity to Ghanaian cultural values relating to both verbal and non-verbal expressions. While it is not practicable to provide an exhaustive listing, particular attention must be paid to the use of epithets and vocatives, euphemisms and proverbs, satire and indecent exposure, and forms of expression or insinuations that have the potential to incite hatred on the basis of, inter alia, political, religious, ethnics, or even chieftaincy differences.

#### **4.3 News Coverage during elections**

Stations must seek an appropriate and fair balance in coverage of parties/candidates in the elections. While special party events (such as the launch of a campaign manifesto) mean that a particular party inevitably dominates the day's news agenda, care must be taken to ensure that comparable prominence and duration are given to similar other party events on the relevant days.

#### **4.4 Paid Airtime**

Notwithstanding the obvious commercial considerations, allowing rich/dominant parties the liberty to buy out substantial time slots on prime news and popular programme strands (such as breakfast shows), with the effect that other parties are crowded out, would seem to violate the spirit of a healthy, democratic contest of ideas. Therefore, the station must seek to accord parity treatment to the parties. This means that the opportunity to buy advertising space should be available to all contending parties, and

on equal conditions and rates of payment. This will reflect in the distribution, duration and timing of rival party ads and programmes.

#### **4.5 Elections Team**

4.5.1 During elections, each local language station may set up an ad hoc elections team led by a professionally responsible journalist with considerable knowledge of elections. The Team Leader must also be very proficient in the station's predominant language of broadcast.

4.5.2 The team may serve as clearing house for all elections-related news and political talk programmes; and will meet at designated times to review the station's political bulletins and programmes.

4.5.3 Each meeting may examine the following:

- i. Does every story reported or planned to be reported on the station answer to the obligations for fair and equitable coverage? (These obligations are implicit in the constitutional provisions of Article 163 and expressly stipulated in various provisions of the National Media Commission's Broadcasting Standards and the Guidelines for Political Journalism; and in the Ghana Journalist Association's Code of Ethics and the Guidelines on Election Reporting).
- ii. How does the station ensure that each report is a complete and balanced picture? (stations may develop a tally sheet or wall chart to monitor political reports and programmes and rectify any inadvertent pattern of imbalance.
- iii. How does the station insulate itself ourselves/reports against pressures to be partial (the Team may discuss potentially compromising

advances/favours from politicians and their agents. Insistence must be placed on full disclosure by all Team Members.

- iv. What are the ground rules for producing/hosting talk programmes involving rival party candidates/representatives? (in-house rules of engagement must be communicated to panelists.
- v. How should the station respond to complaints? Ensure "fair" (i.e equitable) and "balanced" (in terms of scheduling) opportunity to a party or candidate that was the subject of a negative presentation by a reporter or rival candidate/supporter.
- vi. Each station should publicise those guidelines through daily periodic announcements - for both public awareness and self-check. At bottom, the team should be able to respond affirmatively to the question: Does what we have said - or are about to say - amount to responsible journalism?

#### **4.6 Personal Opinion**

Part of the house rule of the political team must be to remind themselves and their colleague reporters and news programme editors about the need to refrain from expressing personal political views. This injunction should be made public and restated at every editorial meeting and at intervals within broadcast programmes.

### **5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

- 5.1 Media practitioners (including local language broadcasters) should not engage in any activity that may appear to be or has the potential to give preferential treatment to any political party or candidate.

- 5.2 Media institutions should endeavour to make adequate arrangements to facilitate the work of journalists.
- 5.3 Journalists and other officials of local language stations should not:
  - 5.3.1 Accept gifts and favours from political parties or candidates.
  - 5.3.2 Solicit gifts, tangible or intangible, directly or indirectly, from political parties or candidates.
- 5.4 Local language broadcasters must familiarize themselves with the principles on conflict of interest developed by the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).