

# **A LightRay! Media Report on Safety for Journalists and Communication Practitioners**

## **Introduction**

In an era marked by the proliferation of information and the importance of a free press, the safety of media practitioners in Africa remains a pressing concern. Journalists, reporters, and media professionals across the continent have often found themselves on the frontlines, facing significant risks and threats in their pursuit of truth, accountability, and the dissemination of information.

The safety of media practitioners is not only a matter of human rights but also a cornerstone of democracy and societal progress. This report explores the challenges faced by media practitioners in Nigeria and the imperative need to address them, drawing on accessible data to highlight the gravity of the situation.

To understand the safety of media practitioners in Africa, it is essential to place it in a global context. According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), violence against journalists and media workers is a widespread problem worldwide.

However, Africa has often stood out as a region with particularly challenging conditions for media professionals. CPJ's annual reports consistently indicate that Africa is one of the most dangerous places for journalists, with high rates of journalist killings, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation.

Africa's diverse landscape presents unique challenges for media practitioners. Political instability, armed conflicts, and social unrest are prevalent in various regions. According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders, several African countries consistently rank low in terms of press freedom. About 45.8% of African countries are in the "problematic" category, while 39.6% are "difficult" with press freedom. These rankings are often associated with a range of threats faced by journalists, including violence, censorship, and legal harassment.

One of the most alarming aspects of the safety of media practitioners in Africa is the level of violence directed towards them. According to the CPJ, journalists covering sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights abuses, and political dissent are particularly vulnerable.

They often face threats, physical assaults, and even murder. Journalists in Africa are frequently subjected to arbitrary arrests and detention as a means of silencing their voices. Governments may use vague and repressive laws to curtail press freedom.

In many cases, journalists are detained without proper legal procedures or access to legal representation. For example, the case of Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega, who was imprisoned for years on charges of terrorism, serves as a stark example of the legal harassment faced by media practitioners in Africa.

The digital age has brought new challenges for media practitioners in Africa. Governments have increasingly resorted to online censorship and surveillance to control the flow of information. Social media platforms have become battlegrounds where journalists are targeted with threats and harassment. For instance, the #FreeSpeechAfrica campaign, which tracks online censorship and threats against journalists, has highlighted the scale of the problem.

Media practitioners in Africa also face gender-specific challenges. Female journalists often confront additional risks, including sexual harassment and gender-based violence. According to the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), female journalists are more likely to experience threats, harassment, and physical violence while reporting. The tragic case of Somali journalist Hodan Nalayeh, who was killed in a terrorist attack in 2019, underscores the gendered nature of risks faced by media professionals.

Addressing the safety of media practitioners in Africa is not only a moral imperative but also essential for the region's development and stability. A free press plays a crucial role in holding governments accountable, promoting transparency, and fostering democratic values. When journalists are silenced or threatened, the entire society suffers. Efforts to improve the safety of media practitioners in Africa must begin with legal reforms and the protection of press freedom. LightRay Media Foundation canvassed the imperative need for change at the masterclass session on the safety of communication professionals, held in Abuja recently.

### **Methodology**

To assess the impact of the masterclass, we distributed feedback forms to all participants at the end of the event. The feedback forms contained both open-ended questions and rating scales. From the collected data, we identified themes in the participation form and analysed the recurring themes, patterns, and sentiments in the responses.

### **Participant Demographics**

The 32 participants of the "Safety of Communication Professionals" masterclass in Nigeria represented a diverse cross-section of individuals from various age groups and professional experiences.

In terms of age, the attendees ranged from young professionals aged 31 to 35 years, comprising approximately 15.7% of the participants, to those in the 41-45 age group, which constituted about 15.6%. A significant number, 9.4%, fell within the 46-50 age range, the other numbers were minute to describe.

Participants' job designation also cut across early-career, mid-level and executive roles of established communication organisations and start-ups.

These participants work at broadcast media organisations (31.3%), online platforms (28.1%) and print media (40.6%).

With the depth and richness identified in discussions and insights shared during the masterclass, we highlighted the importance of addressing safety concerns comprehensively and inclusively.

### **Key discoveries**

- Safety fears for communication professionals have majorly been from security personnel (15.6%) and government intimidations (15.6%). Participants are also concerned about the low compensation rate (15.6%) for practitioners.
- Women in the male-dominated industry also worry about gender harassment (12.5%) and superior intimidation in the newsroom (12.5%). Lack of credibility on pension and insurance take up the same level of concern (12.5%)
- Other causes of worry for participating practitioners include poor work orientation (3.1%), lack of access to quality FOI (6.3%), journalists' well-being (3.1%) and social media intimidation (3.1%)

### **Masterclass feedback**

- All participants revealed that the masterclass made them expand their networks and contact base.
- Some participants said the masterclass will aid their art of budgeting on media operations and investigations.
- All participants desired more physical masterclass sessions than virtual ones, while some suggested an increase in days and time allocated for subsequent masterclasses.
- Fortunately, all 32 participants revealed that they would recommend subsequent masterclasses to others to tackle limited workshops and training sessions that communication practitioners access in Nigeria.
- All participants also commended the facilitator, Lady Ejiro Umukoro -Publisher of LightRay Media, for ensuring that the masterclass was lively and interactive.

## **Recommendations**

- Security operatives and government officials should work in partnership with journalists and ensure their safety while on duty.
- Strict regulatory measures should be put in place to tackle gender harassment from superiors in the newsrooms. Also, provisions should be made for women to carry out activities in their work environment.
- Workshops should be regularly organised to improve access to FOI, the personal well-being of staff and workplace efficiency.