**CONFLICT SENSITIVE REPORTING FOR VIOLENCE FREE ELECTIONS.**

**Location:**

Lagos, Nigeria

**Start and Finish Date**: Online event December 10th December 2022, further newsroom engagements ongoing.

Finish date: 21st January 2023.

# ABSTRACT

The Nigerian media has covered electoral processes since the return to democratic governance in 1999. However, many issues, some of them critical, began to emerge in the performances of the media in the coverage of successive elections. More media content demonstrated lack of conflict sensitivity by showing disregard to standards of journalistic integrity.

Professionally, these basic standards include; accuracy, fairness, balance, due impartiality and conflict sensitivity.

The growing drift away from the fore-going and other standards by the media has now produced a non-conflict sensitive election performance profile characterized by gaps identified as follows:

1. Pre-election coverage is not issue-based. Attention is focused on personalities which often lead to tension in the polity
2. Analysis of the campaign promises of political parties and their candidates is not sufficiently balanced and fair

(d) Many journalists confuse facts with feelings and parade political biases as objective analysis (e) Non-conflict sensitive and inflammatory opinions along with hate speech are widespread within media contents

(f) Overwhelming media attention is devoted to male politicians, while women, youths, people with disabilities, rural dwellers and similar groups are marginalized in political coverage (g) Many media organizations disregard the principle of pluralism by denying access to certain political parties

These performance gaps are seen to have their roots in inadequate training and experience in peace building and collaborative coexistence programming, interferences by government officials, and influences from political parties who most times serve as dividers and spoilers. Statutory regulation has been largely unable to live up to expectation in checking the widespread gaps. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) for instance have been seen to be largely partial in the exercise of their regulatory powers due to their lack of institutional independence and secure funding. This in itself is also a conflict driver in the coverage of the electoral process.

The fore-going performance challenges played out vividly during the 2015 elections and were well documented by observer groups and other media stakeholders such as the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM). Although the 2019 elections marked an improvement from the 2015 performance, the improvement still fall short of satisfactory standards of positive peace journalism. Media reportage continues to stoke ethnic and regional and religious tensions through the use of themes such as north vs. south and Christian vs. Muslim.

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The success or failure of any electoral process lies not just on the shoulders of the electoral umpire nor government, it is reliant on stakeholders to make sure the process is peaceful, free fair and credible. None of these can happen without the media’s obvious and important role of spreading not just any message but clear, concise, accurate and conflict sensitive stories or angles on politicians and political parties and making sure that the message is unbiased, aiming to unite and not further broaden lines for example of religion and ethnicity as it is the case in nigeria.

In today’s world there’s that urge to want to be first to break news and tell the stories to get clicks and views not minding how the message is received, what tone it carries and what damage it could do. With the advent of social media it has become more and more difficult for the traditional media to wait and verify stories or to even tell the stories without sensationalized headlines or undertone. Now everyone with a phone or a camera is a journalist on social media, and in a bid to create content more and more disinformation hold sway on the internet. The burden again falls to the media to educate and continue to inform the populace on the importance of spreading verified and accurate information and making sure as news readers they don’t just go with the screaming headlines but also stop to verify and ask questions.

This SCI seeks to equip the average reporter, desk editor, on air persons and Journalists in general in Nigeria with the right information on how to handle conflict sensitive information especially as the general elections are underway. This training and retraining initiative will serve as a peace building tool that’ll help in promoting peaceful elections through our reportage and programs, not just for the 2023 elections but for subsequent ones.

At the end of the day all newsrooms and presentation officials will have a different disposition to their programming and rightly tailoring their conversations to peaceful strategies and civic education for a better electoral process.

# PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Nigerian media have emerged into a context characterized by dearth or acute shortage of peace programing. The challenge is far worse when it comes to election programming. This is further compounded by the lack of trained conflict sensitive media personnel in classical media outlets. There is also a clear lack of commitment by media organizations to commit to peace programming as they are accused of thriving on conflict to sell commercial content.

The clear lack of commitment to peace programming is demonstrated in the failure of the media to effectively deploy its conferral powers to influence institutions and policy makers on the need for a structural inclusive and participatory electoral process that responds to the cultural and religious dynamics of the nation. Media language in electoral reportage are also indicative of patriarchal biases against women.

An assessment of media performance in the last two general elections, including the just concluded party primaries shows that two major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated news and current affairs programs of national media. Their dominance of media content however was not based on ideologies that could translate to democratic dividends, instead it was prominently based on dividing factors such as north vs south or christian vs muslim candidates.

Government controlled media also clearly favored ruling political parties and used non-conflict sensitive languages for programming.

Leading private commercial broadcasters showed ‘mixed’ directions in coverage. For example, while stations in the DAAR Communications Group (AIT and RayPower) gave heavily biased coverage in favour of the PDP; TV continental demonstrated highly biased coverage in favour of the APC.

The list of sanctioned media organizations released post-election by the NBC helped to strengthen the foregoing observations. According to the regulatory body, various stations breached various rules which include those on sensibilities, airing sponsored materials, denial of access, advertising or promoting dangerous narratives that could trigger violence.

The overall effect of the poor media and regulatory performance is therefore measured in the contest of the threat it constitutes to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

The way forward therefore, is to put in place a comprehensive capacity-building program which responds to the identified gaps, such that the media will return to a state of improved engagement of the electoral process and ultimately contribute to a peaceful election.

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project has the overall objective of “Strengthening the capacity of media professionals for conflict sensitive programming of the electoral process ” This is supported by a specific objective: “the media, provides fair, accurate and ethical coverage of the electoral process.” It has a focus on the period from August 2022-2022; it covers a broad electoral cycle which incorporates activities of the pre-2023 electoral cycle.

The objectives and outcomes of the project will be achieved in two specific clusters of activities which are:

Cluster 1: Will bring together stakeholders who will analyze the challenges in achieving conflict sensitive programming of the electoral process. This meeting will further culminate into an advocacy think-tank which will set the benchmark for achieving peaceful elections. This is to result in the improvement of the ability of media platforms to diversify, deepen, enrich and deliver civic and voter education.

Cluster 2: Includes investigations to establish the take-off mark for the SCI and enable the media to understand conflict dynamics through a range of training which builds capacity of media personnel on wider but key issues of peace-building. Emphasis will also be placed on positive peace programming, language of reportage and content production. At the end, the capacity of media practitioners in conflict sensitive programming will be enhanced.

All the clusters focus on capacity-building in knowledge and skills. Cluster 2 provides wider capacity-building scope, Clusters 2 targets structural advocacies for peaceful election programming. Details of all activities and target outputs are reflected in the full proposal and work plan.

**CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES**

# Funding

There was no funding all the funding agencies we reached out to had exhausted their funds for the year being a campaign year leading to the elections. We did get support and partnerships in other forms like, training where we got trainers from IEP, Aljazeera, the Nigerian Electoral Commission INEC and CSOs who helped us with our outreach and weekly engagements online and on radio and television.

We got speakers every week on our civic engagement and voter education shows for free and some rotary peace fellows to spread the message of peace and the important role it played in the elections.

While waiting and hoping for funding to kick of on a larger scale we have covered a lot of ground so far with volunteers.

# Support

This project enjoyed support from CSOs, the media, the electoral commission, political Parties, consulates and IEP.

**Mitigation strategies:**

1. Strengthen the security apparatus: The Nigerian government should strengthen the security apparatus to ensure that the elections are conducted in a safe and secure environment. This should include the deployment of security personnel to polling stations to ensure that no violence takes place.

1. Increase awareness campaigns: The government should increase awareness campaigns in order to educate the public on the importance of peaceful elections. This should include public service announcements, radio and television programs, and other forms of media.

1. Strict enforcement of existing laws: The government should strictly enforce existing laws to ensure that those who are found guilty of election violence are punished. This should include stiff penalties for those found guilty of election violence.

1. Deployment of international observers: The government should deploy international observers to monitor the elections and ensure that no violence takes place. This should include the deployment of international monitors to polling stations to ensure that no violence takes place.

1. Dialogue and reconciliation: The government should also promote dialogue and reconciliation between political parties and communities in order to reduce the risk of election violence. This should include dialogue between political parties and community leaders in order to find common ground and reduce the risk of violence.

1. Strengthen the electoral process: The government should also strengthen the electoral process by ensuring that it is free and fair. This should include the implementation of measures to reduce the risk of electoral fraud and manipulation.

# Non-financial supports and collaboration with NGOs and Civil society

Electoral body support- The Independent National Electoral Commission gave us one of its commissioners who was part of the training session and made presentations on how to eliminate election violence, the role of the media and free fair election management.

Speakers/ Trainers

We had support from The IEP, who’s representative spoke on the pillars of peace and how it can be co-opted in the electoral process, reportage of the media and messaging by politicians and their political parties.

Politicians:

We had a politician who spoke on messaging, influencing the media, media owners and the role it plays in reporting, sensitivity and objectivity.

Civil Society:

Civil Society organizations played a major role in supporting and promoting this SCI and partnered with me on this and also curated the event alongside me.

We also had the support of Foreign embassies and high commissions.

# Literature Review

The book “Conflict-Sensitive Journalism in the Nigerian Context” by Uduak-Joe Ntuk is an important resource for journalists and media professionals in Nigeria. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges of conflict-sensitive journalism in the Nigerian context, and how to address these challenges.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part provides an overview of the Nigerian media landscape, and the challenges that journalists and media professionals face in reporting on conflicts in the country. It looks at the various forms of media, the role of the media in conflict, and the challenges of reporting on conflict-related issues.

The second part of the book focuses on the ethical considerations of conflict-sensitive journalism. It looks at how to ensure that journalists and media professionals are able to report accurately and objectively on conflicts, as well as how to ensure that the reporting is not biased or sensationalized.

The third part of the book looks at the practical aspects of conflict-sensitive journalism. It provides guidance on how to identify and report on conflicts, as well as how to manage the risks associated with reporting on conflicts.

The fourth and final part of the book looks at the role of the media in peace building. It examines how the media can be used to promote peace and reconciliation, and how media professionals can use their skills to help build a more peaceful society.

Overall, this book provides a comprehensive look at the challenges of conflict-sensitive journalism in the Nigerian context, and how to address these challenges. It is an invaluable resource for journalists and media professionals in Nigeria, and is highly recommended.

# Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical underpinnings of fighting electoral violence through media in Nigeria involve a combination of media literacy and peace education. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. It is a key tool for citizens to become more informed, better able to recognize and resist manipulation, and more capable of engaging in meaningful dialogue. Peace education, meanwhile, is a form of learning that promotes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that support peace, human rights, and social justice. It is a process that helps individuals and communities to develop the capacity to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner.

Together, media literacy and peace education can be used to fight electoral violence in Nigeria by helping citizens become more aware of the potential for violence, more knowledgeable about the causes of violence, and more capable of engaging in meaningful dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution. Through media literacy, citizens can become more informed about the candidates and their platforms, as well as the potential for violence, and be better prepared to recognize and resist manipulation. Through peace education, citizens can learn how to recognize and address potential sources of violence, as well as how to engage in non-violent dialogue and conflict resolution.

In addition to media literacy and peace education, other strategies for fighting electoral violence include civic education, voter education, and the promotion of peaceful elections. Civic education is a process of learning that promotes knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support the functioning of a democratic society. Voter education is a process of learning that promotes knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support the right to vote and the responsibility of citizens to participate in the electoral process. The promotion of peaceful elections is a process of creating an environment where citizens feel safe to express their opinions and where the electoral process is free from violence and intimidation.

By combining media literacy, peace education, civic education, voter education, and the promotion of peaceful elections, Nigeria can create an environment where citizens are better informed and more capable of engaging in meaningful dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution. This will help to reduce the potential for electoral violence and create a more peaceful and democratic society.

# Change theory and how it was applied

The theory of change has been used in tackling election violence in Nigeria through the media. In the lead up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, the media was used to create a narrative of peace and non-violence. This was done by highlighting the consequences of violence, encouraging peaceful dialogue, and promoting the values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The media was used to promote the idea that violence was not the answer to resolving political differences and that peaceful dialogue was the only way to achieve a just and equitable society. Media outlets also highlighted the importance of free and fair elections and the need to ensure that all citizens had their voices heard in the electoral process.

In addition, the media was used to educate the public on the importance of voting and to encourage citizens to participate in the electoral process. This was done through the use of public service announcements, radio and television programs, and newspaper articles.

The media also played a role in providing citizens with information on the different political parties and candidates, as well as information on the election process. This was done to ensure that citizens were well informed and could make an informed decision when it came to voting.

Overall, the use of the theory of change in tackling election violence in Nigeria through the media has been very successful. The media has been able to create a narrative of peace and non-violence, educate the public on the importance of free and fair elections, and encourage citizens to participate in the electoral process. This has helped to reduce election-related violence in Nigeria and helped to create a more peaceful and democratic society.

# Methods and designs

Media can be a powerful tool for tackling election violence in Nigeria. Through media, citizens can be informed about the dangers of election violence and can be encouraged to take action to prevent it.

One method is to create public service announcements (PSAs) that are broadcast on radio and television. These PSAs can highlight the consequences of violence and encourage citizens to report any incidents of violence to the authorities. They can also focus on the importance of peaceful elections and the need for citizens to be involved in the process.

Another method is to use social media to spread messages about the importance of peaceful elections. Social media can be used to create discussion forums and online campaigns that encourage citizens to speak out against violence and to report any incidents of election violence to the authorities.

In addition, media can be used to educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities during elections. This could include information about how to cast a ballot, how to report instances of violence or voter fraud, and how to participate in the electoral process.

Finally, media can be used to promote positive messages about the importance of peaceful elections. This could include campaigns that highlight the positive aspects of elections, such as the opportunity to participate in democracy, or campaigns that showcase successful elections and the positive outcomes they can bring.

Overall, through effective media campaigns, citizens can be informed and empowered to take action to prevent election violence in Nigeria.

# Interventions and activities

In order to achieve the expected results, the SCI will implement three training activities in three locations and targeted advocacies; integrating lessons learned from previous similar actions within and outside the country. The activities are presented below.

Activity 1.1.1: Stakeholders sensitization and advocacy campaigns promoting peace

programming and conflict sensitive coverage of the electoral process

The project highlights the dangers and role of conflict themes in the electoral process and the need for the media to deploy its conferral powers in mobilizing stakeholders for a collaborative response against identified drivers. Media outlets will be committed through structured advocacies to amplify and focus on the strengths in the diversity of the nation.

Sub-Outputs

-Media awareness on the dangers of conflict drivers in the electoral process created -The public is informed/educated on peaceful election through media sensitization

Activity 2.1.1: Trainings and guidance on a wide range of technical journalistic skills with a focus on conflict sensitive reportage, peace programming, and inclusive governance

The project will conduct three (3) trainings for editors, staff in production units and political correspondents in radio, television and print media. The training were organized across three locations (Abuja, Lagos, Rivers). The trainings had a duration of 2 days and took 20 participants each.

Each participant scaled down the training in their various media organizations.

Sub-Outputs:

-Media practitioners acquire knowledge and skills on a range of specific peace building skills

-Media practitioners acquire skills in positive peace programming

# Key Findings/Impact

We mostly discovered that every election cycle the polity gets heated and propaganda takes center stage in nigeria and this has always played out in favor of the political elites who want to win at all costs, hence they use the media as their playing field not necessarily for the right reasons but rile up their opponents and whip up sentiments from their followers who sometimes may be a bit too emotional and go up in arms.

We started this campaign pretty early even before we got support knowing that no better way to educate ourselves and the people on the importance of sensitive reporting and programming but via our media channels, be it broadcast or print and we made sure that social media wasn’t left out.

It is also important to consider electoral law and silencing periods; safety of journalists, civil society, and candidates; gender participation; inflammatory language by media and candidates; rural and urban access to election polls; and media monitoring before, during, and after elections.

The media should be invited to press briefings by the policy body prior to the launching of any major activity of the electoral process. Most times the media or some media houses are black listed Ny certain governments and politicians.

Here are a few take aways;

1. This campaign and civic education or engagement should be continuous, not only before, during and after elections.
2. Peace education is of utmost importance and it must be local just as the problems and factors that prevent peace.
3. Journalists need to stick to truth and facts with less sensation
4. There has to a collaboration between political parties, leadership, the press and CSOs in making sure of a peaceful free and fair elections.

# General Conclusion

For every time we are preparing for an election we must ask ourselves as media practitioners these questions:

How can the media can play a role in creating peaceful and non violent elections?

More specifically:

* What sort of preparations should the media make in advance of an election ?

* What do you think the public wants to know in advance of an election?

* What is the right time frame for the media to discuss aspects of an election ?

Where we’re able to answer these questions, our jobs become easier and purposeful. Though we may not be a 100 percent at covering all grounds, we would have at least done well enough to equip

A large percentage of the voting public and those who are yet to get to the voting age, but we would have succeeded in building a responsible voting public who will stand for peace and nothing else.

# Recommendation/ Implementation for policy

These engagements must me taken beyond just the media but down to the people preaching the message of peace and the importance of voter education and why the media must be trusted to give accurate information.

Many rely on the media for factual information yet the major issue in nigeria is that most media outlets are owned by politicians and governments, making it hard to be unbiased and ask the right questions.

With the wave that this campaign has taken more and more people are learning to trust media more than the propaganda on social media and mere hearsay.

Journalists have also been trained to see their job as an important one in ensuring the peace and sanctity of the political space by doing its job without ear or favor.

# Sustainability Plan

The sustainability plan for conflict sensitive reporting in Nigeria is a comprehensive approach to ensure that journalists and media outlets are able to report on conflict-related issues in a manner that is both accurate and respectful of the affected communities. This plan is designed to provide a framework for media outlets to ensure that their reporting is responsible, ethical, and sensitive to the needs of those affected by the conflict.

The plan will include the following components:

1. Training: Journalists and media outlets should receive training in conflict-sensitive reporting, including an understanding of the complexities of the conflict, the sensitivities of the affected communities, and the need to report responsibly.

1. Guidelines: Media outlets should develop and implement guidelines for reporting on conflictrelated issues, including a code of conduct for journalists and a commitment to accuracy and respect for those affected.

1. Monitoring: Media outlets should monitor their reporting to ensure that it is accurate and respectful of those affected by the conflict.

1. Accountability: Media outlets should be held accountable for their reporting and be willing to accept criticism and feedback from those affected by the conflict.

1. Support: Media outlets should receive support from civil society organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders in order to ensure that their reporting is responsible and ethical.

The sustainability plan for conflict sensitive reporting in Nigeria is an important step towards ensuring that journalists and media outlets are able to report on conflict-related issues in a responsible and respectful manner. It is important that all stakeholders – including the media, government, civil society organizations, and the affected communities – work together to ensure that this plan is implemented effectively and that journalists and media outlets are held accountable for their reporting.

# Sustainability Mechanism

The project targets skill transfer, and institutional strengthening. The activities in the project will empower beneficiaries and other sectorial stakeholders with structural and relational programming skills which they will apply in their professional life. Institutional integration into the project structure is deliberate; this is to ensure that the stakeholder community takes ownership of the project.

**Activities**:

In order to achieve the expected results, the SCI will implement three training activities in three locations and targeted advocacies; integrating lessons learned from previous similar actions within and outside the country. The activities are presented below.

Activity 1.1.1: Stakeholders sensitization and advocacy campaigns promoting peace programming and conflict sensitive coverage of the electoral process.

The project will highlight the dangers and role of conflict themes in the electoral process and the need for the media to deploy its conferral powers in mobilizing stakeholders for a collaborative response against identified drivers. Media outlets will be committed through structured advocacies to amplify and focus on the strengths in the diversity of the nation

Sub-Outputs:

Media awareness on the dangers of conflict drivers in the electoral process created

The public is informed/educated on peaceful election through media sensitization

Activity 2.1.1:

Trainings and guidance on a wide range of technical journalistic skills with a focus on conflict sensitive reportage, peace programming, and inclusive governance

The project will conduct three (3) trainings for editors, staff in production unit and political correspondents in radio, television and print media. The training will be organized across three locations (Abuja, Lagos, Rivers).

The training will have a duration of 2 days and take 20 participants each. Each participant will scale down the training in their various media organizations.

# Appendices

Conflict-Sensitive Journalism in the Nigerian Context

Conflict-sensitive reporting: state of the art; a course for journalists and journalism educators

The Guide on Action Points for the Prevention and Mitigation of Election-related Violence

International IDEA online electoral cycle tool

Calling Article ‘Divisive,’ Afghanistan Orders Expulsion of Times Correspondent

Sending Messages to Reduce Violent Conflict

Dealing with Election-Related Violence in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States