

French-Language Syndicate Report

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*And Syndicate Participants (below)

The members of this group all came from various countries and their only common point was the fact that they shared the use of the French language. No particular theme had been identified for this workshop.

Among the 11 countries represented, the majority (nine) were African countries, and some of them were experiencing:

- a particular “post-conflict” or “post-genocide” context;
- a situation where freedom of the press (and especially freedom of broadcasting) is still in formation;
- a hostile environment (economic, technological, political) for media development.

Each of these particular backgrounds brings up questions and issues about the way local journalists should be trained. Nevertheless, beyond these differences, the members of the group could identify some challenges that were relevant to most of them and to their institutions. They also tried to think about possible solutions to face those challenges.

Challenges

1. Dominance of English

This issue was shared by all the represented institutions, not only the “Francophone” ones, including the ones using other languages for teaching journalism: Portuguese, Arabic and Kurdish.

- The teaching material for journalism educators is mainly published in English.
- The debates about journalism education are mainly held in English.
- Scientific research published in English is more valued at the international level and also more and more in the local assessments of the scientific careers of the journalism educators in non-English speaking countries and institutions.

Recommendations:

- The existing networks should be reactivated and reinforced (as the “Theophraste” networks that gathers all the Francophone schools of journalism), and new networks could be built.
- Exchanges and translations should be facilitated (especially when it comes to scientific

journals and teaching material).

- The experiences from non-English speaking countries should be more visible (especially in Africa) and new tools that are more open to language and cultural diversity could be promoted. For instance, after UNESCO supported the publication of a journalism curricula mostly based on references from English-speaking Africa, another curriculum was produced based on Francophone references, data and experiences.
- The African Union, which has four official languages: English, French, Portuguese and Arabic, could play a part in promoting more contacts and exchanges. The AU already has a project to set up a Pan-African media website and to publish a special issue of its publication about “Media and Development.” The AU is also proposing to welcome more journalism students from the African continent to do internships in Addis Ababa so they could have a wider view on their continent and build continental networks.

2. Widening gaps between the content of teaching and political and newsroom realities

- Political context: In some countries, the development of the media sector (and the content of the teaching in training institutions) is far ahead of the current understanding and state of mind of the political elite when it comes to media freedom and media development. Therefore, young graduates who come to practice journalism have to face a political regime that is often backward and unaware of the changes in society.
- Newsrooms realities: Media companies are generally still weak and not very well structured, so the young graduates that join these companies are faced with professional conduct that is contradictory to what they have been taught in school, especially regarding ethics. Internships that students have to complete in local newsrooms are sometimes supervised by media professionals that are even less trained than the students themselves and that give advice or orders that don't match what the students are learning in school. Very often, the graduates are therefore overqualified, and they end up turning to other professional activities where they will be better paid. As a result, the newsroom is left in the hands of young untrained people. For example, media newsrooms that have bigger audiences, such as those found at local community radio stations, are using young untrained staff.

Recommendations:

- Bring industry on-board and involve it in curriculum development (so that it shares the responsibility of the content of journalism education with educators and the professional future of the young graduates).
- Try to better take into account, in teaching, the expectations of local publics toward the media (for example professionalizing the more popular approaches and types of programs).

3. One-size-fits-all curriculum imposed by national and supra-national institutions

- In several African countries, national or supra-national institutions are interfering in shaping and validating the curricula. For instance, the former French colonies are still under the authority of a common body called CAMES: Conseil Africain et Malgache de l'Enseignement Supérieur. In many countries there is a ministry of higher education that frames the curricula of all university programs (e.g. in the DRC). Therefore, journalism schools don't have a total agency in defining their curricula, and they

sometimes have a hard time integrating the peculiarities of journalism education (especially the practical aspects) into a “one-size fits all” curriculum that is shared with other types of University education. This is especially a problem for J-schools that are fully attached to a University.

- Several institutions are currently faced with the obligation to reform their programs to enter the “License-Master-Doctorate” (LMD) system, with not enough discussions with the local or supra-national authorities in order to have the peculiarities of journalism education recognized and acknowledged.
- One of the countries represented, Rwanda, has been forced to switch to education in English even though most of the teachers are French speaking.

Recommendations:

- More dialogue with national and supra-national institutions in order to make them take into account the peculiarities of journalism education, which has to be open to practical training and to the outside world.
- More dialogue between journalism schools in the several countries that are undergoing similar reform.

4. Reducing government support vs. increasing student numbers

- In most African countries, the proportion of the national budget that is devoted to higher education has been reduced. At the same time, the amount of students is increasing as higher education turns into mass education (vs. elite education). In the DRC, for instance, the part of the national budget devoted to the education sector has dropped from 30 percent in the 1970s to 2 percent today. Although journalism students are increasing in number, they arrive at journalism school with reduced levels of basic knowledge. Journalism schools have to work with reduced budgets while faced with more students and a growing necessity to teach the basics, such as grammar and writing.
- In some countries, teacher cutbacks are also a major concern – there are not enough qualified educators and the education sector, including University that used to be prestigious, doesn’t attract the best teachers anymore.

Recommendations:

- Advocacy to secure more support for the education sector in general.
- On the African continent, a call should be launched to national governments throughout the African Union so education budget issues are put on the agenda.

5. Integrating issues and experiences of specific importance to Africa into journalism curriculum (environment, conflicts, good governance, rural information, health, etc.)

- Most journalism teaching content and materials used on the African continent are developed outside of Africa. Accordingly, they fail to address specific preoccupations of African society and African journalists. For instance, the African media have to address a population that is still mostly rural, sometimes in a conflict or post-conflict context, and evolving in an environment in which good governance and freedom of the press might be lacking or threatened.

Recommendations:

- Develop projects (as the one recently launched by UNESCO about teaching African media) that aim to a better integration of African issues and realities in teaching material for African journalism schools.
- Support practical training where the students have to do field reporting and work about the issues and concerns that are important for their own communities.
- Encourage African journalist to step into the newsrooms of international media so that they can put forward another perspective on the African continent.

Conclusion

The group underlined the necessity to build more bridges between relevant expertise and experiences from various countries, which would help overcome cultural and language differences. Indeed, quality journalism education must take a specific country's situation/characteristics in mind.

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