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Preliminary and incomplete

Evaluating Journalism Training Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa

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The media in much of sub-Saharan Africa are severely constrained by several factors: lack of resources, government pressure, the influence of media ownership and the quality of secondary education and professional education. In many countries, newspapers are unable to perform the role of watchdog or effectively educate the public in part because of the difficulties faced by the journalists in their employ. Into the breach has stepped a plethora of foreign organizations which provide journalism training. Some of these are non-governmental organizations with a development agenda that seek to promote education about their causes. Others are the training arms of professional media groups (Thomson Reuters, BBC Trust) or are organizations that work on journalism education (the Berlin-based International Institute for Journalism and the International Center for Journalism in Washington DC). Findings from two studies conducted by the author which deployed content analysis and interviews with journalists who have had training, are presented to examine these training efforts to assess their effectiveness. This paper looks at ways to measure impact but also suggests that given the challenges faced by African media, donor-driven training programs will have only a limited effect on the larger media climate.

KEYWORDS Africa; business reporting; corruption; journalism training; media; press; newspapers; transparency

Journalism training is a growing concern in the developing world. A part of public diplomacy during the Cold War (Wrenn 2009), it has expanded as the media has grown, as organizations have sought to do journalism training as part of their public relations and outreach efforts and in some cases in response to frustration with low quality journalism. Figures for total spending on journalism training are not available but an estimated \$1 billion is spent on media assistance each year by non-US organizations (Becker 2005).

Introduction: the scope of journalism training in Africa

Today there are hundreds of organizations around the world that are involved in journalism training (Hume 2004). These include well-respected trusts that are part of news

organizations such as the BBC and Thomson Reuters, The International Center for Journalism in Washington DC which receives funding from US AID and the Knight Foundation and the International Institute for Journalism in Berlin which is part of the German government aid agency, InWent. These groups offer training in topics such as business reporting, environmental reporting, investigative reporting, covering elections as well as courses in digital media, community radio and even publishing and the business side of running a media company. The business/economic journalism training offered is usually not focused on advocacy or development but on topics that are most often covered in the Europe and the US such as stock markets, covering company earnings and economic indicators. There is a long standing debate about journalism education in Africa and whether it should be more informed by African values and traditions.(Murphy and Scotton 1987) . More recent critiques have argued that the model of democratic governance underlying much of the current media assistance is based on establishing and maintaining a “political climate conducive to private enterprise” (Kareithi 2005, page 5).

Certainly the type of training offered by Thomson Reuters Foundation and IJ is based on US and European reporting traditions and standards (McCurdy and Power 2007) although there are generally some topics added to the curriculum that are relevant to the African context. These can include discussion of local topics such covering corruption, poverty alleviation, the international financial institutions which lend to Africa (such as the World Bank) or a budget reporting course aimed at promoting transparency.

The World Bank Institute also runs journalism training programs and during the nineties benefited from Tim Carrington, who in his eight years managing their business and economic journalism training program was instrumental in the foundation of press associations around Africa. As well, there are numerous small groups founded by journalists (Independent Journalism Foundation, Indochina Media Memorial Fund, Institute of Financial and Economic Journalists in Ghana, that may receive foundation funding or partner with universities or hire journalists who are no longer working in the profession. In general, media assistance and journalism training efforts are often uncoordinated. (Center for Media Assistance) A 2007 report published by the African Media Development Initiative (AMDI) noted that much of the media assistance programmes in Africa are “ad hoc, “ and noted the existence of “non-sustainable and short-term approaches to projects; disconnected programmes; unnecessary competition amongst donors; and, consequent wasted investment of donor funds.” (AMDI 2007)

Other organizations that offer journalism training are NGOs that hope to encourage journalists to write about the causes that interest them such as HIV AIDS, trafficking of women, the environment, water, the need for transparency in the extractive sector, the importance of social entrepreneurship, public health initiatives. They may run the training themselves or hire/fund an organization such as the Thomson Reuters Foundation to do it.

A number of government agencies (including the Central Banks of Barbados, Kenya, Nigeria, Turkey and Mexico) do their own training because they are frustrated with the poor level of economic coverage in their countries. They use training to help journalists understand the economic topics they write about and to familiarize journalists with economic concepts and the workings of the central bankⁱ.

Most of the training that is conducted by these two groups (NGOs and Central Banks) is short-term and does not include much follow up. (Ogundimu et al. 2007) Typically they offer 2-3 day seminars which don't involve much writing. This is partly because these groups are not as much interested in media development as a whole as they are in promoting coverage of the subjects that their organizations are interested in. And even if they did want to expand their activities into media development, they usually lack the funding and knowledge to carry out long-term trainings.

A fourth category of groups that offer training is newspapers and news outlets that hire and train their own reporters. This is common practice at the US news organization, Bloomberg, and at the Times of India and is starting to take place in Nigeria as well. The advantage for these organizations is that they can train their reporters to meet their needs. (Berger and Matras 2007) It is common for business editors to say that they want to hire good writers because they will learn about business and economics on the job. Typically editors describe hiring someone with a business or economics background and finding it impossible to teach them to write.

The first category of training organizations is the one that we studied this past year at Columbia University. A team of six students from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) traveled to Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda to research the effectiveness of journalism training programs in business and economic reporting. We surveyed reporters and editors who had training and spoke with a number of professors and others in the field. We employed standard qualitative research techniques using an online survey which we supplemented with interviews, research and a content analysis of coverage. Our study was commissioned by Revenue Watch Institute, an NGO based in New York which promotes good governance in resource rich countries. RWI is embarking on some journalism training programs as part of their work building capacity in civil society. Before starting this work, they wanted to get a sense of past journalism training efforts and so they asked us to look into the work that had been done. Since there had been very little training on covering the extractive sector we instead surveyed business and economic journalism training to see what impact it has had. We looked at Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda because all have revenues from extractive industries (oil and mining). They also seemed like suitable choices for a comparative study as their points in common include the fact that they were all British colonies, have reputable journalism programs at local universities, are Anglophone and emerged from authoritarian regimes to become stable democracies with a relatively free press. Despite these factors, we found that the media faces a number of constraints and our (unsurprising) conclusion was that journalism training does help develop skills and knowledge but on its own will not solve the difficult problems faced by journalists in many these countries.

We followed up our first study with a second one carried out in the spring of 2010. SIPA students and alumni interviewed journalists in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia and other countries and asked them to fill out an online survey. The conclusions reached in the second study were almost the same as in the first.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Journalism Training

There is not a lot of information available on monitoring and evaluation of journalism training programs although there is a vast literature on m&e of aid projects in general. Much of the monitoring and evaluation that is done is done by donors for their own internal use and is not made public. Other kinds of evaluations tend to be incomplete. A 2009 report by the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) faulted many programs for not collecting baseline data. (Mosher 2009 p 14) It also noted that most tk. We found that many organizations (IIJ, Thomson Reuters Foundation among others) hand out questionnaires to their trainees but we did not find any publicly available reports on the effectiveness of their journalism training programs or those of the BBC Trust and World Bank Institute. As we did not have any clear guidelines as to how to measure impact we decided to look at a wide range of possible measures. We found Guy Berger's paper on training to be very useful and that helped us broaden our thinking. Instead of just looking to see whether the journalists' articles improved we decided to find out whether they shared what they had learned with their colleagues and whether they stayed in touch with each other, the trainers and the presenters after the course

finished. We asked the trainee journalists about their experiences after they returned to the newsroom. Berger notes that women are more likely to share course materials than our men. He also notes that very often the impact of training increases over time.

Donors are obviously eager for evidence that the projects they have funded actually work. In this case, Investment Climate Facility, which funded the 2009/2010 trainings by Thomson Reuters, was eager to see results before committing to funding more training in 2011. They funded basic and advanced training for African journalists and were open to the idea of doing it again if they could see it had an impact.

Both our 2009 and 2010 surveys involved a mixture of qualitative and quantitative survey techniques. In 2010 we decided to supplement our interviews and questionnaires with a content analysis of articles written before and after the training by Thomson Reuters Foundation took place. To this end, we enlisted Michael Behrman from the Columbia masters' program in Quantitative Methods in Statistical Social Sciences (QMSS) to help us design our survey and come up with criteria for coding the before and after articles written by the journalists.

Methodology

Beginning in November 2009, a multifaceted strategy was employed to measure the ICF/TRF training programs.¹ The strategy was designed to capture quantitative information about the training outcomes and participants' lives, and qualitative knowledge to contextualize the analysis and ground it in the real-life experiences of the participants. At all stages of the process the entire list of participants, provided by ICF, was contacted and persistently followed up with in order to maximize response rates. The strategy involved: (1) an online survey sent to participants in December 2009; (2) face-to-face interviews conducted in late December 2009 and January 2010; (3) phone interviews conducted between January and February 2010; and (4) analysis of articles written before and after the ICF/TRF training programs.

Online Survey

The online survey was administered via Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and made available in English, French and Portuguese. Participants were directed to the appropriate version based on the dominant language at their introductory training site. The survey captured information in seven major areas: demographic; journalistic experience; introductory training; advanced training; other training; career after training; journalism challenges.

Questions of primary interest include the primary 6-point scale rating question that was asked in-person of participants at the training sites in the questionnaire that TRF handed out immediately after their sessions. We used the same 6-point scale in our online survey for the introductory and advanced programs to allow for further comparison. However, respondents were overwhelmingly positive, which diminishes the accuracy of the results. Due to this, we recommend more attention be paid to the questions asking what part of the training was "most valuable"—so as to more clearly establish different preferences. Such skew or "grade inflation" problems are not uncommon—if large issues exist in a training, such questions will often reflect them in raw numbers of low responses rather than in the overall mean.

Demographic questions were included to gain a clearer understanding of trainee education and journalistic experience since a large spread in these measures could create teaching challenges. Personal

¹ See Appendix A for a copy of the initial communication to participants.

questions such as income were avoided to increase response rates, and stand-ins such as “promotion” were used to gauge employment impact. Other impact questions were included that touched on topics commonly mentioned in the academic literature on evaluating training, such as information sharing, article writing and publication, and communication with speakers and other trainees.

Participation in the online survey was requested of all 65 participants via email. Participants who had not completed the survey were followed up with by email, phone and in-person at interviews, if possible. Answers to the survey were recorded via phone when participants indicated they had inadequate Internet access. Of the 65 participants, 47 completed the survey, three began the survey, but did not complete enough of it to be included in the results. The overall response rate was 72% for all participants and 83% for participants who went on to attend an advanced training session. Due to low response rates for the Mozambique training, results should be generalized with caution to that location. See Appendix E for selected anonymous results, and a breakdown of response rates by training session; Appendix F for the 6-point scale for in-person survey results that were administered at training.

Interviews

In-person and phone interviews were conducted with participants in order to gain as much qualitative depth as possible and to help the team place information gained from the other analysis methods in context. Interviews focused on questions that were difficult to fully establish in a multiple choice form question. For instance, feelings regarding the training and how course objectives were met, most useful sessions, and how the training material was used on return to the workplace. Interviews were key in establishing the bounds of the analysis and in finding future directions for further analysis. See Appendix G for the complete interview guide.

Throughout the report we note when interviewees agreed or disagreed with results gleaned from more quantitative methods, such as the before/after article analysis and online survey. In quotes interviewees’ names have been replaced with their training site and a consistent number in order to maintain their anonymity. We did not include country of origin, or gender (referring instead to all participants as “he,” except in a few instances that were important to understanding the context of findings) because we wanted to obscure the interviewees’ identity in all cases.

Five trained interviewers conducted in-person and phone interviews with 52 participants across all training sites. In-person² interviews were conducted with 25 participants in Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Zambia. Phone³ interviews were offered to the remaining participants, 27 accepted and were interviewed. The overall interview response rate was 74% for the introductory training programs and 56% for the advanced training programs; all sessions were reasonably represented in the sample. Limited coding of interview responses was completed to establish a shorter list of impacts that were common across the training locations. This was done with the interviewees’ responses regarding business impacts. By engaging in this coding we offer a more quantitative cross check on the subjective analysis of the interviews as well measures that can be graphed and reported as percents. However, coded results should be approached with caution because they are stripped of context and can be skewed as a result. The coded results should be seen as a complement to longer quotes and the qualitative analysis of the interviews rather than a replacement, especially with a small population where it is feasible to review the majority of direct quotes. The full results of the interview coding analysis can be seen in Appendix H.

Before/After Article Analysis

The team engaged in scoring and content analysis of articles written by participants before and after the training in order to obtain a real-world measure of the training impact. The following steps were taken during the analysis: (1) articles were rendered anonymous and publication dates were removed so that

² In-person interviews were conducted in a private space when available. Twelve of the 25 in-person interviews were conducted in a public or semi-private setting.

³ Phone here is used broadly, and includes computer based Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) methods such as Skype.

the author and “before/after” training status could not be determined;⁴ (2) articles were given to team members broadly familiar with the training country to score using the tool contained in Appendix I, at all times if a coder worked on a before article they also coded the matching after article; (3) automated analysis involving word counts, average quotation length, etc., was conducted; (4) results were reattached to the original author’s information for analysis and a second pass was conducted by coders allowing a comparison of interview statements to actual writing results. The full quantitative results can be seen in Appendix J.

The measures used to score the articles were developed based on standards commonly used in grading articles in university programs, with additional emphasis on topics that the literature pointed to as being of particular concern in the African context. Anchor points were established for each question, giving a clear short example of what a poor and what an excellent article should look like. We engaged in a brief pretest with a single article, having each coder complete a sample article with the tool and to ensure that scores were largely comparable, which they were. We also controlled for potential differences in coding by always having the same coder handle the before and the after article. So a difference in coding only alters the absolute number, not the change between articles that was our central measure.

In the initial communication and follow-up communications examples of participants articles were requested. Two articles were requested: one that was written before the ICF/TRF training, the other written after the training. Only paired articles were included in the final analysis, one for each participant. In cases where participants sent more than two articles, the analyzed articles were chosen at random. In total 44 articles were analyzed: 22 from before the training and 22 from after the training. Ideally the articles sampled would have been randomly chosen from the participants’ full list of publications over the last year, but this was not possible given time constraints and archival availability. The articles given still represent a reasonable sample of “best” works, which is a reasonable proxy to a random sample since we are evaluating how well participants acted on what they learned in training.

There are a number of ways that the before/after article analysis could be improved. These include: (1) further refinement and definition of each criteria’s grading scale; (2) improved and expanded sample, including randomizing the trainee articles selected and establishing a “control” population that is either untrained or differently trained; (3) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) should be conducted to establish whether the chosen measures are appropriate and work to improve them through an iterative design process. Importantly, CFA could also provide feedback as to whether the concept that each question purports to measure is in fact being measured by that question.

While the methods were imperfect and the sample was small, and therefore not statistically significant, it is our hope that this article analysis provides an inspiration for future training evaluations. If continued across multiple training programs and compared with a baseline sample of non-ICF/TRF trained journalists, a long-term picture of training impact and needs can be constructed. Since real articles are being analyzed, this technique is very concrete and closes the loop between the training experience and actual on the ground results.

The state of the media in Africa today

Space constraints prevent us from delving into the history of the African media in the 20th century but it’s worth noting that there were 179 newspapers in Africa in 1969 (Hachten 1971, page 24) with the media climate declining under the authoritarian regimes of 1970s and 1980s (Bourgault 2005, page 34). Today there are thousands of outlets including radio stations (with very broad reach) private and public print and television outlets and a burgeoning online community.ⁱⁱ There are a growing number of journalism schools and

⁴ A few articles contained information that held dates but could not be removed without significantly altering the content meaning. In these cases whether the article was written before or after the training could be determined. Coders were instructed not to take this into consideration in their scoring.

departments throughout the continent (Diedong 2008) including Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda, a number of which were identified as potential centres of excellence in a 2007 UNESCO report. (Berger and Matras, 2007)

In general, the media has become freer in much of Africa as many countries have transitioned to Democracy and this is certainly true of Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda.

However, there is still a long way to go in much of Africa and even in Ghana, Uganda and Nigeria journalists still face pressure from government and suffer from a lack of resources. (AMDI 2007) The Freedom of Information Bill has still not been passed in Nigeria despite a decade of attempts. The Freedom of Information Act bill in Ghana has been delayed in parliament since 2003. The Ugandan constitution protects freedom of expression and freedom of the media but the government sometimes prosecutes journalists and is now considering a new bill which would further curtail freedom of expression.ⁱⁱⁱ Most dangerous of all is the oil producing area of the Niger Delta where journalists often face harassment, arrest and the threat of violence.

Badly paid, poorly trained and working under both political and commercial pressures, many African journalists suffer from the devaluing of their profession which has left them vulnerable and isolated. Typifying these conditions, in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, some journalists are not given a salary but simply left to rely on payments from sources.

The need for training and its benefits

The need for training in African journalism has been discussed for decades (Ainslie 1966 pp 228-230) (Hachten 1971, pp 138-140) and many of the problems mentioned in the sixties are still noted today (Steyn, De Beer 2004). Writing in 1966, Rosalind Ainslie hoped that training would lessen the dependence of African media on imported "tape, film and features". Andrew Hachten, whose book was published in 1971, noted that a 1962 UNESCO meeting in Paris called for more training throughout the Third World. In Africa, editors hoped that training would prepare Africans to replace the Europeans who were running many of the local newspapers. Numerous foreign organizations –including some with Cold War-era public diplomacy agendas--supported training. (Hachten 1971, page 133).

For many years it was hoped that training would help ameliorate the many problems that journalism faced. These problems have been characterized as everything from superficial coverage lacking in context or follow up (Ainslie) extreme partisanship, lack of professionalism (Diedong) and laziness on the part of reporters who print gossip and scandal (Nyamanjoh, 2005 page 59) to low pay which breeds poor ethics and makes the profession unattractive. In the sixties, Ainslie noted that the Nigerian press published personal attacks and scandal that would not have been found in the East African newspapers or in the British press. Even today, journalists have been accused of practicing vendetta journalism (Nyamanjoh 2005, page 60) and making personal attacks which "do not augur well for sustainable democratic tolerance" (Tettey 2001).

Even as journalism training was discussed decades ago, it was understood that training couldn't solve all the media's problems such as those related to the lack of resources or a viable business model for African newspapers. Clearly, journalism training could not prevent government pressure on journalists or threats to freedom of the press. Nor could training provide an in-depth education in writing or social science techniques, but it was hoped that even short courses would help develop basic skills. (Hachten 1971, page 138).

Our findings

For our first study in 2009, we talked to almost 100 people for our research, including some 40 journalists who had had training in business reporting. The interviews were conducted mostly in person. Of the 100 interviewees about 40 also completed a written survey. Some did this via email while others filled out the survey with our researchers when they were on-site for interviews. In a few cases, we did interviews by email and over the phone. Most of these journalists worked for urban, daily newspapers although a few were in broadcast. Of those who answered the question, 65% said their most recent employer was in the private sector and 15% said they worked for a government-owned outlet. On average, our respondents had 11 years of work experience in journalism. About one third had been to multiple journalism trainings. Of those who had been trained, 18 had attended IJ trainings, 11 had been to Thomson Reuters trainings, nine had been trained by the World Bank Institute, two by the BBC, five had studied at overseas universities and three were in the "other" category. For our second study, we spoke to fewer outside experts, instead focusing on working journalists who had attended training sessions in 2009. Of the 65 journalists who attended the 2009 trainings (which mostly took place in Africa) we interviewed 50 in person or over the phone, **and** 45 completed an online survey that we emailed them. In this group, the average work experience was between **5½ and 7 years** and most worked for private media outlets although 20% worked for state-owned ones.

The Key Impacts of the Thomson Reuters training that we observed in our 2010 surveys/interviews and content analysis were the following:

- **Improved Writing Skills** – Participants learned how to better structure their writing, be more concise, use less jargon and use numbers more effectively to make their writing more accessible to readers. In fact, our before and after article analysis revealed that eight of nine grading criteria improved for articles written after the training.
- **Better Sourcing** – Participants learned to use a greater balance of sources that provides more viewpoints, to not merely reprint all quotes and press releases verbatim, and to include their own independent analysis.
- **More Practical Experience** – Writing exercises and feedback from instructors, as well as field trips, provided much needed practice and learning by example.
- **Understanding of Economic Concepts** – Participants' writing seemed to improve more than their understanding of economic concepts. However, trainees from all locations said they learned a lot from the sessions on covering the stock market.
- **Increased Confidence and Heightened Professional Status** – Participants were more confident as journalists and more sought out by colleagues as experts. Over 30% of participants also reported receiving a promotion at some point after the training.
- **Expanded Networking** – Participants said that expanding their network to share ideas and learn from others' experiences was an important benefit from this training, with all survey respondents reporting that they have had at least some contact with fellow participants after training, and 61% saying they have done so regularly.
- **Training Reach** – The training also benefited journalists that did not attend the training, with 72% of participants reporting in the survey that they shared skills and techniques with colleagues.

Key Training Commentary

- **Instructors/Speakers** – Participants generally rated instructors and speakers highly and praised for their approachability, with some exceptions.
- **Format** – Participants very much appreciated the mix of lectures, discussions and writing exercises.

- **Topics/Sessions** – Writing exercises and receiving feedback were generally seen as the most useful. Participants generally found the economic training useful, particularly the stock market sessions, though the training was not long enough for the less economically experienced to retain much of what they learned.
- **Field Trips** – Field trips were highly rated for their practical nature, with widespread requests for more, though a lack of field trips was criticized in the Dakar training.
- **Logistics** – Trainees from the countries where the training was held were often at a disadvantage to those that traveled from abroad, because of distractions from work and delays in getting to the training caused by traffic. On the other hand, trainees from abroad, particularly those for the London training, often faced significant challenges in paying for transport and obtaining visas.

The lack of training and lack of skills were obvious in the business and economic stories we read from Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda. Many of the journalists are not well educated and write extremely poorly. Nor do they have in depth understanding of the topics they write about. The result is often confusing stories which skate over complex issues or which appear to be regurgitating press releases issued by companies and government. The journalists are themselves aware of the problem. In our survey asking journalists what they viewed as challenges to reporting on economics and business 79.1% said that lack of knowledge and skills were “very important” while 18.6% said that lack of knowledge and skills was “important”. In our 2010 survey 42.2% said lack of knowledge and skills were “very important” and 33.5% said these lack of knowledge and skills was “important.”

Overwhelmingly the journalists said that the training helped them in a number of areas and many described the experience as transformational (Colmery et al 2009) Courses such as those offered by Thomson Reuters Foundation, the World Bank Institute and the International Institute for Journalism helped in two areas: the first was promoting their overall understanding of government budgets, international trade, development and macro economics, including such as macroeconomic indicators and inflation. They also said training helped them cover companies and institutions such as the stock market, and international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The training also helped the journalists surveyed to learn how to find information and which sources to use, how to present information including how to keep a story focused and how to make their writing clear enough for a general audience and the importance of balance. Some of the journalists interviewed also said the trainings gave them the confidence to write on topics they would have previously been reluctant to cover. The training sessions also gave them exposure to potential sources for their future articles and provided opportunities for networking with other journalists from around the continent.

Editors also told us that training has a beneficial effect and that they encourage their journalists to enroll in short courses. The business editor of a government-owned paper told us that he tries to send all of his reporters on training courses, especially those run by Thomson Reuters because the effect is so noticeable. (A major limitation of our first survey was that we were unable to see many examples of the work they had produced because in many cases newspaper libraries were non existent or inadequate and much of the work was not available online.) For our second survey we did a content analysis of articles written before and after the training. Our sample was small but we found improvement in nearly all areas that we looked at, which included overall balance, use of appropriate sources and story structure. Most noticeable in the 44 stories we coded was a reduction in the use of jargon and an increase in independent analysis.

(Sourcing is an interesting subject. Getting multiple sources in order to present a diversity of views is one of the tenets of Western journalism. Studies of newspapers in the US in 2005 and 2006 found that national newspapers had three or more sources 90% of the time (2006) and four or more sources 48% of the time (PEJ 2005 and 2006 reports). We have not studied sourcing in African newspapers but in our report *Watchdog or Lapdog: Limits of African Media Coverage of the Extractive Sector* (Canonge, Purcell 2010) we noted that the mean number of sources used in the newspapers from Nigeria that we looked at ranged from 0-2 depending on which newspaper we coded. Certainly sourcing was emphasized in the Thomson Reuters training).

The brain drain seemed to be less of a problem than we expected. We had observed that journalists who enrolled in longer programs which give a certificate at the end, such as the Knight-Bagehot Fellowship which sends journalists to Columbia business school for a year and the World Bank Institute program which provided more in depth training in developmental economics, tended to leave journalism often to go into better-paid public relations jobs. But of the journalists we surveyed in 2009, only 22% left their employer and of these only 30% left journalism. However it is likely that our sample was biased in favor of people still working in journalism because they were easier to contact and the number of people surveyed is too small to be really reliable. Some Nigerian journalists told us that during the period of banking consolidation, around 2005, there was a need for public relations personnel and that a number of journalists left the profession at that time but that, in recent years, several have come back to journalism. In 2010 we also found that 30% of the journalists we surveyed who had training got promoted or moved to other organizations. It may be that the economic crisis meant there were fewer opportunities for mobility.

But although African reporters and their editors say that training has helped them a lot they note that there face other challenges which are not addressed by training. Our study uncovered three other critical problems. (a) Lack of funding means that they are often unable to go on reporting trips and rely on corporate sponsorship to cover travel costs. They often feel compelled to accept payment from their sources, with the obvious risk of slanting of stories. (b) Lack of access to information hampers the work of journalists in Africa (and elsewhere). The lack of adequate access to what in advanced industrial countries is viewed as information that should be publicly available is not the only way that the legal environment affects coverage. (c) Libel laws and physical intimidation may discourage press coverage of key stories, such as those relating to corruption and environmental disasters. Our research suggests that unless these problems are addressed, the effects of journalism training will continue to be piecemeal.

Lack of information

One of the problems facing journalists is lack of information. Lack of freedom of information laws means that all kinds of data is unavailable—including some of the most important sources for economic and business reporting. This includes oil contracts, data on government spending, bidding processes and details on infrastructure construction. In countries with mining and gas, activists and journalists say that it's very difficult to report on corruption because of the paucity of data. While such contracts between private parties are seldom available, for a country whose major source of revenue is oil, and where there is suspicion of corruption in the leasing of oil lands, access to the contracts and bidding process is obviously essential for adequate coverage.

In our 2009 survey, 71.4% said that "lack of a Freedom of Information Act and/or poor information" was a "very important" challenge to reporting on business/economics and 19.0% called it "important". Many reporters blamed the government for making it impossible

to get hold of information and cited the fact that Ghana and Nigeria have still not passed a Freedom of Information Act.

However, other observers said that journalists are wrong to blame the government because it is often the journalists themselves who are simply unaware of how to find information and/or unwilling to spend the time to look. Indeed, a reading of the print media in many African countries reveals the preponderance of stories with three or fewer cited sources. One of the important functions of journalism training is to make journalists aware of the sources available, and to make them aware of the biases that may be latent in the sources to which they have to turn in the absence of publicly available information (e.g. the corporations themselves or the international economic institutions.)

Political Constraints

As in many African countries, Nigeria and Uganda still have a number of laws including those on libel and sedition as well as licensing requirements. These contribute to a climate in which the fear of prosecution (or even) violence is always lurking in the background. One reporter apologized for his late reply to our email query: he explained he had been in hospital after a beating by local police!

Threats to safety and government pressure are also a problem in some countries. The Niger Delta is notorious for being dangerous. Local security forces frequently arrest and harass journalists. The journalists we spoke to in Uganda also faced attacks. (Colmery et al.) In listing the challenges to business and economic reporting, in our 2009 survey the threat of violence against journalists was considered by 41.5% of journalists as “very important” and by 39.0% as “important”.

Lack of resources

But lack of funding is probably the single most important impediment to the improvement in journalism. One Ghanaian editor put it simply: “our main problem is lack of resources”.

We should note here that there is a vast range of outlets, with different economic circumstances and business models. While the diversity is part of the strength of African journalism, it is also part of the problem. A small market is splintered, non-economic motives drive many of the publications, and there is often “unfair” competition between government and non-governmental publications—with government publications having an advantage both economically and in access to sources.

Government-run publications and broadcast channels tend to be well financed, have the best equipment and pay competitive salaries. They also receive preferential access to government sources, press conferences and information given by the government (Hasty 2005, page 35, page 84). They may also receive most of the government advertising.

At the other end of the spectrum are tiny vanity newspapers which are run by one person with a political or personal agenda and which have a tiny circulation and pay little or no salary to reporters. These sorts of papers are quite common in Ghana, which is estimated to have 100 print publications, appearing during and after Ghana’s transition to democracy. (Gadzekpo 1997) They have no sustainable business model and are not profitable but do not want to merge or consolidate.^{iv}

Circulation, subscription and advertising figures are generally not released by media houses in Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda^v but across Africa it seems that most newspaper revenues come from newsstand sales rather than from advertising or subscriptions. This exacerbates the trend towards sensationalist coverage as newspapers “hype stories in order to achieve street sales.” (Berger 2006)

The lack of resources—especially among the smaller outlets-- is a major impediment in several ways:

- 1) It makes the job of journalism less attractive for older, experienced journalists who need to earn substantial salaries.
- 2) There is a lack of equipment—It was common to visit newsrooms and find there are not enough computers to go around. Journalists lack laptops, digital tape recorders, are unable to make long distance phone calls
- 3) Journalists often rely on sponsorship in order to go on reporting trips with the concomitant problem that their coverage may be influenced/limited (an area for further study).
- 4) Media outlets are very vulnerable to pressure from advertisers. In a market where there are only a couple of major advertisers or where government ads (for tenders and the like) make up the bulk of advertising, newspapers/broadcasters become afraid of losing advertising. If one advertiser pulls out, then losing a second advertiser is disastrous. In our interviews with journalists, we heard numerous accounts of advertisers who suspended advertising because they were displeased with a story that appeared.
- 5) Salaries are low and journalists resort to taking payments from the people they cover. Some journalists even extort money from government officials/businessmen by inventing stories and threatening to publish them if they are not paid off. According to our research, journalists at the smaller publications are paid as little as zero or \$100 a month and more or less left to fend for themselves. This often means taking money from individual sources or companies/government bodies. Better-paid journalists working for official media or in television may be paid several hundred dollars a month. Staffers at New Vision newspaper in Uganda are paid between \$500 and \$1000 a month. A job in Public Relations in these same countries pays several times this sum. ^{vi}
- 6) It is worth noting that government officials contribute to this sort of behavior by paying journalists to write about them or place their stories in prominent positions in the newspaper. A senior Nigerian official told us that his office routinely pays journalists so as to make sure that stories emanating from his government agency are placed prominently on the front page of the paper “otherwise they pop it in a little corner somewhere” (Schiffrin 2009)

Conclusion

Journalism training can make an important contribution to the quality of journalism and the ability of journalism to fulfill its basic missions. This study focused on the impact on business and economics reporting, an area where few journalists have adequate training, and where on-the-job training is unlikely to suffice. But even in this technical area, journalism training can have general benefits. It can enhance a sense of professionalism, and at least an awareness of professional ethics. It can expose reporters to ideas, concepts and people that they otherwise would not have access to. Such contacts can be particularly important in ensuring adequate coverage of complex topics. It can help them build contacts more broadly in the journalism community and promote networking which could lead to doing stories together. If properly reinforced by editors and colleagues upon returning to their publication/media outlet it can lead to more sophisticated coverage which touches on subjects they might not have written on before.

But such training will have only a piecemeal effect. Most of the problems facing African journalism cannot be addressed by journalism training alone. Journalists may know that they should not receive money from sources, but with limited pay, they may see no alternative. The

quality of journalism rests, of course, on the quality of the labor force that they have access to, and that means there needs to be more investment in secondary education. But more than an educated and trained labor force is required: for African media to improve rapidly, more funding—entailing new business models-- and a better legal climate are necessary.

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NOTES

1. http://mail.google.com/mail/?ui=2&view=js&name=js&ver=rUPyrM6PosQ.en.&am=f3EopdTXcGGZBf_s0fQ2RjalhXafHw#_edn1
2. Internet penetration in Africa 5.3% and Nigeria is the biggest user <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>
3. Amnesty International, (2009) section on freedom of expression in Uganda section of *Amnesty International Report 2009*. <http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/regions/africa/uganda#freedom-of-expression>
4. Author interview with Dr. Audrey Gadzekpo, April 2009.
5. Data on circulation is hard to come by and Punch declines to release the numbers. For more information, please see: <http://www.rap21.org/article18257.html> which says that in 2004, circulation was 80,000—larger than any other newspaper in Nigeria. Spring 2009,
6. The New Vision newspaper in Uganda told me that their circulation is 35,000.
7. Author correspondence, June 2009.

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Charts to accompany chapter

Journalists' perceptions of the obstacles to reporting (2009)

	Very important	Important	Not important	Response Count
Lack of Freedom of Information Act and/or poor freedom of information	71.4% (30)	19.0% (8)	9.5% (4)	42
Libel laws	29.3% (12)	51.2% (21)	19.5% (8)	41
Political and business pressure not to publish	67.4% (29)	23.3% (10)	9.3% (4)	43
Threat of violence	41.5% (17)	39.0%	19.5% (8)	41

How important are each of the following challenges journalists face when reporting on economic and business issues?

against
journalists

(16)

Lack of
adequate
knowledge
and skills

79.1% (34)

18.6% (8)

2.3% (1)

43

Pay for
journalists

84.1% (37)

13.6% (6)

2.3% (1)

44

Inadequate
Internet
access

44.2% (19)

34.9%
(15)

20.9% (9)

43

Lack of new
media and
Internet skills

58.1% (25)

27.9%
(12)

14.0% (6)

43

answered question

4
5

How important are each of the following challenges journalists face when reporting on economic and business issues?

skipped question 1

Journalists' ranking of the training they received on economic topics

What topics were covered in the economic journalism trainings you had? Please rate them in terms of their impact on your ability to report on economic issues. If a topic was not covered, please mark the "Not covered" box and rate it according to how helpful you believe it would be.

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Neutral	Somewhat unhelpful	Very unhelpful	Not covered	Response Count
						answered question	43
						skipped question	3
Government budgets and fiscal spending	70.0% (28)	15.0% (6)	10.0% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.5% (3)	40
International trade	66.7% (28)	14.3% (6)	11.9% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	23.8% (10)	42
Accounting	41.0% (16)	28.2% (11)	12.8% (5)	2.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	43.6% (17)	39

What topics were covered in the economic journalism trainings you had? Please rate them in terms of their impact on your ability to report on economic issues. If a topic was not covered, please mark the "Not covered" box and rate it according to how helpful you believe it would be.

Economics of extractive industries (oil, mining, gas, etc.)	50.0% (20)	20.0% (8)	7.5% (3)	2.5% (1)	2.5% (1)	37.5% (15)	40
Investigative reporting	61.9% (26)	19.0% (8)	7.1% (3)	4.8% (2)	0.0% (0)	23.8% (10)	42
Corporate finance	42.5% (17)	25.0% (10)	7.5% (3)	2.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	35.0% (14)	40
Economic development	70.7% (29)	14.6% (6)	4.9% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	19.5% (8)	41
Business reporting	90.2% (37)	7.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	12.2% (5)	41
Stock markets	67.5% (27)	7.5% (3)	5.0% (2)	2.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	25.0% (10)	40
Corporate reporting/financial results	68.4% (26)	13.2% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	28.9% (11)	38
Retail companies	46.2% (18)	12.8% (5)	7.7% (3)	2.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	51.3% (20)	39

What topics were covered in the economic journalism trainings you had? Please rate them in terms of their impact on your ability to report on economic issues. If a topic was not covered, please mark the "Not covered" box and rate it according to how helpful you believe it would be.

Macroeconomic indicators	68.3% (28)	19.5% (8)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	26.8% (11)	41
New media/new technology	45.9% (17)	18.9% (7)	5.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	51.4% (19)	37
Online resources of economic information	75.0% (30)	17.5% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	22.5% (9)	40