

## “The media have a very big role in promoting social cohesion”

### Interview with William Tayeebwa on conventional and peace journalism

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#### What are the differences between conventional and peace journalism?

What we call conventional journalism tends to focus on violence, on drama and on conflict. In conventional journalism, we say: “If it bleeds, it leads.” Conventional journalism is also mainly preoccupied with zero-sum scenarios – there has to be a clear winner

**“Advocates of peace journalism believe that even the perceived “loser” has a point to make and something they stand for.”**

and a clear loser. Advocates of peace journalism, on the other hand, believe that even the perceived “loser” has a point to make and something they stand for. Conventional journalism generally concentrates on elite personalities and elite nations, with little focus on people at the grassroots. It is what we call the “prominence value”. Peace journalism gives

a platform to the grassroots, believing that everyone has a role to play and a voice that should be heard. These are the key differences between conventional and peace journalism.

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#### What are the main challenges for local media in conflict situations?

I see three main challenges. First of all, there is the aptitude of the individual journalists. Radio, especially in the Global South, is still the biggest mass media. However, the owners of the radio stations tend to hire untrained people. But when you hire untrained people, they are often unaware of the principles of journalism. They do not understand fairness, objectivity and balanced reporting. Often, they also do not realise how important it is to be truthful in their reporting. A second challenge relates to the institutional and structural aspects of media outlets.

Many radio stations in countries of the Global South are owned by politicians. This is the case in my own country, Uganda, but also in other parts of Africa.

Issues are mostly framed in a way that suits the agenda of the politicians owning the station, rarely giving a voice to the opposition or alternative viewpoints.

Any journalist employed by politicians – even the good ones – will naturally frame issues to promote the agenda of their employer. The third challenge comes with extra media factors, such as advertisers and other

stakeholders who in most cases may not be interested in promoting an agenda that seeks to identify common ground or build communal harmony. Instead, with perceived audiences wanting conflict, journalists tend to frame issues to respond to their audiences. In addition, most African countries do not value freedom of expression and freedom of speech enough, so governance becomes another factor challenging journalists in Africa.

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#### In what way can the media play a role in creating social cohesion?

The media have a very big role in promoting cohesion in societies. First of all, they can give a voice to peacemakers and grassroots organisations promoting communal harmony and dialogue. Grassroots media, women and youth organisations are the voices that should be heard. Instead of constantly giving airtime to politicians who promote conflict and set communities against each other, the media should provide a platform for civil society organisations that are working to identify common ground.

**Dr William Tayeebwa**

Dr William Tayeebwa is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Communication at Makerere University in Uganda. He holds a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Communication from Concordia University, Montreal, Canada (2012) focusing on peace journalism and communication. His areas of research, teaching and consultancy include the nexus between journalism with the environment, peace and conflict. He has published mainly in the area of 'media for peace building' in the African Great Lakes region. He has held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Cambridge in the UK on an ongoing research project on 'United Nations Radio Framing of Peace-building in Burundi, DR Congo and South Sudan'. He is a co-author with Prof. Kristin Skare Orgeret of Journalism in Conflict and Post-Conflict Conditions: Worldwide Perspectives (Nordicom, 2016).




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