

MEDIA COUNCIL OF TANZANIA

**CODE OF ETHICS
FOR
MEDIA PROFESSIONALS**

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RATIONALE FOR MEDIA CODES OF ETHICS PRACTICE

1.0 Media practice is a profession with various trades that use skills, knowledge and orientation to serve society as expected, and hence the need for ethical practice. Ethics is based on the assumption that our society has morals. Morality is behavior and actions that are guided by generally accepted human values and responsibilities. Media content is determined by individuals, but guided by their perception of what is right or wrong given the circumstances. Social, political and economic forces that are operating at that material time heavily influence their decisions. The value and decisions of media workers are based on life experiences, education and interactions with others in various social groups. These factors generate the guidelines we call codes of ethics. These codes do set the minimum standards that are acceptable in society in performing a certain task. It is against these standards that conduct can be measured and evaluated.

2.0 Standards are set internally. In a democracy and self-managing social sector, standards are not described by courts, executive decrees or the legislature (laws/acts). That is why in most countries there are bodies formed by the industry and independent of government that set-up the codes and administer them. In non democratic states governments set up these bodies. In Tanzania, the media refused to have a body imposed on them and instead the industry established the Media Council of Tanzania in 1995 and mandated it to enforce the code(s) of ethics, with the following aims:

- a) To protect the public which consumes the services and products of the media from any irresponsible, anti social or propaganda use of the media.
- b) To enable the public enjoy their basic rights especially that of information.
- c) To protect media practitioners from being forced to act in ways that are irresponsible, humiliating or in any manner contrary to the dictates of their consciences.
- d) To keep open all channels of communication inside the industry and within the public sphere.
- e) To ensure that the public gets information needed in self-governing society; and to ensure that ordinary people can always register their opinion through the media.

- f) To help practitioners understand principles and values that give the profession credibility.

CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE FOR MEDIA OWNERS/PUBLISHERS

1.0 *Introduction*

The Media are social institutions in the information communication sector.

They are there, to get society fully informed, educated and entertained.

These are established according to the guidelines outlined in the respective law(s). In Tanzania there is the Newspapers Act (1976), and the Broadcasting Services Act (1993). Furthermore, other laws, especially the telecommunications and the company acts, have a bearing on the establishment of media.

These professionals have functions in fulfilling the media role. The functions include, amongst others: binding society together, giving leadership to the public; linking leaders and the public; satisfying all needs of information for the various public; offering means of expression for various groups, providing a mirror of society, acting as an instrument of change and being the conscience of society.

In Addition, they are watchdogs of the environment, transmit cultural heritage, provide intrinsic entertainment and mobilize people. They are

also expected to advance national interests, and to promote key values and behavior patterns, especially so in times of war and other crises.

The license to operate is a contract between the owner/publisher and the public to fulfill the above roles and functions. The owner/publisher therefore has two basic responsibilities: to ensure the media role is fulfilled to society's expectations; and to provide and direct the resources needed in performing the service functions. These resources are materials, finance and manpower.

Society expects media services of a definite standard and quantity. Society also expects a particular kind of relationship between it and the media organ. The media must show that they are socially responsible.

2.0 ***Definitions and Status***

Media owners and publishers are individuals, groups or institutions with capital to establish a media organ. They may not be of the media professional themselves. The law requires that professionals should do executive management and operations. However it is the responsibility of the owner/publisher to declare in public the purpose for which the organ was established. This is referred to as editorial policy. The owner/publisher employs professionals who realize the policy objectives.

3.0 ***Ethical Practice***

Media Owners/Publishers should:

- 3.1 Employ managers on professional merit only.
- 3.2 State the purpose for which the organ was established.
- 3.3 As a rule, not interfere with the decisions of the managers in recruitment, management and disciplinary matters.
- 3.4 Spell out clearly professional and non-professional interests and ambitions in relation to the investment and the media organ.
- 3.5 Allow for the establishment of mechanisms that monitor and respond to public opinion and concern as regards the media output and service.
- 3.6 Avoid sell-out attitudes like summoning the manager before a disgruntled party for redress.
- 3.7 Consider with care gifts and offers that may compromise the policy, objectives and integrity of the enterprise.
- 3.8 Suggest without coercion or intimidation any feelings regarding certain issues to the manager.

CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE FOR MEDIA MANAGERS/EDITORS

1.0 ***Introduction***

Media managers/editors are persons who realize the corporate purposes as defined by owners/publishers. By the nature of their placement within

the organizational hierarchy managers/editors are synonymous with ownership and bear wholly the publishing responsibility. Managers/editors are first and foremost-accomplished professionals. Both the owner/publisher and the registering/licensing authority must be satisfied with the credentials of the manger/editor during and after establishment, be it in print or broadcast media.

2.0 ***Ethical Practice***

The manager/editor shall ensure that:

- 2.1 All workers know clearly the organisation's objectives and how best to achieve them.
- 2.2 Motivate personnel and work out incentives for job satisfaction.
- 2.3 Remunerate fairly all work done by employees.
- 2.4 Ensure that all employees are given an opportunity to enhance their professional competence through further training.
- 2.5 Ensure that media output is distinguishable between factual and commentary; that only proven and accurate stories are published and that rumors are discouraged.
- 2.6 Ensure that information published does not incite discrimination, sexism, racism or violence.
- 2.7 Ensure that libel is avoided, and that the hour of a person is respected.

- 2.8 Ensure that all points of view are exposed by seeking out the main parties in a story. When a party refuses to cooperate, the organ should say so.
- 2.9 Inform all editorial staff of important decisions that may influence the life of the enterprise.
- 2.10 Ensure that the organ reports fairly and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation to which it has been a party.
- 2.11 Ensure that in times of grief or shock inquiries are made with sympathy; and editing is carried out with discretion so that the concerned are not made to relive their agony.
- 2.12 Ensure that children and minors are not identified in sexual or any other criminal offence.
- 2.13 Ensure that material that would identify victims of sexual assault is not published.
- 2.14 Ensure that derogative reference to a person's creed or racial origin is not made.
- 2.15 Ensure that neither him nor her, nor any of the employees take gifts or bribes in cash or kind in the course of duty or off-duty.
- 2.16 Examine offers, sponsorships and attractive contracts and agreements to ensure they have no attachments that would compromise the performance of the organization.

- 2.17 Not for any reason other than public interest, suppress useful information.
- 2.18 Not entertain favoritism and greed.
- 2.19 Ensure that the public is provided with un-biased, accurate balanced and comprehensive information/news.
- 2.20 Not as a rule, disclose sources of information given in confidence.
- 2.21 Avoid violation of individual privacy and human dignity, unless necessitated by public interest.
- 2.22 Not to use plagiarized material without giving due credit to the source.
- 2.23 Not open to ridicule any underprivileged persons or communities.
- 2.24

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