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## EDITOR'S NOTE.

Capacity building and continuous training of media professionals has become crucial in a rapidly changing world of media brought about by digital disruptions.

Accurate and ethical spread of information by the properly trained professional is critical to the proper handling of the wealth of information presented by the new social media and its users with a high content of misinformation and disinformation.

To ensure the training are achieving the desired objectives required that there should be feedback from the participants. The feedback would also encourage proper assessment of content materials for proper planning of future training.

Have the participants been using the knowledge in enhancing their capacity for the job? What areas in particular have they found wanting in the training? Have they come across any barrier in the usage of the knowledge acquired? What area in further training opportunity would they like to

focus on?

To answer these questions, we undertook a survey of a cross section of participants in a series of training and capacity building seminars, workshops and retreats organized by the IMS for media professionals and the officials of the regulator in the broadcast sector partly in fulfillment of its mandate on the media under the EU-SDGN Project in Nigeria.

The answers are eye-opening and go to confirm the compelling fact that training for media professionals play a key role in enhancing their capacity to deliver on the job, particularly in the coverage of elections and democratic governance.

In addition, we have our usual interview segment, this time with a key player in the media's periodic rating of candidates during electioneering. He is Mr. Eddy Emessiri, the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Political Debate Group, which always organizes debates for presidential and governorship candidates during electioneering with the support of the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria, BON.

He harps on the need for training and re-training of professionals in the broadcast sector in compliance with global standards and the need for financial and administrative independence of the industry regulator, the National Broadcasting Organisation, NBC.



In case you missed the final public onslaught against the proposed hate speech and fake news bills, the public outcry and mounted opposition by the stakeholders from the media, human rights community, CSO, NGOs, that finally rallied to kill the bill at a public hearing by the National Assembly, here is the main gist for the records, on pages 11 and 12.

The picture pages, as usual, dazzle with photographs that tell their own story of camaraderie during the period under review. What about our sister implementers of the EU-SDGN Project?

They have a generous mention in the inside pages as you would see when you read through the stories packaged for you delight. Happy reading.

Please send your comments to Media4DemocracyNG @ imesoimeso.org

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# EU-SDGN: Trainees Recount Experiences

In the bid to fulfill its mandate under the overall objective of the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria, EU-SDGN, Project, the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, as an implementing partner conducted a series of tailored trainings for various categories of broadcasters across the country under Component 4A-Support to Media.

While the specific objective of component 4 is that the Media, including new and social media, provide fair, accurate and ethical coverage of the electoral process in Nigeria, the expected results from the activities under that media mandate are that professionalism of media practitioners, is enhanced; media platforms' capacity to deepen and deliver civic and voter education is strengthened, and media engagement in promoting women, youth and marginalized groups in politics is improved.

To this end, the IMS organized several capacity training for different categories of broadcasters: media managers, editors and reporters.

The trainings were done in the Northern and Southern parts of the country for representatives of selected media cutting across the six geo-political zones of the country.

Media professionals in the field and from the academia facilitated the trainings. All the events were participatory and in some cases, involved field-work and event simulations.

Periodic interactions with the various participants after each training enabled IMS to get feedback for the purpose of improving its future engagements with the media and ensuring that the knowledge gained at the trainings were applied at the workplaces.

Some of the participants have shared their experiences from the trainings and how they have positively impacted on their journalism practice back on

the beat. The general impression here is that trainees have immediately put

into practice what they learnt to enhance their professionalism so much so that they are yearning for more trainings to continually expose them to the ever expanding demands of the profession.

Mr Igba Ogbole:

Journalism is an ever- evolving profession that demands training and re-training of the practitioner to be current, efficient and effective in the discharge of his duties. Unfortunately, paucity of corporate and personal funds makes it very difficult, and in some cases, impossible for this critical exercise to be carried out as often as necessary.



Ogbole

However, the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, has largely risen to the challenge in filling the training gap for many Nigerian Journalists including myself and some of my colleagues in Radio Benue, Makurdi, the Food Basket Station.

I had my first taste of the rich delicacy that IMS trainings represent in February, 2018, when for two straight

days (26th & 27th), selected Journalists were accommodated at a hotel in Abuja and were drilled by experts on Media Research for Democratic Governance in Nigeria.

Prof. Victor Ayedun-Aluma and Dr. Bell Ihua lectured us on the importance of audience research to media content and the best ways to conduct it and get quality results. I went back to my station better enriched and better equipped on how to infuse more scientific research in our news and programmes contents.

On the 24th and 25th October, 2018, IMS again kept us at a hotel in Kano where the knowledge of Journalists drawn from Radio and Television stations across Northern Nigeria was strengthened in the areas of political stability, inclusion and participation in the democratic process, and mechanisms for proper coverage of elections. Bayo Bodurin of the African Independent Television, AIT and former MD of Kano Radio, Umar Said Tudun Wada, anchored this training. I returned to my station more convinced and emboldened to enforce the ethical values of the profession in the coverage of the 2019 general elections on my station.

On Tuesday January 29, 2019, IMS moved right to my door steps at the premises of Radio Benue, Makurdi and its expert resource person, former DG, FRCN, Maria Odeh, sensitized the News and Programmes staff of the station on the need

for participation of women, youths and People With Disabilities, PWDs, in the electoral process. It was a robust engagement and many of us participants saw fresh perspectives to how we should report, initiate story lines and make our choice of interview personalities in relation to gender equity and inclusive reportage of election matters.

*Continued on pg 4*

Continued from pg 3

The good thing about constant training is that apart from learning new things, the Journalist is exposed to fresh angles of, and perspectives to those things he already knows. Since 2018 when IMS first beckoned, my professional competence as a Journalist has enjoyed periodic boosts from the Institute's usually rich, lively and timely trainings in relaxing environment. And like Oliver Twist, I pray that the Institute continues to remember me and the organisation I represent, Radio Benue, in its sustained efforts to make the profession better through constant training programmes.

*Mr Igba Ogbole is Director of News & Current Affairs, Radio Benue, Makurdi, Benue State, North Central Nigeria.*

Ms. Nneka Luke:

IMS training has greatly improved my career in broadcast journalism, especially in areas of election coverage and gender representation in the media.

Prior to the IMS training I wasn't well equipped with regards to some professional ethics of covering and reporting elections in Nigeria. This includes: the preparation process, planning, logistics and even the safety of the journalist among many others. The knowledge I gained reflected and aided me in the last election I covered and reported.

My perception and reporting on gender



Luke:

and its representation in media has greatly improved after the last training I had with IMS. I now have a better understanding of the process and ways of reporting gender issues to promote a balanced and inclusive society for all.

Basically, the IMS trainings have greatly promoted professionalism in my career.

*Nneka Luke is with Liberty TV, Kaduna, Kaduna State, North- West Nigeria.*

Ms. Dana Zaggi:

Some times in the course of practice as a journalist, it looks like we have it all together.



Zaggi:

But other times when the reverse is the case, trainings such as what the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, provides comes in handy.

IMS trainings have helped me in practice not to give issues a blanket approach, but to critically focus on salient issues within 'the big issue' and awaken people's consciousness to those 'little' components that need attention.

It was as a result of the training on election by the IMS, that I learnt to re-adjust my reporting style to focus on

the challenges of old people, pregnant women, people living with disabilities among other peculiar classes during the 2019 general election.

*Dana Zaggi is with Progress FM, Gombe, Gombe State, North-east Nigeria.*

Mr. Collins Ossai:

The training I got from the IMS workshop in Benin City in 2019 has been of immense benefit to my career. Having been a news correspondent for over a decade, I usually make little or no plans for election coverage. Before now, I usually approached elections coverage like an everyday journalism business, but having been equipped with the trainings on the various stages of election reporting, the aims and objectives, I now see elections coverage as a SPECIAL PROJECT.

The pre- election, during and post elections planning and evaluation are some of the high points of my learning during the workshop.

I must also equally commend the resource persons who spiced up the sessions with their wealth of experiences.

Good training in journalism means that the world's pillars of truth and justice are reinforced. Thank you IMS and partners!

*Collins Ossai, Assistant Senior Correspondent, Channels Television, Benin City, Edo State, South- South Nigeria.*

Ms Racheal Ramson:

The training that I attended under IMS was a workshop for broadcast journalist on sensitization for inclusion of women, youths and PWDs in the electoral process.

Before my training with Institute for Media and Society, I was just a journalist doing any report with no intent.

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# Conference Participants Seek Stakeholders' Team Work In Future Elections

Participants at the International Press Center, IPC, public presentation of post-election activities and media roundtable, with the theme, "Trends in Reportage of Post 2019 Elections Issues", have called for co-operation among stakeholders in future elections held in Nigeria.

The roundtable, which was anchored by Dr. Tunde Akaani, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Communication at the Lagos State University, LASU, held in Lagos.

In his review, Akaani, who titled his paper; Media Analysis as Inter-Track Constructivism; Media Analysis as Peace Building, said 12 media outfits comprising nine print media, namely, The Punch, The Guardian, Daily Sun, Vanguard, ThisDay, Nigerian Tribune, The Nation, Leadership and Daily Trust; three online ones, which are Blue Print (online version), The Cable and Premium Times, were selected for monitoring.

According to him, "the focus of the monitoring here is clear: to showcase the electoral/governance process, namely: the pre-election/voter registration phase; the electoral campaigns/voting phase and the post-election/governance phase.

To accomplish this task, the "monitoring decidedly focused on no fewer than six categories of supposed political stakeholders These are Political Parties Aspirants/Candidates; Youths and the Electoral Process; Women and the Electoral Process; People Living with Disabilities (PWDS) and the Electoral Process and the Electoral Management Body (EMB) - INEC

A total of 3,145 reports on political and governance issues were tracked between July and September 2019. These issues covered the following: Political Conflict; Election Petition; Campaigns and Hate speech.

Based on his findings, he made the recommendation that "media managers need to sit with their editorial teams to strategise on the best ways of ensuring inclusive political and

electoral reporting and equitable coverage of all political stakeholders, especially the political parties and candidates."

That "INEC should issue press releases regularly in response to the concerns of parties, candidates, the media, civil society groups, the citizens, etc, while also striving to ensure that such press releases and other information dissemination instruments are more evenly reported in the media through monitoring."



L-R: Mr. Rotimi Oyekanmi, Chief Press Secretary to INEC Chairman, Editor, Vanguard Newspaper, Mr Eze Anaba, Director of IPC, Mr Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of IMS, Dr Akin Akingbulu and Dr. Tunde Akaani, Lecturer, Lagos State University

Following Akanni's presentation, the panelists took turns to react before other participants made their comments.

In a goodwill message, the Executive Director of the Institute for Media and Society, Dr Akin Akingbulu buttressed Akaani's presentation by briefs from similar findings by the IMS in a post-election research it conducted and found that cases of harmful content in broadcast media came from political parties, campaign rallies and programmes of some of the stations, which the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, sanctioned.

Host, Mr Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of the International Press Centre, IPC, said the body before the 2019 poll documented the campaign promises of political parties but published only that of President Muhammadu Buhari after he was declared winner.

"The idea is that the media should ask questions after elections and use it to get responses from the politicians and parties once they fail to deliver," he said, adding, that "IPC documentation did not cover the states but believed the real governance challenge comes from them."

A panelist, Mr Taiwo George, Editor of The Cable, an online publication, narrated his experiences during and after the conduct of the 2018 governorship poll in Ekiti State.

According to him, the INEC was

selective in granting access to collation centers during the polls and delayed in uploading the final results on its website. In his estimation, this shortcoming by the electoral umpire made it hard for political reporters to authenticate results fast enough in the midst of competing but often unreliable information from the social media.

In his contribution, Mr. Rotimi Oyekanmi, Chief Press Secretary to the Chairman of the INEC, explained statutory role of INEC during elections, which are guided by the Electoral Act and the Constitution and urged journalists to be abreast of them.

Reacting to the Cable Editor's observations, Oyekanmi said, "It was lack of space and not the intension of INEC that prevented journalists from getting into collation centers during election in Ekiti state.

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# An Array of Personalities, Facilitators and IMS and IPC in Lagos are



Participants at an IMS Event



Senator Murray Bruce, Chairman of Silverbird Group and Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of Institute For Media And Society at the DAAR/AIT meeting in Abuja



Participants at an IMS Event



L-R: Mr. Oyekanmi, Vanguard Newspaper, Mr. Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director, of IMS, Mr. Taiwo George



L-R: Mr. Oyekanmi, Chief Press Secretary to INEC Chairman, Editor, Vanguard Newspaper, Mr Eze Anaba, Director of IPC, Mr Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director, of IMS, Dr Akin Akingbulu and Dr. Tunde Akaani, Lecturer, Lagos State University



Participants at an IMS Event

# and Participants at events organised by s and DAAR/AIT in Abuja



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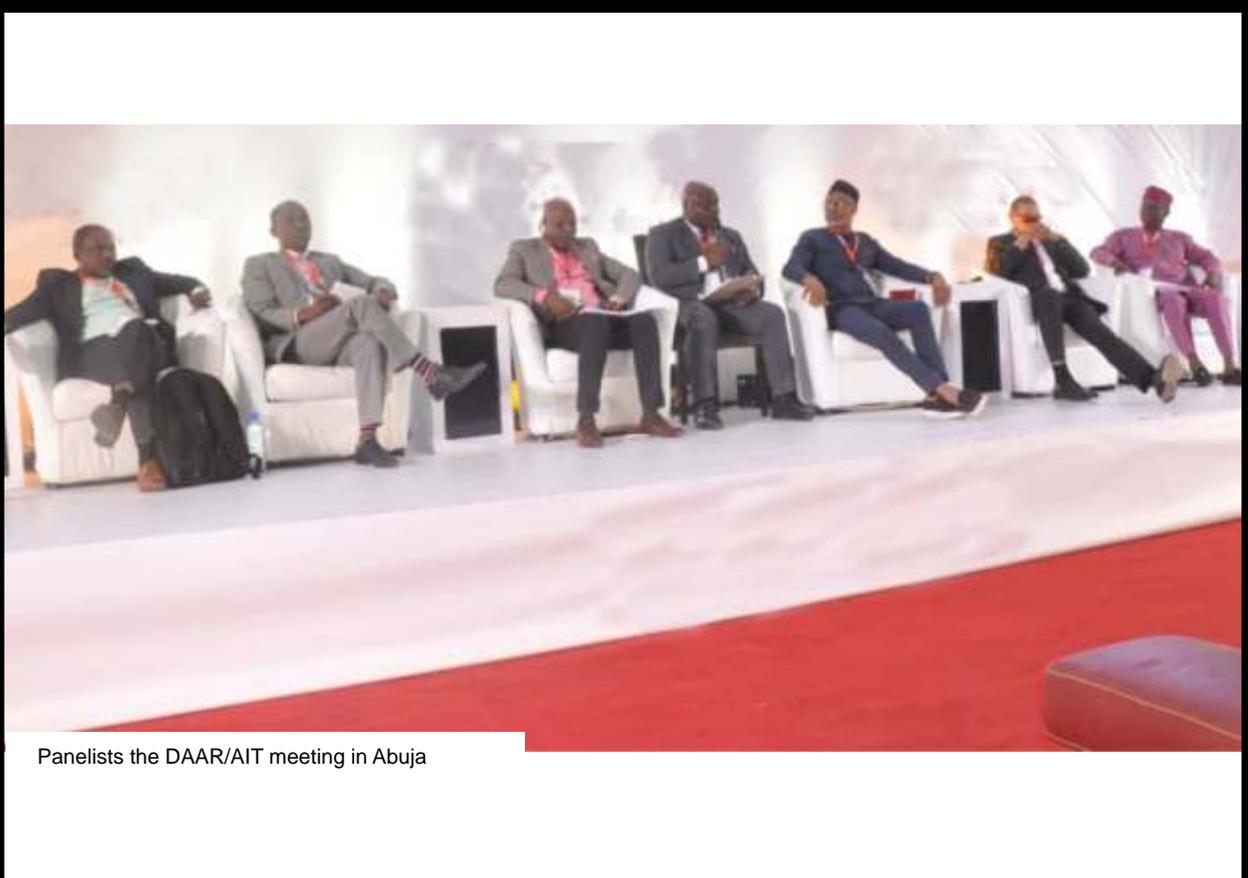
Participants at an IMS Event



Oyekanmi, Chief Press Secretary to INEC Chairman, Editor,  
d Newspaper, Mr Eze Anaba, Director of IPC, Mr Lanre  
lade, Executive Director, of IMS, Dr Akin Akingbulu and  
o George, Editor of The Cable, an Online Publication



Participants at the IPC public presentation of  
post-election activities and media roundtable



Panelists the DAAR/AIT meeting in Abuja

## 'Training Is A Major Challenge in Broadcast Media'

*Mr Eddy Emessiri is the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Election Debate Group under the aegis of the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria, BON. In this interview with Media4 Democracy, he identifies training, re-training as the gateway to professionalism in the broadcast media. Excerpts:*



*Emessiri*

*How would you rate the broadcast media coverage of elections since the return of democratic governance in 1999?*

The broadcast media has done very well since 1999. Before the deregulation of the broadcast sector that took place in the 90s, government-owned stations dominated broadcasting. With the arrival of many private stations, the industry became very competitive and by 2011, the private stations had been able to find their feet and know what to do. They were able to make use of the meagre resources available to them unlike government stations that were and are public funded stations. The stations have always held government to account. For

instance, they helped in the seamless transition of power from the administration of late President Umaru Yar'Adua to that of President Jonathan by highlighting issues of national interest.

*During the 2019 elections the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, penalized some stations for the infringement of broadcasting codes. That number is quite high. How does that justify your view that the stations have done well since 1999?*

You see, the NBC people are civil servants. But those on the field, those on the ground are the broadcast stations. It is within such periods as electioneering that things like hate speech came to light. No doubt the media stations took some things for granted and for that they were penalized for it. You can see that by the 2019 polls, the number of stations penalized reduced. It was higher in 2015.

*What would you say are the major challenges facing that sector?*

*"Many in the broadcast industry need continuous training, because for instance, the electoral laws keep changing and the owners of the stations do not embark on training regularly. Not all media practitioners in the field are conversant with the NBC codes."*

It is training. Many in the broadcast industry need continuous training, because, for instance, the electoral laws keep changing and the owners of the stations do not embark on training regularly. Not all media practitioners in the field are conversant with the NBC codes. So from experience it is necessary to insist that training must be a major component of broadcast media operations as we go forward.

*Recently, government issued licenses to radio and TV stations. One of the major challenges the deregulation of the industry in the 90's threw up was availability of quality personnel. If the sector still faces problem of training, how are these new stations going to cope professionally?*

The new stations that took off in 1994 following the deregulation in 1993 were able to get staff from the old government stations. Ray Power, for example, was able to get staff from the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, specifically Radio Nigeria 3, Lagos and Ogun Broadcasting Corporations, OGBC and Plateau TV, Jos station.

And as the numbers of private stations increased, the experienced hands in the industry started moving and conducting training for their staff. But right now, we have over 240 stations, radio and TV, excluding the recent additions.

The problem of training becomes essential because the students who graduate from our higher institutions would need retraining to meet the many challenges of the profession. Most of the stations relied on sponsored training by the European Union, the BBC, Deutsch Welle, and the VOA. We still have training schools in the country like FRCN training school, NTA TV College in Jos, Plateau state.

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But unfortunately not every station owner has made it necessary to send personnel there for training. But experience has taught us now that we have to embrace training.

*Why are owners reluctant to send staff for training when training is a key component in the successful operation of the stations?*

It is business. I know what it costs stations to send their staff for training at FRCN, for example. Even FRCN needs to do re-training for their new staff, so the problem of space constraint is there, hence many stations keep relying of training coming from international agencies abroad.

*A Pre-election study has shown that radio is still the preferred medium by many Nigerians. Are you surprised?*

No, not all, but the one that gives more believability is TV because pictures do not lie. The number of persons who listen to radio are more no doubt because of reach, cost of possession and availability, but information on TV is believed more by Nigerians.

*Some media stakeholders have faulted government plan to use loans to upgrade NTA to compete with international cable networks How do you see it?*

Government needs to upgrade NTA if the money that is allocated is actually spent for that purpose. What we want for NTA is full independence, fully funded by Nigerians that makes it adhere to some standards that can benchmark with global practices. If you compare NTA to South Africa Broadcasting Corporation SAB, in South Africa, for instance, NTA does not match at all. But NTA is older. So I think it should be funded and allowed some independence after the Act governing it is amended to make it truly independent of government.

*How would you assess the performance of private-owned media*

*vis-a vis public owned media in the country.?*

He who pays the piper dictates the tune. There are some level of interference by private owners just as governments do through the Minister of Information and Commissioners at the state level, who interfere in the running of the public organisations. But we want to see less government interfere in the operations of public funded stations just like you have with the BBC, which is not controlled by the government and appointments are tenured which are either renewed or not.

*What is your take on hate speech bill that many stakeholders have kicked against loudly?*

I can say personally there is nothing wrong with the hate speech bill. It is the language used in the presentation, the way it is framed has infringed on the fundamental human rights of Nigerians. I think there is need for regulation but that should not be done in a way that negates other laws that are already in the

**“We need a law to emphasise the need for every person who seeks political office to come forward to tell the people why they are seeking office. That is part of the selection process for office. Running for office does not begin and end with political rallies as our governors currently do.”**

books to take care of what the bill targets. I think that is why many stakeholders are still finding it hard to support it. After all, many countries are also legislating on hate speech, so I think the bill should be humane enough and not infringe on aspects of our rights that make it possible for our people to support it. Why bring a bill and set up a Commission for that, meaning every



state, local government would have it. Who is going to pay for all that?

*As an official of the election debate group run by BON, what is the major problem with holding the programme every year?*

There is no law backing it. We need a law to emphasise the need for every person who seeks political office to come forward to tell the people why they are seeking office. That is part of the selection process for office. Running for office does not begin and end with political rallies as our governors currently do. Debates should make it mandatory for aspiring political office holders to explain to the people what they want to do, how they are going to do it, where they are going to get the money to execute it. Many of us like to watch American political debates, as they take place first through intra-party primaries to the selection process of candidates and then inter-party debates after candidates have emerged as flagbearers of their parties.

It would be good if we adopt such processes here, so before you become president or governor, we don't expect any surprises from you. The current situation whereby a few persons sit down somewhere and choose someone and impose him or her on the rest of us, should stop.

*Continued from pg 5*

During that election, we even had to provide large screens outside the centers where ongoing activities during collation of results were projected.”

Reactions from participants centered on hate speech, fake news and safety of journalists on election duties, with

the Commission, according to him, issued a code of conduct that journalists should not be harassed but allowed access to collation centers.

He, however, disclosed a defect in that area that needed to be looked into.

Journalists were accredited but security agencies still harassed them. I



Participants at the IPC public presentation of post-election activities and media roundtable

many citing examples from the recent governorship elections that held on November 6, 2019 in Bayelsa and Kogi States.

Journalists, some of whom were participants, narrated ordeals of harassment by policemen, while others recounted being barred from collation centers, while thugs destroyed their phones and cameras with the police looking the other way.

On hate speech, IPC Head of Research, Mr Raji Rasaq, said from research conducted by the organization, it is safe to assume that 83 per cent of hate speech in the media during elections come from politicians.

He said; “In the 2019 election, hate speech was not generated by the media but by politicians. But it is an assumption.”

On fake news, Rasaq said; “The media allowed fake news from social media to penetrate their content. Many did not fact-check often.”

Responding, Oyekanmi said on the issue of violence and safety of

journalists during elections, the Commission took certain proactive steps. First was advocacy.

During the Bayelsa and Kogi elections,

feel there is inherent hostility some of the security agencies have against journalists and it is an area that needs to be looked into,” he said.

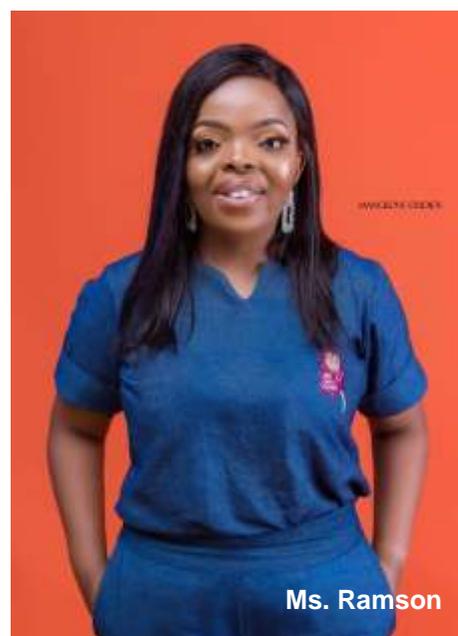
Other proactive measures the Commission has taken, according to Oyekanmi, are to set up a Committee on Election Monitoring to, among other things, provide security for journalists. The Committee is composed of all security agencies.

At the end of the media roundtable, the participants drew up some recommendations.

They held that the media should give sufficient coverage to disadvantaged persons such as People With Disabilities, PWDs and Women; that the media and NBC should embark on enlightenment on encouraging youth participation in elections.

To fast track these recommendations, it was proposed that relevant stakeholders should collaborate to woo youths through appropriate media such as campus radio that many universities in the country have set up.

It was also recommended that the INEC should democratize the voting space, make PVC registration and collection easy, regularly update its websites and make it accessible to the media.



Ms. Ramson

*Continued from pg 4*

IMS training opened my eyes into many sides to the story while reporting especially in the area of marginalized groups, which includes the PWDs, Youths, and Women.

In Nigeria these sets of people are mostly marginalized in companies, organizations even in governance.

After the training I was able to make and put these sets of marginalized groups into importance.

For example, some Albinos still find it difficult to access their creams, soaps and even get elected positions because of their skin, which ought not to be so.

So, the training with amazing facilitators enabled me to note importance and need to highlight these disadvantaged people in my reportage and live programs.

I did it so well that since 2018 I am now the correspondent on PWDs, Women and Albino's stories for my station Silverbird TV and Rhythm FM, Port Harcourt.

I have done several special reports regarding the neglected issues ranging from the inability of PWDs to get their permanent voters card to their inability to vote during elections and other related matter.

*Ms Racheal Ramson is with Silverbird Television/Rhythm FM Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Southsouth Nigeria.*

# No! Nigerians Reject Hate Speech, Fake News Bills

**O**n Monday, March 8, Nigerians from all walks of life crowded the halls and public gallery of the National Assembly, Abuja venue of the public hearing on Fake News and Hate Speech Bills. The bills had gone through first reading but following persistent public opposition against their contents, the lawmakers had called for a public hearing before deciding to convene a plenary session to pass them.

With unanimity, Nigerians comprising media stakeholders, CSOs, NGOs, human rights lawyers and advocates, participated in the hearing and then rejected the bills.

Participants at the Town Hall Forum with the theme "Media Regulation, Society and Governance," had called for immediate withdrawal of the Hate Speech and Fake News bills pending before the National Assembly.

Specifically, the bills are, "A bill for the Protection from Internet Falsehood, Manipulation and Related Matters," sponsored by Senator Mohammed Sani Musa, representing Niger State at the Senate, and "A bill for the Establishment of the National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech and Related Matters and the Proposed Amendment to the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, Act." Senator Aliyu Sabi, representing Niger

participants to be exhaustive in their deliberations as cross-fertilisation of ideas by the stakeholders would go a long way to guide the government in finding a lasting solution to the points at issue.

Lawan said: "These issues have become topical because of our new realities. The realities have come because of the fresh gains in media and information technologies. These tools have re-defined the way we gather and share information. Gathering and distributing information has become easier, faster and much more involving. Like most innovations, new challenges have also arisen."

Harping on the resolute decision of the NASS to pass only laws that fulfill the wishes of the people, he added, "of course, democracy is about inclusion and participation. We do not expect these features only in the provision of the dividends of democracy, but also in the processes that lead to it. The new freedom has led to an equally new celebration... Coming with this freedom, however, is different patterns and channels of abuses. Our conclusions will subsequently be helpful to the National Assembly and the government at large. This ninth National Assembly is open to ideas. Good policy directions and decisions come through a rigorous process of debate, and with participation from all shades of opinion."

His conciliating views were however opposed by the Attorney-General, Malami, who adopted a hardline position.

He said: "The rate at which the proliferation of acrimony and vilifying statements dominate the social media space is alarming, the consequence of which will be dangerous. No society will fold its arms and allow such ominous crime to go unchecked."

"The absence of gate-keeping processes of the conventional media, individuals with neither the skills of information verification nor the use of what the reality was had taken it upon themselves to be the purveyors of fake news, hatred, and animosity. Some turn the platforms into avenues for committing heinous Internet fraud and cybercrime."

*Continued on pg 12*



Panelists the DAAR/AIT meeting in Abuja

The contents of the bills and not their import was the compliant by stakeholders who had persistently pointed to the existence of extant rules and laws in the penal codes, the Constitution and Cybercrime Act that the drafted bills were duplicating. As a prelude to that unanimous rejection, the stakeholders had galvanized enough support during a robust participation at a town hall meeting on Hate Speech and Media Regulations

West, sponsored the second bill. Both senators are from Niger State, in the North-Central Zone of the country.

The panelist and participants comprised media practitioners, government officials, National Assembly members and principal officers, the civil society and the academia.

All the major players for and against the bills were in attendance to bare their minds. Notably present were President of the Senate, Ahmed Lawan, the sponsor of the hate speech bill, Senator Abdullahi Sabi, Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Ibrahim Malami, represented by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Umar Gwandu, ex- National Human Rights Commission boss, Prof Chidi Odinkalu, Amnesty International, Nigeria, Ms Ossai Ojigho, Dr Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of the Institute for Media and Society, IMS and many others.

Lawan who said the National Assembly was open to new ideas, urged the

*"All over the world, the international standard is to have an independent full-fledged Commission with full regulatory powers but in Nigeria the*

Bills organized by the DAAR Communication, at the NAF

Conference Centre in Abuja on February 10.

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Senator Sabi defended his stand and justified his reasons for sponsoring the Hate Speech bill on the grounds that the country needs to “avert the needless killings occasioned by hate and careless speeches in the country. The bill if passed into law, would be helpful in saving innocent lives and controlling unguarded utterances by the people.”

In his remark, Odinkalu, noted that insecurity, not hate speech, remained the country's critical challenge.

“Insecurity does not give them (legislators) sleepless night but what gives them the sleepless night is heckling Nigerians for daring to speak. We are invited to the expensive chambers of the National assembly to establish a Murder Commission because the murder had been committed,” he said.

Mr Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of International Press Center, IPC said the existing frameworks were enough to deal with the problem of hate speech, which the media does not condone by virtue of the provisions of media code of conduct especially the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage. Besides, the propose National Hate Speech Commission be just another money guzzling bureaucracy.

Ojigho of Amnesty International said the freedom of Nigerians was

not negotiable, describing the intent of the bills as tools to oppress dissenting voices.

In his contribution, Dr Akingbulu of IMS, focused his attention on the contentious issues in broadcasting legislation, especially the NBC Act. He called attention to some of the challenges facing the National Broadcasting Commission and suggested some solutions. The main challenges, according to him, deal with regulatory powers, appointment process and funding.

He said: “All over the world, the international standard is to have an independent full-fledged Commission with full regulatory powers but in Nigeria the regulator is just like a post office.”

He suggested that full regulatory powers should be given to the Commission just as the government had promised. On the issue of appointment, he called for “adequate consultation with stakeholders to cater to diversity of interests in the country”, and urged that, “interest groups be carried along in the appointment and dismissal of the director general”

NBC, he suggested should be “better resourced by being put in the first line charge”, just as the “National Assembly should join forces with the Executive in providing oversight function to the Commission.”

At the end of the exhaustive debate on the bill at the town hall meeting, participants agree on

need to focus on more creative ways to handle disruptions caused by social media and new technology, particularly with attention on social media companies rather than the media, which is the end user.

Any move to abridge the right of citizens to freedom of expression, guaranteed by the Constitution, would be infringing on the basic tenet of democracy, which is inclusiveness and freedom of speech, the participants noted.

They further resolved that sufficient and effective laws abound in existing laws to handle hate speech and fake news, such as the Nigeria Criminal Codes, especially sections 42; 59; 86; 88; 204; 375; 210; and 399. In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, stakeholders called for the immediate withdrawal of the bills, describing them as a waste of time and duplication of existing laws.

The DAAR Communications town hall meeting was therefore the harbinger of the March 8 unanimous rejection of stakeholders of the fake news and hate speech bills as it provided the platform for the collective action.



Senator Murray Bruce, Chairman of Silverbird Group and Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of Institute For Media And Society at the DAAR/AIT meeting in Abuja

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