



# Coaching manual for Support to media during elections

MANUAL

July 2006

© IMS, Réseau Liberté, M&DG

---

This manual is copyrighted by International Media Support,  
Media&Democracy Group and Réseau Liberté.  
First edition 2006



International Media Support  
Wilders Plads 8A  
1403 Copenhagen K  
Denmark  
Tel: +45 32698989  
Fax: +45 32698994  
i-m-s@i-m-s.dk  
www.i-m-s.dk



Media&Democracy Group  
500- 200 Cambie St.  
Vancouver  
Canada V6B 2M9  
Tel: 1-902-422-1271 Ext. 164  
info@mediaanddemocracy.ca  
www.mediaanddemocracy.ca



Réseau Liberté  
235A Fleury Ouest  
Montréal, Québec  
Canada H3L 1T8  
Tel: +1 514 858-7448  
Fax: +1 514 858-1624  
info@reseauliberte.com  
www.reseauliberte.com

Developed and produced by:  
Torben Brandt, Thomas Hughes and Finn Rasmussen (*IMS*);  
Ross Howard and Derek Quinn (*Media&Democracy Group*);  
Réal Barnabé, Paul Breton and Jacquelin Télémaque (*Réseau Liberté*).

Coverphoto: Nike Nelson, Scanpix Denmark  
"Woman casts her vote for Egyptian Parliamentary elections, November 2005".

Any reproduction, modification, publication, transmission, transfer, sale distribution, display or exploitation of this information, in any form or by any means, or its storage in a retrieval system, whether in whole or in part, without the express written permission of the individual copyright holder is prohibited.

Design and production: nanette graphic design

---

# Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2 Country information: Before you go.</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 Political context .....	6
2.2 The media environment .....	7
2.3 The election environment .....	8
<b>3 Coaching methodology</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>4 An election-reporting toolbox.</b> .....	<b>13</b>
4.1 Introductory note .....	13
4.2 Tools for election reporting .....	14
4.3 International standards of elections .....	22
4.4 Basic journalism .....	23
4.4.1 News judgement and skills .....	23
4.4.2 Techniques .....	25
4.4.3 Logistics and technology .....	29
4.5 Planning election coverage .....	30
<b>5 Practical information.</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>6 Resources: Finding what you need on the internet.</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>7 A newsroom reminder.</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>8 Annex: Case-study, Haiti</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>9 Questionnaire for coaches.</b> .....	<b>42</b>

# 1 Introduction

This manual offers a basic description of a new method of developing journalistic skills to cover elections, and provides some essential information about elections and reporting responsibilities and techniques. Although it can be used in a wide range of elections, referenda and other votes around the world, it is specifically designed as a tool for coaching journalists in countries marked by conflict, or countries in the midst of a transition to democracy.

The manual, as you will see, is foremost intended for those persons – we call them coaches – who are assisting in skills development. It is a handbook for those who are doing the coaching, or providing the training. But the information about elections and reporting is also meant to be passed on to reporters, editors and managers who are developing their skills. So the information here is to be shared, copied and used as journalists' guidelines, as much as possible.

This manual stems from a Réseau Liberté journalism development programme funded by CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency). This programme to support Haitian media involves two main partners: CBC/Radio-Canada's Institute for Training in Public Broadcasting and the Montreal-based NGO, Alternatives.

After conducting several traditional training seminars to help journalists prepare to cover the 2005 - 2006 elections in Haiti, Réseau Liberté wanted to try another approach. This consisted of working with the journalists and the media outlets in their daily tasks, rather than inviting them to seminars outside their workplace.

This new approach was examined and developed into a structured new methodology of media development which we call "coaching." The methodology was supported by a handbook or manual for the coaches, covering Haiti-specific issues and election reporting generally.

The Haiti manual was developed by Réseau Liberté of Montreal in partnership with International Media Support (IMS) of Copenhagen and Media and Democracy Group (M&DG) of Vancouver which both contributed significantly to the contents. Like Réseau Liberté, these two organisations are dedicated to promoting freedom of the press around the world, and supporting media and journalists in countries affected by violent conflict.

Based on the success of the Haiti experience (see Haiti case study, in Annex), it was agreed to create this new generic manual on election-reporting coaching for use on a world-wide scale. It provides basic tools for journalist coaches approaching any country's election process but with special focus on countries in democratic transition. It contains: a definition of coaching, along with its goals, methods and the spirit in which it is offered to journalists and media outlets; a description of some of the things coaches will want to know about the country, its election process and political situation; a toolbox of all the basic aspects of the media's work during an election; plus practical information on daily life and organising oneself for a coaching operation.

This manual is also generic in that its content covers radio, television, print and Internet – whereas the Haitian manual focused only on radio and television. It also contains additions to its toolbox: international standards for free and fair elections, preparing an election coverage plan, and tips for using the Internet, along with recommended websites. However, it should be noted that coaches using this manual will still have to obtain information about any specific country they are preparing for. The manual sets out the kinds of information to obtain.

Lastly, the questionnaire at the end of the manual can be used to assess your particular coaching operation. It can also help the organisations which have produced this manual. We would appreciate receiving reports from the users, to help us fine-tune our work.

This manual is the result of close collaboration among the three main contributors. International Media Support of Copenhagen provided much of the inspiration and resource for the concept of a coaching handbook and the coaching methodology, and oversaw the entire production of this generic edition. Réseau Liberté of Montreal prepared the Introduction, the Coaching Methodology and the Case Study on Haiti. Media and Democracy Group of Vancouver prepared the Country Information, Media Environment and Election Conditions section; the Election Tool-box; the Practical information; and the section on using the Internet as a research tool. This manual also involved the appreciated participation of the CBC/Radio-Canada's Institute for Training in Public Broadcasting which supplied information on preparing an election coverage plan. In addition, the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is gratefully acknowledged.

We hope you enjoy the manual and wish you success in your work.

## 2 Country information: Before you go

### Overview

Coaches and trainers, like working journalists will want to do intensive research before they arrive in any unfamiliar country. It is enormously beneficial to have a basic understanding of the country. This includes its demographics, culture and history, as well as the recent and current political situation and media environment. This information is important in setting the context for the specific election. You also will want to know about the specific conditions of the election.

The Internet and Web today provide numerous country-specific guidebooks and sites which present basic information on everything from population, economic conditions and health standards to educational levels. In examining guidebooks, look for information such as life expectancy and number of citizens of voting age, extent of literacy, different ethnic groups, religions and languages, and urban and rural populations. These are factors to consider in guiding media coverage of an election campaign because they identify important groups of voters, challenges to voter education, and regions or issues which otherwise might be neglected.

Basic information and websites can be found with any Web search engine and the words "country guides". These may include sources such as the BBC World Country Profiles, IRIN, AllAfrica.com, Oneworld.net, the Lonely Planet tourist guides, the INCORE guides to specific Internet resources on post-conflict countries, and even the CIA World Factbook. There are many more. For coaches, it is advisable to carry a small guidebook including maps for reference because local media outlets may not have them. Do not take information which could be considered provocative or offensive to local citizens.

### 2.1 Political context

#### Political background

Elections are about political parties competing for popular support and power, so it is essential to know the basic facts about the political history of the country. There may be facts or events which play a symbolic or special role in the parties' campaigns because of how they are perceived by the voters. Information such as the date of the country's independence, major internal and trans-boundary conflicts, and the names of former heroes or villains, who may become an issue or rallying point in the campaign, should be identified. These kinds of considerations also apply in the case of referenda.

Other factors to examine include the pattern of stability of previous governments, and the role of the army or other forces, or foreign interventions in the duration of past governments. Also, the structure of government and leading figures – presidency, parliamentary democracy, monarchy, and so on – should be understood. The patterns of recent municipal elections may be important to understand as well.

#### Current political landscape

The current political landscape or immediate context for the election is essential knowledge for coaches. Learn what key issues arose during the term of

the previous government, how they were handled and whether they caused this election. Coaches should know the names of the main political parties, their central ideologies and leaders, and relative strength and popularity. This kind of information aids coaches in assessing whether election reporting is balanced. Other factors to consider include the extent of democracy, the strength and activity of civil society in public life, the courts' and authorities' respect for the rule of law and human rights, extent of corruption and lawlessness, and the economic or political disparity between identity groups. In addition to media reports and country profiles, organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, Freedom House, the International Crisis Group, and the United Nations Development Programme's human development indicators can provide such assessments. Coaches will also usually find the reports and staff of international observer teams monitoring the election to be helpful and well-informed.

## 2.2 The media environment

The first priority is to identify the principles of the country's media freedoms and regulations. Coaches must then determine the practical realities of these freedoms and regulations. In some countries there may be wide-ranging protection for media freedoms in the constitution or in legislation but the freedoms are much abused or ignored by authorities or journalists in daily life.

### Media regulations

Among the essential media regulations to examine are:

- Constitutional guarantees for a free press: Do they exist in law? Do the courts protect them effectively against government or other interests' harassment, intimidation, assault?
- Media regulation bodies (press councils and radio-television regulators): What powers do they have? Are they independent of government? Are they free of corruption? Do they defend media freedoms? Do they fairly discipline irresponsible media?
- Content restrictions: Are there laws which censor what the media can report or offer as opinions? Who imposes these restrictions? Is there an appeal to the courts? Are there laws against hate speech? Is criminal libel used to suppress published criticism of government?
- The Internet: Is it widely available? Is it regulated or censored? Is it influential?
- Ownership restrictions: Is media ownership determined by government, by law, or by free market competition?
- Journalist registration/accreditation: Is there any law defining who can be a journalist? Who administers the law? Is this law used to restrict free expression?
- Broadcast media: How is it regulated? Is licensing conducted fairly? Is public or state broadcasting treated differently than private broadcasting?
- Are there Access-to-Information laws? Are they effective? Are they blocked by secrecy laws, political interference or bureaucratic obstruction?

### Media industry

Coaches should also examine media structure and practices including:

- The number of government-controlled and privately-owned media outlets, both print and broadcasting, and how wide an audience they reach, both urban and rural.
- The effectiveness of regulations. Do media outlets respect media laws and civil laws?

- The independence or partisan control and bias of each major media outlet. Do owners or other interests force their journalists to bias the news?
- The media's influence. Is the media respected and influential because it is considered credible and independent or is it considered the voice of powerful interests? Is the media the most important influence on public opinion?

### **Journalism community**

Coaches should also be aware of the journalism community:

- Are there clearly evident professional standards such as accuracy, fair balance and social responsibility in reporting in most journalism in the country?
- What are the working conditions for journalists, their security, training, equipment, pay and social status, both in society in general and in their specific workplace? Journalists who are badly paid, threatened or not respected will more likely accept bribes, produce unbalanced stories and censor themselves to survive.
- Are there journalists' associations and unions? Are they independent or strongly associated with political interests? Do these organizations have influence in politics, in civil society and with journalists?
- Are there journalism schools and training institutes? Can they be used as support for or partners with coaches?
- Is there an offshore or exile media community? Is it widely received and influential? Is foreign or other countries' media influential?
- Are skills development and training available? Have local journalists received previous training? Has it been effective? Are reports of previous capacity-building initiatives available?

Coaches should, as possible, apply all these considerations and questions to the media locations where they will be working. Also, reports of the local press council, and reports and websites of international organizations such as Article 19, the International Federation of Journalists, and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), should be consulted for country-specific information.

A final consideration is the relative impacts of different forms of media – are newspapers limited by public illiteracy to reaching only an elite but influential strata; is state-owned media equally dominant in urban and rural areas; are radio talk-shows the most influential forum of political discussion; are private radio stations popular for their music entertainment but devote little attention to news; are non-commercial media outlets such as religious or NGO-operated media popular and influential? These issues may influence the coaches' strategy, or they may influence the attitudes of journalists they are working with.

## **2.3 The election environment**

### **Essential questions**

The important aspects of election reporting, and international standards for a free and fair or democratic election, and the role the media play, and how to achieve reliable media reporting, are described in the Toolbox section of this manual. However, coaches will want to have as good an understanding as possible of the specific election environment in which they are working.

Coaches need to know:

- Why is the election being held? Is it a first democratic election? Is it being held due to the regular expiration of the government's term in office or because the government was politically defeated or forcibly overthrown while in office? Have previous elections in the past decade been conducted peacefully and fairly?
- What are the issues? Individual candidates and political parties will campaign on certain issues which they believe will make them popular, or to avoid sharp criticism of their policies. Coaches will want to determine if parties are addressing the obvious major issues facing the country such as poverty and employment, access to education and housing and essential resources such as water and electricity, law and order and respect for human rights.
- What are the rules? Coaches will want to have access to the complete rules for the election. These are usually issued by an Election Commission or election management body. In many cases the rules for the election appear to guarantee a free and fair election but the reality may be much less because of weak enforcement of the rules, corruption and intimidation, or a lack of election resources and security. Voter registration is an important indicator of fairness and efficiency by the election management body. Disqualification of parties and candidates is also a controversial issue.
- Who are the candidates? Coaches should have information listing all of the parties and giving details about the major parties' past record, current promises, and financial and political strength and key regions or communities of supporters. Coaches should also know the major parties' ideological tendencies and alliances, and the names of leaders, since parties often campaign on a leader's name rather than their party label.
- Who are the voters? Coaches should determine if universal suffrage applies, and whether particular groups are discriminated against or discouraged from voting such as women, ethnic identities or social class or region. Are voters likely to vote or stay away because of intimidation, insecurity, tradition, lack of information or location?
- What are the international interests? Is pressure from outside the country, such as from international organizations like the UN, or from an individual country, partially or entirely the cause of this election? What international or foreign observers are monitoring or helping to conduct the election? These interests can be important sources of information during the campaign.
- What is the election calendar? Coaches need to be aware of dates for specific events such as the close of nominations, registration of voters, dates for ending the campaign, voting day, vote-counting, appeals, and installation of elected government. It is also important to note whether there will be separate elections for the presidency and the legislature, and when.
- Referenda or plebiscites, and municipal elections, may have different regulations and generate voter reaction along different lines than national or provincial elections, so these distinctions should be sought out and examined.

## 3 Coaching methodology

Coaching, as we conceive of it, consists of assigning a team of versatile, experienced journalist-trainers to the media of a country, in this case during its elections. These trainers – called coaches – each individually work with a different media outlet for the period of the programme, making their expertise available to the editorial staff and individual journalists. Coaching seems to work best when the programme lasts several weeks, rather than for shorter periods.

The coaching approach is quite different from traditional seminar-based training. Although seminars usually include practical exercises after the general lectures, there is no involvement in the day-to-day work of the media in the country concerned. Coaching, however, immerses the trainers in the concrete reality of the specific constraints and opportunities experienced by the journalists and the media they work for.

This provides fertile terrain for the coach. It is also a very demanding terrain since it requires the trainer to have substantial expertise in a wide range of journalism skills and knowledge, from organising a newsroom to encouraging individual working techniques, from reporting to editing to assigning, plus an elemental knowledge of the technical tools used, whether print, broadcast or Web-based, and manual, electrical, analogue or digital. Without being omniscient, a good trainer must be able to intervene competently on a number of levels according to visible needs and requests for professional advice.

The success of a coaching operation depends on perception of the initiative by both the coaches and those they are working with. Coaches must see and present themselves as seasoned journalists who have come to share their professional experience. That is how the services should be offered to the media outlets, and that is also how the trainers should present themselves to the editorial teams and journalists with whom they will be working.

### **Gaining acceptance**

This approach thus means that the trainers must be accepted by those they are working with, and not be seen as imposed by management. Trainers' attitude is the key to the effectiveness of the work. No matter how extensive their experience, trainers should not lose sight of the fact that they are not the editors, and they are not there to direct the media outlets. Their job is much more complex and delicate. They must transfer their knowledge and provide advice as they accompany the editorial staff in their work, but make sure to respect the staff's professional autonomy. It is delicate work, encouraging but not directing or ordering individuals to achieve greater skill and news judgment. This concept of coaching is essential to the success of the operation. It determines how the editorial staff will view the offer of having a trainer with them and how the individual journalists will view this foreign presence in their day-to-day work.

Like all training initiatives, the coaching methodology requires a prior agreement with the management of the media outlet as to the scope and direction of programme. Coaching in particular requires careful explanation because it is a different approach, putting coaches into the newsroom shoulder-to-shoulder with staff and managers. One of its great appeals,

however, is that the staff can continue to do their jobs in the newsroom rather than attend seminars. The coaches are supervised by the organisation conducting the operation, usually an international agency that specialises in promoting freedom of the press and supporting efforts to make the media more professional, primarily in emerging democracies. Needless to say, this type of intervention and training can take place at other times and in other circumstances than elections.

Special attention should be paid to preparing the trainers before they leave. This manual will be an important tool for that. Coaches should engage in preparatory meetings to deal with all the aspects addressed in the manual. The work to be accomplished, the history of the country, the general political situation and the upcoming elections, all need to be understood, as well as the duration of the operation, living and working conditions in the host country, etc.

Once in the field, it is important for the trainers to meet regularly, at the end of each day, with the field coordinator(s) of the supervising organisation to discuss each person's work. It is important for team members to share their experiences, since they will be different from one media outlet to the next, and coaching activities will most likely have to be adapted. Some media managers/owners may be open to discussing their work organisation issues with coaches, while others might only want to focus on improving their journalists' work methods and techniques. These daily coaches' wrap-up sessions are a good way to share difficulties and explore solutions at any particular media outlet using the team's collective wisdom, and to build team spirit among the members of the operation.

One of the best ways of coaches becoming accepted is to become involved in editorial activities such as attending production meetings if there are any, and if there aren't, suggesting that such meetings be held. An even more effective technique is for coaches to accompany individual journalists as they do their regular reporting on press conferences and other events. The experience in Haiti indicated that this was particularly useful for strengthening the relationship between coaches and the journalists as professionals.

### **Be flexible, be adaptable**

Since coaching is a voluntary initiative between an international (likely foreign) organisation providing a service and the media outlets that accept that service, trainers will want to determine their priorities with the management and journalists of the outlets they are working with. The acceptance and impact of the trainer's work will always depend on how relevant the recipients consider it to be. If the priority areas identified by the management and journalists do not match the perception of the trainer, the trainer will have no choice but to adapt or change the work plan. No matter how worthwhile the goal, training is not something that can be imposed.

Thus, a trainer must be someone who is flexible and adaptable. The ideal coaching operation will encourage and assist a media outlet to assess its work outlet in order to best determine what to concentrate on with the coach, and what to focus on in the future. What coaching will not do, however, is solve all the problems identified, in only a few weeks.

At the end of the coaching operation, a report on the experience should be written with the media outlets and the journalists, together or separately according to the circumstances. The Haiti experience included in the Case Study in this manual is one example of lessons learned by the coaches and programme managers. The joint coaches-and-journalists' report, and a more

detailed one done by the coaches upon their return with the organisation in charge of the operation, will obviously be used for more detailed learning. These reports should also be done with attention to potential follow-up and continued training with the media outlets, which will be particularly relevant since it will be based on detailed knowledge of the needs. And finally, coaches and their organisation are urged to complete the questionnaire at the end of this manual to help in future revisions.

### **Translators**

Coaches should be selected for their ability to speak the language of those with whom they are working. However, in some cases it may be necessary for coaches to be assisted by an assigned translator, and program organizers and coaches should pay special attention to establishing a good relationship with translators. It is best to have translators who are familiar with the media and journalism. But translators should not be workers from directly competing media. Coaches should give translators this manual and ensure translators are familiar with everything that is in it. Coaches should also confirm that translators can faithfully reflect the words and ideas of both the coach and the trainees. Because coaching involves much fast-paced informal conversation, more than one translator may be needed working in turn alongside the coach.

## 4 An election-reporting toolbox

### 4.1 Introductory note

– to coaches and trainers about media and elections in fragile states.

#### The challenge

Elections are an enormous challenge for journalism in conflict-stressed societies or fragile states. They are a period when passionate feelings about change – change of government, policies and personalities – are encouraged and become a central focus of public and media attention. Even in the most enduring democracies there is a tendency for the media to pursue passionate emotions, and to emphasize the most inflammatory accusations and denials among the parties, ignoring citizens' voices and real concerns that confront communities.

The risks are intensified in societies where journalism has not achieved standards of professionalism such as accuracy, fair balance and responsibility. All of this can occur in an environment where there are only weak laws and little protection for journalists doing their job professionally, and where media outlets are controlled by the state or by owners with corrupt or political agendas, and thus the news is often biased. In such an environment, even professional reporting ends up being publicly distrusted.

Elections are indeed a severe challenge for journalism. However, democratic elections are what can be called regulated conflict – openly conducted, constrained by extensive rules about fairness, expressly designed to resolve change by non-violence. There is no better occasion for journalism to both be guided by those rules and to use the rules to contribute to public understanding and well-informed choices in the voting booth.

If there is any single code or principle or mantra which coaches may want to impress upon their reporters as guidance in how to do their job, in a period of such legally permitted tumult as an election, it is that the election should be free and fair. Free means free speech by all parties, candidates and voters. Fair means the campaign and voting is conducted without corruption and fear. As well as possible, it is the media's job to ensure that "free and fair" prevails.

#### Professional skills matter most

However, if the basic skills of journalism such as accuracy and balance, interviewing and editing aren't in place, then knowledge about the rules and procedures of elections won't be enough to make the reporting contribute to a free and fair election. Coaches will probably want to continuously blend professional skills development with specific election-related reporting, and to emphasize professionalism as the bedrock of election reporting. Emphasizing professional journalism as an ethic can also build a bond among journalists, even journalists from competing news outlets, that gives them as individuals a strength to avoid the worst of sensational, partisan or corrupt reporting. Part of the value of this coaching method of training is that the professional journalist-coaches work alongside the reporters and editors, and even in the field, and whenever possible demonstrate professional standards and behaviour.

## Tools for do-it-yourself work

The suggested topics and information for coaches contained in this Toolkit are derived from several sources and the authors' personal experiences. Some of the tools are for coaches and some are for the reporters and editors they are working with. The tools include introductory concepts about elections and specific techniques for reporting on elections. Coaches can decide which tool to use at what time, and can copy and distribute particular tools to reporters as guidelines for their reporting. For a more specific brief manual for election reporters, coaches should also refer to and if possible distribute the manual entitled *Media and Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook* published by IMPACS and International Media Support. ISBN 0-9733391-1-X and available on the web.

## 4.2 Tools for election reporting

The basic principles of a democratic election:

1. The election must be free and fair
2. The media must play its three roles: to inform, be the watchdog, and be the voters' voice.

Coaches should impress upon reporters that an election is more than just an intense, long-running major news story. For many countries and people, an election is a crucial decision about the future. And the outcome depends very much on how the media reports the election campaign and vote. It is important for coaches to encourage the media to report on the fairness of the process of the election, almost as much as reporting on the parties and candidates.

For an election to go well, it must be free and fair. Free and fair are the two most important elements that professional journalists watch for in reporting on elections.

Free quite simply means that during the campaign there must be free speech by the candidates, parties and by the voters. It means the political players must have equitable access to the media. It means the media reports on all of them without bias. (Equitable does not mean exactly equal. It means a proportion representative of a party's significance in the campaign.)

Also, the election must be fair. There must be rules to ensure every citizen has a secret vote. All candidates and parties must have equal rights and opportunities to campaign without interference or intimidation. The rules must be enforced fairly and everyone must respect the results of the vote.

### Media roles

The media play three critical roles in an election:

1. First, the media informs people about the election. The media reports fairly on the campaigns of all the political parties so the people can determine if there are differences between them and make their own choices. The media also provides opinions by columnists, commentators and talk-show presenters. It also presents educational information from the election commission to tell citizens who the candidates are and where to vote, and how to cast a vote in secret. And the media may carry advertisements from the political parties seeking the people's support.

2. Secondly the media is the watchdog over the fairness of the election campaign and the voting. It is the media's job to report if there is no free speech because some candidates are afraid to speak, or if there is corruption in election and voting procedures, or if the Election Commission is not doing its job fairly.
3. And thirdly the media should be the voice of the voters. The election is not just for the politicians. An election is also an opportunity for ordinary people to speak up, to say what issues they think are important and why. The media should go out into the community and be the voice of the ordinary voters who have something to say, and also be the voice for those who cannot speak up or have been ignored in the past.

### **The three parts of an election campaign**

The Election Commission has established the rules for every aspect of how the election campaign should be conducted. The rules may include how the media will provide fairness in its reporting. But the rules don't tell the media what to look for or what to report. So what does a journalist look at, in a democratic election?

During the campaign period preceding the voting day, the media have at least three important subjects to report on, including:

1. The political parties and candidates.  
The media should report how strong the parties are, how many candidates they have and what groups and interests they do not include. The media should provide voters with some information about every party which is running in the election. But the largest parties with the most candidates will likely get more news. There should also be some reporting on independent candidates.
2. The issues.  
Each political party will have its own views about what is most important, and why voters should elect that party. The media's role is to report on the differences between parties on the same issues and to give voters enough information to compare the parties' positions. Professional reporting does not tell the voters which choice is better. Reporters leave that to editorials, columnists and commentators. The media should also identify issues that the people believe are important but that some politicians do not want to talk about.
3. The voting process.  
Both the Election Commission and the media provide information about the election procedures to assist people in participating. This information includes explaining how voters can register; the length of the campaign; who will count the votes; how much money parties can spend on their campaigns; and many more concerns. The media must watch the process to see if the rules are followed without corruption or favouritism to any one party, or abuse of any group of voters.

### **The Election Commission**

The Election Commission is supposed to be a completely independent agency that sets rules to keep the election free and fair. But the news media must play the role of watchdog which looks at the conduct of the election and the Election Commission itself.

Because the job of running a free and fair election is so complicated, election reporters need to know something about the Election Commission, how it

operates and what the election rules are, and to understand if they are being enforced.

If the media know the election rules, they can report clearly on the election campaign and expose corruption of the rules for the Election Commission to deal with. And the media also report what action the commission takes.

Questions for the watchdog-media:

- Does every eligible citizen have the right to vote? How will they be added to the voters' list before voting day?
- Do women and minorities feel safe in voting? Will they be protected from threat at the voting booth?
- Are all political parties equally able to hold public meetings without fear? How will they be protected?
- Are all parties being given equitable time in news and public forums on the state media?
- Are government officials maintaining neutrality? The government should not favour any party during the campaign. The police should protect all parties equally.
- Are the voting stations secure? Who will guard the ballots and who will count them fairly?

If the police are not maintaining security and neutrality towards all parties or if some citizens are being refused the right to vote – this is news. The media should report it. The Election Commission should be asked for a response. Other parties should be asked to comment. The media has a responsibility to protect a free and fair election by exposing failures through news reports.

### **The Election Commission as the media's guide to fairness**

The Election Commission will likely set rules for the media during the election campaign and voting period. There may be rules which require the state media or all media to give all parties a minimum percentage of coverage in the newscasts and public debates which are broadcast or printed. There may be rules about the media accepting political advertising. Reporters and news managers must know these rules.

For journalists in media outlets whose owners want news reports to favour one political party, the Election Commission rules may help the professional journalist defend a more balanced news report. The reporter can point to the commission's rules on fairness and equitable access in the media, and explain to managers that they risk penalties from the Election Commission if they present only one-sided news.

Owners and news managers should express their views about politics separately from the news reports. The clear separation of news from editorials or opinions helps build public trust in a media outlet.

Election Commissions can, in the pursuit of a free and fair election, actually create a media environment during the election period which is more independent and more diverse than normally exists. But Election Commissions are often plagued by government interference, partisanship, corruption or lack of competence and resources so they must be scrutinized and reported on by the media without favouritism.

## **Covering the campaign**

Most parties make their leader the centre of attention so voters who like the leader will vote for the party's candidates. So the party's election campaign is composed of speeches, party rallies and press conferences featuring the party leader. But the media's job is not just to repeat all the words spoken by the leaders. There should also be information in the news story about where the speech was given and how many people were there and what was the reaction of people in the streets, and what did political opponents say? Voters deserve to know so they can compare and decide for themselves.

## **Core votes and undecided voters**

Most political parties rely on the same voters who supported them last time, known as their core voters, and the parties make promises to reassure these voters and keep them loyal. But especially in close elections parties cannot win an election with only the support of their core voters. They need to attract undecided voters – people who are voting for the first time, or people who are no longer satisfied with their old party. Journalists need to examine and report on undecided voters and what the parties are promising to undecided voters to win their support.

## **Avoiding media manipulation**

Political parties know many people believe what they see and hear in the news media. Each party tries to create “soft news” events which make the leader or candidate look appealing to voters, such as visiting schools or homes, kissing babies and greeting enthusiastic crowds.

Professional journalists cannot ignore soft news because other competing media will report it. But journalists have a responsibility to ask leaders to discuss what ordinary voters are talking about, and what other party leaders are saying. Journalists can use these soft news opportunities to ask tough questions, and ask leaders to respond to issues raised by other leaders in order to create balance in the news reports about the other leaders. The questions must be polite and respectful, but asked in the name of the voters and a free and fair election. The election is for the voters, not the politicians.

## **Covering speeches**

Political speeches are intended to stir the loyalty of traditional supporters and attract new supporters by promising to solve their problems and make life better. They are designed to make other parties look weak or corrupt and unattractive to voters.

But speeches can use violent language and inflame emotions with attacks on other politicians. These remarks should not be censored by journalists, and should be reported accurately. But news with inflammatory remarks must be balanced as much as possible by quickly getting reaction from the other side, from those being attacked, and inserting it into the story about the speech. Also include reaction from ordinary voters.

Professional journalists do not make personal opinions or criticism of speeches in their news reports. Professionals do not applaud or clap during the speech, because they are neutral, or impartial.

### **Hate speech**

*But what to do about hate speech? Hate speech is any form of words, including old prophecies and metaphors, which suggest certain people are less human because of their tribe or caste or religion, and which advocates their destruction as a group. If the person who makes the hate speech is important enough their words may have to be reported. But hate speech should never be reported unchallenged. Hate speech is an offence against international human rights. Journalists should work extra hard to get reaction to hate speech from independent experts and human rights advocates, as well as those attacked by the hate speech, and to include those comments in the story.*

### **Opinion polls – don't be fooled**

Political parties use opinion polls to discover what issues a representative sample of voters think is important. Parties will sometimes change their campaign promises because opinion polls reveal what will be more popular. Opinion polls also influence voters because voters like to know what their neighbours are thinking and may decide to vote the same way.

But opinion polls are only a brief sample of people's opinions at the time they were asked. Polls cannot predict how opinions – and votes – will change if voters learn new information. Polls should not become the lead story every day because they may influence voters (and the media) to follow popular opinion rather than think for themselves.

Opinion polls can be manipulated by political parties or other interests to influence voters. Journalists should only report polls that are conducted by professional polling companies and follow strict procedures to provide an accurate picture of people's opinions at that time. Journalists should learn what constitutes professional polling.

### **Voters' Voice reporting: Making candidates answer the voters**

An election campaign should be for the voters, not for the politicians. It is the voters who have to make a serious decision on voting day. One of election reporters' greatest challenge is to get beyond all the noise created by politicians' speeches and news conferences, and to report what it is the voters and other citizens want.

### **Think like voters**

In setting its own agenda to ensure independent coverage, the media needs to think of itself as the voter's voice. This way of thinking will assist reporters in finding stories and people to interview outside the party campaigns. The media needs to reflect what people are talking about in the streets. Typically, people are thinking about their safety, and getting secure jobs and having clean water and schooling for their children. They want a new bridge, a better road, cheaper fuel. People want to know what different politicians will do to resolve these issues. As part of its role, the media's job is to be the voters' voice and take these issues to the political parties and get responses, so the voters can decide who to vote for.

Of course the reporting of voters' voices has to be accurate, fair and balanced. And it takes more time and effort to talk to independent community leaders

and enough citizens to understand what are the strongest concerns of the community. But thinking like a voter produces more stories to report than just speeches. And it produces important questions to ask politicians.

On talk-shows and call-in programmes, the presenter can become the voters' voice by asking voters for questions they want to put to politicians. Presenters also can ask voters for suggestions on how a problem can be solved. These questions and possible solutions can be put to politicians for answers when they come on the talk-show or in later interviews.

Being the voters' voice is not the only role. The media must report what the parties' and candidates' are saying, even if it does not reflect issues the people want addressed. Voters ultimately must decide for themselves who to vote for.

### **Seeking other voices, other communities**

There are also communities which do not speak up, or have no voice – such as women, minorities and the poor – for whom the media should be their voice. There are also communities united not by where they live but by what they do, such as farmers, teachers, market vendors, or war veterans, who have concerns important to them but are ignored by politicians.

But how does a journalist give voice to the concerns of neglected groups, such as women? Seek out leaders among women. Ask questions where women gather. Seek specialists such as university professors and human rights experts. Conduct an opinion poll among women. And the questions and issues the women express should be put to several political leaders, not just one leader, so women voters can compare and decide who to vote for.

### **Interviewing politicians**

*Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How?*

These are the six basic questions a journalist should ask to report any story.

But when interviewing a political candidate there are three questions that produce better answers. The three questions begin with the word *What?*, *How?* or *Why?*

For example, ask the politician: what will your party do about the raw sewage running in the streets of this village? How did it happen that this village has been neglected so long by your government? Why did the village not get sewers and clean water for so many years?

All of these questions require the candidate to think about an answer. They are called open-ended questions because they require more than a quick "yes" or "no" answer, which ends the discussion.

Other tips:

- Ask short questions. If you begin a question with a long statement the politician will only answer the long statement and ignore your question.
- Do not ask two questions at once. The politician will pick the easier one and only answer it.
- Do research before the interview. Find out what this person has said in the past. Find out what the community wants to ask this politician. What do opponents or critics think? Ask the politician to respond to the criticisms.
- Develop questions before the interview. Prepare open-ended questions.

Campaign security and safety:

- Never wear political colours, party badges or clothing with political slogans.
- Do not accept favours from political party workers or candidates. If it is necessary to accept free transportation to get to the news, you should still report the news with accuracy and balance.
- Journalists should carry identification stating that they are journalists.
- Never carry a weapon. An armed journalist will be mistaken for a fighter.
- Journalists have a right to refuse an assignment that they consider too dangerous.
- Journalists should have proper equipment and insurance in dangerous assignments.
- Always tell the employer about any attacks or threats. All the media should make news about any threats against journalists, and should demand the election commission to protect journalists.
- Always tell someone else – your editor, co-workers or family – where you are going and when you will return.
- A reporter's best defence against threats is show that their work is balanced and takes no sides. Reporting both sides allows the people to make their own intelligent comparisons and choices.

### **The voting and the results**

The day of voting is a major news event because the media must do everything to ensure that every voter has freedom to vote, in secret, and that all ballots are counted fairly and the results are not tampered with. This means understanding the Election Commission rules on voting, and observing that they are enforced. If there is voter fraud or voter interference this news should be reported but also kept in context. Voting may have been clean and fair in other areas. One instance of vote-tampering does not invalidate the whole election. The media must be extremely careful about reporting only factually correct information about ballot counts. Inaccurate reporting can be inflammatory.

Reporters themselves must not interfere in the voting procedure in any way.

Election coverage does not end after the votes are counted and announced. The media should analyze and report on voting trends, popularity shifts and the reasons for them, and on citizen satisfaction with the outcome. The promises made by the winning party should be noted for the public to hold the new government accountable. The preparations for a run-off election, if one is necessary, should be reported on.

### **Election coverage concepts**

Often media outlets develop specific formats for their coverage of the campaign. The aim of such formats such as series or programmes is to mirror the election process on a wide and balanced basis, as part of informing voters about their choices when it comes time to vote.

Series:

- In a series of articles or broadcasts, each one examines a single party or candidate, but by the end of the series a fair and representative consideration must be given to all significant parties. This is the essence of fair balance.
- Single topic roundtable.
- A variation on the series format, each week a representative of each of the major parties and some representative smaller parties are asked to discuss their similarities and differences on a single major issue. This enables voters to compare and choose the party they prefer on that issue.

- Cross-country call-in formats, where a roundtable of party representatives in the studio answer questions from listeners or viewers all over the country who call in to discuss a specific, previously-announced hot issue. This format requires providing access to all major parties, and covering all the main issues, during the length of the campaign.

An advantage of using an established format for election programmes is that it allows the production team – editors and researchers – more time to research in advance, to anticipate developments and to focus on essential highpoints. It also requires keeping track of previous programmes and issues covered, to refer to them if necessary and to ensure that by the end of the series there has been a fair balance in coverage.

### **Conflict Sensitive Reporting Elections are about conflict**

Elections are about possible change and how to handle it. Should there be a change in the government, change in the government's policies, or change in the persons who represent the people? Some say yes, some say no. This is political conflict. A democratic election is a way to peacefully resolve the political conflict before it turns into physical violence.

The political conflict may be caused by deeper disagreement within the country, which election reporters need to understand. What was the change demanded by some people and resisted by others? What were the basic issues? Who represents those who want change or resist it? Sensitivity to the underlying roots of conflict gives reporters much more information to report than just the political debate, during an election.

### **Sources of conflict**

The most common cause of conflict is inequitable access to scarce resources such as food, housing or jobs. Poverty fuels conflict. Conflict can also be caused by poor communication among groups who develop false beliefs about each other. Laws that allow unequal treatment based on gender, race, social class, or religion can incite conflict. A long period of corruption, or fear of neighbouring groups or countries, can also trigger conflict. Conflict which is not resolved peacefully, by democratic politics will eventually turn violent. For more information on conflict sensitivity, see: *Conflict Sensitive Journalism: A Handbook for Reporters*, published by IMPACS and IMS. ISBN 87-989502-0-7 and available on the web.

### **Choosing our words carefully**

As journalists, the words we use in our reporting influence whether the news helps to build understanding or reinforces misperceptions and fear. Language is the strongest tool which journalists have to do their work and it has to be used with care to avoid doing harm. This particularly applies during elections when political candidates get greater attention by making sometimes emotional statements.

Try to avoid:

- Reporters should try to avoid imprecise and accusatory words such as massacre, assassination and genocide which inflame more than inform. If political candidates use these words, they should be directly attributed to the candidate and not just reported as facts.
- In their own reports, reporters should avoid descriptive words such as terrorized, brutalized or devastated because those are the words of people on one side who see themselves as victims, and reporters do not take sides. Only quote someone else using such language.

- Also avoid putting labels on a group such as terrorist, fanatic, fundamentalist or extremist because this amounts to the reporter taking a position, condemning the group. To identify groups, use the name or label they call themselves. If political candidates use these words for groups, they should be directly attributed to the candidate and not just reported as facts.

### 4.3 International standards of elections

Most of the world considers a free and fair election as the most important indication that a country is or is becoming a democracy. Free means there is free speech for all citizens and candidates in the election. Fair means the campaign has rules equally applied to everyone to protect against corruption. Beyond that, there are no completely agreed-upon international standards for what constitutes democratic elections. Democracy itself is sometimes a contested concept, although the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance defines it as a system of political governance whose decision-making power is ultimately controlled by its citizens who are all treated as equals.

However, there is international consensus that standards for elections should include the principle of free, fair and periodic voting that guarantees universal suffrage, the secrecy of the ballot, freedom from coercion, and a commitment to one person-one vote. These principles were included in the definition of democratic elections set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1946 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in the 1960s. Since then it has become recognized that there also should be fair representation of all citizens, equality of men and women, rights for minorities and special provision for the handicapped.

The Code of Good Practices in Electoral Matters, produced in 2002 by the European Council for Democracy Through Law, says democratic elections must involve universal, equal, free, secret and direct voting, and be held at regular intervals.

- Universal means all citizens have the right to vote and the right to seek elected office, if qualified by age, place of residence or other reasonable limits;
- Equal means each voter has one vote, seats are evenly distributed among constituencies; candidates and parties have equal access to the campaign and the media; minorities are included but not discriminated against.
- Free means voters can form opinions without state or other interference, can openly support parties and have unimpeded and equal access to information and voting procedures;
- Secret means voters' names and their individual choices on the ballot are never revealed;
- Direct means that at least one chamber of the legislative body must be directly elected by the voters.

Different countries also practise varying formulas for reflecting the outcome of the vote, such as plurality/majority, proportional or mixed allocation of elected candidates. There also can be voting for party or for individuals; and there can be one or several representatives elected from each voting district. Any of these formulae or voting systems can be considered democratic if they achieve an election that is inclusive, participatory, representative, accountable, transparent and responsive to citizens' aspirations and expectations.

What really matters, however, is not the endorsement of these kinds of democratic election principles but the actual application of them, to the

maximum degree, in an election campaign. It is the process, described in hundreds of regulations and rules, and enforced fairly during the campaign, that will determine if an election outcome can afterwards be declared as democratic. And the declaration has to come not only from within a country but also from the international community, which needs to know what and who it is dealing with and wants to see international standards associated with democracy being honoured. As a result, international institutions like the United Nations, the European Community, the Organisation of American States (OAS) and organizations and individual countries have developed sophisticated programmes to monitor the conduct of a country's election and to assess its democratic fairness. The conduct of the media during an election is always a major part of that assessment.

The UN Electoral Assistance Division is the world's largest elections monitor, with information available at: [www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/eadhome.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/eadhome.htm). Good information on election monitoring and links to a number of monitoring organizations and material also can be found on the Beyond Intractability.org site at: [www.beyondintractability.org/essay/election\\_monitoring/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/election_monitoring/).

## 4.4 Basic journalism

Coaches, with their considerable experience as journalism professionals, will have numerous ways to introduce and upgrade the essential reporting skills of those they are working with. Their personal toolbox of journalistic and coaching capabilities will be vastly bigger than what is offered here. And especially in conflict-stressed states there is need for enormous flexibility and ingenuity by coaches to determine how and when to introduce any particular concept or skill of journalism. The subjects listed here are provided as reminders, perspectives and handy tools in what is essentially a do-it-yourself situation. The basic journalism skills part of the toolbox is divided into three categories: news judgement and skills; techniques, and logistical tools.

### 4.4.1 News judgement and skills

#### What is news?

News is what people talk about. News is information about change or novelty or danger or famous people. News is what makes people ask questions. "Did you hear what happened on Main Street? The police are stopping everybody." "Why?" "I heard they're trying to catch some criminal." Or "Did you hear the price of gas is going up again?" or "Hey! Fifty-four people registered for the presidential vote." "Yes, I never heard of half of them. How are we supposed to choose from so many people?"

For most people, the news has a greater impact if it happens close to them – on their street, in their community, in their town, city or country. Events further away mean less to most people unless they involve universal values that we all hold such as fear (hurricanes), death (150 people killed in Iraq in one day), survival (An Air France jet crashes in Toronto and everyone survives), etc.

The news comes from radio, television, Internet, newspapers and word-of-mouth. How does it get there? It comes from journalists, reporters and producers who go out and look for it because they have a good sense of people's news values. And people turn to the news media because they expect the media to deliver information on what is happening and what may affect them.

**What is a news story?**

Basic journalism is telling a story. It is like when you talk to a friend or someone in your family, you speak clearly and openly about something that has happened or about to happen. You also talk about what it means, and why. In short, basic journalism is like an informative conversation.

A good story contains the answers to the questions: *Who? How? What? Where? When? and Why?* In election reporting, these questions help define the basic content of a news story. Who is the candidate for which party in this area? What promises is the candidate making? How does the candidate intend to keep the promises? When does the candidate expect to honour their promises? Who is paying for the candidate's campaign? How could that affect the candidate's decisions should they win? But to make this information more meaningful to voters, the story should also refer to how other candidates answer the same questions. It is not always possible to make every story equally balanced, but over a number of stories there has to be a fair or representative balance.

**Responsibility**

Elections are like any other kind of reporting. They place obligations of responsibility on professional journalists. This means journalists protect their sources when they cannot be named. It means they use only honest, legal methods to obtain the news. It means journalists avoid reporting what has been reported elsewhere without checking the facts. And even in campaigns, journalism does not knowingly repeat inaccurate allegations and offensive speech without allowing the other side to comment or answer. This is what makes a democratic election – well-informed voters freely making up their own minds.

**Accuracy**

Your stories must be accurate not only in spelling the candidate's names but also in descriptions, quotes, and context and in giving things their proper emphasis without exaggeration. If you do not describe people, places and events accurately, you misinform people. Worse, if people see that your basic reporting is inaccurate they will not trust you to get any other information correct. So they will not talk to you.

Professional reporters understand that accuracy begins with spelling everything correctly. Use a dictionary or spell-check on your computer. Even when writing for radio or television, words are spoken more naturally when they are spelled accurately in the script.

**Fair and balanced stories**

Fair and balanced election coverage means individual stories, and the pattern of stories over a period of time, contain points of view from different parties or candidates. Not every candidate or party will be reported in every story. But professional journalists do not favour any candidate. They simply ask questions on behalf of the people, compare answers, present and explain the various points of view, and add background information and context, so the public can understand all sides of the issues.

Balance is more than just a courtesy. It is a necessity, especially in campaigns when candidates often make accusations about each other. Do not report specific allegations or insults without making sure you have a response or reaction from the other side. You are allowed to state what Candidate A says about Candidate B, even if the language is offensive.

However, if at all possible you must speak to Candidate B and ensure that their reaction to the allegation also appears in the same story so it is balanced.

**Attribution**

When you give information in a news story, you must reveal or attribute the source. For example, suppose Jacques Faipamal of the Blue Sky party says he will lower gas prices if elected. In the news report it is important to say it is he, Mr. Faipamal, who said it, so readers, listeners and viewers will know the reporter did not make up the information, and so listeners and viewers will know who to complain to – not the reporter – if they disagree with what has been reported.

**Responsibility to protect your sources**

If a source tells a journalist something significant and wants to remain anonymous, the journalist has a responsibility NOT to reveal the name of the source. It is this trust in journalists' responsibility which enables the media to get information from sources that often can not be obtained anywhere else.

However, offering protection for a source cannot be an excuse for allowing the reporting of rumours or accusations without concern for accuracy and fair balance.

**4.4.2 Techniques****Asking questions**

Reporters are always asking questions but not always getting answers that say much. The trick to getting useful informative answers is to ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no which cuts off conversation. Open-ended questions force the candidate to think and to answer fully. Open-ended questions begin with the words “*what*”, “*why*” or “*how*”. They force the candidate to explain. How to you expect to pay lower prices if the distributor is unable to? How would you subsidize fuel prices? Where would the money come from to do this? What will you do if distributors do not lower their prices? These are the questions, which get a politician to open up and speak in revealing words and phrases.

**Clarity**

Other than in brief direct quotes, journalists should use their own words to report a story. Part of the journalist's skill is translating long, complicated, or evasive statements from candidates into simple language that readers, listeners and viewers of all levels of education can understand. If a candidate says something which is unclear, only report enough to reveal that the candidate is unclear. In other words, don't repeat what you don't understand or cannot explain more clearly.

The bigger the word, the longer the sentence, the less understandable your story becomes. The simpler the language you use, the more understandable it is.

**Personal opinions**

As in all news reporting, journalists do not put their own opinions into election reporting. The public is depending on you to hear information on what is happening, not your judgement on whether you like the candidate or their ideas.

**What to avoid**

Journalists should not accept anything from a political candidate or political party even if it is called a gift. As much as possible journalists should not even accept transportation from candidates. It may be possible and wiser for journalists to travel together in a private vehicle, sharing the cost, rather than to

travel separately with the candidates. Media outlets as a group can share the cost of working, travelling, and finding accommodation together in the field without compromising their individual reporters' ability to each separately report the story with integrity and without influence from the others.

### **Reporting for each individual citizen**

Whether reporting for print or electronic media, professional journalists know they are talking to only one person at a time. To make their reports clear, professionals think of someone they know and mentally write or speak to that one person.

### **Manipulation**

Political candidates try to use the media to convey their own message to the people, so journalists must not only gather facts but remain vigilant to attempts to manipulate them. Politicians will often use words such as new, dynamic, fresh, forward-looking, visionary, progressive, or improved because they denote something positive. Politicians use such words to make voters feel good about what they say. Reporters do not have to repeat these words except when directly attributing them to the politician.

Politicians and their aides also try to tell reporters what the news is so it will favour the candidate. Or they offer interpretations of the news to favour the candidate. This is called spin. It is important to get the other major candidates' opinions, or to get the counter-spin, for fair balance. But it is better for reporters to think for themselves, to ask the voters what they think, and to seek experts' opinions, than just to rely on spin.

Especially in a campaign journalists have a responsibility to ask for clarification so the public receives as clear and unambiguous a story as possible. If a candidate promises a new programme, ask how it is different from what existed previously. Ask how they intend to achieve it.

The journalist is responsible for asking for details and drawing the information out of the candidate. If the candidate says it is too soon to reveal details, or we haven't worked all the details out yet, it is up to the journalist to ask if the campaign promise is more than empty rhetoric. Clever questioning can achieve this. "How can you make this promise if you do not know how you will achieve it? Why should people vote for you if your plan has no details?" "How does this get us out of the crisis in the country for the past year or so?"

Be aware of candidates who claim to speak on behalf of the people. If a politician says "the people overwhelmingly want to change this law", a reporter should ask: How do you know? What polls do you base that statement on? Are there studies to support that?

Reporters also must try to avoid intimidation. Some aides of candidates may try to threaten harm against a reporter in order to influence a news report. If possible, get the threat on the record, in front of witnesses, and include it in the story. If this is not possible or too dangerous, always tell your editor about the threat. And reporters should always make news stories about threats, if possible, to expose the attempted intimidation.

### **The art of the interview**

Whether it is for print or electronic media, an interview is an unspoken process of negotiation between the journalist and the candidate or source. It is all about gradually reaching agreement on how much very revealing information the candidate will divulge. The journalist must really listen to the candidate or

source as a fellow human being – not as an object, or a guest or a celebrity but as a person – and encourage them to share themselves with the public.

Most successful interviews are based on four fundamental principles:

- 1) Know what they know before you interview them.
- 2) Know the point of your interview: what information, story or evidence you are trying to obtain.
- 3) Approach every interview as a conversation between equals, and treat all candidates equally.
- 4) No matter how difficult or controversial a question or answer might seem, maintain a 'comfort zone of human dignity' or basic courtesy. Even the worst evil-doers deserve the opportunity to put their point of view on the public record. It's up to the journalist to ask a clear, honest question that both respects and trusts the person to find the courage to give an honest answer.

During the interview:

- 1) Play close attention to the conversation.
- 2) Lean forward when asking specific details.
- 3) Sit so you let the person being interviewed know you are alert and involved in the conversation. Don't slouch, twist and turn in the chair, or yawn.
- 4) If there is anything you do not understand, immediately ask questions to clarify it. If the person interviewed says something unexpectedly interesting, ask more questions about it immediately. Don't wait. Respond immediately to probe any misunderstanding or interesting material.
- 5) Make eye-contact with the speaker when they are talking to and gently nod your head to reassure them of your understanding. This is useful only if it is genuine.

What *NOT* to do in an interview:

- 1) Don't ask two or more questions at the same time. If you ask "What is your relationship with Mr. ABC and is there any chance of his returning to power?" the candidate will most likely answer only the second question, partly because it's last and possibly because it's easier.
- 2) Don't ask leading questions. These are questions that imply the journalist is right and the guest is wrong. Questions such as: Don't you think that ... Shouldn't you have done ...
- 3) Don't put opinions in a question. It stops the flow of important information, gives the candidate something else to talk about.
- 4) Don't ask questions that include assumptions, such as "How did someone like" x-y-z get elected president?" Such an assumption that x-y-z was unqualified may be different than the candidate's assumption and will cause the candidate to be defensive and suppress information. Ask instead "Why do you think XYZ was elected?"
- 5) Don't ask questions that contain trigger or sensitive words. A phrase like "As a hardliner, why did you ..." will interrupt your questioning. The guest will dispute your use of the word "hardliner", and defend their position and you will have lost the opportunity to pursue your original question.
- 6) Don't use biased words, such as: "How did you enjoy your meeting with the Banana Party?" Instead, ask: "What did you think of your meeting with the Banana Party?" A good interviewer is scrupulously neutral, revealing nothing about themselves but getting the candidate to reveal a great deal.
- 7) Don't ask questions that are too long. Shorter questions are clear, demand clear replies, and provide no time for evasion.

### **Vetting a story**

Vetting is verifying how a story reads or sounds before it goes to the public. Vetting is something every reporter should do more of. Ask another person in the newsroom to pretend to be the public, to read the story, or listen while you read your script out loud. Afterwards, the pretend public asks for clarification: "This part sounds unclear, is there a better way to say it?"

"This sentence seems a bit strong/weak; is that really what happened/what the candidate meant?"

You can vet a story simply by asking a colleague, "Hey, what do you think of this?" Most vetting does not take long – just a few minutes – but when journalists help each other this way the end result is a better story, which reflects well on everyone.

### **The editorial meeting**

Every reporter, producer or editor in a newsroom, whether print media or electronic, should be expected to come to work every day with ideas about what should be reported that day. Ideas can come from a newspaper article, a magazine, television, a news service, something you've seen or overheard, a source, a news release, a check on an ongoing situation or anything that makes you curious to know more. Reporters should be prepared to talk about these ideas, share them, and argue for them. And at some point early in the day, all the journalists or at least the editors and managers need to meet together to plan the daily editorial or news coverage.

### **Conducting the meeting**

In the meeting, each person presents their best ideas and defends them when questioned by others. An idea should be presented as a story, not just an issue. For example, on the issue of crime, the story is: "I know several community leaders afraid to call the police because...." Quickly, a list will develop of the stories everyone agrees are most important today. The senior editor or manager conducting the meeting usually assigns each story to the person who proposed it. Less interesting ideas are saved for another day. Over time, unused ideas will fall off the list as new ideas are presented.

Questions raised in an Editorial Meeting could include:

- Why did this story interest you? Why should I care?
- Why today?
- Where's the passion in this story?
- How will it help the listener? Is this what people want?
- Haven't we done this before? What's new about it?
- Is this idea too light/too much like show business?
- Who can we talk to about this?
- Who would have a different point of view on this?
- How would we cover such a story?
- Do we do this story by telephone interview, personal interview, as a profile or in some other form? How do we convey real context and background in this story?
- What's being overlooked here? What's missing?

The meeting must be conducted briskly and end on time, usually no more than 40 minutes.

### **Assigned to a story?**

The first thing a good reporter does is confirms the time and location of the story they are assigned to. Also find out who else will be there – it may provide more than one interview. Arrive early. Gather information from everyone. Reporters who arrive late for assignments should find another career.

### 4.4.3 Logistics and technology

#### **Arranging the interview**

A person who has a good knowledge of a subject does not always make a good interview when there is little time to take notes. Or they may not make a good interview for radio or television. It is therefore important to prepare the persons to be interviewed.

In arranging an interview, explain who you are, why you are inquiring and what information you are seeking. Ask a few preliminary questions before deciding if this is the person you want to interview. You may realize there may be someone else who is a better source of clear information.

If you are interviewing someone for radio or television, make sure they understand the arrangements, such as the precise time and location and the approximate length of the interview and whether it is in person or live or pre-recorded or whether they will be part of a debate. Make sure you have the correct telephone numbers, the correct pronunciation and the spelling of their name, and other interesting details about them that can be added to the interview or to the end of the programme. For both print and electronic reporters, make sure they have your phone number in case the timing has to change.

#### **Fresh batteries, long memories.**

For print and radio reporters: before leaving the station, put fresh batteries in your tape or digital recorder. Carry an extra set of batteries. Digital recorders use up batteries quickly. Also, carry a spare mini-disc if you are doing several interviews. Make sure you label the contents of every mini-disc or tape.

For television: Reporters should shoulder their share of heavy battery packs, tripods, lights and microphones for their camerapersons. And remind the cameraperson to bring extra cassettes or discs, microphone cords and other essential equipment.

#### **Reporting from the field**

Reporters who go out on assignment should have a mobile phone whenever possible. They should call their editor while in the field to learn if there is additional news that is part of their assignment or interview. They should also phone their editor or manager when they have gathered the news or completed the interview or if the story has changed.

For radio reporters, when recording anywhere but in a studio or quiet place, wear an earphone to ensure your levels are correct and there is no distortion.

Radio reporters delivering a live story to the station announcer or host by telephone should have pre-arranged their technique, with a few questions provided to the host to ask the reporter and with agreed words such as "...back to you, host" to indicate each time you have finished talking. Also write down the correct titles of the people you talk about or refer to.

#### **Creating lively, clear news**

Half of the journalist's job is gathering the news. The other half is telling it so well that readers, listeners and viewers will pay attention, will remain interested and will learn something. Good reporters have to be good story tellers.

For radio reporters this means using techniques of always introducing the person who is speaking within the last two sentences before the clip

containing their voice. Do not use clips longer than 40 seconds. Shorter clips are better. Radio listeners are often doing something else while they listen and cannot stop to figure out the meaning of long clips.

Similarly, for print reporters it is better to use shorter direct quotes than long quotes. Most people are not trained to speak in brief concise information but that is what readers want. If the candidate's quote is too long, put into your own words the essence of what the candidate said.

It is not up to the journalist to give a candidate a platform to speak on and on. It is up to the journalist to pick and choose the correct quote or length of clip from the candidate to ensure the listener has a better understanding of the story.

The journalist's job is to report, not just repeat.

## 4.5 Planning election coverage

It is important to draw up an election-coverage plan before the campaign. It is better to plan in advance and determine what you will cover rather than to react to events. Otherwise the party or candidate that creates the loudest event will always catch your attention and become the news just because it is loud. Be absolutely fair and balanced in the plan, so you can tell every loud politician that you treat them all equally. And when you report what the loudest candidate says, make sure to include other candidates' viewpoints. When candidates demand attention from the media, they usually do not want balanced reporting. Balanced reporting is important in trying to establish an independent news coverage plan.

Remember the concept of Voters Voice reporting. A news agenda which reflects what the voters are talking about, and reports the voters' concerns and questions, may convince the candidates to start talking about those issues too.

Be cautious in preparing an electoral coverage plan. For example, if you have limited staff and funding, it is better to concentrate on a few areas of reporting and do them well, rather than trying to report on everything and do poorly.

### Questions to consider

Will your coverage be limited? (national, regional, local?)

Is it better to work with other radio and television stations or newspapers to cover certain events? It is cheaper for several stations or networks to use one set of cameras, microphones or sound/video feeds to enable all of them to have access to a political debate or public meeting. Working in partnership with other stations and/or newspapers can save money and still maintain editorial independence. It is also possible to work together in reporting the vote-counting results. This is a common practise in many countries. It ensures that every listener or every reader receives the same information. Each radio, television station, newspaper and Internet outlet still retains editorial independence to interpret and comment on the results.

Without an electoral plan, you will react to and be drawn along by events rather than concentrating on serving the public with good, clear, balanced reports.

## Election coverage

### Without a plan

You will tend to report on:

Party events  
 The candidate's agenda  
 Who's in the lead? (Horse race)  
 A party's strategy  
 What a spokesperson says  
 A party's popularity  
 A party's past

### With a plan

You will tend to:

Expose a party's programmes  
 Respond to citizens questions  
 Identify what's at stake  
 Report on proposed solutions  
 Follow your own investigation  
 Report on party qualification  
 Report on party's actions now

## Make-up of an electoral-coverage plan

### Three phases: before, during and after the campaign

Before the campaign it is important to gather statistics from the past, such as who was in what party in the last election, and how many candidates each party had. Also gather background on each candidate, and on each constituency or riding. This documentation must be updated through research, press releases, and the latest newspaper and internet reports, and made available throughout all three phases of the campaign.

There is no ready-made recipe for preparing an electoral-coverage plan – but preparation is the most important part of good election coverage.

*Start with an open mind:* Gather documentation: electoral laws, names and contact numbers of all parties and candidates, public opinion firms if they exist, newspaper articles, Internet research and information on allowable expenses.

*Call each party* and ask for their electoral calendar. Parties plan ahead for specific events you will want to know about. Gather information on the location of campaign offices and polling stations.

*Put together a list* of knowledgeable contacts, commentators, political scientists and specialists on issues likely to be mentioned during the campaign. Some of these people will prove invaluable for inclusion in reports during and after the campaign.

*Create a place* in the newsroom where election material is accumulated and where you can discuss and exchange ideas.

From the point of view of a political party, there is no existence without media. As the saying goes "Speak well of me or speak ill, but speak!" But journalists must determine if a party's announcements and events are real or are simply designed to draw media attention and public exposure.

As a journalist, remember to ask clear questions on behalf of ordinary voters, such as how, and with what means, a party intends to accomplish a particular promise. Ask obvious questions such as why a party is supporting an idea which it previously voted against. Remember to ask open-ended questions, beginning with why or what about or how. These questions require politicians to provide full answers.

Each party is entitled to fair, honest coverage to ensure that the public can make an informed choice when voting. Generally, this means giving the same amount of coverage to each party.

Opinion polls are one way to gauge political popularity, at the time the poll was taken. But if there are no reliable public opinion polls, ask everyone in your newsroom to list once a week who they consider the 5 or 10 most popular candidates. The chances are high that the names of two or three top candidates will appear on each person's list. This gives a good idea of the most important candidates to focus on for that week. As the campaign progresses, some candidates' personalities or ideas will engage your attention more than others, and so the list may change. It is also important to include coverage of lesser candidates in reports about issues and in comparisons with leading candidates' ideas. And when a candidate or party that rated low on your lists becomes popular in the public eye, you must be flexible and report accordingly.

## 5 Practical information

### Communications

You must have access to reliable communications at all times. Most cellular telephone systems in the world use GSM technology. It is much cheaper to use a local Sim card than to pay international roaming charges. A local card usually accepts incoming calls free-of-charge. A local card can also be refilled with additional calling units as needed.

If you have access to high-speed internet, [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) offers free software which lets you make phone calls from your laptop at very low rates. This is for personal use only. It is NOT a replacement for a cell phone.

### Transportation

Know who is responsible for your transportation before you leave your country of origin. This includes transport to and from the airport. Will it be local taxi or someone hired by your organisation? Will someone meet you? Will you need a bullet-proof vehicle? Will you have to travel in a convoy? Will you have to take a specific route to avoid conflict? These considerations must all be discussed before you leave.

### Information

Keep the following information in a notebook, in your cell phone and in your laptop. If one is lost, you still have vital information.

- Cell phone numbers of all team members and organizers.
- Contacts in media outlets and media associations.
- Key government ministries (Communications, Security, Education, or Transitional Government contacts).
- Electoral Commission, Electoral Parties, Major candidates.
- Major NGO's, Rights Groups, Women's Groups.
- Police contacts (and where valid, local UN contacts).
- Local taxis companies just in case.
- Local hospitals, clinics, pharmacy, doctor, dentist.
- Contacts at major embassies, consular services.
- Local church groups and missions. They are a valuable source of information about a country's conditions.
- The numbers for the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters Sans Frontières, and the International Federation of Journalists. They aid journalists in trouble.

For more information on safety and security, consult the website of the International News Safety Institute at [www.newssafety.com](http://www.newssafety.com) for country-specific warnings. Also see the INSI safety code available at: [www.newssafety.com/safety/index.htm](http://www.newssafety.com/safety/index.htm) and also the very useful Practical Guide for Journalists produced by UNESCO and Reporters Sans Frontières available at: [www.reseau-damocles.org/IMG/pdf/GUIDE\\_Anglais\\_2002.pdf](http://www.reseau-damocles.org/IMG/pdf/GUIDE_Anglais_2002.pdf)

## Regular contact

Nothing is as important as up-to-date information. Talk to your fellow team members regularly. Exchange information, tips on coaching – what works or doesn't work, information about security conditions and about local attitudes. It is important to share your information.

Stay informed:

- Have a small portable radio to listen to news broadcasts and to measure your progress.
- Read the local newspapers and watch the local TV-channels regularly.
- On websites, regularly check international and local web sites for news.
  - International: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)
  - World News Network. [www.wnEurope.com](http://www.wnEurope.com)
  - Africa: [www.irinnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org), [www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com),  
[www.westafricanews.com](http://www.westafricanews.com), [www.afrol.com](http://www.afrol.com)
  - Middle East: [www.mideastweb.org](http://www.mideastweb.org)
  - Asia: [www.asianewsnet.com](http://www.asianewsnet.com)
  - Caucasus : [www.caucastimes.com](http://www.caucastimes.com)
  - Latin America: [www.ipsnews.net/latin](http://www.ipsnews.net/latin)

## Evacuation plan

Most coaching assignments are in countries with little real political stability. Conditions can be dangerous. It is important to take necessary precautions.

- Have an evacuation plan. Every member of your team must know what to do in case of an emergency. During a coup d'état, heightened state of alert, or other event, you must know who to contact, what procedure to follow, and if necessary, where and when to meet.
- Carry a local map and consult it often.
- Know which areas to avoid.
- Never walk alone and always remain alert.
- Know the location of taxis or other means of transport and the location of major airlines.
- Have your travel documents and cash ready.
- Expect the unexpected.

Behaviour:

- Conduct yourself in a respectful courteous manner.
- Learn local customs.
- Do not draw attention to yourself.
- Never wear badges, insignia or clothing that identify you with a political party or group.
- Do not accept rides with police or members of political parties.
- Remain friendly but neutral at all times.

# 6 Resources: Finding what you need on the internet

## Be advised

The internet is not the same everywhere. Depending on how authorities control information, you may not have access to what you need. Recent agreements with Yahoo and Google in China have not passed unnoticed in other countries. Despite appearances, the free flow of information may still be restricted.

- The internet is constantly evolving. What's there today won't necessarily be what was there yesterday or will be tomorrow.
- Nothing guarantees that what you find will be accurate. Don't believe everything you hear or read, especially on unfamiliar websites, even if they look official.

### Which search engine or directory to use:

The world increasingly uses [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). However, it is a good habit to use several "search engines" because NOT all Search Engines work the same or give the same results.

### Subject directories or catalogues list subjects in categories

Use [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com), [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com), [www.beaucoup.com](http://www.beaucoup.com)

- When you have a broad topic or idea to research
- When you want a list of sites on your topic rather than individual pages

### Detailed search engines

Use [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com), [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), [www.hotbot.com](http://www.hotbot.com)

- When you are looking for a specific fact/person/event/topic or when topic is made up of multiple ideas.
- These sites also offer more advanced searching by filling out a form enabling you to narrow your search.

Some search engines accept simple questions in plain English, [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com), [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com), [www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com), [www.brainboost.com](http://www.brainboost.com). Several also work in other languages: [www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com), [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com), [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com).

Practical tips:

- Know what you want: use singular words rather than plural. Try several similar combinations of keywords.
- Don't use common, generic words unless you include them in a phrase with more specific terms. Eg: Party is too generic. Use Party politics, political, democratic plus name of country.
- Use quotation marks to find exact phrases: "Democracy Party". Using democracy party without quotation marks will give you results where the words appear throughout a text individually.
- To include a key word in the information you are researching, precede it with the plus sign or use the word AND. Eg: party +democracy or: party AND democracy.
- To exclude a search term from the other, use a minus sign or the word NOT directly in front of the term. Eg: Einstein -relativity or: Einstein NOT relativity.

*Note: For a comprehensive 140 page UNESCO booklet on internet research, enter the phrase "The NET for Journalists" in Google.*

## Some useful election-related websites

With search engines on the Web it is possible to find almost any combination of specific information, if you search long enough. However, for coaching how to report on elections, there are some websites and sources which can quickly provide useful information, including:

The complete directory to most of the important aspects of a democratic election, by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance is available at: [www.aceproject.org](http://www.aceproject.org)

The International Foundation for Election Systems: [www.ifes.org/](http://www.ifes.org/)

Monitoring media fairness in election campaigns, by Patrick Merloe. Washington DC, NDI: Tacis, 1995.

Reports on election reporting training projects, by the international media development organization Internews, available at: [www.internews.org/activities/elections/default.htm](http://www.internews.org/activities/elections/default.htm)

The UNESCO guide to elections and media issues. Based on Article XIX (Article 19) information for Iraqi elections but widely applicable. Available at: [portal.unesco.org](http://portal.unesco.org) using the search function.

Election Reporting Manual, by the International Federation of Journalists. Available at: [www.ifj.org/pdfs/electionreporting.pdf](http://www.ifj.org/pdfs/electionreporting.pdf)

Media and Elections: An elections reporting manual, available at: [www.impacs.org](http://www.impacs.org) using the search function.

# 7 A newsroom reminder: Post this page in your newsroom

## Election reporting: is my story complete?

Every journalist and editor should ask these questions *before* reporting election news.

1. Is this story accurate? Are the facts and names correct and do I believe the information is true? Have I made every effort to confirm the information is true?
2. Is this story impartial and balanced fairly? Does it include both sides, or alternative views and does it present the news without giving any special favour to one party or candidate?
3. Is this responsible journalism? Was this news obtained without bribes or illegal actions and does it protect sources and not violate the election and press laws?
4. Is this story voter-focused? Does it have significant news for the voters? Does it present the concerns of voters?
5. Is this the whole picture? Do these words, photographs, television clips or audio-tapes give a true picture of the most important thing that happened at the event?
6. Will this news story help to make the voters well informed, so they can vote wisely, in their own best interest?
7. Is this election free and fair? Is there other news about this election that should be reported?

From: Media&Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook. By Ross Howard. IMS-IMPACS. 2004.

## 8 Annex: Case study, Haiti

The coaching approach was designed to help media managers plan and execute their coverage of the 2005–2006 Haiti election campaign. It offered a range of information and assistance to journalists in their daily work, and techniques on how to improve the way they work, both individually and together. One of the expected results in placing coaches in six different newsrooms for one month was to obtain a better understanding of the needs and working conditions of Haiti's electronic media. This was part of a larger project involving several organisations. The Montreal-based group, Réseau Liberté, handled several aspects of the project, including the in-house coaching with the help of journalists selected in collaboration with the CBC/Radio-Canada's Institute for Training in Public Broadcasting. The political upheaval of 2004 which ended with the resignation of Jean-Bertrand Aristide had contributed to lessening the standards of a balanced media, depriving the Haitian population of the information needed to make informed decisions. Réseau Liberté undertook to – at least partially – restore that balance and improve journalistic standards.

This part of the project started with the view that Réseau Liberté would learn more and be more effective by working within Haitian media on a daily basis rather than conducting training courses outside everyday working conditions. It was also felt that interventions by the coaches would have a verifiable effect on the journalists' work.

### Media collaboration

Five radio stations and one television station were involved: Haitian National Television and Radio, and private radio stations Métropole, Caraïbes, Mégastar and Ginen. These stations reflected the various political and economic tendencies among Haiti's radio stations. Haitian National Television and Radio were natural choices considering their evolution towards greater independence from the government.

All media involved willingly accepted an experienced journalist to work for a month with their news teams. We described the coaches as experienced journalists offering assistance, and not as people who would take over newsroom operations. This reflected the difference between a training session directed by experts, and coaching where the expert acts as a partner rather than an authority. The intent was to make clear that the coaching would respect the needs and editorial line and freedom of the media, and involve only activities that the media and coaches could agree upon.

### Coaches' findings

The coaches identified several problems at various levels in all the media:

- Newscasts are long (one hour on average). They contain long reports of officials' declarations. This is difficult to remedy since reducing the length of such reports could not be compensated by the journalists creating new or alternative reports, given the lack of manpower and overall working conditions.

- News Reports are based primarily on the coverage of press conferences and sporadic events like demonstrations or strikes. Few news subjects are generated by the journalists. During press conferences, they do not seek the point of view of those who are blamed or have different opinions. There is no follow-up of events or issues covered.
- No media had a coverage plan for the election campaign. They reacted to events rather than attempted to identify issues of importance to cover.
- Newsrooms are poorly organized: There are few production meetings; no second reading (vetting) before going on air; no daily evaluation of the news broadcasts. Journalists are assigned only on the basis of invitations to press conferences.
- Salaries are quite low. Several journalists have more than one job to make ends meet. Certain stations pay such low salaries that they admit and encourage journalists to take under-the-table payments from the organisations they cover. This suggests that lengthy on-air reports are aimed at pleasing the "client", not serving the public.
- Equipment used by the journalists is generally not in top working condition. Tape recorders are inadequate and microphones are not professional. In some cases, the lack of editing materials leads to long on-air clips. Tapes worn out by overuse result in poor sound quality. Many reports are difficult to understand because reporters place their microphones directly in front of a loud speaker.
- Transportation is a major problem. Most stations have a vehicle that takes journalists to press conferences or other events. They have to wait for the vehicle to return before they can return to the station. This results in lost time, sometimes making it impossible to cover planned events. Public transportation is not an option.

## Impact of the coaching operation

The impact of coaching was generally positive, though different from one station to another. This reflects the differences in economic level of each station and problems encountered from one station to another.

Collaboration with media heads and news management varied from one station to another, but most collaborated actively during the whole process.

- The most effective results often came after working with the journalists in the field, covering press conferences or other events. This allowed on-the-spot coaching. Coaches were side-by-side with journalists at press conferences, during a confrontation between lawyers and the Supreme Court about judges' appointments, at meetings with the Prime Minister and for a joint press conference of both the Haitian and Dominican police forces at the Dominican border. For several coaches, this field work was a turning point in their work: the Haitian journalists appreciated them more afterwards. For the coaches, it was an ideal occasion to discuss the lead, the angle of the report, interview and writing techniques, etc. but also, the role of the press in democracy, role of the journalist towards spokespersons or sensitive matters and journalistic ethics. Generally, Haitian journalists showed great interest in improving their work.

The work of individual coaches depended on the news structure and how work was organised in each newsroom and ranged from addressing the need for an assignment or desk editor, to second reading of news scripts, evaluating daily news broadcasts, explaining the importance of production meetings, etc.

- Work sessions in both the field and in newsrooms resulted in requests from the journalists or management for additional, specific training: a work session on journalistic ethics was held at Haitian National Television one Saturday morning; three training courses, each of which lasted half a day, were held at Haitian National Radio. Almost all the journalists attended the courses. Most of the journalists who attended took part in an examination after the sessions.
- At Radio Métropole, the journalists requested a training course on how to cover the elections. This led to a lively exchange of information. At Radio Ginen, the coach produced a text on elections coverage and had it translated into Creole. On all these occasions, the Toolbox with the Coaches' manual was extremely useful.
- Many news managers and several journalists mentioned noticing a change in their programs after the coaching operation. At Radio Métropole, the General Manager said that he noted a clear improvement on the air, as well as in the news scripts. He said he "felt the level go up". In most other cases, the improvements related to more concise writing, a better selection of topics and more angles to treat them.
- The coaches made suggestions to resolve major problems they identified, even if necessary changes are still to come.
- It is important to note the public promise by Radio Métropole's General Manager to raise the salaries of the news team and to supervise their work better. Mégastar's director promised to reorganize the newsroom, improve journalists' salaries and make a more rational use of them.
- Where news managers were actively involved with the coaching program, the managers and journalists afterward expressed their desire for longer training courses for their news team. Where managers were not involved, the request came from the journalists. In both other cases, the journalists asked for more coaching.

A lot remains to be done to improve the treatment of news and information in Haiti, the technical equipment, and the public perception of the value of reliable journalism. In-house coaching made it possible to identify many of these needs, which could be met by additional training programmes.

Working methods:

- The preparation before departure was extremely important: learning about the country, the media, and general conditions of work. It was especially important for all coaches to have a clear understanding of the coaching method as an approach of sharing experience, being respectful of people and not presenting oneself as a foreigner who will tell everyone what to do.
- The daily evaluation by the six coaches of what was achieved was also important. The sharing of experiences and analyses of successes and difficulties allowed all the coaches to be more effective. The emerging group spirit and support from these daily meetings were valuable reinforcements in the work.

- Creating bonds and building confidence in both the newsroom and in the field, and fully engaging the partners in the identification of the work initiatives undertaken, strongly contributed to the success of coaches' work.
- The Toolbox section of the manual was particularly useful, because during the month-long process of training in such a wide range of journalism issues, the coaches could refer to it to refresh their memory at any time and to answer specific questions.
- During final assessments, one radio station specifically emphasized the advantage of the coaching method over previous training experiences which were too formally structured and directive, and less responsive to the situation on the ground.

## **Conclusion**

This operation can be considered a success because both coaches and media outlets were eager to continue professional exchanges. Coaching, undertaken in the spirit indicated above, can be a very effective training methodology. It should not be an end in itself, but when successful can lead to further, more in-depth initiatives with the same media.

## 9 Questionnaire for coaches

The team behind this Coaching Manual for Media Support during Elections is eager to learn about your experiences using it. Please respond to our brief questionnaire or compose a brief report addressing these questions and return it to International Media Support (see contact details at page 2).

1. Please describe briefly when and where you used this coaching methodology and manual, as an individual coach or as an organization. Indicate how long the coaching programme lasted and the number of coaches involved. Please include your name and contacts.
2. As an individual coach, or on behalf of the organization, please indicate what extent you made use of this coaching manual. On a very regular or daily basis, or at least once a week, or on several unscheduled occasions, or not at all?
3. What were the most useful parts of the manual, for your coaching?
4. Please comment on the usefulness of these specific sections of the manual: the introductory section; the coaching methodology section; the Toolbox on election reporting and basic reporting; the Haiti case study and Annex.
5. What pages or chapters did you reproduce for distribution to the participants?
6. What subjects of major importance were lacking from this manual and how did you deal with this?
7. What additional material do you recommend for inclusion in a future revised edition?