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## EDITOR'S NOTE.

**I**n furtherance of our tradition of assessing media performance in the coverage of elections and democratic governance based on feedback from workshop and seminar participants, we feature the story of a major retreat organized by the Institute of Media and Society, IMS, in Lagos.

The retreat brought together under one roof stakeholders in the broadcast, print and online media to assess performance of the media, deliberate on ongoing electoral and broadcast industry reforms and suggest ways forward in the coverage of future elections and democratic governance in the country.

Officials of the industry regulator, the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, were present in full force and made presentations that were eye-opening. So, too, were officials of the Broadcasting

Organisations of Nigeria, BON, many others from the print and Online media. The story, on pages 3 to 5, is engaging and educative.

It is not often that one gets to hear about the triumphs, challenges and expectations of the broadcast media regulator itself.

Here in an engaging interview is all you would want to know about the NBC from the proverbial horse's mouth, the Acting Director-General, Professor Armstrong Idachaba. He takes us through the new reforms been packaged by the government to make the Commission march with the times and give assurances of a more professionally run organization to reposition the industry. It is on pages 8 and 9

Also, in tune with the mood for electoral reforms for enhanced democratic governance in the country is the story of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, on page 12.

In the story, the Chairman of the Commission, Professor Mahmood



Yakubu detailed the Commission's suggested reforms that would make it more responsive and effective in handling future elections in the country.

Of course, as usual, we feed you the picture pages, which capture the moods and body language of the period.

This edition is a bumper and we trust you will enjoy it and send us a feedback.

Please send your comments to [Media4DemocracyNG@imesoimeso.org](mailto:Media4DemocracyNG@imesoimeso.org)

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# Stakeholders Seek Improved Media, NBC Performance in Future Elections

**O**n the backdrop of lessons learned in the coverage of the 2019 elections, participants at a 2-day retreat on the performance of the broadcast media canvassed more professionalism as key to efficiency and quality delivery in the coverage of future elections.

The retreat, which held in Ikeja, Lagos on Monday 6 and Tuesday 7, March, was organized by the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, as part of the Support to Media component of the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) Project, with the theme: NBC-BON Post Election Lessons Learned Retreat.

This event brought together officials of the broadcast media regulator, the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, the industry regulator, the Broadcasting Organizations of Nigeria, BON, and other media stakeholders in the print, electronic and online sectors, to review the performances of the broadcast media and the regulator during the 2019 electoral process. Also discussed were issues around the proposed review of the Electoral Act.

In his welcome address, Executive Director of the IMS, Dr Akin Akingbulu reminded participants of the need to make robust contributions that would

*“I want to single out the IMS among other partners who have invested resources on the training of staff of the regulator. I recall the trainings IMS conducted for NBC staff in Kaduna, Kaduna State and Akwanga in Nasarawa State ahead of the 2019 elections. We have made the literatures available to staff.”*

form part of recommendations for ongoing reforms in the electoral and broadcast media sectors in the country.

He said: “...About 18 months ago we



L-R: Editor, Unilag Radio, Lydia Eke, Chairperson of NAWOJ, Mrs. Adeola Ekine, Prof. Ayobami Ojebode, Facilitator, Dr. Tony Anigala, Director., NBC, Abuja and Mrs. Susan Obi, Zonal Director, NBC Enugu at the 2-Day IMS Retreat, Lagos.

had the privilege of hosting a similar event in Kaduna, in the Northwest of the country. Coincidentally, the man who made it happen at that difficult time because of workload at the NBC, was Prof Armstrong Idachaba, acting Director-General. As we gather in Lagos for another similar event one cannot but recall with nostalgia the lively, cordial and productive atmosphere at the Kaduna event and express the hope that this Lagos event would reach greater heights.

“The activity for which we have gathered is part of the project titled the Support to Media Component of the project supported by the EU. The component being handled by the IMS works to strengthen the media, to provide fair, accurate and ethical coverage of the electoral process in Nigeria.”

He reminded participants that the talks at the 2-day event would generate advocacy for an improved performance of the media and the regulator in future elections.

In his opening remarks, Professor Idachaba hailed the smooth working relationship among the IMS, BON, NBC and other media stakeholders and solicited for the continued professional relationship to advance the broadcast industry in the country.

He said; “I want to single out the IMS among other partners who have invested resources on the training of staff of the regulator. I recall the trainings IMS conducted for NBC staff

in Kaduna, Kaduna State and Akwanga in Nasarawa State ahead of the 2019 elections. We have made the literatures available to staff. I urge all of us at this retreat to identify policy issues that need to be looked into before the 2023 polls, come out with a literature that would make critical inputs into ongoing reforms.”

He assured the participants that the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed “is committed to reforms just as the Board of the Commission.”

Moderator of the 2-day event, Professor Ayobami Ojebode, of the University of Ibadan, started the first day of the event with three topics, namely a review of the State of the Broadcast media in the run up to the 2019 elections; Statutory Initiative in the 2019 elections and After; and Overview of the Media in the 2019 elections.

According to him, a survey conducted 12 months to the 2019 polls, involving BON, the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists, NAWOJ, NUJ, Journalists, listeners and viewers across the country, showed that radio was the preferred choice of the electorate when it came to clarity of information, confirming the veracity of news and following up on stories. This was closely followed by privately-owned TV stations and online mediums, which upload videos in addition to news materials.

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Private radio and TV stations were considered freer in giving authentic information unlike government-owned stations,” Ojebode said.

On the readiness of their stations and themselves for the coverage of the 2019 election, journalists, the survey found, were concerned with issues of security, staff welfare, requisite training and poor equipment. “The greatest source of worry for journalists preparing to cover elections was safety and security scored at 67 percent,” he said.

“Even top management staff interviewed were confused about what to do with voter education. Some said it was the duty of the Independent Electoral Commission, INEC, others said it was the National Orientation Agency, NOA. But this is supposed to be a partnership.”

The moderator concluded with what he called early warning signs of trouble to look out for, 12 months to election coverage.

These are presence of journalists on election duty with little knowledge on conflict reporting; a large number of journalists who need training on hate speech; journalists who worry about their safety; citizens who depend on private stations for information and delayed voter education.

Participants thereafter took turns to make contributions, comments and suggestions on the survey and related matters.

In his contribution, Mr Eddy Emessiri, Executive Secretary of Nigeria Election Debate Group/BON, noted that improper training is a major problem in the broadcast industry along with sustained funding, particularly for the private stations and expressed the hope that with the ongoing electoral and constitutional reforms and new changes in the proposed NBC Act, “its implementation could open doors to new sources of funds, if for instance, radio and TV license fees hitherto collected by states and local governments, are collected by NBC and shared according to spread of stations across the country.”

Imoni Amarere of DAAR/AIT station, Abuja, identified what he called “fire brigade approach” method of

preparation for election coverage as one of the reasons for poor reportage in print and broadcast media.

He said, “There are many untrained journalists in the media. Reason is that people see journalism as a stopgap.

***“There were collaborations and regular meetings between NBC and INEC and decisions on zonal reports were taken immediately and very many stations were sanctioned for infractions.”***

Stations do not invest in their training and journalists do not invest in themselves. Even when there is training, it is usually for the staff at the head offices.”

He tasked journalists to fact-check stories before publication and broadcast, and called on the electoral umpire, INEC, to partner with the media on time to avoid the observed lapses in information dissemination, voter education before, during and after the conduct of elections.

He said from experience, the NBC/BON coordinated ‘train the trainer’ programme for the media before coverage of polls should be strengthened by in-house training by media houses and peer review among stations.

On the second topic of the first day, Statutory Initiatives in 2019 Elections and After, the NBC team showcased their efforts.

To avoid problems that arose in the

2015 polls, the NBC team said, the Commission together with INEC undertook sensitization of the political parties and stations on the do's and don'ts of the NBC code, printed and shared posters on ethics on election coverage and advertising which stations were encouraged to display conspicuously.

Zonal directors of the Commission were moved around to avoid emotional attachment to their zones. The mandatory reports they regularly sent to a central monitoring unit at the head office in Abuja, headed by the Director, Broadcast Monitoring but supervised by the DG, formed the basis for the sanctions meted to stations, which violated the codes during and after the 2019 election.

According to the Commission's Director, Communications, Franca, Aiyetan; “There were collaborations and regular meetings between NBC and INEC and decisions on zonal reports were taken immediately and very many stations were sanctioned for infractions.”

Though the Director of Broadcast Monitoring of NBC, Dr. Tony Anigala disclosed that hate speech was becoming a controversial subject globally and urged stations to observe the definition in the Commission's code, Olufisayo Oguntuyi, Moderator, Political Updates on NTA, Abuja, suggested that the dispute can be solved once there are agreeable standards on what constitutes hate speech and urged stations to invest in new technology that can detect and delete swear and hate words.

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# Covid-19: EU Donates N12b To Support Nigeria

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President Muhammadu Buhari, Amb. Ketil Karlsen and other members of The EU Delegation, at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

**A**mbassador Ketil Karlsen, European Union, EU, Ambassador to Nigeria and West Africa on Tuesday, April 21 led a delegation on a visit to President Buhari in Aso Villa and made a donation of N21 billion (50 million Euros) to support Nigeria's efforts at controlling the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

In his remarks, Ambassador Karlsen described the donation, channelled through the UN COVID-19 basket fund as, so far, the largest single contribution to the response in Nigeria and the largest support that EU is providing anywhere outside Europe.

"We heard your call for assistance and the EU has reacted swiftly as a demonstration of our true partnership," he said.

The EU Ambassador congratulated the President for "a very powerful address to the nation last night", stressing "indeed the current situation is no joke and we wish to commend you for taking bold and necessary measures."

He also announced that the Union was mobilising other sources of funding, noting that they have already donated

*"We heard your call for assistance and the EU has reacted swiftly as a demonstration of our true partnership,"*

1.2 million Euros to UNICEF, and goods purchased through that funding are expected in the country soon.

In his remarks, President Buhari said the donation would go a long way in

supporting Nigeria's efforts at controlling and containing the virus to prevent community spread, as well as revitalise the national health care systems, according to Mr Femi Adesina, Media Adviser to the president

He said the President used the occasion to express sincere condolences of the Government and people of Nigeria to EU-member countries and families who lost their loved ones as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Buhari said, "Although the EU is facing significant challenges due to this pandemic, I am indeed touched and grateful that the European Union still had the vision and foresight to remember its friends, partners and allies across the world."

The President also lauded EU on the recent launch of the "Team Europe" package to support countries in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences.

The President noted that the intervention, which is a collaboration between EU, its member states, and financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, would go a long way in ensuring the impact of this pandemic was controlled and contained.

"Indeed, this brotherly support will save millions of lives. Nigeria, Africa and many beneficiary countries across the world will remain grateful for generations to come," Buhari said.

The President told the delegation that his administration had done a lot to date in the fight against COVID-19.

For Qasim Akinreti, Chairman of the NUJ, Lagos Council, the BON and the NBC need to look into two critical areas relating on professionalism.

He urged the BON to seek out avenues for funding from international donors that have benefitted the print media and avoid being compromised by what he called 'toxic funds' that usually come from questionable politicians during election.

He urged the organization to send the right people for training and the NBC to conduct background check on owners of stations before issuing licences to them. He recommended the Ghanaian Commission model for Nigeria, which he said is "professionally run by core professionals that had been vetted by an independent body."

Towards this end, he urged the NBC and BON to be involved in programme planning sessions of stations, to use sanctions as last option and regularly conduct town hall meetings on their activities to sensitise viewers and listeners.

"The NBC can also distribute its codes to media students before their graduation as part of measures to have well-rounded professionals from the start."

Day two of the event was a more practical session. The topic was the regulation and strengthening of the media profession for future elections.

The participants broke into four groups to examine the above topic under four key areas, namely, government and government agencies; trade unions: NUJ, RATTAWU, NAWOJ; the EU and other funders, NBC and BON; and finally, the individual Journalist and CSO.

Before the close of the retreat, participants agreed on some suggestions on Electoral Law Reforms.

These included the need for statutory requirements to regulate the provisions requiring candidates in election debates; need for insurance cover by media organizations for journalists on election duty; proper funding; law mandating media, advert agencies, digital platforms to report advert spend to regulatory authorities for transparency and lastly, voter education by the media.



# Events, People and Places in Lagos Where IMS O retreat and in Abuja Where the EU Delegation Paid



President Muhammadu Buhari (Right), Amb., Ketil Karlsen, (Middle), Other Members of the EU Delegation and Ministers at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, Nigeria



L-R: Mr Abubakar, Umar Kumo, Zonal Director, Zonal Director, NBC, Lagos, Prof. Ayobami O and Prof, Armstrong Idachaba, Acting Director



L-R: National Commissioner, Mrs. May Agbamuche-Mbu, (3rd Left) INEC Chairman Prof. Mamood Yakubu, Mr. David LeNotre Director, ECES, Nigeria and Maria Mauro of ECES and other guests at the INEC/ ECES Retreat in Lagos.



L-R: Mrs S Director, NBC THISAGE



Participants at the 2-day IMS Retreat in Lagos.



L-R: Editor, Unilag Radio, Lydia Eke, Chairperson of NAWO, Prof. Ayobami Ojebode, Facilitator, Dr. Tony Anigala, Director, Mrs. Susan Obi, Zonal Director, NBC Enugu at the 2-Day IM



President Muhammadu Buhari (Front), Amb., Ketil Karlsen, (4th L of the EU Delegation and Ministers at the Presidential Villa, Abuja



# Organised a 2-day Retreat, INEC Held a week-long and President Muhammadu Buhari A Courtesy Visit



L-R: Prof. Ojebode UI, Dr. Akin Akingbulu, ED, IMS, Dr. Tony Anigala, Director, NBC at the IMS 2-Day Retreat in Lagos



L-R: Prof. Ayobami Ojebode of UI, Dr. Tony Anigala, Director NBC, Abuja, Mrs. Susan Obi, Zonal Director NBC Enugu, Abubakar Umar Kumo, Zonal Director, NBC Kaduna. at the IMS 2-Day Retreat in Lagos



L-R: Stella Erunmhuse, Acting Director NBC, Abuja, Mrs Gloria Makinde, Zonal Director NBC, Abuja, Mrs. Franca Aiyetan, Director, NBC, Abuja, Mrs. Susan Obi, Zonal Director NBC Enugu, Abubakar Umar Kumo, Zonal Director, NBC Kaduna, Mr Aminu Garba Indabawa, Wonderland TV, Kano right



L-R: Prof. Ojebode, Dr. Akingbulu, Prof, Idachaba and Mr Eddy Emessiri, Executive Secretary, Nigeria Political Debate Group/BON at the 2-Day IMS Retreat in Lagos.



L-R: Prof. Ojebode, Dr. Akin Akingbulu, ED, IMS, Dr. Tony Anigala, Director, NBC, Abuja and Mrs. Susan Obi, Zonal Director NBC Enugu at the IMS Retreat, Lagos.



L-R: Prof. Ojebode, Dr. Akin Akingbulu, ED, IMS, Dr. Tony Anigala, Director, NBC, Abuja and Mrs. Susan Obi, Zonal Director NBC Enugu at the IMS Retreat, Lagos.



Participants at the INEC/ECES Retreat held in Lagos.



# 'NBC is a Non-Partisan Regulator of the Broadcast Industry'

*Prof Armstrong Idachaba is the Acting Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC. In this interview with Media4 Democracy, he highlights the watchdog role played by the Commission to sanitize the industry and calls for more professionalism in the industry to deepen democratic governance in the country.*

*It has been a long time since a professional who has been in the organization, knows it in and out has been appointed to head the NBC. Congratulations. What are you bringing to the table?*

It is key as you said, perhaps, I have come with a professional understanding of what the issues are. To situate it properly, the NBC is a regulatory body. What it does strictly is professional, to regulate and control the broadcast industry.

The agitation over the years has been that in terms of the day-to-day implementation of the functions of the Commission that it is always recommended, that you have technocrats, people who are practising media or broadcast practitioners or as scholars, to head the place. Again that comes against the background that people with political partisan background can tilt their decisions in a partisan way that is against the neutrality and fairness that is required of a regulator.

*Giving the current state of things, perhaps until and when government implements reforms for financial and administrative independence of the NBC, do you think you can really act in a way that makes room for independence in operations of the Commission?*

Again, the point cannot be overstated for the need for an independent regulator of the industry. You know the broadcast media, especially in political broadcast, can be highly influential,

especially in determining outcome of elections. And that is why the proposition, the clamour of most professionals is that the regulator should be independent from political interference, because if you have a partisan regulator, naturally, there would be suspicion even when you tend to be neutral. Also, there is the question of licensing, because the regulator is the one who allocates frequencies, who determines a lot of issues that affect the value of frequency usage and once there is a partisan inclination in terms of giving license and usage, of course, there would be suspicion of bias.

*Do you foresee the possibility of government disengaging from being sole appointee of the NBC Board, the Director General and funding of the Commission?*

Why not? The interesting thing is that the current reform that is being driven and spearheaded by Alhaji Lai Mohammed, Minister of Information and Culture, is that this is the first time in Nigeria that a government would want to undertake an open reform of the broadcast sector. And I think the current government believes that it is in the national interest to have an independent, unbiased and non-partisan regulator of the broadcast industry. And they have taken the bull by the horn and shown an uncommon course by going ahead with some of the reforms. So we believe that having shown that intention they will follow through with the process.

*From experience, to what extent would you say the regulator has been able to regulate the industry before, during and after elections in the country?*

Well, first of all, it is a difficult thing to control or regulate human behavior. Man is created naturally to want to be self-expressive. And some human beings actually all the time tend to test the law. So to that extent we would say the rules are clearly enunciated in th

broadcast codes regarding what stations can do and not do. But over the years, particularly during elections, you find that some stations are recalcitrant, some get carried away by their political, economic and social affiliations to interested parties, some by motives of money, others are busy violating the rules, some get carried away by their emotional attachment to the campaign period and there are all kinds of infractions. So what the regulator has done is to follow the rules as clearly written in the books and impose necessary sanctions that are intended to serve as deterrent. But again, it would appear the sanctions are not deterring enough.



*What do you do in that instance?*

When we reviewed the broadcast rules, we took up the fight against political broadcast violation and hate speech, especially when they become abusive, outright inciting. The fines now are up to N20million though the reform committee proposed that it should still be N5million. I guess after the amendment of the code, the N5million is what would stand.

*Let's look at training. There is the general concern by stakeholders that training done by the Commission does not go to those who need it. How do you react to this?*

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Thank you for that question. Now, we know it is a problem. But what happens is that it is the chief executives of stations that get the letters of invitation for the training. The ones they get interested in, they go. Now that we are getting this kind of feelers, we have increased what we used to do in such situations by indicating in the invitation letter who should be sent for training; heads of news desk or presenters. May be we would need to intensify efforts on that with the feelers we are getting.

*How would you describe NBC's partnership with IMS with regards to training?*

On training also, we must also commend the Institute of Media and Society, IMS, for partnering with the Commission to organize a lot of these trainings. Honestly, we could not have had a more supportive partner than the IMS in the area of training.

*To what extent would you say the NBC has been able to adhere to global best practices as a regulator considering your membership of ACRAN, which is largely made of many countries, which are independent of government control?*

In actual sense it is not as if the NBC has over the period been dragged and controlled by government. After all, we have had NBC before where DG were professionals. For example, we have had Mr Tom Adaba, the first DG, second, Mallam Danladi Bako, Mr Silas an engineer, who was working in the engineering department of NBC; we have had Yomi Bolarinwa, also an engineer, working directly with NBC. Yes, no matter who you are, the people in power or politicians would naturally want to exact pressure. What is expected is that the regulator must stand firm to be independent.

So it depends to a large extent on the orientation of leadership. I think all we need to do is to clearly make the provisions in law so that whoever is there is not overtly influenced by



*Idachaba*

partisan interest.

*There appears to be controversy surrounding what is hate speech which is making it difficult to get the National Assembly legislate on it. What is your take?*

I do not know why people find it difficult to define what constitutes hate speech. I feel alarmed when I hear that even highly intelligent people and intellectuals say they cannot define what is hate speech. The converse way to look at it is should people be allowed

to come to a group and rain

curses on people and abuse their father and mother and say he is expressing his freedom of speech? So it is within that parameter that you create certain restrictions and say your freedom is guaranteed by law and by nature. But there should be moderation, because it is said in law your right stops where that of another begins. No matter how tolerant you are, if somebody comes to attack you on the basis of your religion, your tribe, he would be provoking violence. Do not forget that there is a long- standing conflict in history when people discriminate against others on account of race, religion. So hate speech is what attacks a person on account of religion, race, sex. Attack

is the key word.

*To what extent has the Commission been able to tackle the hate speech in broadcast stations?*

There are quarterly reports that zonal directors make to the Commission. We have quarterly reports we send out. For station by station, across the country, we publish the infringement. At times, particularly during elections, we see hateful and abusive comments in relation to the tribe. That is not good or proper.

*Recently, the Nigeria University Commission unbundled Mass Communication study in higher institutions in the country. What role is the NBC playing?*

Yes, it is in the NBC Act that the Commission shall be involved in formulating the mass communication curricula. How do we do that? We do that in relationship with the NUC, we always liaise with them. During the build up to the unbundling of the mass communication curricula, NBC participated. We want to follow-up by ensuring that the study of the broadcast code is a major component of all the courses that have been introduced so that students are taught very early those critical elements of media ethics and law.

**“it depends to a large extent on the orientation of leadership. I think all we need to do is to clearly make the provision in law so that whoever is there is not overtly influenced by partisan interest.”**

to make all kinds of speech? Would you allow people in your house to make all kinds of speech, anyhow they feel? We live in a society, where there are norms for civilized conduct including how you dress. Would it be proper for somebody

# Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, IMS, Conduct e-Training for Community Broadcasters on Covid-19 Coverage

**T**he Institute for Media and Society, IMS, in collaboration with the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, NCRC, in April commenced a series of trainings for the broadcast media in Nigeria as part of efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

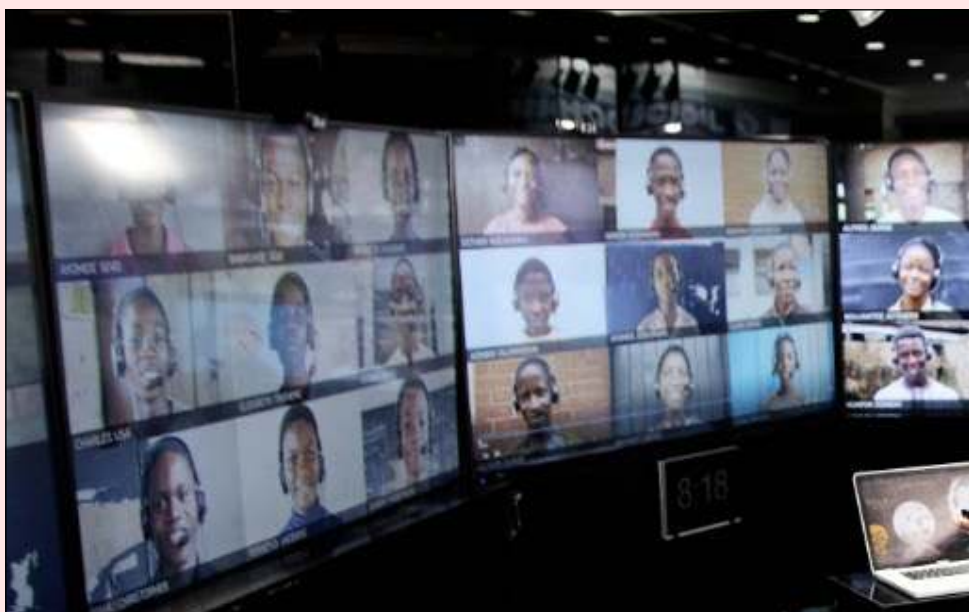
Speaking at the inaugural training session on Thursday, 23 April, 2020, for community radio

stations drawn from various parts of Nigeria, using online video conference technology, the Executive Director of the Institute for Media and Society, Dr Akin Akingbulu, noted that the training was important to strengthen community journalists to provide rich and professional coverage while giving voice to grassroots citizens to overcome the global scourge.

“We are in a very unusual time. The whole world is involved in the fight against Covid-19. One of the crucial needs in this fight is the provision of information and education to large sections of our population who live in the grassroots. Community journalists, as frontline communicators there, need constant training to equip them to perform this task”, he said.

Declaring the training open, the Acting Director General of National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, Prof. Armstrong Idachaba, who joined online from Abuja, also commended IMS and NCRC for the initiative. He expressed his delight that the two organizations took the pioneering step of training community broadcasters online in order to educate the people in the rural areas on the Covid-19 pandemic.

He urged the participants to ensure that the training impacted on their professional work and the output of their radio stations, adding that, “going forward, we must consciously make effort to keep the tradition going”.



On his part the lead facilitator, Prof. Ayobami Ojebode, from the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, reiterated the need for community radio stations to join in the fight against the pandemic.

Other facilitators were Dr Adeola Fowotade from the University Teaching Hospital, Ibadan and her colleague, Dr Kemi Adekanbi. Both of them handled the sub-themes; The Nature of Coronavirus and Misinformation About Coronavirus, respectively.

Others were Dr Abiodun Ogidan of the University of Lagos, who treated the topic Using Community-Friendly Formats in the Coverage of Covid-19; Mrs Miriam Menkiti, a veteran journalists from Enugu, who handled, How to Deal With Harmful and Unprofessional Content in the Coverage of Covid-19 and Malam Zakari Nadabu of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, Abuja, who treated, How Can Journalists Stay Safe? Dr Tony Anigala, Director of Broadcast Monitoring in the NBC, took the topic; Regulatory Compliance: The Dos and Don'ts.

It was themed “Training of Community Broadcasters on the Coverage of Covid-19 in Nigeria.”

In her contribution, Dr Adeola Fowotade, who spoke on the nature of coronavirus said though it is in the

same family with SARS, a virus disease that affected mostly European

countries in 2002, Corona Virus, which has spread to all continents of the world because of its higher rate of transmission, owes its name to crown-like look when seen under a

microscope.

Describing the symptoms, she said they were categorized from the mild to severe cases. “Simple respiratory symptoms,” according to her, “include running nose, diarrhea, lose of sense of smell, taste and rashes of the skin while severe cases as shown in 80 per cent clinical manifestation include sever pneumonia, underlying diseases such as obesity, diabetes and old age.”

For diagnosis, she said the National Center for Disease Control, NCDC, Nigeria approves sputum sample that is tested in approved laboratories as well as reverse transmission test, which deals with looking for the nuclei of the virus. She added that patients with no underlying symptoms can be put through sequencing of their DNA to confirm their travel history.

In the area of treatment, she said the protocols are different since some are diet related while severe cases require anti-viral drugs such as hydroxychloroquine, retromycin, remdesivir currently being applied before a vaccine is found.

She disclosed that means of contracting the disease range from prolonged exposure in improperly ventilated houses, to air-borne droplets from infected persons and surfaces.

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Dr. Kemi Adekanbi on her part began by debunking some persistent public notions about the virus that time has rendered false: that only the rich catches the disease; that sunlight kills it; that years of surviving malaria attacks and environmental disasters have conferred immunity on Africans; that the young or infants cannot contract the disease.

She said; "In fact, you can have the symptoms before your symptoms develop into the disease and 80 per cent of persons can continue to spread the virus without having the disease."

She said there is no known cure for the disease yet and the cocktail of herbal or orthodox medications that are being used are unproven.

She said people should adhere strictly to the preventive measures by wearing face masks, which should be properly disposed off in the case of an infected person; regular hand washing and use of hand sanitisers; maintaining social distance and avoid sharing mask.

During the handling of his topic, Regulatory Compliance: The Dos and Don'ts, Dr Anigala, said Section 12, sub-section 6 of the NBC Act states that the station's owner shall be responsible for the content of the broadcast, while Section 9, Sub-section 6;2 states that community broadcasters are operating their outfit for the community.

"So you must always have at the back of your minds the requirements of the NBC codes and be more professional in your reportage whether you are dealing with foreign or local affairs, which must be in decent language," he said and urged participants to be aware of their Corporate Social Responsibility role at a time like the Covid-19 pandemic when they are expected to push the enlightenment messages of government, other agencies and platforms to the grassroots.

He said; "Community Broadcasters know they are non-profit and should not expect to see the pandemic as chance to quickly make money."

He urged them to make authentic use of accurate materials, refuse to broadcast contents that are abusive, insulting, take all necessary steps to avoid being infected in the course of their job and

ensure proper translation of their materials to avoid contents being negatively interpreted.

For the don'ts, he urged participants to be aware of fake news and avoid broadcasting unsubstantiated claims, which Section 5, sub-section 1; 3 of the NBC code disapprove.

"Any broadcaster that flouts the regulations at this time would be penalized," he concluded, while disclosing that the NBC gave out kits to community broadcasting stations in appreciation of the work they are doing.

Dr Ogidan who spoke on Using Community-Friendly Formats in The Coverage of Covid-19, said existing format such as drama, documentary, magazine may not be adequate to handle the coverage of the disease because of its peculiarity.

She, therefore, canvassed the idea of taking the particularities of every community such as demography into consideration.

Accordingly, messages designed for children would be different from those for the elderly, market and pregnant women, religious leaders, traditional rulers as well as care givers.

She said; "To achieve this, consider, for example, using credible persons, culture advocates, celebrated personalities in our community to give short, factual messages that are in line with what the health experts have given us about the virus. Testimony by somebody who has survived the disease can also be used.

"Let us be careful in raising false alarm. A short awareness jingle explaining the process of washing hands, level of social distancing, and the use of proverbs, local music to drive home our messages would do."

Urging participants to be flexible and creative in what they do for the interest



of their community, she said those covering news must keep updating the stories as they emerge.

Mrs Miriam Menkiti who spoke on How to Deal With Harmful Content and Coverage of Covid-19, called on reporters, on air persons and producers to endeavor always to get reliable information from experts before broadcasting, to avoid the recent trends of fake news on social media.

"A reporter has no business in the dissemination of unverified content," she said, adding that they must avoid being distracted at press conferences as the usual practices of sharing information may not be adequate during coverage of a novel virus such as coronavirus.

"Regular visits to the websites of WHO, NCDC and approved agencies would be very helpful."

Malam Zakari Nadabu of FRCN, Abuja handled the sub-topic; How Can Journalists Stay Safe?

He said since the reporter interfaces with the listener, he or she must try to be as original as possible in the course of their work and convey their messages in local languages that are clear, concise and correct.

"Be well prepared, sanitise your hands, keep social distance when conducting your assignments and be conscious of the issues as they unfold on Covid-19", he said, adding that journalists need to maintain regular contacts with officials of the Presidential Tasks Force, PTF, on Covid-19, National Center for Disease Control, NCDC, etc, "so that we are constantly packaging, verified information to disseminate to your audience."

# INEC Suggests 34 Amendments to Electoral Act

Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, has disclosed that the Commission is proposing 34 amendments to the Electoral Act. Yakubu, said the agency is committed to the review of the Electoral Act to enhance better conduct of elections

Speaking at the opening of a week-long retreat on the review of the electoral legal framework jointly organised by the Commission, the European Centre for Electoral Support, ECES, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, IFES,

Yakubu said the retreat was organised to complete the Commission's full proposal to the National Assembly for amendment to the electoral legal framework.

He said; "Our draft is ready, but requires further internal review ahead of submission to the National Assembly.

"The review of the Electoral Act will increase citizens' confidence, enhance the transparency and credibility of the electoral process; entrench internal democracy within political parties; reduce violence, expand the scope of participation for women, youths and people living with

disability; deepen the use of technology and foster independence of INEC.

"I am glad to know that members of the Senate Committee on INEC and House of Representatives Committee on Electoral Matters are joining us on Thursday and Friday for in-depth review of both their proposal and our input.

"This is the first time that the National Assembly and INEC are coming together on electoral reform. We look forward to this opportunity to serve Nigerians better."

According to the Commission's Director of Legal Services, Oluwatoyin Babalola, there are certain shortcomings in the electoral legal

framework that needed to be addressed through legislation.

She said the INEC in collaboration with relevant stakeholders had identified some gaps in the provisions of the extant Electoral Act 2010 (as amended), adding that while Commission's proposals were accepted prior to the conduct of the 2019 election, the executive did not sign the amended Electoral Act.



L-R: National Commissioner, Mrs. May Agbamuche-Mbu, INEC Chairman Prof. Mamood Yakubu, Mr. David LeNotre Director, ECES, Nigeria and Maria Mauro of ECES at the INEC/ ECES Retreat in Lagos.

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