

CBA EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

# CBA EDITORIAL GUIDELINES



Commonwealth Broadcasting Association

Working for quality broadcasting



# **CBA Editorial Guidelines**

**The Commonwealth Broadcasting Association**  
with Support from UNESCO

**Editor:**

**Mary Raine**

Former Editor, Radio News Features, BBC World Service

The authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in this book and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the organization.

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Published in 2004 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Communication and Information

B-5/29 Safdarjung Enclave

New Delhi-110029 (INDIA)

ISBN: 81-89218-00-X

Web: <http://www.unesco.org/webworld>

# CONTENTS

Preface	1
Foreword	3
Basic editorial principles	5
Credibility, balance and impartiality	6
Achieving impartiality in News	7
Accuracy	8
Interviews	9-11
Election coverage	12-16
Conflict of interest	17-18
Phone-ins	19
Religion in programmes	20
Taste and decency	21
Health programmes	22
HIV/AIDS	23 - 24
Children	25 - 26
The “watershed”	27 - 28
Crime and anti-social activity	29 - 30
Disaster coverage	31
Violence	32-33
Disorder, kidnapping and hostages	34
Bomb warnings	35
Demonstrations	36
Fairness and straight dealing	37
Privacy	38
Complaints procedures	39 - 40

# PREFACE

In compiling these guidelines, we have drawn heavily on those issued to their production staff by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Special Broadcasting Service, British Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, All India Radio, South African Broadcasting Corporation, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, TV New Zealand and Media Corporation of Singapore PTE Ltd. Our thanks are also due to Tim Neale from whose paper, Commonwealth Election Broadcasting Guidelines, we have quoted freely, and Dr Graham Easton of Health Matters, BBC World Service, and Bisakha Ghose of BBC World Service for advice on health programmes.

We found there is very little difference between the Guidelines of these major broadcasters, even though there is a great difference in the societies to which they broadcast.

## **Elizabeth Smith**

*Secretary-General, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association*

17 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1AA,

Tel : 44 207 583 5550

Fax : 44 207 583 5549,

Web : [cba@.org.uk](mailto:cba@.org.uk)

[www.cba.org.uk](http://www.cba.org.uk)

# FOREWORD

The free flow of information is the cornerstone and basis for democracy and the respect of human rights. It is entrenched in, among many other international instruments, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also at the heart of UNESCO's mandate and objectives. By its constitution, UNESCO is committed to promote and defend the free flow of information. As the Chairperson of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication, Torben Krogh puts it: "One of the most important activities in this regard is the development of free, independent and pluralistic mass media. Without freedom of expression there is no democracy. And democracy, on the other hand, can hardly function without a plurality of information sources and opinions."

In the field of broadcasting, many organizations face more and more complex choices in their coverage. Some have adopted Guidelines to help producers and reporters deal with difficult and controversial issues. Others have not yet gone through this process. These internal codes and principles of professional conduct, which shall be elaborated and applied only by media professionals and their associations on a voluntary basis (never forced and never by "outside actors" of any kind) can be of great assistance in reaching these objectives. The Guidelines presented in this publication are an attempt to help broadcasters find their way through the maze and help them identify and adopt good practice that ensures free and fair coverage. These CBA guidelines are available for any organization to voluntarily adopt, in whole or in part.

It is because UNESCO realizes how difficult it is for the media in many parts of the world to operate freely and fairly that through its regular programmes of freedom of expression and development of communication, as well as the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), it aims to address the difficulties faced and thus accelerate media development.

We urge readers of these Guidelines, in particular broadcasters and their associations, to promote voluntary and professional respect of such Guidelines and conduct and to ensure that they are respected and observed in practice.

Thanks for the availability of the guidelines go to the CBA team led by the CBA Secretary-General, Elizabeth Smith, as well as to my colleagues, Mr W. Jayaweera, Mr Marcello Scarone, and Ms Tarja Virtanen, of the Communication and Information sector in New Delhi and in Paris.

**Prof. M. Tawfik**

*Director, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau  
for Communication & Information*

## BASIC EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

- Report and present news and current affairs honestly by disclosing all the essential facts.
- Respect the right of listeners to hear a variety of views. Do not suppress relevant, available facts or distort by wrong or improper emphasis.
- Try to present all sides of a question. Try to achieve balance. This may not always be achieved in a single programme or news bulletin, but should be done within a reasonable time.
- Reach editorial decisions on news merit. Fairness does not mean being unquestioning, or that every side of an issue should receive the same amount of time.
- It is vital to uphold the principle of journalistic freedom. Protection of a journalists' source is an important part of this principle.
- Take great care in the presentation of brutality, violence, atrocities and personal grief.
- Respect a person's legitimate right to privacy and do not intrude into private grief and distress, unless it is justified by overriding considerations of public interest.
- Do not allow advertising, commercial, political or personal considerations to influence editorial decisions.
- Do not take any editorial position in reporting and programming.

# CREDIBILITY, BALANCE AND IMPARTIALITY

In an open society, credibility is an essential attribute of a journalistic organization. The credibility of the organization and that of its journalists are inter-linked. Credibility is dependent not only on factors such as accuracy and truthfulness in reporting and presentation, but upon avoidance by the journalists of associations or contacts which could reasonably give rise to perceptions of partiality. In taking on staff in its news and current affairs programming, the station must be aware of their published views, their personal involvement and their associations and backgrounds in order to avoid any perception of bias or susceptibility to undue influence in the execution of their professional responsibilities. In order to maintain their credibility and the credibility of the broadcaster, on air personnel as well as those who edit, produce or manage programmes must avoid publicly identifying themselves in any way with partisan statements or actions on controversial matters.

News programmes should offer viewers and listeners an intelligent and informed account of issues that enables them to form their own views. A reporter or specialist correspondent may express a professional journalistic judgement but not a personal opinion. That judgement must be recognized as perceptive and fair. Audiences should not be able to tell from a programme a presenter's or correspondent's personal views on any controversial issue.

Journalists, like anyone else, will have opinions of their own. However, they must not yield to bias or prejudice. For a journalist to be professional is not to be without opinions, but to be aware of those opinions and make allowances for them so that their reporting is and appears to be, judicious and fair.

Information programmes must reflect established journalistic principles:

- **Accuracy:** the information is correct and is not in any way misleading or false. This demands careful and thorough research and disciplined use of language and production techniques.
- **Integrity:** the information is truthful, not distorted to justify a conclusion. Broadcasters must not show personal bias.
- **Fairness:** the information reports equitably all relevant facts and significant points of view. It deals fairly and ethically with persons, institutions, issues and events.



# ACHIEVING IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS

To achieve balance and fairness the widest possible range of views must be expressed. Programming cannot be limited to what the largest audience wants to know. It must include what the public is entitled to know and needs to know. The challenging of accepted orthodoxies should be reported - but the established views must also be clearly put.

Programmes must have breadth and depth. Reporting must not be too simplistic so that the listeners are able to have an adequate understanding of issues.

A broadcaster should reflect society around it. Balance must be maintained between the national, regional and local needs. Undue weight should not be given to points of view of one region of the country.

Programmes dealing with matters of public interest on which differing views are held must ensure they cover all sides of the argument. In reporting matters of political or industrial controversy, the main differing views should be given. If a variety of viewpoints cannot be projected in the same bulletin or programme, the balance should be achieved within a reasonable period of time.

When an appropriate representative of one side of the story cannot be reached, the journalist or producer should make every effort to find someone who can represent that point of view. If unable to do so, they should say so.

In aiming to record all points of view, programmes will sometimes need to report on or interview people whose views may well cause offence to many listeners or viewers. Editors must be convinced that there is a material public interest, which outweighs the offence, which will be caused.

Broadcasters should:

- Give all sides to a question and ensure all viewpoints are presented.
- Make sure opposing views are not misrepresented.
- Where necessary achieve impartiality over a series or over a number of programmes within a series making this clear to audiences.
- Consider making follow up discussions or other programme formats such as phone-ins as alternative methods of achieving impartiality.

# ACCURACY

“Accuracy is not a virtue. It is a necessity.”

Accuracy can be difficult to achieve. It is important to distinguish between first hand and second hand sources. Wherever possible we should gather information first hand by being there ourselves, or where that is not possible by talking to those who were.

Research for all programmes must be thorough. Simple matters like dates and titles may well need to be checked and re-checked.

Look for confirmation from more than one source. Look for a report on more than one news agency. Agencies vary in reliability. Be aware that one local correspondent can be stringer for all the main news agencies. One general rule of thumb is that the French news agency Agence France Presse is strong in Francophone countries. Likewise, the Spanish news Agency EFE is strong in the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America and Spain and Portugal.

Be careful in the use of newspaper cuttings. They can rapidly get out of date – or simply contain information, which is wrong. An error can easily be repeated.

A reporter should try to make contemporaneous notes of an event he/she is covering.

Do not exaggerate. Avoid value judgements.

If there is a gap between recording a programme and putting it on air, check to make sure it has not got out of date or been overtaken by events - such as the death of a contributor, the charging of an offender. Likewise if a programme is being repeated it may need to be amended.

## **Personal View Programmes**

Some broadcasters, such as Britain’s BBC, have a long tradition of open access to the airwaves to offer a personal view or advance a contentious argument.

- If it is a personal view programme, this should be signalled clearly in advance.
- The editor must make sure any such programme does not seriously misrepresent opposing viewpoints.

Regular presenters or reporters normally associated with news or public policy related programmes should not present personal view programmes on controversial matters.

# INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a vital tool of journalism and programme making.

An interview should have a clear purpose. Do not invite people to appear simply because they are major players in a news story unless you have a clear idea of what you want to find out from them.

Interviews should be well informed and well prepared.

Interviews may be searching, sharp, sceptical – but not partial, discourteous or showing an attachment to one side of an argument. Interviewees should be given a fair chance to set out their full response to a question.

If an interviewee refuses to give an interview unless questions are rigidly agreed in advance, or unless certain subjects are avoided, it may be worth not proceeding with the interview.

Some interviews are not meant to be challenging, but to inform, explain or entertain. People interviewed as eyewitnesses or as experts may need to be encouraged, rather than challenged.

## **Even-handedness in Interviews**

Anyone expressing contentious views should be rigorously challenged. If the interview becomes charged, the emotion should come from the person interviewed, not the interviewer. Politicians have a known standpoint, but it should not be assumed that academics and journalists from other organizations are impartial. It should be made clear to the audience if they are associated with a particular standpoint.

## **Fair Dealing with Interviewees**

It is important interviewees know why they are being invited for interview, what subjects they are going to be asked about, the context of the programme and the sort of part they will play in it. Some interviewees ask in advance what the particular line of questioning may be. This request is not unreasonable, but it should be pointed out that only a broad outline can be given because the interview itself will depend on what the interviewee says. It is not usually right to submit details of actual questions in advance – or to give any undertaking about the precise form of questions.

Interviewees will sometimes try to change the terms on which an interview was suggested - perhaps to exclude a particular line of questioning. They may try to filibuster or use the interview as a platform for their views and evade answering the question. Do not interrupt too much but evasions should be exposed coolly and politely if necessary by repeating the questions and explaining to the interviewee and the audience why the previous answer has not dealt with the question.

Occasionally, a person who has been interviewed seeks to withdraw permission for the interview to be broadcast. If the producer nonetheless believes that the interview should be presented in the public interest - a decision a producer is entitled to take - the matter should

be referred upward to senior management. While there may be occasional exceptions in special circumstances, only those with editorial responsibility should view or hear the programme before broadcast. While there must be impartiality and fairness in presentation, there must not be external interference in the preparation of programmes. Interviewees cannot be allowed to give directions on how an interview should be edited or broadcast.

## **Political Interviews**

When a politician is asked, but refuses or is unable to appear this should not normally act as a veto on the appearance of other politicians or other outside speakers holding different views. But there may be occasions when the refusal of a particular key player to take part invalidates the idea behind the programme proposal.

Anyone has a right to refuse to appear in a programme. It is not always necessary to mention a refusal on air. However, where the audience might reasonably expect to hear counter-arguments or where an individual, viewpoint or party is not represented, it may be appropriate to explain that the person concerned “was invited to appear on the programme but declined”.

Politicians and other contributors sometimes try to place conditions on programme before agreeing to take part. Any arrangement reached must not prevent the programme asking questions that audiences would reasonably expect to hear asked.

Politicians may have an expertise outside the political field. Care must be taken to ensure that frequent use of a particular person in public life - made on valid editorial grounds - do not give any politicians undue advantage over their opponents.

## **Doorstepping**

Journalists regularly catch people in the news as they enter and leave buildings and put questions to them even though there has been no prior arrangement for an interview. This is a legitimate part of news gathering known as door stepping. People in the news must expect to be questioned and recorded by journalists – even if the questions are sometimes unwelcome.

## **Media Scrums**

When a person suddenly features large in the news, media organizations will send reporters to that person’s private home to try to secure pictures or interviews. The result is frequently a large number of journalists gathered in the streets outside. It is essential that it does not become intimidating or intrusive. People must not be harassed unfairly with repeated phone calls, knocks on the door, or by obstructing them as they come and go. Ask yourself

- Is the subject of the story a private citizen or public figure?
- Is he/she a villain, victim or interested party?
- Has that person expressed a wish not to give interviews and to be left in peace?

## **Payments to MPs**

These are not normally made. Their appearances on radio and TV to express political views

are part of political life and payment is not appropriate. This applies when they answer questions on matters like public policy, international affairs, party politics or constituency issues.

If their contribution is outside the normal course of their duties, politicians may be paid a fee. If they are called in very late or early in the day or at weekends they would be paid a small disturbance fee.

Politicians who hold government office or executive office in any elected assembly or have party front bench responsibilities do not qualify for a fee.

## **Protection of Sources**

Protecting sources is a key principle of journalism – for which some journalists have even gone to jail. Information, which the public should know, is sometimes only available through a confidential source. Off-the-record conversations take place frequently between journalists and public figures. If the confidentiality of sources is not respected as a matter of principle, this would inhibit the free flow of information, which is essential to the vitality of a democratic society.

Information from someone who wishes to remain anonymous (or be on a non-attributable basis) may be used if the source is known to the journalist and has a record of reliability. However to avoid the possibility of being manipulated to broadcast inaccurate or biased information, the journalist must seek corroboration from other sources.

Promises of confidentiality given to a source or contributor must be honoured. Otherwise the broadcasters' journalism will suffer if people who have provided information on condition they remain anonymous are subsequently identified.

Anyone who comes across information which could prevent a terrorist act or lead to the arrest of a terrorist wanted for violence is obliged to inform the authorities.

## **Anonymity**

Accuracy and integrity in journalism require that the identity and credentials of an interviewee be evident to the audience. If an interviewee or participant in a programme is concealed or has their voice distorted, this is tantamount to depriving the audience of pertinent information enabling the viewer or listener to make a judgment on their comments. The authority of the programme can be undermined by the use of anonymous contributors whose status the audience cannot judge. But there are times when anonymity is appropriate:

- For reasons of safety. Someone – e.g. in a totalitarian state – whose personal safety may be jeopardized by identification.
- If the subject is a delicate one – e.g. health.
- For legal reasons.

Where anonymity is necessary, producers must make sure it is effective. Both picture and voice may need to be disguised.

## ELECTION COVERAGE

*“We believe in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief and in the individual’s inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic processes in framing the society in which he or she lives”.* (Commonwealth Principles 1971 re-affirmed Harare Declaration 1995.)

All broadcast outlets, large or small, rich or poor, have a public service duty to contribute to free and fair elections in any way they can. Radio and TV create and foster the democratic environment by telling the truth, by investigating the hidden, by explaining the background, by presenting the facts so that a well-informed electorate can make reasoned choices.

The real test of a broadcaster’s commitment to impartiality is in the way it reports elections and election campaigns. It is during elections in particular that a station’s commitment to objectivity, accuracy, fairness, impartiality and balance is scrutinized closely and evaluated assiduously.

A public service broadcaster will, during an election campaign, make periods of programme time available to the officially recognized political parties so that they can explain their policies directly to the electorate whose support they are seeking.

All parties will seek to influence editorial decisions at election time. Programme makers must not let themselves be intimidated by the politicians. Complaints will be made throughout. Politicians should be told that any complaints they make would be dealt with at a higher level.

Several principles apply at election time:

- The public is entitled to hear the principal points of view of the various parties on all questions of importance.
- Broadcasting must not fall under the control of individuals or organized pressure groups that are influential either because of their wealth or because of their special position.
- The full exchange of opinions is one of the safeguards of free institutions and of democracy. The right to hear alternative policies and points of view is inherent in the concepts of objective reporting and impartiality, which are part of the broadcaster’s duty.

At every election, the parties fighting the campaign are issued with a detailed guide which outlines the allocation of free time on radio and television, the conditions for broadcasting, and the technical standards to be observed.

News decisions at election time have to be driven by the news judgement of the broadcasting journalists who must ensure that attention is given to a thorough examination of the views, policies and campaigns of all the main political parties.

News staff must familiarize themselves fully with the law on election broadcasting - regulating matters like party election broadcasts, time on air to be made available to the various political parties, the duration and scheduling of party election broadcasts and political advertising during election periods.

As a general guide, the government and opposition parties are allocated equal time on air for their broadcasts. If parties are in coalition, either as government or as the official opposition, they will be given an equal allocation of time. It will be up to the parties, which are in coalition to divide the time between them as they see fit.

Significant minor parties must also receive coverage during the campaign. The amount of time they will be given for the election broadcasts will be less than the main government and opposition parties, but will be proportionate. In some countries, e.g. Canada, and India, it will be based on their representation in the outgoing Parliament or poll performance at the last general and state assembly elections.

The broadcaster will maintain the same ratio for the allocation of broadcasts among the parties in each of the country's official languages where appropriate.

The question of editorial control over the party election broadcasts must be spelled out clearly. In countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand, the parties make their election broadcasts themselves at their own expense and are responsible for their content. But they have to abide by ground rules laid down, such as observing the law - for example on libel and incitement to racial hatred and violence - and observe the broadcaster's own guidelines on taste and decency. They must ensure that their party broadcasts are not used as a vehicle for personal attack as distinguished from criticism of a party and its policies. The broadcaster should have the right to take out any material submitted for broadcast if, in the opinion of the broadcaster, it is of a defamatory nature, containing unacceptable abuse of political opponents.

It may be necessary for the broadcaster to offer production facilities; otherwise the technical quality of the broadcasts may be well below standard.

There are a number of essential steps, which a broadcaster should take in preparing for an election:

- Set up a special elections unit, staffed by the station's most talented journalists, well before an election is due to draw up plans for the campaign. It should meet regularly, weekly to begin with, but more frequently as the campaign period approaches. It may be a one-person unit on a very small station, but whatever the size, it will ensure that appropriate planning takes place.
- Train this election team during this pre-election period. Ensure that an experienced senior journalist leads the team. As the elections approach, the team will inevitably expand.
- Draw up guidelines for coverage, which include achieving balance, monitoring that balance, resisting pressure to act undemocratically and responding to complaints from the parties, which will inevitably arrive.
- Secure acceptance for these guidelines by all concerned as the agreed basis for election broadcasting. This includes the Ministry of Information, the major political parties and the official body responsible for running the election. If there are disagreements, it is better to sort these out beforehand when things are quiet rather than in the heat of an election.
- Publish these guidelines. This can be as a pamphlet, in newspapers or magazines, on a

website on the Internet and of course on air. The wider the publicity given, the easier it will be to convince the nation of the honourable role you are playing in the democratic process.

- Establish an overall election programme plan, which covers what programmes will be produced, their format, how the issues will be explained, what rules will apply to programmes where rival candidates are taking part. Communicate this plan to the electoral body, to the politicians and to the audience. Wherever possible get a consensus.
- Introduce a comprehensive system for monitoring the election output. Be able to judge at every point in the campaign the balance of the programmes up to that point and relate that balance to the output, which will follow. It will often be necessary to adjust the output to maintain fairness. Editors need to assess each bulletin and where normal journalistic judgment creates an unavoidable temporary imbalance, they must rectify it as soon as possible over succeeding output. Some system must be set up to log coverage given to each party. A large wall-chart with basic details of every election story broadcast entered after each bulletin/news programme is one effective way of doing this.
- Educate the audience. Responsibility for voter education rests largely with the broadcasters. The media must get across to the public an understanding that their votes matter, politics matters, politics are about their lives, their health, their education, their culture, their security, their future. Creating a democratic environment is not necessarily a heavy intellectual exercise.
- Some politicians are boring and poor communicators. In every country many of the leading politicians of all parties are poor broadcasters. But in many countries politicians are groomed for TV and radio. Where possible, the politicians who are the best communicators should be invited to take part in programmes.

### **How to Achieve Balance**

This is basically a matter of fine judgment. Here is the advice, which the BBC has given on election coverage:

- Daily news magazine programmes...must achieve an appropriate and fair balance in coverage of the main parties in the course of each week of the campaign.
- Each strand (e.g. a late afternoon show on radio as people are going home after work) is responsible for reaching its own targets within the week and cannot rely on any other outlets at different times of day (e.g. a breakfast show) to do so for it.
- Single programmes should avoid individual editions getting badly out of balance. There may be days when inevitably one party dominates the news agenda (e.g. when it launches its manifesto) but in that case care must be taken to ensure that coverage of similar prominence is given to the other manifesto launches on the relevant days.
- Every edition of the multi-item programmes which cover the campaign.... should refer in at least one item to each of the main parties.



- Weekly programmes, or running series within daily sequence programmes, which focus on one party or another should trail both forwards and backwards so that it is clear to the audience that balance is built in over time.

## Fair Coverage

A station should have a rule that newsroom bulletin writers and reporters are forbidden to express their own political views. News and comment must be kept separate. In some countries journalists are identified with one or other political party. This completely destroys their credibility and that of their station.

Does “fair” mean, “equal”? Here is how South Africa’s SABC answer this dilemma:

- The SABC will treat all parties and all viewpoints equitably. But this does not mean we will distort our news values and processes by giving the same weight to small one-person parties as we do to serious contenders for a place in national or provincial government. The electorate is entitled to more comprehensive coverage of serious contenders for a place in government.
- Equitable treatment is achieved over time. It is unlikely to be achieved in a single programme. This also means that not all parties have the right to appear on every programme.
- We will be consistent in our treatment of contesting parties and conflicting views.
- We will not only rely on parties to bring information to us, but will actively seek out information. Failure to do so would skew our coverage in favour of those parties with more resources.

Broadcasters in the Southern African Development Community have agreed to give equitable time Independent candidates as well. Their codes of conduct states:

- Broadcasters have a responsibility to provide equitable time for all contestants, whether they are party candidates or candidates standing as independents.

In a general election campaign there is a risk of top politicians, such as the president or prime minister trying to manipulate events for political advantage. They try to turn ministerial engagements into extra electioneering broadcast opportunities. This is a major problem in many countries, which grossly distorts the balance of election coverage on both radio and television. All candidates, up to the highest level, must be told well before the election that the media will not aid the making of political capital out of day-to-day official events. Politicians who try to exploit their official engagements will find the event reported but not any blatant electioneering statements.

In Australia, for example, if the Prime Minister requests time to address the nation on a matter of national interest, he has to submit a request to the national broadcaster, the ABC. If the ABC grants the request, it will reserve the right to offer the leader of the Opposition the right of reply if the broadcaster considers the Prime Minister’s request is of a party political nature.

## **Party Political Broadcasts**

The content of party political broadcasts is primarily a matter for the party making the broadcast and is therefore not required to achieve impartiality. The broadcaster remains responsible for the broadcast as publisher and requires the parties to observe proper standards of legality, taste and accuracy. It must show impartiality in the allocation of such broadcasts.

## **Opinion Polls**

Public opinion polls should not be ignored during an election campaign, but they must be treated with great care. A party may try to swing undecided voters by publishing so-called opinion polls that appear to put it in a strong position thus creating a bandwagon effect.

In reporting the findings of voter intention polls, say who carried out the poll, who commissioned it, when was it carried out, over how many days?

Poll results should not be the lead item in a news bulletin or programme. They are often interesting because they show a trend in voter intention. Polls, which defy the general trend without convincing explanation, should be treated with scepticism and caution.

Exit polls are carried out on voting day when people are asked how they voted as they are leaving the polling station. They may predict the result accurately, but beware, they can sometimes be wrong! Careful language must be used in reporting poll predictions. "It looks as if x or y will be the biggest party with between a and b number of seats".

# CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A broadcaster's reputation for impartiality and objectivity is crucial. The public must be able to trust the integrity of programmes and services. The integrity of any organisation ultimately is shaped by the individual integrity of each of its employees in their work and outside. Audiences need to be confident that the broadcaster's impartiality is not undermined by the outside activities of programme makers or presenters. The broadcaster must be satisfied that everyone involved in editorial decisions and programme making is free from inappropriate outside commitments. They must also consider whether the position of families and close personal contacts presents a likely conflict of interest.

## Presenters and Reporters

Those known to the public primarily as presenters and correspondents must be seen to be impartial. They should have no outside interests or commitments, which could damage the broadcaster's reputation for fairness, impartiality and integrity. Nothing they do, such as writing, speech making, giving interviews should lead to any doubt about their objectivity on air. If presenters and correspondents express personal views off-air on controversial issues, then their on-air role may be seriously compromised. It is important that in outside activities such as writing, speaking or giving interviews they do not:

- State how they vote or express support for any political party.
- Express views for or against any policy, which is a matter of current political debate.
- Advocate any particular position on a matter of current controversy.
- Call for change in public policy.

## Commercial, Business and Financial Interests

It is essential that a station's integrity is not undermined by the commercial, business or financial interests of any programme makers, journalists or presenters. There must never be any suggestion that commercial or financial interests have influenced coverage of the subject matter of programmes or the choice of items.

Programme producers, journalists and presenters must declare if they have interests, which could be perceived as a conflict of interest:

- Any directorships or consultancy work for outside organizations, especially those with business in the media.
- Any significant shareholdings, loans (except mortgages) or financial commitments which could constitute a conflict of interest.
- Any shareholdings or securities in media-related companies. Very senior officials might be requested to sever any financial interest in other broadcasting or related organizations.

## Personal Benefits and Gifts

Anyone working on a financial story must on no account use information they have come across in the course of covering a financial or business story to trade ahead of the markets. This is unethical.

Individuals must not accept personal gifts or benefits for themselves or members of their family from organizations or people with whom they might have dealings in their journalistic work. These include: gifts, goods, discounts, services, cash, loans gratuities or entertainment outside the normal scope of business hospitality. Receiving such benefits could lead to a conflict of interest.

### **On Air Talent and Commercial Advertising**

Increasingly advertisers and companies want to employ presenters to endorse their products. Presenters should observe certain generally agreed principles.

- No advertising campaign in which they appear should give the public reason to doubt their station's objectivity.
- The product must not be shown featured, reviewed or discussed in the programmes they present.
- No presenter shall replicate his/her on air role to endorse a product or service in advertising or Internet advertising.
- Stricter rules are likely to apply to long-established presenters than someone doing a few programmes or a one-off series.

### **News and Current Affairs Presenters, Consumer Programme Presenters**

News presenters and correspondents should not take part in any promotions, endorsements or advertisements for outside companies. The same applies to presenters of consumer programmes because there is no product or service they can be certain they will not one day find arising in a news context. It is the duty of presenters and correspondents, producers and freelance staff to declare any personal interest, which may affect their work.

### **Political Activities**

Some broadcasting staff may wish to become involved in political activities. In certain circumstances there can be no objections. The main considerations are:

- The level of political involvement involved (if publicly identified as a candidate or prospective candidate, holding office in a political party, speaking in public for that party on matters of political controversy, or writing about it in books, articles, letters to the press, promoting a partisan view on an issue). This may be inconsistent with their work for a public service broadcaster.
- The nature and level of the individual's job in the broadcasting organization.
- The extent of involvement in editorial decision-making. Stricter rules apply to news and current affairs staff than to others.

### **Standing in a General Election**

If a member of staff has been selected to stand for election the rule in the BBC for example, is that that person may not work in any programme area, which could be linked to political issues. Once an election is called, the member of staff is granted six weeks unpaid leave. This is to avoid any suggestion that the BBC is subsidizing the individual's election campaign.

# PHONE-INS

Using the telephone can enhance programmes by allowing the public to give their own point of view or to interact directly with programmes. Phone-in programmes are an accepted and important means of broadcasting individual points of view and of allowing the listeners and viewers to question politicians and other public figures. Both factual and entertainment programmes use phone-in programmes to provide individual contributions or to get an immediate response from members of the public.

- Phone-in programmes are generally live. The aim is genuine spontaneity.
- The producer must be constantly alert to the possibility of callers breaking the law by making outspoken remarks, wild unsubstantiated allegations or causing widespread offence in matters of taste or decency.
- To minimize the risks, a station needs to have a system whereby staff screen potential callers before allowing them to be put through to the programme. Callers should not normally be put straight on air.
- Staff should also ensure that the phone-in does not become a focus or platform for organized pressure groups or wild irresponsible individuals.

The presenter/moderator should take special care to maintain fairness, impartiality and balance and to ensure that a wide range of views is broadcast. They must be able to extricate the programme where difficult situations arise, cutting short a caller politely and firmly.

Some broadcasters offer back up information for the audience to phone-in programmes and use telephone help lines to follow up and provide extra advice and support for problems covered in the phone in or other programmes. There is a range of services such as fact sheets, booklets, and telephone help lines. The broadcaster must take care not to promote any one particular organization, charity or agency, manufacturer or supplier. Where possible, give details of a range of organizations, which are in position to offer help or advice.

## **Vox Pops (clips of views by members of the public)**

These are not an indication of wider public opinion but their value is that they allow different sides of an issue in question to be expressed through the voices of the man and woman in the street. But it should be made clear that they are an expression of a point of view, not an indication of the weight of opinion on either side. Great care is needed with political questions and the various voice clips should be assembled in such a way as to ensure both sides of an issue are covered.

Statements gathered from people chosen at random should be presented solely to illustrate the range and texture of popular opinion on a topical issue. There should not be any suggestion - explicit or implicit - that the views broadcast in such a survey reflect wider public opinion.

## RELIGION IN PROGRAMMES

Where the majority of citizens of a country acknowledge belief in the Divine, and when it is expressed through a variety of religious beliefs, practices and forms of worship, a public broadcaster may feel under an obligation to provide religious programmes, and to broadcast religious material in a manner which is unbiased and representative of the different faiths in society.

In multi-cultural societies, religious programming should reflect a mix of faiths. But the broadcaster should not support any one religion over another nor provide a medium for one religion to denigrate another.

- References to religion should be presented accurately and in a dignified manner.
- Programmes that denigrate or satirize any racial or religious group should not be broadcast.
- Programmes that feature the views or beliefs of any race or religion must be acceptable to the target audience and should not be proselytising in nature.

Programmes covering religion can be most effective if they follow a variety of formats. Religious services (where appropriate), religious news programmes, giving, say, news developments of the past week, month or quarter, magazine-type programmes combining music, hymns, interviews, coverage of general issues from a religious standpoint. At major religious festivals there could be devotional talks, including prayers.

Programme makers dealing with religious themes should be aware of what may cause offence. What may be unexceptional to some may provoke strong feelings elsewhere. Deep offence will be caused by:

- Profane references or disrespect, whether verbal or visual, directed at deities, scriptures, holy days and rituals which are at the heart of various religions e.g. the Crucifixion, Gospels, the Koran, the Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Mecca) the Holy season of Ramadan and the Jewish Sabbath and dietary laws.
- Casual use of names considered holy by believers in expletives e.g. the use of “Jesus”, “Christ” or “God” or of names held holy by other faiths. The use of such expletives in drama or light entertainment causes distress far beyond their dramatic or humorous value.

Programmes, which contain profane expressions or other references to religion, which could cause deep offence, should not be broadcast before the watershed and broadcasters should give warnings of material, which could cause offence to an audience.

People and countries should not be defined by their religions unless it is strictly relevant. Particular religious groups or factions should not be portrayed as speaking for their faith as a whole. For example footage of chanting crowds of Islamic activists should not be used to illustrate the whole Muslim world.

## TASTE AND DECENCY

“Programmes should be in good taste, that is to say, they should respect and reflect the generally accepted values in society regarding such matters as vulgarity, profanity or sexual behaviour. The audience for broadcast information is composed of differing groups and notions of good taste vary substantially among them. Where matters of taste are concerned, therefore, care must be taken not to cause gratuitous offence to the audience.” (CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices p103)

“Broadcasters should be mindful of public morals and social values of local viewers. For instance, themes on sex and promiscuity should be treated with caution. Explicit sexual sequences are not allowed. Information, themes or sub-plots on alternative lifestyles (e.g. homosexuality, bi-sexuality, incest) should be treated with caution. Their portrayals should clearly not promote, justify or glamorise such lifestyles. Explicit sequences on alternative sexual behaviour should not be broadcast. In general nudity is not allowed except in exceptional circumstances.” (Singapore Guidelines No. 5)

These two extracts from two leading broadcasters, one North American, the other Asian illustrate the problem. Notions of what is in good taste and what is considered decent are often simply matters of judgment. South Africa’s SABC goes one step further: “freedom of expression [is] held to protect even unpopular and offensive speech. It is believed that any attempt to curb speech carries the potential to stifle artistic creativity which is seen as fundamental to broadcasting.” (SABC Guidelines p10)

So instead of banning completely anything, which might give offence, broadcasters need to:

- Give the audience clear and adequate warning beforehand when they believe material may upset viewers/listeners.
- Be very careful in their scheduling of such material. Do not let material that viewers and listeners might find threatening or shocking intrude unexpectedly.
- Make sure material that is unsuitable for children is not broadcast at a time when they are likely to be watching.

While a station will do everything possible to minimize what audiences might find distasteful or tasteless, a public broadcaster nevertheless does have a duty to deal frankly with controversial topics, HIV/AIDS for example, and cannot avoid tackling issues because of the risk of offending certain people. The key is careful scheduling (“A good rule of thumb is to avoid taking the audience by surprise.”). Advance warning means viewers can make their own choices about what they want to see and hear and any offence caused can be kept to a minimum. People are likely to respond less negatively to violent and distressing scenes if they have been alerted in advance.

# HEALTH PROGRAMMES

“I switched on the radio.... heard your programme about testicular cancer.... found a lump. I can say I probably wouldn't be alive if it weren't for the programme” (a listener to a BBC World Service “Health Matters” programme.)

Health programmes are not current affairs programmes. Nor are they “blue skies” accounts of the latest medical research at the frontier of knowledge. They can be programmes aimed at doctors keeping them abreast of latest developments in medical thinking as gleaned from the leading medical journals and interviews with specialists and researchers. But their most important purpose is to be a source of authoritative and reliable advice for doctors and health workers.

Mostly however, health programmes will be aimed at the ordinary person. Health coverage should be undertaken with advice from the relevant medical authorities. The perspective will be that of the patient. In many parts of the world it is radio and television, which are the most important sources of information. Radio in particular is often the only way of reaching the vast majority of people living in rural areas where literacy levels are low. Put simply, it is the best way of reaching people and getting across important information on basic matters such as the need for hygiene, washing hands regularly, ensuring latrines are not placed next to wells, urging the importance of anti-mosquito nets to prevent malaria and such like. These audiences can be reached via programmes using a variety of formats: reports, packages, discussions, interviews and on-the-spot reports from hospitals, surgeries and clinics.

## Health Campaigns

Campaigns should be run in cooperation with appropriate bodies such as the Ministry of Health, specialist medical organizations, e.g. HIV/AIDS organisations, the global funds to fight tuberculosis and malaria, and NGOs working in the health field.

- Producers should check all medical facts with doctors and authoritative medical journals specialising in the particular field.
- They must make special efforts to ensure the accuracy of their information.
- They must make sure their programmes are not used as vehicles for disinformation.
- Producers should consider running campaigns across all types of programming, for maximum effect, rather than just specialist information slots.
- Health broadcasters should work in partnership with reputable organisations for community back up.
- It is important that producers know who their audience is and are clear what they want to achieve.
- Each country will have its own approach and priorities.



# HIV/AIDS

“Stop playing deaf and blind. It’s a killer” (AIDS sufferer calling on governments and political leaders on BBC World Service, World Aids Day, December 1st 2003). Broadcasting about HIV/AIDS presents special challenges because of the size of the epidemic, the means of its transmission, and the social ostracism of its victims.

HIV/AIDS is the one area where broadcasters may find themselves in conflict with accepted ideas of taste and decency. For example, a public service broadcaster may hesitate to talk about condoms. Yet, all experts agree that the use of condoms is the most effective way of preventing the spread of the disease.

Certain basic principles need to be observed in broadcasting about HIV/AIDS. Programmes and campaigns should:

- Dispel ignorance – provide the facts, what it is, how people get it. Many people who are at risk may not know what HIV/AIDS is or how it is spread. There is a need for programmes to simply set out the facts. Broadcasters have a responsibility to tell the truth.
- Separate the truth from disinformation and lies. For example, there is no justification for claims that condoms are unsafe or full of holes. But it is true that you can safely have a meal with someone who has HIV/AIDS.
- Be clear – in order to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS people’s behaviour may well have to change. Broadcasters need to tell audiences in what ways they can prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS by changing their behaviour (for example men need to wear condoms for their own protection and the protection of women, razor blades and needles need to be sterilised or, even better, used only once during medical treatment, health care workers need to take precautions against accidental infection).
- Use doctors and experts as advisors regularly.
- Advise audiences to beware of bogus cures.
- Be factually accurate – audiences need to know about available drugs, ways of caring for people with HIV/AIDS, ways of living with people who have HIV/AIDS.
- Research the latest developments thoroughly – new medical findings will continue to emerge and need to be communicated to people reliably. Broadcasters should be sceptical of announcements of AIDS cures.
- Make programmes about how HIV/AIDS sufferers are coping, allowing them to tell their story and how they are being helped.
- Maintain a sense of proportion. It is important to tell the facts without exaggeration and to avoid value judgements. Stigma and the fear of discrimination are preventing people from coming forward and getting tested and this is contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

- Aim to reach the target audience. Health campaigns are often effective if they target different sections of the population at different times in different ways. For example a programme for married women about HIV/AIDS may be very different in style and content from a programme for teenage boys. It may also reach more of its target audience if it is scheduled at a particular time of day.
- Take a range of approaches and draw on other countries' experience. For example, South Africa believes it is vital that teenagers and parents should talk to each other about HIV/AIDS, and is making programmes to encourage that to happen.

Broadcasters will have to think about how they put across this message with taste and discretion. They may need to use cautious language, but the message cannot be dodged. "Silence is death," said the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. "There is no embarrassment in saving lives".

### **Soaps as Health Messages**

One of the most effective ways of getting information across to people are "soaps", serials or short dramas which put across vital information about matters of public interest. The BBC's long-running soap, "The Archers", was originally aimed at farmers and contained advice on growing food crops. Another example is a soap opera broadcast to Afghans audiences, which included basic health advice on birth spacing and simple treatment of child diarrhoea. It also had a sub-plot about a returning refugee family. The villagers in the series discussed how to help them re-settle, how they could spot landmines, and which areas to avoid, reinforcing a message in an entertaining way.

# CHILDREN

Children can be involved in programmes in a number of ways – as actors, interviewees, participants or subjects of programmes. The use of children in programmes requires handling with great care. In many countries there are laws to protect children. Special care should be taken to ensure that programmes children are likely to watch unsupervised would not cause alarm or distress, or incite aggressive behaviour.

“Offering children enjoyable and enriching programmes should not be confused with concealing the real world from them. Adults sometimes seek to exclude [things].... to protect children. For some children, though, the world is already violent and dangerous and it is important for the media, especially television, to help them understand and deal with their own lives.” (SABC Guidelines p16).

There is general agreement among the major broadcasters about children and the media:

- Material that is unsuitable for children should not be broadcast at times when large numbers of them may be expected to be part of the audience.
- Broadcasters should exercise particular care in depicting violence in children’s programmes.
- Animated programming for children shall not have violence as a central theme and shall not invite dangerous imitation.
- Programming for children should be very careful in dealing with themes that threaten a child’s sense of security - themes like domestic conflict, death, crime or the use of drugs.
- Programmes for children should not contain realistic scenes of violence, which create the impression that violence is the best way to resolve conflict.
- Programmes for children shall not contain realistic scenes of violence that minimize or gloss over the effect of violent acts. Any realistic depiction of violence shall also portray the consequences for both victims and perpetrators of that violence.
- Programmes for children shall not contain frightening or otherwise excessive special effects not required by the story line.
- Adult-only type programmes should not be shown immediately after the watershed. Children often stay up later during school holidays.
- Children’s cartoons should avoid gratuitous violence.
- In news breaks screened during programmes directed at children, broadcasters should not normally use images or descriptions likely to alarm or disturb children except in cases of public interest.
- Broadcasters should recognise the rights of children and young people not to be exploited, humiliated or unnecessarily identified (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child).

## Children and Violence

There is some evidence that violence in circumstances resembling real life is more upsetting for children than violence in a fantasy setting. Children may feel particularly distressed when violence occurs in a familiar setting or between familiar figures. For instance, violence in the home between characters resembling their parents, or towards characters or pets with which the child can sympathize, should be avoided. Children can be particularly upset and distressed by violence involving animals. (BBC Guidelines 27/45).

The dangers of imitation are very real among children. Extra care should be taken for example over karate chops, or the use of weapons that are easily accessible such as ropes, knives, bottles or hammers. Producers should also remember the danger of suffocation from plastic bags and of fire from playing with matches. Criminal acts, if shown, should not be lessons in "how to do it". Children's play is often influenced by what they see on TV. In making programmes for children, or likely to be popular with them, showing actions or techniques which could lead to dangerous imitation should be avoided. The BBC guidelines on children's programmes states:

- Smoking and drinking should generally be avoided in children's programmes. Likewise pop stars, sportsmen, popular entertainers and others likely to be admired by children should not smoke and drink when being interviewed in children's programmes.
- Inventive and unusual methods of inflicting pain and injury should not appear in children's programmes - particularly when capable of easy imitation with objects readily available in the home such as knives or hammers.
- Where hazardous activities such as climbing or motorcycling are portrayed in programmes aimed at children, warnings should be given of the dangers of trying to imitate without expert supervision.

## THE “WATERSHED”

Many broadcasters have a policy of not showing material, which would be unsuitable for children before a certain hour. This is usually set at 2030 or 2100 (2200 in Singapore) and is known in countries where English is widely used as “the watershed”. The basic principle of the watershed is that material, which is unsuitable for children, cannot be broadcast before this time, as large numbers of children are likely to be viewing. These are programmes which are intended for adult audiences, which deal with controversial themes, or contain scenes of violence, sexually explicit conduct, nudity, swearing, bad or profane language. They should not be broadcast until well after the watershed.

Particular care should be taken in the period immediately after the watershed. The transition to more adult programming after the watershed time should be very gradual as children often watch beyond this time - particularly during the school holidays. Adult material should never be positioned close to the watershed.

The broadcaster has a responsibility to ensure that audiences have enough information upon which to judge if a programme is likely to be one they want to watch or listen to or if it is suitable for their children to see or hear.

Basically it is up to parents to decide whether or not individual programmes should be seen by their children. The broadcaster has a responsibility to ensure that audiences have enough information on which to judge if a programme is likely to be one they want to watch or listen to, or if it is suitable for children to see or hear. Whenever there is a programme containing material that might be offensive to significant numbers of viewers or listeners, the broadcaster should consider how best to prepare audiences. In some cases, it may simply require a warning. E.g. “this report contains scenes which may upset some viewers”. To help them in this, some broadcasters, Australia and New Zealand for example, have devised a system of programme classification. In these countries, broadcasters are responsible for ensuring that programmes are correctly classified and display the right symbols. NZBC Guidelines spell it out in the following way:

- Definition: A child means any boy or girl under the age of 14 years.
- G – General: programmes, which exclude material likely to be unsuitable for children. Programmes may not necessarily be designed for child viewers but must not contain material likely to alarm or distress them.
- PGR – Parental Guidance Recommended: programmes containing material more suited for mature audiences but not necessarily unsuitable for child viewers when subject to the guidance of a parent or an adult. (In New Zealand PGR programmes may be screened between 9am and 4pm and after 7pm until 6am).
- AO – Adult Only: programmes containing adult themes and directed primarily at mature audiences. (These may be shown between set hours when children are not likely to be watching).

Current Affairs programmes, which may be scheduled at any time, are not subject to the classification system. However producers need to remember that young people may be

among viewers of news and current affairs programmes during morning, day- time and early evening hours and should give consideration to including warnings where appropriate.

In addition, the country's broadcasters are reminded:

- Broadcasters should ensure that appropriate classification codes are established and observed. Classification symbols should be displayed at the beginning of each programme and after each advertising break.
- Broadcasters should ensure that all promotional material and programme trails comply in content with the classification band in which they are shown. For example, trails for Adult Only programmes shown outside Adult Only time must conform in content with the classification of the time band in which they are broadcast.
- Broadcasters should consider the use of warnings where content is likely to offend or disturb a significant proportion of the audience.
- News flashes prepared for screening outside regular news bulletins, particularly during children's viewing hours, should avoid unnecessary distress or alarm. If news flashes contain distressing footage, prior warning should be given.

# CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Programmes on crime must not glamorise crime or criminals or act as incitement to violence and other anti-social behaviour. Scenes of violence or suffering such as close-ups of persons being brutally killed and tortured, and visual descriptions of rape scenes should normally be avoided. Gratuitous and graphic portrayals of violence should not be shown.

Violent crime is usually a tiny proportion of total crime but it takes up a greater proportion of crime coverage. In handling crime stories, broadcasters need to be alert to the possible cumulative effect of crime coverage. Television and radio may add to peoples' fears of becoming victims of crime even when this is unlikely to happen.

Care should be given before identifying the victim of a crime. Broadcasting the victim's identity often only adds to the person's grief, anguish and trauma especially in the case of sexual assault. Do not broadcast the name of someone who has been the victim of a sexual assault unless the victim gives consent, or volunteers his/her own story for broadcast. Only rarely will it be in the public interest.

News programmes must not stage their own reconstructions of crimes in their reporting. They may feature coverage of police reconstructions for the purpose of gathering evidence.

Interviews with serious criminals who are active or being sought by the police are rarely justified. The broadcaster must be sensitive to the impact such interviews would have on an audience. Usually it is necessary for approval to be given by someone at a senior level before such an interview can take place.

When interviewing witnesses to a particular crime, there must be particular care that the interview will in no way interfere with the course of justice. No such interview should take place once legal action has begun and a trial is under way.

## **Surreptitious Recording**

Journalists should operate within a framework, which respects people's right to privacy, treats them fairly, and yet permits investigation into matter of public interest. The BBC, for example, permits surreptitious recordings only in certain circumstances:

- As an investigative tool to explore matters which raise issues of serious anti-social or criminal behaviour where there is reasonable prior evidence of such behaviour. The programme maker has to show that an open approach would be unlikely to succeed and that there is a public interest in showing such material.
- To gather material in countries where the local law is hostile to fundamental freedoms and where reporters and correspondents are not able to work openly.

New Zealand guidelines, which encapsulate the principles, which many broadcasters follow, say that "in the preparation and presentation of programmes, broadcasters are responsible for maintaining standards which are consistent with the maintenance of law and order.

- Broadcasters must respect the principles of law, which sustain society.

- Factual programmes should not glamorise criminal activity or condone the actions of criminals.
- Programmes should not depict or describe techniques of crime in a manner, which invites imitation.
- Ingenious devices and unfamiliar methods of inflicting pain, injury or death, particularly if capable of easy imitation, should not be shown except in exceptional circumstances, which are in the public interest.
- The realistic portrayal of anti-social behaviour, including violent and serious crime and the abuse of alcohol and drugs, should not be shown in a way that glamorises these activities.
- Programmes should not glamorise suicide and should not show or explain in detail how suicides are carried out.
- Broadcasters should ensure that the incidental promotion of liquor is kept to the minimum”.



## DISASTER COVERAGE

The aftermath of a tragic event calls for considerable sensitivity. Every effort must be made to ensure that nothing is broadcast on radio or television or posted on-line which might cause widespread offence.

In covering accidents, disasters and disturbances, journalists need to balance accurate reporting against the obligation to avoid causing unnecessary distress or anxiety. The emphasis must be on providing swiftly and accurately basic factual information such as times, locations, place of departure, destination, route, flight number (in the case of an airline crash, for example). By doing so, you can avoid needless suffering.

Where forewarning can prevent widespread damage and reduce human misery and avert loss of life, break into a programme and give a warning of some impending natural disaster. All programmes beamed towards the region likely to be affected must carry and give prominent position to warnings, announcements regarding relief measures and such statements of leaders as would build up morale of the people affected. In serious situations, transmissions should be kept open all day long and not restricted merely to their regular transmission hours. Weather forecasts should be taken only from the official meteorological service.

In the early stages of a disaster, it is especially important to give the source of information. If different sources give different casualty estimates, either report the range or quote the source, which carries the greatest authority.

News and factual programmes should follow some basic well-established principles:

- The dead should be treated with respect and not shown unless there are compelling reasons for doing so.
- Close-ups of faces and serious injuries should be used very sparingly.
- A person should not learn from a radio or television report that a relative has been killed. Concern for next-of-kin calls for special care in naming people who have died or are missing. Leave out names until you are sure next-of-kin have been informed.
- Avoid using violent material simply because it is available.
- In virtually no circumstances is it justified to show executions or other scenes in which people are being killed.
- Still photographs can sometimes convey the horrific reality without shocking to the same degree as moving pictures.
- Do not put pressure on grieving relatives for interviews.
- In cases of drought or cyclone, avoid putting crop losses in monetary terms until a figure is available from a reliable official source.

# VIOLENCE

We live in a violent world. Violence is part of everyday life but particular care must be taken in portraying it. Violence on screen does upset many people, particularly children whom it has a unique potential to distress and disturb, and audiences remain concerned about its showing on screen. Decisions about whether and how to portray violence should not be taken lightly. Producers should also bear in mind its possible effects, including whether it may stimulate aggressive or violent behaviour or induce indifference or insensitivity. Violence should not be presented in such a manner as to glamorise it or make it attractive. It is important that when violence is portrayed that, as a rule, its serious consequences are not glossed over. An excess of violence can de-sensitise viewers.

In the preparation and presentation of programmes, broadcasters are required to exercise care and discretion when dealing with the issue of violence. NZBC advises:

- Broadcasters should ensure that any violence shown is not gratuitous and is justified by the context.
- Broadcasters should be aware of the cumulative effect of violent incidents and themes.
- Scenes of rape or sexual violence should be treated with the utmost care. Explicit details and prolonged focus on sexually violent contact should be avoided.
- The combination of violence and sexuality in a way designed to titillate should not be shown.
- When real or fictitious killings, including assassinations are shown, the coverage should not be explicit or prolonged or repeated gratuitously.

## Violence in News Programmes

News, current affairs and factual programmes will by their nature often contain violent, disturbing or alarming material. A broadcaster's duty to inform includes communicating and analysing the facts about violent events. Broadcasters should not try to sanitize by omission a world in which much violence and brutality occurs. When such scenes are included to serve the public interest, the fact that violence has painful and bloody consequences should be made clear.

The decision whether to broadcast certain pictures or sounds which portray violence must be based on their newsworthiness and reporting value, together with a proper regard for the susceptibilities of audiences to the detail of what is broadcast. Many news events are violent and involve injury and death but reports should never linger on corpses or the sufferings of the wounded. Wide-shots of the dead may be necessary to make a point but unnecessary close-ups should be avoided. Editors must use judgment and discretion in deciding the amount of graphic detail to be shown.

Scenes of suffering should be used only when necessary to an understanding of information important to the public. Discretion is necessary in showing harrowing sights and if used, they should not be prolonged unnecessarily. Private grief may sometimes have a legitimate pro-

gramme purpose but must not be exploited for sensational effect and personal privacy must be respected.

With some news stories, a sense of shock is part of a full understanding of what has happened. There may be occasions when it is judged necessary to use material that will shock, but this should be done only after very careful consideration. Where a particular sequence is likely to disturb, distress or offend some of the audience, the broadcaster has a responsibility to provide a prior warning.

The more often viewers are shocked, the more it will take to shock them. Some of the material will involve images of the aftermath of violent acts, rather than the act itself.

Consideration needs to be given to the time of day when any violent sequences are shown. Particular care needs to be exercised in the editing of pictures for bulletins likely to be seen by vulnerable groups such as children.

Where appropriate, news segments should be preceded with a warning that the material may be distressing to some viewers or listeners.

## DISORDER, KIDNAPPING AND HOSTAGES

Each broadcasting organisation will have its own rules for covering demonstrations and protests. In some cases of rioting and civil disorder, it is clear the presence of cameras and microphones can provoke further violence. On the other hand there is evidence in other situations to show that the presence of the media has had a moderating effect on violent incidents.

When plans are being made to cover events where civil violence might be expected, every precaution should be taken to ensure that the presence of journalists, cameras and microphones is not a provocation. If journalists are by their presence seeming to aggravate a potentially dangerous situation they should cease using recording equipment and in some cases even conceal it.

Reporting on hostage-taking acts, terrorism, riots and civil disorder puts a heavy responsibility on the broadcaster. Journalists must ensure they do not further endanger the lives of the hostages or interfere with the efforts of the authorities to secure their release. They must guard against being used or manipulated by terrorists/hostage-takers.

No live or recorded broadcast of a statement by or an interview with a terrorist/hostage-taker or hostage should take place without authorization at a very senior level. It is likely that authorization would be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

In protracted incidents and where hostages are involved, broadcasters must be aware of the danger that anything they say on air may be overheard by the kidnappers/hostage-takers. Reporting must be strictly factual. Do not speculate about what has happened or what may happen. Journalists and camera crew must follow advice of the police about what they can report so as not to exacerbate the situation.

Occasionally the police may ask broadcasting organizations and the media to withhold or even include some piece of information. In complying be sure you never knowingly broadcast something you know to be untrue.

Great care is needed over language used in terrorist incidents. Terrorist groups often use military and judicial terms to give themselves status.

# BOMB WARNINGS

News organizations sometimes receive telephone warnings from people claiming to have planted bombs. Pass on such warnings immediately to the police and emergency services. The warnings may well be preceded by a special code so the broadcaster knows they are genuine and not hoaxes. In reporting bomb warnings, the broadcaster must never reveal the code words used by callers. If a broadcaster becomes aware of bomb alerts at specific locations it may be appropriate for programmes to report them even before it is known for certain whether they are genuine or merely hoaxes. Editors have to balance the need to inform and warn the public against the importance of not giving publicity to hoaxers.

Do not normally report terrorist threats against particular individuals unless the threats have produced a serious and evident effect. E.g. the cancellation of a public appearance.

Care should be taken filming the homes of people whose position clearly puts them at risk (politicians, senior military, members of the security services, judges). Avoid giving any detail, which might aid a terrorist attack. This includes exact locations, detailed plans of buildings, aerial pictures, readable shots of vehicle number plates etc. Likewise details of anti-terrorist devices should not be revealed.

Care must also be taken not to identify as possible targets for a terrorist attack people who would otherwise not be in danger – e.g. avoid naming companies working for military establishments or animal laboratories (if revealing the latter could put them at increased risk from animal rights campaigners.)

## **Interviews with Terrorists and Guerrilla Leaders**

This is permissible only on occasions where the public interest in doing so outweighs the outrage and offence such interviews are likely to arouse in viewers/listeners. Permission would have to be granted at the highest levels.

## **Suicide**

Suicide is a legitimate subject for news reporting. Any portrayal of suicide requires a high degree of sensitivity and reports should avoid glamorising the story. They should also avoid graphic or technical details of suicide methods. Broadcasters should not put out material, which is likely to incite or encourage self-harm or suicidal behaviour.

# DEMONSTRATIONS

Protests and demonstrations and the right to conduct them are part of the democratic process. They take many forms, including marches, the occupation of buildings or other places, picket lines, sit-ins, hunger strikes and similar initiatives by individuals or groups.

Many public events are planned and conducted largely with media coverage in mind, particularly protests and demonstrations. Demonstrators have increasingly sought media coverage by positioning themselves prominently at large or important public events or by trying to disrupt these events. The potential for manipulation of coverage is often great. Canada's CBC requires its journalists to observe the following guidelines:

- The decision to cover a demonstration should not be communicated to anyone outside the broadcasting organization.
- Journalists must maintain their distance from organizers and demonstrators.
- Reporting teams should be wary of persons or groups who are clearly putting on a performance for the cameras or microphones.
- Reporting teams must not make any suggestions or requests to demonstrators, which could lead to staging of events.
- Journalists should inquire into and report on the identity of the organizers, the aim of the demonstration and the number of those taking part.
- When a planned public event is disturbed by a demonstration, the event itself should still receive the coverage it merits.
- The decision to broadcast a report must be based on the importance of the event, protest or demonstration, rather than on the sounds and images it provides.

All India Radio adds further advice, based on its experience of covering communal unrest:

- When riots and communal clashes occur in any part of the country, AIR broadcasts should help to defuse the situation and restore amity, order and confidence.
- While facts should not be distorted or suppressed, they should be presented in a manner, which should serve the national interest. As a rule treat all such news in a low key.
- If riots are of a communal nature, do not identify the communities concerned. Even if delayed, information about clashes, such as casualties, should be given after proper verification. They should be attributed to a dependable source. Only such views as would defuse the situation should be highlighted.
- Never offend any particular community or religion.
- While reporting disturbed situations, avoid references, which may create panic among people and induce violent or emotional reaction among communities or sections of people.
- Unconfirmed reports and hearsay in disturbed situations are best ignored.

# FAIRNESS AND STRAIGHT DEALING

Programmes should be based on fairness, openness, and straight dealing. Contributors should be treated honestly and with respect. From the start, programme makers should be as clear as they can about the nature of the programme and its purpose. They should be open about their plans and honest with everyone taking part in a programme.

Whether they are public figures or ordinary citizens, contributors ought to be able to assume that they will be dealt with in a fair way. They should not feel misled, deceived or misrepresented before, during or after the programme. Contributors have a right to know:

- What a programme is about.
- What kind of contribution they are expected to make (interview, take part in a discussion), who the other participants are, whether it will be live or recorded and whether it will be edited. They should not be given a guarantee that their contribution will be broadcast. But programme makers should not record a substantial contribution unless they expect to use it.
- The need for fairness applies equally to people asked for help and advice in the preparation of programmes. They should be told why they are being contacted and what the programme is about.

The only occasion when programme makers are not frank with contributors is where there is a clear interest when dealing with serious illegal or anti-social behaviour. Deception should be the minimum necessary and only after approval has been granted by a senior broadcasting official.

Some contributors may ask to see/hear a copy of the programme before it is broadcast. It is generally unwise to agree to this – for legal reasons and to maintain editorial independence. There may be special circumstances when a preview is allowed without surrendering editorial control.

## Embargoes

When programmes accept material under embargo, the policy must be to observe it. Sometimes it may be possible to persuade the organization that has imposed the embargo to lift it – sometimes other media break it. In this case, it may be justified to do likewise. The more widespread the disregarding of an embargo, the more justifiable it is to follow suit.

## Anonymity

There is no absolute obligation to name all programme contributors, though in most cases, both contributors and audiences would expect speakers to be identified, especially if the contribution is significant. Sometimes, a decision is taken not to name a person in order to protect that person.

# PRIVACY

Privacy in the broadest sense means being left alone. It means protecting an individual's personal and private life, as opposed to his/her public life, from intrusion or exposure to public view. Intrusion is justified only when the individual's private life impinges on or becomes part of his/her public life, is relevant to discussion of a public issue or becomes a matter of legitimate public concern.

"Any intrusions have to be justified by serving a greater good. Private behaviour, correspondence and conversation should not be brought into the public domain unless there is a wider public issue." (BBC Guidelines)

## Private Lives and Public Issues

Public figures are in a special position, but they still have rights to a private life. The public should be given facts that bear upon an individual's ability to perform their duties or his/her suitability for office. The public does not have the right to know about a public figure's private behaviour provided it is legal and does not raise important wider issues (even if the newspapers are full of it).

An individual's legitimate right to privacy must be respected. Broadcasters should not do anything that entails intrusion into private grief and distress unless it is justified by overriding considerations of public interest. But in certain circumstances, the public's right to information may take precedence over privacy:

- The public has a right to receive information about public figures and public institutions if the information is in the public interest.
- Invasion of privacy may be justified in order to give information that has a bearing on someone's performance of public duties and on any matter of public interest.
- It is important to distinguish between those aspects of the private lives of public figures that are pertinent to their public duties, and those, which are not.
- Where it does not affect public interest, public figures should have the same right to privacy as others.

The right to privacy is qualified by:

- Public interest: people are less entitled to privacy when protection of privacy means concealing matters, which are against the public interest.
- Behaviour: people are less entitled to privacy where their behaviour is criminal or seriously anti-social.
- Location: the right to privacy is clearly much greater in a place such as a private home than it is in a public place.



# COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

A broadcaster is responsible for the quality and standards of all programmes on its services. This includes programmes produced by its own staff as well as co-productions or bought in material. It is important that the public have opportunities to express their opinions on programmes and to make complaints if they wish. A public service broadcaster must be accountable to its viewers and listeners. It has to monitor and respond to public concerns whether they are expressed in the form of letters, phone calls or e-mails or are raised by newspapers or other media, or through formal means.

With so many programme services being provided each day errors may occur from time to time. Each station will have its own rules and formulas for dealing with any complaints it receives from the public. Usually it will have a special department to deal with such matters. There are several generally accepted ways of dealing with complaints.

## Correcting Mistakes

When a serious factual error does occur it is important to admit it clearly and frankly. Saying what was wrong, and offering an apology, if appropriate, can be an important factor in making an effective correction.

Inaccuracy can lead to complaints of unfairness. Where an error is acknowledged, a timely correction may have the effect of persuading the person who made the complaint from taking the matter further.

## Complaints

It is important that complaints receive a prompt reply, even if initially it is simply an acknowledgment while the complaint is investigated. More serious complaints are likely to be

- A claim of unjust or unfair treatment in a programme.
- Unwarranted infringement of privacy over the way material in a programme was obtained.
- The portrayal of violence or sexual behaviour or use of foul language in a programme
- Other matters of taste and decency.

Some broadcasters, such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation lay down a time scale for the handling of complaints. There must be a reply within four weeks of receipt of a complaint. In Britain, anyone can complain to the Broadcasting Standards Commission about matters of taste and decency within three weeks of the transmission of a radio programme and within two months of the last showing of a television programme.

In the first instance, the broadcaster should consider whether the complaint is reasonable. If so, something should be done about it. If not, the broadcaster should reject the complaint - courteously.

If a complaint is received while a programme is still live on air, a correction may be made during or immediately after the programme. This is a decision, which will be up to the most

senior editorial person present.

Many people prefer the immediacy and informality of making a complaint by telephone. If the person simply wants his/her complaint noted, audience contact staff will register their comments. If the caller is not satisfied, usually he/she should be asked to put the complaint in writing. This is the most appropriate action where the matter is more serious and complex, or where a caller becomes abusive.

If the caller has problems in writing (language, literacy or disability) alternative arrangements will need to be made to obtain a written record of the complaint.

Once a complaint has been lodged, the department, which deals with the public, will refer the matter to the department, which produced the programme and ask for a detailed response.

When there is a threat that legal action may be taken, the broadcaster's legal department should be informed and its advice sought.

### **Pursuing Complaints**

If a person who has made a complaint is not satisfied with the station's response, it may be appropriate to refer the matter for further investigation. Stations have different ways of dealing with these matters. In Britain, for example, the BBC Governors consider appeals from viewers and listeners dissatisfied with the Corporation's response. Every quarter, they publish a bulletin outlining complaints that have been upheld and saying what action has been taken as a result. This is a public document available on the BBC's public website.

If a complaint is upheld the broadcaster will be expected to publish a summary of the complaint and the findings. It may be required to broadcast these findings on screen or on air as well as to publish the verdict in the newspapers.

**Published by: UNESCO, New Delhi (INDIA)**

**Printed by: MEDIA WORKSHOP INDIA PVT LTD**