

University releases journalism practice book

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Department of Journalism and Media Studies of the Polytechnic Constituent College of the University of Malawi has released a 228-page book titled *Journalism Practice in Malawi: History, Progress and Prospects*.

It is expected that the book will stop journalism students and scholars from depending on international publications with contents that do not apply to Malawi.

The book, a UNESCO funded project has brought together nine journalism lecturers from the university as well as an official from UNESCO who have tackled different aspects of journalism to produce seven chapters.

These include 'Origins, Development and Management of the Newspaper Industry in Malawi', 'Origins, Growth and Development of the Broadcasting Industry in Malawi' and 'Online Journalism in Malawi: Emergence, Challenges and Prospects'.

The other areas covered include, 'Media in the Service of Human and Social Development', 'Media Markets and Commodification of News', 'Freedom of Expression, Journalism and Media Ethics in Malawi: Theory and Practice' as well as 'General Principles of Print Media Practice'.

Acting deputy executive secretary for Malawi National Commission for UNESCO, Emmanuel Kondowe said UNESCO has been supporting the training of journalists at the Polytechnic since 1998 when the degree programme was launched.

"The book is building on that support," he said. "It is primarily meant to give journalism students at the Polytechnic and elsewhere in Malawi, a locally relevant resource for studying journalism and thus supplement other resources currently available."

Well received by media

Most media practitioners in Malawi have applauded the production of the book large section of them describing it as a welcome development in the field and sending congratulatory messages to all the authors.

Kondowe said it is UNESCO's interest to help countries reap the benefits that communication and information hold for the enhancement of democracy, development and dialogue.

"The organisation is currently placing particular emphasis [on] freedom of expression and information," said Kondowe.

One journalist who opted for anonymity said with such a publication, it is quite amazing to see how journalism has become of age in the country and playing its rightful role in keeping those in public offices accountable and honest.

Apart from Kondowe as one of the book's editors, other editors include Pascal Kishindo, professor of Linguistics at the University of Malawi's Chancellor College and Dr. Francis Mkandawire executive secretary at the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO and these were language editor and assistant language editor respectively.

Focusing on Malawi media

The foreword, written by Kondowe, states from the onset that it has been specifically written to complement the resources available to the Journalism Degree Bachelor of Arts Journalism Programme, offered by the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at the Malawi Polytechnic.

Covering various areas of journalism but mostly with specific reference to Malawi, the book aims at availing a resource tailored to the issues and the practice of journalism in Malawi as there is an abundance of resources for journalism training which are not country-specific.

One of the editors at Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Mzati Nkolokosa said he believes the department needs to be applauded for this book.

"My request is that circulation or distribution to those who may need it is a must," he said.

Chapter One

In Chapter One the book traces the 130 year-old history of the development of the newspaper industry in Malawi from around the 1800s when pioneer publications were established, first by early missionaries then by government and the private sector.

The authors of this chapter Edward Chitsulo, part-time lecturer at the institution and managing editor for Nation Publications Limited (NPL) and Grey Mang'anda dean of Education and Media Studies at the Polytechnic have written on 'Origins, Development and Management of the Newspaper Industry in Malawi'.

Nkolososa says this is a one stop print media history chapter that eases a researcher's work because in the past one had to read here and there to gather pieces of print media history in Malawi.

The foreword of the books says the chapter examines how over the years the private sector print media has grown to dominate the industry; how the church media has slowly thinned out due to lack of financial sustainability and possibly outliving its key thematic areas of taking the gospel to the "natives".

It also examines how government publications have remained in the background almost becoming irrelevant among readers who are looking for something more engaging, relevant and answering to the dynamic imperatives of today.

Chapter Two

The book's second chapter brings to the fore the 'Origin, development and structures of the broadcasting industry in Malawi'.

Written by lecturers Ellard Manjawira and Peter Mitunda who have both worked at MBC, Chapter two provides a fair balance of theory and practice.

"In all fairness, the chapters on print media and broadcast media have done justice to media history in Malawi in general. It is up to the rest of us or next such work to be particular," says Nkolokosa.

The chapter identifies key players, as well as factors leading to its growth and development by analyzing trends in the broadcasting sector during three distinct phases of Malawi's political history, namely, the colonial period (1891-1964), the independence one-party era (1964-1994), and the multi-party democratic period (1994 to date).

'Online Journalism in Malawi: Emergence, Challenges and Prospects' written by another Polytechnic lecturer Francis Chikunkhuzeni comes as chapter three which raises questions about online journalism.

Nkolokosa says these are questions that will leave journalists thinking.

"Not just about the possible answers he has provided, but your own suggestions on such tricky issues as blogging and what we are calling citizen journalism because the question of the definition of online journalism is interesting," he says.

The chapter presents an analysis of online journalism practice in Malawi by highlighting its development stages, the manner in which it is currently practiced, contemporary challenges and prospects for the future.

"The chapter accomplishes this by defining online journalism to determine whether or not Malawi has any online journalism, then it outlines the emergence and development of online journalism in Malawi and explores the extent to which online journalism in Malawi exploits the potential offered by key features that distinguish traditional media from online media," explains Kondowe.

Human and social development in media

Media researcher and lecturer Levi Zeleza Manda authored chapter four which introduces the reader to the concept of human and social development and outlines the criteria and theories used to classify the world and rate the levels of development for each country in the world.

It illustrates the links between media practice and development. It also outlines the major models and praxes that have dominated the application of communication to development and relates all these to Malawi.

The chapter called 'Media in the Service of Human and Social Development' is a piece that challenges all of media practitioners about the goals of their work.

Nkolokosa says there is a stealth question about the place of profit in the course of journalists' duty, which should be a service to human and social development.

"The chapter has tackled a number of areas of development that it is impossible to discuss them in detail in one chapter. But Mr. Manda has done great work that should initiate debate," he says.

Freedom of expression and the press

Chapter five discusses some of the theories that have been advanced to explain freedom of expression and the press, understood by both the print and electronic media.

The chapter written by Kondowe reviews journalism practices in Malawi in the light of the normative theories and the attendant issues so as to present a theoretical basis of the link between freedom of expression and the press.

Along the way it makes some observations on the status of theory and press practice in Malawi.

"Of course, there is no practice without theory and I fear when people dismiss theory in favour of practice," says Nkolokosa on the chapter which is titled Freedom of Expression, Journalism and Media Ethics in Malawi: Theory and Practice.

Economic characteristics of news; structure of media markets

Chapter six tackles the area that most media practitioners tend to dodge as it discusses economic characteristics of news and structure of media markets in Malawi.

It begins with an explanation of economic theory followed by a section dedicated to explaining economic characteristics of news. The chapter also examines the media market structure.

This chapter called 'Media Markets and Commodification of News' is a professionally engaging entry of the book written by Maclan Kanyang'wa who is head of journalism and media Studies at Polytechnic and Simeon Mkwaila, an economist resident in the Faculty of Commerce at the same institution.

They raise questions of marketing news as a commodity or good and market forces.

"Common characteristics of news as a product are discussed and if you are running a news organisation, however, small, this chapter is a must read for you," says Nkolokosa in his review.

Costly Mtogolo, head of journalism at Malawi Polytechnic, has done the final and seventh chapter where he is discussing the obtaining environment of the Malawian journalist working in the media in Malawi.

The chapter is said to be putting into perspective the mandate of the journalist in making decisions and in disseminating information to the public besides presenting the different skills and techniques of interviewing and drafting news items and goes on to review the relationship between the media and Government with observable examples.

The chapter, called General Principles of Print Media Practice has been authored in such a way that it has an engaging approach on the environment in which journalists work.

"The chapter leaves one with a thought of how they should work, how they should gather news and how they should relate with news sources and everybody else in the news chain," says Nkolokosa.

He says the writers in the book have achieved several goals, one of which is engaging readers to think anew about old questions of journalism theory and practice.

"I hope the rest of us will begin to engage our media scholars on questions that bother us so that together we can tackle them; [this] book...is a great starting point," says Nkolokosa.

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