

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE WORLD JOURNALISM EDUCATION COUNCIL (WJEC) SPONSORED ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE ON "BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE CLASSROOM AND THE NEWSROOM," HELD AT BIODUN SHOBANJO CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN MULTI-MEDIA AND CINEMATROGRAPHY, DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, NIGERIA ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2021.**

There were 223 participants in attendance, 97 of which were physically present and 126 participated online. The physical attendance was made up of members of the academia, media professionals, media regulatory agencies, media professional associations, civil society groups, policy makers, and some select postgraduate and undergraduate students. The roundtable also attracted robust coverage by the popular print, broadcast and online media organisations in the country. A most distinguished Editor-in-Chief of many major Nigerian newspapers and former Ogun State Governor, Aremo Olusegun Osoba, CON, was the Chairman with Dr. Biodun Shobanjo, one of the major employers of mass communication graduates and the country's pacesetter in integrated communications, as the Special Guest of Honour.

The roundtable conference was kick-started by the Convener, Africa's Representative on the Council of World Journalism Education Congress, Professor Ralph Afolabi Akinfeleye of Nigeria, who spoke on "Journalism Training: Beyond the Inverted Pyramid Formular." He noted that classroom used to be ahead of the newsroom and that the reverse is the case today.

He lamented that while students who go for internship these days are not exposed to the rudiments of the job, Journalism teachers rather go to other universities for their sabbaticals instead of going to the industry to learn new practices. He urged editors to leave the newsroom and come to the classroom for their sabbaticals so as to improve their knowledge on theretical framework and research in journalism.

He noted that newsroom and classroom are capital intensive especially in these days of digital technology. He challenged media regulatory agencies to be mindful of the proliferation of journalism schools which is negatively affecting journalism practice and standard. For instance, in a skill course such as news writing, news reporting, editing and graphics of communication, broadcasting, announcing and performance, broadcast management and organisation etc., over 250 students in a class for one teacher to teach, is humanly impossible to achieve the goals of the courses. He cautioned the approving agencies to curtail the unhealthy approval of journalism schools without appropriate infrastructure such as studios, laboratories and other facilities. He drew curtains on his presentation by emphasising that establishment of journalism schools should not be seen as establishing gas or petro stations.

### **GOODWILL MESSAGES**

Professor Adepoju Tejumaiye, Head of Department of Mass Communication of University of Lagos, expressed the opinion that journalists, Journalism teachers and media owners have the responsibility to ensure that Journalism graduates fit into the field. He added that the reward system is also important to the performance of the profession.

Professor Oluwatoyin Ogundipe, FAS, Vice Chancellor of University of Lagos, started by reeling out some achievements of the University of Lagos after he became Vice Chancellor in 2017.

These included rise among universities in global ranking, a library with Robots that can assist in searching for books, receipt of research grants and the focus of University of Lagos on research, innovation and entrepreneurship so that the students will be able to compete globally and avoid publishing news that cannot be verified.

He described Nigerian Journalism practice as "Jungle Journalism" with falsehoods and unreal stories that could destroy destinies or cause death. He encouraged the media to focus on positive news.

While stressing that Nigeria cannot afford to be a failed nation whose citizens could end up as refugees in other countries, Prof Ogundipe underscored the need for the government to be responsible, and the citizens must endeavour to support the government.

Dr. Kunle Ogedengbe, HoD, Mass Communication as well as Acting Dean of Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences of Trinity University, Lagos, who represented the Vice Chancellor, Prof Charles Korede Ayo, congratulated Prof Akinfeleye for convening the roundtable, while also acknowledging the contribution of Professor Akinfeleye in the establishment of the Mass Communication programme of his university. He promised that his University will not let Nigeria down in the area of professional training of journalists.

Mr. Jimi Awosika, an alumnus of University of Lagos Mass Communication Department, and Vice Chairman of Troyka Holdings, an integrated marketing communication company, spoke on behalf of his Chairman, Dr. Biodun Shobanjo, the Special Guest of Honour. He stressed that relationship between the university and the community is important.

In advocating for a shift of emphasis in education and training, he pointed out that today's digital age rewards what you do and not what you know, while also noting that in the past, teaching standard was very high and the lecturers gave a sense of purpose to the students in their efforts to produce the future professionals.

He submitted that improvements must reach all professions in Nigeria, and not just Journalism, so that Nigeria will be able to compete globally.

He noted that Nigeria's digital revolution is driven from the hub in Yaba in Lagos State, and not from the universities as it would have been expected.

In acknowledging that bridging the gap between the classroom and the newsroom was uppermost in the mind of Professor Akinfeleye, Professor Olusola Oyero, HoD, Mass Communication, Anchor University, Lagos, who spoke on behalf of his Vice Chancellor, revealed that Anchor University regularly invites professionals in the media industry to interact with their students, in order to prepare the students ready for the industry.

Mr. Gbenga Adefaye, Editor-in-Chief of Vanguard Newspapers Limited and Provost, Nigerian Institute of Journalism (NIJ), who described the roundtable as timely, said he would always employ only those who can write news and features and can conduct interviews.

He however added that not only students, but those already in the industry also need to constantly upgrade their skills by going back to the classroom.

Chief Segun Osoba, former Managing Director of Herald Newspapers, Sketch Newspapers and Daily Times Newspapers, and former Governor of Ogun State of Nigeria, revealed that he was one of the pioneer students of the Institute of Journalism, precursor of the Department of Mass Communication of University of Lagos, that was initiated by International Press Institute

(IPI) in the 1960s. He regretted that the IPI grant was withdrawn after the crisis that resulted from the succession to the office of the Vice Chancellor of the University.

He noted that the British emphasise learning Journalism on-the-job training more than in the classroom. He however thinks that a good way to bridge the gap between the classroom and the newsroom is for institutions of higher education, like University of Lagos, to appoint professionals in industry as Adjunct Professors or Professors of Practice. This would encourage them to share their practical experiences with university students.

Chief Osoba thinks that the major problems of Journalism in Nigeria are issues of fake news, dearth of investigative journalism, and slow adoption of digital technology. He suggested that one way to raise the standard of practice of online publications in Nigeria is for trained Journalism professionals to own and practise on digital space. He added that online publications and professionals must be registered by the Nigeria Union of Journalists.

He disagreed with the proposed Nigeria Press Council Act that he said would not help the profession, and pointed out that the ethics of the profession has already taught the journalism professionals the discretion to determine what to publish and what to withhold.

He blamed government for failure to inform the public of the good jobs it has been doing since it assumed office in 2015 and regretted that public figures complicate issues for themselves when they deny or withhold news about their health. He insists that public figures, who are maintained at public expense, no longer have a private life.

## **PANELISTS**

**PROFESSOR ARMSTRONG IDACHABA – MEDIA REGULATOR (National Broadcasting Commission, NBC)**

Professor Armstrong Idachaba who is a Director, Broadcast Monitoring and Evaluation as well as immediate past Acting Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), noted that while some old media houses are reinventing, the new ones have no professional foundation.

He explained that NBC has responsibility to maintain standards in the broadcasting industry based on the broadcasting code of ethics. He revealed that the NBC Act gives the NBC powers to ensure growth of manpower by drawing up curriculum for the training of broadcasters. He added that the NBC also has responsibility to set up training codes for students of broadcasting and broadcast engineering in universities.

He lamented that some university radio stations choose to employ professionals from the community and fail to expose broadcast students to the use of the equipment and suggested a roster for broadcast students in the studio. He is of the opinion that those in the industry have a responsibility to tell the universities the trends in the industry as well as the manpower needs of the industry.

**PROFESSOR LAI OSO – MEDIA TRAINER**

Lai Oso, a Professor of Communication and former Dean of School of Communication at Lagos State University, observed that a major cause of the gap between the classroom and the newsroom is in the poor academic foundation of students admitted into the universities.

Those kinds of students, he submitted, couldn't be good enough for training and for use in the industry. He decried that many students today are unable to maintain relationships with their lecturers as of old. He lamented that there are little resources available to teach larger numbers of students in the classroom, contrary to the past where there were fewer students in the classroom. He added that many students today, not only failed to buy recommended textbooks, they usually threw away those they have bought after their final examinations.

Professor Oso, who is also Chairman of the committee that oversees the unbundling of Mass Communication education in Nigerian universities, thinks veterans of the profession should write their memoirs as an effort to compile the history of the media in Nigeria. He thinks the National Universities Commission (NUC) should raise admissions standards for university students as he admonishes university lecturers to be more serious with their responsibilities and be willing to collaborate with professionals in the field.

Also, he advocates that the universities should appoint Adjunct lecturers from the field.

#### **PROFESSOR INNOCENT OKOYE – MEDIA TRAINER**

Professor Innocent Okoye of Afe Babalola University disclosed that a survey that he conducted in the past indicated that employers in the media have low assessment of university graduates and were also deficient in the use of information technology for page planning when compared to those of polytechnics who were more productive.

He recommended that university lecturers must stress practicals, write textbooks on Communication, insist that students must do the needful, ensure that they promptly grade the assignments and examination of their students and show them areas where they need improvement.

He suggested that those who wish to study Journalism must have the flair and be interested in current affairs. He concluded by stressing the need to encourage females to go into the Journalism profession.

#### **GBENGA ADEFAYE – EMPLOYER OF JOURNALISM GRADUATES**

Mr Gbenga Adefaye, Editor-in-Chief of Vanguard Newspapers, who is currently on sabbatical as the provost of the Nigeria Institute of Journalism (NIJ) observed that in 2021 action in Journalism is more online than in newspapers, magazines or even the broadcast media.

He admonished today's journalists to regard themselves more as content providers and must constantly go on further training, because everything is about content and skills set in these days of technological convergence.

He thinks journalists must be knowledgeable in the subject areas of other professions, must broaden their knowledge base in order to be good specialists and must continue to upgrade their skills.

He suggested that even the lecturers and those already working in the industry must be retrained. He added that journalists must develop skills set to debunk fake news.

But more importantly he suggested that Journalism lecturers must have working knowledge of the profession to be able to help the students.

#### **COMMENTS**

#### DR AKIN AKINGBULU – CEO OF A MEDIA ORGANISATION

Dr Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of Institute for Media and Society (IMESO), acknowledged that Professor Akinfeleye led in the advocacy for pluralisation of broadcasting in Nigeria and that this led to emergence of university campus radios and community radios in Nigeria. He recommended capacity building and retraining for professionals in the media.

#### MR. JIMI AWOSIKA – EMPLOYER OF JOURNALISM GRADUATE

Mr Jimi Awosika, Vice Chairman of Troyka Group, who suggested that a problem identified is 50 per cent solved, thinks that Communication scholars need to now ask themselves what has to be done now that the problems of the press have been identified.

He noted that the issue at hand is that of the problems of reality and of perception. He therefore warns against hoping to achieve future outcomes with current capabilities.

He then suggested the diagram of a four-sided model with Current Capabilities placed at the base of the rectangle, and Current Outcomes along the vertical line on the left. The Future Capabilities are on the top horizontal line, while the vertical line to the right shows the Future Outcomes.

#### PROFESSOR ABIGAIL OGWEZZY-NDISIKA – MEDIA TRAINER

Abigail Ogwezzy-Ndisika, a professor of Mass Communication as former Head of Department of Mass Communication of University of Lagos, suggested that industry should not only assist in providing infrastructure for the universities, but should also consider getting more involved in capacity building for trainers in the universities.

#### **ISSUES IDENTIFIED**

Discussants and commentators at the roundtable raised the following issues: Classrooms are no longer ahead of the newsrooms; Journalism students are no longer exposed to the run of the profession when they go for internship in media houses; and Journalism students lack the academic foundations and flair.

The discussants also observed that Journalism lecturers rather go for their sabbaticals in other universities instead of going to the field and practise journalism, while media professionals also refused to go to the classroom and learn other concepts in journalism such as fake news, hate speech, media literacy, compo journalism and other new trends in the profession.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The roundtable recommended that Journalists, Journalism teachers and media owners must ensure that Journalism graduates fit into the industry; the reward system in the industry must be adequate; media must stress positive news.

They also recommended that relationship between the universities and the community should include all professions and not just Journalism; and there must be a shift in the content of what is taught to reflect the new digital technology.

In addition, they recommended that journalists should be able to write news and feature stories and conduct interviews; both Journalism teachers and those in the field must constantly upgrade their skills; universities should appoint Adjunct lecturers with practical experiences from the industry; bloggers must be registered by the Nigeria Union of

Journalists; and trained journalists must begin to operate on online media. They canvassed the stoppage of unhealthy proliferation of journalism schools so as to reduce the gap between the newsroom and the classroom.

### **RAPORTEURS**

Kabir Alabi Garba, Editor, The Guardian on Sunday, Guardian Newspapers Limited, Lagos - Chairman

Lekan Sote, Columnist, The Punch Newspaper - Co-Chairman

Dr. Kunle Ogedengbe, HoD, Mass Communication, Trinity University, Lagos - Member

Rev Father Peter Akodu, Communication Department of the Catholic Church Nigeria - Member

Babatunde Faustino, Mass Communication Department, University of Lagos - Member

Ibiremi Ibikunle, Reporter, Gatekeepers News- Member