

# Needs assessment on promoting ethics and transparency in Pakistani media



PAKISTAN PRESS FOUNDATION  
AN INDEPENDENT MEDIA RESEARCH, DOCUMENTATION AND TRAINING CENTER

in collaboration with



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with Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism



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# PAKISTAN PRESS FOUNDATION

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## 1 - Executive Summary:

Across the world, media as an industry faces challenges that are social, political, and commercial. The environment is fiercely competitive, and today's world is a place where events have been unfolding at an unprecedented pace. The demands from the consumers of the media to be constantly fed information that is accurate, and current, puts additional pressures on the media practitioners. They have to work very hard at balancing the demands of their trade while remaining within the confines of ethics, which is what journalism is all about.

The debate on ethical journalism has been taking place not only in the context of consumer complaints, but also by the flag-bearers of principled journalism. Societal watchdogs have also sounded an alarm over media's potential to cause harm if it indulges in irresponsible practices. This has led to introspection, and a growing body of media persons have come together to promote the cause of ethical journalism.

This however, does not mean that merely sounding out a note of cautions would right the balance. It is the considered opinion of the experts the media needs to adopt certain practices, and there need to be certain processes in place within the media organizations that would provide an enabling environment for ethical practices to flourish.

Situation in Pakistan is even more critical than in most places. Regional instability and internal conflict, and rise in extremism pose an added challenge to the ones already mentioned above. Pressures by the State, as well as non-state actors have even translated into loss of lives, making Pakistan one of the most dangerous places for journalists.

The assessment of ethical standards in Pakistan's media has to be done in this context. This report is an attempt at a needs assessment of the processes that need to be in place for the media to function within the confines of ethics.

It has focused on some media organizations that have the reputation of being trend-setters, and through dialogue with industry stakeholders, identified some gaps which are responsible for ethical compromises.

The report also presents a set of recommendations, prepared in consultation with the stakeholders like media owners, practitioners and civil society organizations. The consultations held helped in identifying a process through which to address these compromises on an industry level, so that initiatives do not remain confined to individual media houses.

## 2 - Organizations Responsible for the Research

### 2.1- PPF

Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) is an independent media documentation and training center non-governmental organization committed to promoting and defending freedom of expression.

PPF was established in 1967 as a non-profit organization and continued working until 1974, when it had to suspend operations due to the political environment then prevailing in the country. It was reactivated in 1992, and has since been involved in assisting the development of independent media in Pakistan by conducting training programs for journalists, carrying out projects in research and documentation and campaigning to defend and promote freedom of the press.

The aim of the PPF is to establish an effective network of media and journalists throughout Pakistan to gather and document information concerning violations against the press so that they may be able to monitor and defend freedom of expression.

PPF helps to raise the standard of journalism in Pakistan and to promote and defend freedom of expression in Pakistan and internationally through the media, greater awareness of social and development issues and to encourage research on mass communication in Pakistan.

PPF organizes media training programs and seminars, in rural centers as well as in the cities, on issues faced by Pakistani media. The organization has worked for the improvement of professional skills, and in helping to raise journalists' awareness on professional, social, political and human-rights issues as well as those related to the environment.

### 2.2 - Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism

The Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism is a network of media professional groups and leading journalists who are working together to promote fresh debate about how to:

- Raise awareness among journalists at all levels about ethics and how to work professionally.
- Promote engagement and commitment from media owners to support good governance through transparency and accountability.

Create stronger and more credible forms of self-regulation both inside media houses and within society at large. Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism draws its members from media organizations, media outlets, media development organizations as well as civil society organizations. It has been nested in ROZAN,<sup>1</sup> which serves as its Secretariat.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.rozan.org.pk](http://www.rozan.org.pk)

## 3 - About the Author

The research has been done by Afia Salam, who has over three decades of experience of working different fields of the media. She started her career as through print journalism, joined the advertising industry, then the electronic media and finally the new media through blogs and webshows.

She is also a media trainer, and has conducted trainings in the fields of Environment, Climate Change, Gender & Labour issues, and effective use of New Media as an extension of journalism. She writes on a freelance basis for some of the leading publications of the country, and has been responsible for content creation, and co-production of documentaries. This research was commissioned to her by Pakistan Press Foundation.



## 4 - Methodology of the Research

For the purpose of this research people belonging to different tiers of four media houses chosen for this purpose were interviewed. The media houses included Geo television, Dawn newspaper (English daily), Roznama Express (Urdu daily) and Radio Mast FM 103.

As the State controlled media works under completely different set of circumstances, privately owned media channels were made the subject of research. These media houses were chosen after careful consideration as they are seen as trend setters in their fields.

It has been observed that the practices promoted by the above-mentioned media outlets have been adopted by the others. Also, because of their high profile, and perceived influence, these media houses find them under the gaze of the watchdogs, and have been taking steps for improvement in light of the feedback received.

In order to preserve the organizations' competitiveness, the analysis below at times omits details of weaknesses of specific organizations, and instead presents trends observed across organizations.

### 4.1- Departments interviewed

For this purpose, meetings were held with four tiers of organizational decision-makers between July and December 2013. These included:

- Management/Editorial
- Marketing
- Programming/editorial decision makers
- Circulation Department
- Reporters

Other than these, former employees, industry specialists, members of the academia, and representatives of trade union bodies were also interviewed.

### 4.2- Advisory Committee

The information gleaned from these meetings was collated, and analyzed to form discussion papers focusing on the four selected branches of the media. These papers were circulated among the members of the Advisory Committee comprising of:

Nisar Zuberi, Senior journalist and academician  
Javed Jabbar, Former Minister for Information  
Mohammad Ziauddin, Executive Editor, Express Tribune  
Zubeida Mustafa, Former columnist DAWN  
Murtaza Solangi, former Director General of Radio Pakistan



The members of the Advisory Committee are media persons of great experience and reputation, and their opinions, as well as contribution to the development of good journalism have been acknowledged across the media spectrum, both in Pakistan as well as outside it.

The feedback from the Advisory Committee members on the discussion papers formed the basis of a gap analysis, which was presented along with corresponding recommendations before a broader audience.

### 4.3- Round Table Discussions

This was done at two roundtables, one of which focused on the electronic media, (radio and television) and the other on the print media, (Urdu & English). The roundtable discussion was moderated by senior journalist, Mazhar Abbas.

The rationale for this needs assessment study was presented by Owais Aslam Ali, Secretary General, Pakistan Press Foundation.

Participants for the roundtable were drawn from broad spectrum of media practitioners. They included reporters, editors, producers, gatekeepers within the media outlets, owners, members of media development organizations, and civil society organization representative. Members of the Advisory Committee were also among the part of the discussion



Mazhar Abbas, Owais Aslam Ali, Shabana Arif





## 5 - Aim of the Report

This needs assessment report incorporates the outcome of the discussions of both these roundtables. In its entirety, this report attempts to provide an analysis based on an internal audit of four leading media organizations, along with interviews and discussion emanating from the stakeholder dialogue.

On one level, the case study analysis helps Pakistan's media take the first steps towards establishing a system for progress in which an internal audit identifies the gaps present in ethical reporting in a media organization, while on the other, the case studies and outcome of the stakeholder dialogue present a corresponding set of recommendations.

### 5.1- Situation analysis

Pakistani media competes fiercely for market and audience share. However, many people, including those within the media, worry about the compromises on standards and ethics of journalism and media governance due to these stresses and strains.

Intolerable time constraints, friction between journalism and commercial objectives and the need to adapt rapidly to changing market conditions take their toll. Media companies themselves often find it difficult to effectively monitor their own performance, particularly their obligation to be open, inclusive and accountable.

### 5.2- Identification of Support Mechanisms

More broadly, the research has sought to identify the support mechanisms needed by the media industry to extend the ethical journalism into all media platforms, as well as the rapidly growing and evolving field of new media.

The findings presented in this report attempt to shed light on what has worked in certain media organizations, how the gaps identified have been filled, and in what ways the identified strengths and weaknesses might be extrapolated to the entire media landscape.

**Through the dialogue process, these media stakeholders, among whom were advertisers and regulators, agreed to a proactive engagement on generating content that conforms to the norms of ethical journalism and is in line with international best practices.**

## 6 - Development of Media in Pakistan

This report aims to serve as a starting point toward a broad-based consensus definition of ethical journalism, to identify the process and practices that are essential for promoting ethical journalism within a media organization, and to begin working towards industry wide buy-in from media owners, managers, and practitioners for the those processes and practices.

During colonial times, journalism was the medium through which aspirations for independence and freedom from colonialism were articulated. Journalism was one of the main drivers of the political awakening, and most of the big names associated with journalism of the freedom movement were those of leading politicians. The English language press was dominated by Gazetteers, and some social and literary publications. People were associated with journalism more due to passion than in a professional capacity.

### 6.1-Print Media

The birth of Pakistan saw the local language newspapers taking on the dissemination of news as their main function, though most retained their political stance. However, as media grew as a profession and widened its reach to all parts of the country, we saw the birth of some quality newspapers with a balanced, non-aligned stance.



### 6.2- Categories of Newspapers:

- Mainstream national Urdu press
- Mainstream national English press
- Regional language papers or the vernacular press.

Currently there are sub-categories of Urdu newspapers which are evening newspapers with circulation in the larger cities, and the smaller, local newspapers which cater to an audience confined to either a district, or sometimes just the town from which they are being published.

### 6.2.1- Categories of publications

As far as the stance of the publications, three distinct groups developed again;

- State-owned publications
- State-influenced publications that toed the Government line, especially if they were heavily dependent on advertising from government sources
- Independent publications.

The last mentioned have had to work hard at maintaining their independence in the face of many repressive laws during dictatorial regimes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The trilogy of books by Zamir Niazi, "Press in Chains," "The Web of Censorship," and the "Press Under Siege" are essential reading for those wanting to see how the governments at various times have tried through enactment of repressive laws, takeovers, control of newsprint quotas, issuance of 'press advise,' and the notorious practice of 'pre-censorship,' tried to control the printed word.

## 6.3- Broadcast Media

While the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, or Radio Pakistan as it is known as, preceded Pakistan's birth by two days, it had also monopolized the airwaves as the State owned broadcasting medium. From 13th August 1947 to October 1998, its transmissions were heard across the country on Medium waves. The airwaves were dominated by the State run Radio Pakistan, and when television was introduced in 1964, by the Pakistan Television Corporation.<sup>3</sup>



A historic opportunity to end the State monopoly was created by the promulgation of the Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance of 14th February 1997 by the caretaker Government of President Farooq Leghari and Prime Minister Meraj Khalid which would have enabled the introduction of privately-owned TV and radio channels for the first time in Pakistan.

However, the elected Government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif serving his second term allowed this Ordinance to lapse after four months in June 1997.

It then took military-led Government of General Pervez Musharraf to revive the original EMRA law initially through a version approved in 2000 by the name of RAMBO and then eventually promulgated on 1st March 2002 as the PEMRA Ordinance.

Thus it was only in 2002 that private television channels and FM radio stations were allowed, and an umbrella regulatory body, PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority), was formed.

## 6.4- Rise of the Radio

FM stations, due to their easy of reach and audience participation, gained immediate popularity. There are currently 130 operational commercial FM stations, half a dozen Shalimar Recording Co. FM 94.6 stations and 55 ISPR led 89.4 stations across Pakistan. State run Radio Pakistan also has 36 FM transmitting stations. The complete list can be accessed on the website of PEMRA.<sup>4</sup>



The medium of radio claims no more than 4% of the entire advertising spend. The commercial viability of these stations is now facing another threat as PEMRA has raised the license fee to Rs. 30 million. At the time of granting the license to independent radio stations, the amount had been Rs..5 million.

<sup>3</sup> The history of the manner in which media, and its laws and codes have developed in Pakistan, and the organizations representing the stakeholders, like All Pakistan Newspapers' Society, Council of Newspaper Editors, Press Council of Pakistan etc. is also documented in a comprehensive publication, "Mass Media Laws and Regulations in Pakistan," compiled by Javed Jabbar, former Minister of Information and Senator, in collaboration with Qazi Faez Isa, now Chief Justice, Balochistan High Court.

<sup>4</sup> [www.pmr.gov.pk](http://www.pmr.gov.pk)



## 6.5- Growth of Television

The freeing of the electronic media from State control saw a huge jump in the choices available, and within just ten years (2002-2012) the number rose from 3 State run/owned television outlets to over 80 privately owned channels.



Most of these independent, privately owned mainstream television channels have nation-wide coverage. They mostly form a part of media houses with cross media ownership, with newspapers and radio stations as sister concerns, albeit legally separate entities.

There are also many television channels catering to a niche audience. While the experiment with English language television broadcasting did not succeed due to too small a niche to bring in the desired economic returns, there are 'specialty' channels.

These include channels dedicated to sports, entertainment, food, health, and well local, city based news. There is also a vibrant regional media, which broadcasts content in regional languages like Sindhi, Balochi, Pushto, Seraiki, Punjabi and Hindko.

## 6.6- Online Medium

The use of online medium is growing rapidly in Pakistan. Current figures place the number of internet users as close to 25m (16% of the population), 15m of whom access it through their cellular phones. The use of broadband services is also showing growth, with, about 1.7m current users. Introduction of 3G technology is likely to revolutionize the content delivery mechanism by making it accessible through cell phones.



News websites of some of the Pakistani media houses rank among the highest in searches from Pakistan. Most have a robust online present.

## 7- Regulatory Environment

The long spells of autocratic rule in the country led to spells of draconian laws and repression, including the Press and Publication Ordinance of 1962. The history of attempts at repressing the press, and capitulation of some media outlets, either through coercion or collusion, contrast sharply with some shining examples of courage and defiance to maintain independence and journalistic ethics.

### 7.1- Laws governing print media

The infamous Press and Publications Ordinance was repealed in 1988, and replaced by the Press, Newspapers, News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance (PNNABRO) of 2002. This legislation deals with procedures for registration of publications of criteria of media ownerships.

It was under this Ordinance that the former dictator Pervez Musharraf issued 'show cause' notices to some newspapers after imposition of Emergency in 2007, when some television channels were also banned from airing.

Different laws govern the press in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where no newspapers are published, and in Azad Kashmir, where publications need special permission from the regional government to operate and pro-independence publications are generally prohibited.

### **7.2 - Laws regulating Electronic media**

Electronic media is regulated through the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, which is a statutory body that issues licenses as well as regulates content that contravenes its Code of Content. Clampdowns on TV channels and FM Radio stations have been handed down through this Body.

### **7.3- Laws governing online content**

Contrary to the popular impression given because of the blockage of online content through a ban on the video sharing platform like YouTube, and removal of content deemed 'inappropriate' by the Government, there are no specific laws that govern regulation of online content in Pakistan.

Recourse is taken to other laws for surveillance, and monitoring of content, like the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, or the Fair Trials Act 2013, or other broader exceptions contained in the Constitution of Pakistan regarding 'national security,' 'blasphemy,' and 'morality.'<sup>5</sup> The takedown request made by the Government of Pakistan are made to the international companies providing the content generation platforms like Google, Facebook and Twitter, and content is blocked through directives issued to the Internet Service Providers by the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA).

However, PTA is only a licensing authority, and has no legal mandate to either monitor, or regulate content. These points have been clearly enunciated during the deliberations of the court case in Lahore High Court against the Youtube ban by Bytes4All.<sup>6</sup>

These are also detailed in the submission made to the court by the amicus curie.<sup>7</sup>

The absence of a legal mandate has also been explained by a leading lawyer in a documentary.<sup>8</sup>

## **8- Civil Society Oversight**

### **8.1- Citizens' Media Commission of Pakistan**

When the elected Government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif failed to convert the PEMRA Ordinance of 1997 into a permanent Act of Parliament, a group of concerned citizens established the first-ever civil society forum in order to conduct advocacy for freedom of electronic media and apply an independent perspective on media issues.

Thus, in the first week of December 1997, the Citizens' Media Commission of Pakistan was formed and, remained active up to about 2005. The Commission convened a large number of workshops, published monographs and observed 14th February as Electronic Media Freedom

<sup>5</sup> <http://content.bytesforall.pk/sites/default/files/MappingReportFinal%20-%20Published.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://bolobhi.org/resources/timelines/youtube-case-updates-by-bolo-bhi/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://content.bytesforall.pk/sites/default/files/BytesForAll-NetFreedom-Petition\\_0.pdf](http://content.bytesforall.pk/sites/default/files/BytesForAll-NetFreedom-Petition_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://bolobhi.org/pakistans-internet-banwagon-a-documentary-by-bolo-bhi/>

Day and also opened a new two-way channel of communication between media, Government and civil society. These dialogues prompted the government to take the necessary steps to pass the bill, converting it into an Act after the dialogues altered the overbroad terms of its mandate to make them more acceptable than the original text.

Its mandate is to facilitate and regulate the private electronic media by "improving the standards of information, education and entertainment and to enlarge the choice available to the people of Pakistan Including news, current affairs, religious knowledge, art and culture as well as science and technology."

### **8.2- Citizens' for Free and Responsible Media**

A very vigilant online community has come together in a forum titled Citizens' for Free and Responsible Media, which has been keeping a watchful eye on content and ethical practices of the media.

The search for raising the standards and introducing ethical practices is an on-going one. In a short span of just over 10 years, many milestones have been crossed.

## **9 - Judicial Intervention**

The recent example of judicial intervention, through the appointment of a 2-Member Media Commission by the Supreme Court of Pakistan was also to examine the role of the media, specifically in the context of the 2013 elections in Pakistan, but broadly to compare examples of how the media functions elsewhere and the extent of official regulation versus self-regulation that ensures adherence to ethical practices.

After submission of the Report in June 2013 to the Supreme Court, roundtable discussions with civil society members, organizations and academia were held under the banner of CIMI, Citizens' Initiative on Media issues (a successor body to the original Citizens' Media Commission of Pakistan) and the Society for Alternative Media (SAMAR, Islamabad), supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (<http://www.fes-pakistan.org/>).

The eight roundtables were attended by 367 persons representing media academia and students, civil society, journalists and professional specialists. They reviewed about 40 recommendations made by the Media Commission which include several dealing with issues of ethical journalism and overwhelmingly endorsed them. As of 2nd February 2014, the final opinion of the Supreme Court about the Report and the Recommendations is awaited. Many of the Recommendations call for reform by the media itself. However, a principal observation of the Media Commission is that self-regulation by itself has proven to be inadequate and ineffective in Pakistan to ensure ethical journalism. The set of recommendations has been formulated can be viewed online on <http://mediacommissionreview.org>

## 10 - Existing Research

The research presented in this Needs Assessment Report has also taken account of the research and analysis done by various other Pakistani and international stakeholders. Among the many reports referred to are:

### 10.1- The Asian Media Barometer<sup>12</sup>

This was compiled by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. It is a research-based analysis of elements of professionalism and ethics in the media. Dialogue and discussion about its findings help in constructing a contextualized view of the state of reporting in Pakistan.

### 10.2- Media Credibility Index

The pressures on ethical journalism that the race for ratings is deemed to bear has also led to the development of an alternate measure. Supported by Open Society Foundation, the Media Credibility Index<sup>13</sup> was launched by Mishal Pakistan, a media development organization. This index solely focuses on the content creation within the electronic media.

### 10.3- BBC Media Action

The role of the media in fostering democracy, especially in the context of the 2013 elections, also became the focus of research by BBC Media Action, and its report<sup>14</sup> traces the historical role of the media, and uses that as a context for the path it has taken to reach its present position.

## 11 - Challenges to Ethical Journalism

The organizations researched for the purpose of this Report outlined various challenges to remaining within the confines of ethical journalism. While lack of sensitization and training, along with commercial compulsions were cited as internal factors responsible for departure from ethical norms, many external factors also continue to negatively influence the content.

The challenges listed below were identified directly by stakeholders belonging to the organizations audited. They were also agreed to by the members of the Advisory Committee's. The final corroboration came through interaction with the participants of the two roundtables.

### 11.1- Regulatory Environment

An arbitrary regulatory environment caused by structural weaknesses and inefficiencies plus outright discrimination in the enforcement of regulatory frameworks limits the extent to which media organizations can use ethical journalism standards as the primary factors in deciding the way they present information.

Polarization within the journalist's representative bodies and political and bureaucratic interference in the functioning of the regulators were cited as the primary reasons why the industry had not been able to develop or implement standards that could be applied across all branches of the media.

Some content is tolerated despite transgressions of the stated regulations, while some is restricted despite there being no reason for any curbs.

In the case studies of the organizations studied for the purpose of this report, there are specific instances where pulling out of government advertising, which formed a substantial part of the revenue for a publication like Dawn, was used as a means of coercion by the government.

Radio FM103 was another target of the Regulator's (PEMRA) irregular behavior when the station's transmission was shut down arbitrarily without any show cause notice, as is required by the law, and restored without being given any reason.

The common complaint heard from the stakeholders interviewed was that there is lack of transparency, and complaints against the Regulator do not figure as such on its website, which only carries complaints against the media houses, either by the public, or by PEMRA.

There is also no common yardstick of dealing with complaints from the public against the media houses, and all are dealt with in an ad hoc manner.

Punitive action or cases filed by the regulator, especially in the case of electronic media, are also arbitrary. So is dismissing complaints without following due process, or withholding explanation of how a case has been resolved.

### 11.2- Security Environment

Due to the prevailing environment of conflict and militancy in many parts of the country, as well as the rise in politically motivated crime and vendettas, fair and objective journalism has at times become a life threatening proposition.

Strong arm tactics are by far the mildest form of security threats that the journalists have to deal with, and they can come from the security agencies, militant wings of political parties, or the extremists battling State authority.

Two of the organizations studied, Radio FM 103 and Express Newspaper, have had armed attacks on their organizations' premises, and have received threats of attack on their personnel. Three employees of Express Newspaper's sister concern, the Express News TV channel, were killed in an attack on their vehicle while they were out assisting in news gathering.

Pakistan has already been classified as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. There have been demands for an end to impunity and for protocols to be developed to cover conflict with industry-wide consensus, but lack of adherence has seen to the loss of many precious lives.

When viewed beyond the spectrum of coverage of the conflict, such threats have a direct bearing on the ethics of the content being generated.

The recently formed Freedom Network carries out a media mapping of incidents of violence or threats of violence against the media, and steps, if any, that are being taken by media organizations, as well as the Government, to redress them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> These can be followed on <http://www.freedomnetwork.org.pk/?p=2463>



### 11.3- Sectarianism

Special attention and safeguards are needed to uphold ethical reporting practices in a sectarian environment. Fanning of sectarian or faith-based conflicts is a matter that the media needs to deal with very sensitively. It requires special handling, strict editorial control, and multi-layered gatekeeping, giving its inflammable nature.

While the mainstream media is gradually showing increasing responsibility, the regional, plus the 'religious' niche publications and channels require greater civil society as well as regulatory oversight.

There have been deliberate and specific cases of incitement of hatred and violence against particular persons or communities on certain programmes which have resulted in damaging action. These have gone beyond the careless choice of words. Two examples are of the manner in which late Governor of Punjab, late Salman Taseer was grilled on the media for his support to a woman accused of blasphemy, and vilification of a community that led to attacks on its members.

### 11.4- Sensitive Reporting

A vast number of topics can be covered under the umbrella of sensitive reporting, and these include reporting on gender issues, labor rights, minorities, children, disabled, and other marginalized communities, as well as matters of conflict between and within communities, provinces, as well as neighboring countries.

Adequate sensitization, training, and editorial guidelines are at best sporadic and whimsical, and depend on the abilities, and sensitization of the gatekeepers who are able to engage with the reporters through constant mentoring. This is especially so as most guidelines are reactive in nature, and tend to fall within the scope of damage control of slip ups. A lack of training on sensitive reporting prevents journalists from applying ethical journalism principles when reporting on critical issues.

### 11.5- Organizational Structure

Where there are weak structures of editorial oversight, there are more compromises to demands made from the owners and proprietors and the marketing department. The inability to push back against these demands due to lack of editorial ascendancy eats into allocated column space and airtime for journalistic content.

Where there are clearly written down policies articulating zero tolerance for unethical practices within the organization, going beyond the domain of content generation to each and every department, digressions are few and far between. When they do occur, there are systems and processes in place to check repeat occurrence, and also take punitive action in case of deliberate mischief.

Dawn newspaper's written policies, which are communicated by the Human Resource department to employees along with their appointment letter from the day of appointment, are a case in point.

Similarly, Geo Asool, the set of guidelines for ethical journalism that was drafted with input from persons across the Geo Television network, was communicated to the rank and file, and placed on the web not just for input but for audience engagement. It is another example of a step in the right direction.

### 12 - Ethical Guidelines Applied in-house

Rather than there being consistent ethical guidelines throughout media houses, it is interesting that in a landscape of cross-media ownership, the same owners who allow certain standards in one of their media outlets are totally unmindful of their application in others. This is done according to the perception of the 'tolerance level' of each niche audience to the level of ethics in the content reaching them.

This dichotomy resulted in the shift, especially in the electronic media, from pure information to infotainment. Almost all the journalists that were interviewed for this research, as well those offering their opinion during the roundtables, were very critical of this new trend. They clearly designated the news bulletin to be 'sacrosanct', and criticized the trend of playing songs as accompaniment to the news.

Crime row re-enactments, and even some talk shows were also placed by them in the category of infotainment instead of information, and they were said to violate the spirit of ethical journalism.

### 13 - Human Resource Development

There are no formal training structures within media organizations to incorporate sensitization to ethics as an on-going institutional process.

There is also a wide gap between the academia and industry, as universities do not prepare 'trade ready' graduates in this regard. Training on ethical journalism for university journalism students hinges on the proactive approach of professors with industry experience. Professors also sometimes use their industry linkages to place their students in media houses for internships which can add value to their education.

The problem of hiring inadequately trained journalists arises in particular when the Human Resource Department assesses candidates for content generation positions without input from the editorial management. In those cases, selection is based solely on academic qualifications, without regard for education or training in professional/ethical practices.

Even experienced media persons, when hired by a media house, are not assessed based on their past experience or reputation in terms of ethics. A couple of glaring examples from the electronic media were of programme hosts who were severely taken to task for the unethical manner of conducting their shows.

Their behavior earned them a fraternity as well industry-wide condemnation and backlash for their employers, who were compelled to fire them. However, almost immediately afterwards, they found even better paying assignments on rival channels, where they carried on as before

Lack of investment in human resource development along with resource constraints; limit opportunities for fresh entrants to familiarize themselves with the work environment. They are usually thrown in at the deep end, and the nature of the job does not allow them to be able to plug the gaps in their understanding of ethical and professional reporting.

### 14 - Training

There are scant training opportunities within media organizations, because the realization of in-house investment has not yet seeped in across the industry. However, the access of staff to training opportunities offered by the media development organizations is also not fruitfully availed of.

As was pointed out by a participant of the roundtable who heads a media development organization, Pakistan is 128th out of 14 countries in terms of training. Media is no exception.

The process of selection of persons being sent on trainings is non-transparent, to the point of being discriminatory. There are usually two extremes. Either favorites are nominated, despite their unsuitability, or the weakest link in the chain within the newsroom is sent to oblige friends within the training organizations. In either case, neither the individual nor the organization benefit.

Many journalists who want to improve themselves on their own and do not receive support from their respective organization stay on the lookout for training opportunities through links with media development organizations, and online resources. They utilize their allocated leaves to attend these trainings. The downside is that many of those who do not utilize their leaves attend just a few sessions and rush off to work, so the full benefit of the training is lost on them.

The organizations also not able to benefit from the knowledge gained by such trainees as they rarely communicate the lessons learned to their peers or juniors within the organizations especially if they have undergone training through their own personal initiative.

### 15 - Mentoring

Most media organizations that cannot afford to have in-house trainings rely on mentoring from the industry seniors. The pitfalls here are that this is too informal a manner in which to communicate or critique the style of content being produced by the uninitiated.

Unless officially designated by the organization, as has been done by GEO, which has an Editorial Committee headed by a senior journalist, no one in the organization is 'compelled' to alter content on the suggestion of the mentor.

There have been instances of media development organizations providing training opportunities, and at the end of it, twinning the trainees and the resource persons or master trainers, who are usually senior journalists. This allows for a longer term relationship that extends beyond the project cycle of the training period, and usually delivers better results.



### 16- Audience engagement

With more and more media organizations creating and maintaining an online footprint through web pages, as well as presence on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the channels for audience complaints, registration, or general feedback are becoming more open.

However, to fully utilize this platform, and make it adequately responsive, the media houses will need to invest in a team that is internet savvy, and able to act as a bridge between the consumers and the editorial team to give the right responses.

In print media, where earlier its consumer had recourse to the forum like letters to the Editor or phone calls to the editorial members, now most writers as well as segments in a publication have a dedicated email address, and sometimes even a Facebook page and Twitter handle. Live call-ins in programmes form another very powerful feedback mechanism.

There also needs to be more fairness as the principle of Right of Reply is still not very well established. Complaints against the organizations or some particular piece of content generally do not find space within the Letters to the Editors' columns.

Media outlets rarely apologize for errors of omission and commission, and retractions are never given the space and display the original offending piece of content receives. When they are published, it is most often due to pressure from a powerful person, party or organization.

Weak consumer rights awareness and a lengthy judicial process do not encourage recourse through libel laws. Media organizations do warn their reporters to be careful not to provoke any legal against themselves or their employers, but do not train them into recognizing content that crosses ethical, and legal boundaries.

### 17- Ethical Employment Guidelines

In-house ethical guidelines are multi-dimensional. Journalists are expected to produce ethical content, but many organizations do not treat their own journalists in a very ethical manner. This is especially so in the case of their terms of employment, which are non-existent in many cases.

Journalist organizations like the Union of Journalists and APNEC have struggled for decades for journalists' right to decent, legal, and ethical employment conditions. The rights to adequate employment conditions had to come from the Supreme Court of the country as a directive to the media houses to bring the employment of journalists within legal, ethical parameters. Organizations like Dawn, Jang and a few others have complied, and have a tradition of allowing collecting bargaining activity, but this still is not the norm across the media.

Collective Bargaining Agents are still confined to the print media, but none of the media houses boasting electronic channels or radio stations have allowed such rights to their workers.

## 18-Current Efforts

### 18.1 - Development of Media's Representative Organizations

#### 18.1.1- APNS

Once the newspaper industry was established, professional organizations came into being to safeguard the interests of the owners, publishers and journalists as well as the readers. The foremost body that serves as the industry organization is APNS, All Pakistan Newspaper Society. APNS was the successor to the Pakistan Newspaper Society, which had formed in 1950. As it failed to garner adequate support from the fraternity, it gave way to APNS in 1953.<sup>10</sup>

Besides serving as a professional industry association, APNS works to improve and acknowledge high standards of journalism through its institution of the annual APNS awards. In 1981 it also instituted awards for the advertising industry.

#### 18.1.2- CPNE

Another organization that has been active in watching over the industry is the CPNE, or Council of Newspaper Editors. The organization's has served "since its foundation in 1957 as the combined body of Newspaper Editors in Pakistan to campaign for defense of press freedom and the right of access to information in the service of democratic practice and strengthening of democratic institutions in the country."<sup>11</sup>

#### 18.1.3- The Press Council of Pakistan

This is an autonomous and independent apex body that issues and monitors standards of media practice. The main ambits of the Council are

1. To receive complaints about the violation of Ethical Code of Practice relating to newspapers, news agencies, editors and journalists; and
2. To revise, update, enforce and implement the Ethical Code of Practice for the newspapers, news agencies, editors, journalists and publishers as laid down in the Schedule to this Ordinance.<sup>12</sup>

The Press Council also receives and hears cases<sup>13</sup> filed against its members.

#### 18.1.4- APNEC

APNEC (All Pakistan Newspaper Employees Council), is another representative body, and draws its membership from the various Unions of Journalists, as well as the Collective Bargaining Agents of each media house. However, its mandate does not cover matters of journalistic content, and it deals mostly with labor issues.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.apns.com.pk/about\\_us/index.php](http://www.apns.com.pk/about_us/index.php)

<sup>11</sup> <http://cpne.webs.com/aboutcpne.htm>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.presscouncil.org.pk/ethical\\_code](http://www.presscouncil.org.pk/ethical_code)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.presscouncil.org.pk/media/docs/complaint\\_details.pdf](http://www.presscouncil.org.pk/media/docs/complaint_details.pdf)

### 18.1.5- Unions of Journalists & Press Clubs

There exist on a national level, Pakistan Union of Journalists. There are provincial chapters, as well as city chapters. Similarly, all press clubs in cities and towns have an elected body to look after the interests of the members.

While these organizations have a long history of working for the rights of the journalists, but this history is also rife with divisive politics. Despite that, where these organizations are able to garner support of the majority of influential members of the fraternity, they serve as a strong lobby.

However, this strength and clout has not translated into putting weight behind promotion of ethical content through the media. These bodies have the potential of becoming a strong stakeholder in the process through greater engagement.

## 19 - Trend Towards Self-regulation for Ethical Reporting

Besides the above named industry organizations, most mainstream media outlets have been making their efforts to bring their operations, and especially the content aired by them, within the guiding principles espoused by the Ethical Journalism Network.

On various occasions, members of the media have come together and proposed self-regulatory measures to deal with difficult issues, like coverage of conflict and terrorism and journalist's safety. There exist at this time about 7 national codes of conducts, which include those framed by media development organization through multi-stakeholder participation, and organization specific codes.

Ethical practices, which are compromised by political pressures, financial irregularities, and race for Television Rating Points (TRPs) have repeatedly come under the spotlight not just from the highest judiciary of the country but also from civil society forums who are coalescing into informal watchdog bodies.

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<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The hierarchical structures where there is a lack of professional editorial management do not lend themselves to putting in place systems that will ensure ethical journalism practices.</li> <li>❑ Supremacy of business interests makes editorial guidelines bend to State, political and commercial pressures, as well as threats from criminal elements.</li> </ul>	<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Documented editorial guidelines are not the norm across the media</li> <li>❑ Most rely on verbal communication and mentoring.</li> <li>❑ The organizations with weak reader/viewer feedback mechanisms and complaint redressal systems are the ones most vulnerable to compromises on ethical issues.</li> </ul>	<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Unethical practices, especially at the district level promote unethical journalism practices</li> <li>❑ Financial insecurity among journalists figures hugely in the compromise of ethical standards e.g             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Contract employment</li> <li>❑ Late salaries</li> <li>❑ Low salaries making life with dignity difficult</li> <li>❑ COMPROMISES ON SAFETY</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The assessment of personnel who will be responsible for content generation is done by the Human resource division in isolation with the requirements of the editorial, as far as ethical practices and reputation/experience of the new entrant is concerned.</li> <li>❑ Journalists do not go through a proper orientation into the ethos of the media house before being handed over their first assignment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ In the debate on ethical journalism, there is little or no engagement with a key stakeholder/influencer</li> <li>❑ The Advertising agencies</li> <li>❑ The Advertisers</li> </ul>	<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ There are no training structures in place within the organization to make this sensitization an on-going process.</li> <li>❑ The access of staff to training opportunities offered by the media development organizations is ad hoc.</li> <li>❑ Appropriate staffers are not sent for training</li> <li>❑ Trained staff's expertise is not fully utilized</li> <li>❑ The benefits of the training are not communicated among peers</li> </ul>	<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ There is an overemphasis of focusing on the training of reporters, but the gatekeepers and watchdogs within the organizations, be they the desk/editors, or producers in electronic media, are rarely provided the same opportunities.</li> <li>❑ There is little interaction with external watchdog bodies monitoring ethical practices within the media</li> </ul>	<p><b>GAPS IDENTIFIED....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The code of conducts formulated and signed on to are not adhered to, and there is no mechanism to enforce implementation</li> <li>❑ Weak, inefficient, discriminatory and corrupt regulatory practices do not facilitate either the implementation of the code of conducts or punishment of violators</li> </ul>

## 20 - Recommendations in light of the gaps identified

This section contains recommendations based on the audits, roundtables, and feedback from the expert Advisory Council. They follow the thematic challenges presented earlier in the report. They are intended to guide media organizations, as well as international agencies and local groups seeking to move forward in promoting ethical journalism.

- For industry organizations and regulators to be effective, institutional autonomy as well as financial independence is essential.
- There should be clearly stated and documented policies, guidelines and style guides for ethical journalism practices that should cover the entire media organization, and not be confined to the journalists.
- Ethical contractual practices are a must if ethical journalism is to be expected.
- The organization must display zero tolerance toward unethical practices through punitive measures clearly articulated in the policy guidebook.
- Greater industry-academia engagement so that the right human resource pool can be developed that is already sensitized to ethical practices. Media organization entry criteria need to be carefully reviewed, while parameters of professional competence need to be defined and made more stringent, and educational standards adapted accordingly.
- The Human Resource Department's buy-in for all the policies is a must.
- In the course of this research and discussion, there was criticism of the fact that the industry bodies show unity only when their financial interests are at stake, and do not take a firm, united stand on matters that impact ethical journalism, or ethical practices towards journalists. One major piece of the enabling environment for ethical journalism to be adopted across the board is for the Press Council and the Pakistan Broadcasters' Association to break their shackles and assume industry leadership. They need to break free from the burden of financial gratitude and obligation to the government and become

financially sustainable through generation of revenue from their own members. Only through this independence will emerge the necessary leadership that can formulate codes of conduct covering the issue of ethical journalism in Pakistan. This is especially important in an industry that is prone to a high personnel turnover, so that wherever a journalist may move, he or she should carry the basic norms and values that are the accepted industry standards.

- Ideally, a training wing should be housed within the Administration department.
- Training has to be an integral part of an organization's structure. Ideally, there should be an in-house training cell through which all personnel must pass.
- Each organization must have a training calendar and each employee must have a marked date after which he/she must undergo a refresher
- If the organization cannot host a dedicated training wing then it must come to an arrangement with an external training facility
- The role of an Ombudsman and/or a Reader's Editor needs to be institutionalized.
- Regular debrief sessions must take place for all those involved in putting content out in the public space. These should include reporters, desk staff, camerapersons and producers.
- Digital media must be fully made use of not just to disseminate content but to elicit consumer feedback. Response mechanisms need to be clear and within policy guidelines, not ad hoc.
- Internationally accepted processes for facilitating the practice of ethical journalism (listed below) should be mainstreamed alongside multi-tiered trainings.
- Assistance in setting up in house training wings by
  - Providing the experts
  - Providing training material
  - Simulation exercises of situations that test the ethical boundaries
  - External trainings of Master Trainers who can in turn train staff in-house
  - Customized trainings for each media field
  - Customized trainings for each media house
- Development of a commonly agreed upon guidebook as well as a training module that can be adopted by the industry

### 21- Conclusion

- Ethical journalism has for years been a goal of the media in Pakistan and, alongside seemingly daunting challenges, there are creative initiatives and partnerships with great potential.
- Consensus on the gaps identified and recommendations by a body of media practitioners, which included owners, news directors, editors, producers, reporters, anchors, and trainers indicates a willingness to traverse that path to make the media ethical and effective.
- Ethical journalism has a rough ride in the age of cross media ownership concentrating too much power in too few hands. However, it is encouraging to note that the social media has opened space for two-way communication, and given a voice to those nameless, faceless consumers of journalism who can now protest, and condemn vociferously what they deem to be beyond the boundaries of ethics.
- This is where the consumers of media content, individually, as well as in the form of civil society forums bear pressure as a watchdog. Already this new mode of consumer feedback has made the media organizations aware of setting their houses in order and being responsive to their demands.
- International standards call on the government, the media industry, civil society organizations, and citizens, to work together on developing and implementing procedures that facilitate and promote ethical journalism. The move towards ethical journalism needs to be on-going, and supported internally as well as externally through greater industry-civil society engagement.



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### \*Annexure

#### RT on Ethical Journalism for Broadcast Media      January 11, 2014 - Karachi

Name	Organization
Shahzada Zulfiqar	Freelance
Owais Tohid	Former ARY
Faysal Aziz Khan	Geo News
Asif Zuberi	Aaj TV
Shabana Arif	Rozan
Amir Jahangir	Mishal
Murtaza Solangi	Freelance
Javed Jabbar	
Afia Salam	Freelance
Ansar Naqvi	Geo News
Sundus Rasheed	City FM 89
Mazhar Abbas	Freelance
Idrees Bakhtiar	Geo News

#### RT on Ethical Journalism for Print Media, January 25, 2014 - Karachi

Name	Organization
Mr. Saleem Shahid	Daily Dawn
Tauseef Ahmed	University of Karachi
Kamal Siddiqui	Express tribune
Mohammed Ziauddin	Express tribune
Zubaida Mustafa	Dawn
Adeel Pathan	Rozan
Mahmood Sham	Former Jang
Shujauddin Qureshi	Piller
Naseer Hashmi	Daily Ummat
Syed Kamran Mumtaz	Daily Mashriq
Mahim Mahar	Express Tribune
Afia Salaam	Freelance
Bilal Farooqui	Daily Aghaz
Nisar Ahmed Zuberi	Editor/Prof: JUW
Shahid Hussain	The News
Tahir Najmi	Roznama Express
Mazhar Abbas	Freelance
Idrees Bakhtiar	Geo News

Needs assessment on promoting ethics and transparency in Pakistani media



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