



# Report on the Regional High-Profile Roundtable on Inclusive Journalism for Senior Media Professionals and Editors





April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Monarch Hotel, Accra



By Mary Ama Kudom-Agyemang & The Ghana EMMAP Team

## Acknowledgement

The two-year “Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding” (EMMAP) project, has been made possible through the European Union’s (EU) funded intervention to raise public awareness of the interconnections between conflict, migration, and minority exclusion to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

EMMAP is being coordinated by Uganda-based Minority Rights Group Africa (MRGA) and implemented by three countries by partners namely: the Media Platform on Environmental and Climate Change (MPEC) in Ghana, Media Reform Coordination Group (MRCG) in Sierra Leone, and Networks for Social Justice Rights (FAHAMU) in Senegal.

## Preamble

This report presents details of the High-Profile Roundtable on Inclusive Journalism for Senior Media Professionals and Editors” from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal. The event, which was organized by MPEC in partnership with MRGA, MRCG and FAHAMU, took place on Wednesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2023, in Accra, Ghana. The Roundtable can be described as introducing fresh breath in journalism work in the three countries: to enhance the abilities of journalists to appreciate, handle and report sensitively on conflicts and minority related issues in ways that contribute to peacebuilding. Hitherto, this was one of the seriously underreported areas within the three countries.

## List of Abbreviations

### **Abbreviations**

### **In Full**

DPOs	Disabled Persons Organization
EMMAP	Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding
EU	European Union
FAHAMU	Networks for Social Justice Rights
GBC	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning
MPEC	Media Platform on Environmental and Climate Change
MRCG	Media Reform Coordination Group
MRG	Minority Rights Group
MRGA	Minority Rights Group Africa
MRGI	Minority Rights Group International
NADMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
UK	United Kingdom



## Executive Summary

On Wednesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2023, 53 media related professional senior journalists, chief editors, reporters, journalism lecturers and minority activists from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal gathered in Accra, Ghana to brainstorm on the subject of conflicts and minority issues that have become prevalent in the West African Sub-region.

The gathering was one of the key activities under the “Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding (EMMAP)” project, made possible through the European Union’s (EU) funded intervention to raise public awareness of the interconnections between conflict, migration, and minority exclusion to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

The nature of rising conflicts in these countries has become a source of concern for national governments and the international community.

The three countries of the EMMAP project were ranked low by the 2020 Global Peace Index, as follows: 43rd (Ghana), 46th (Sierra Leone) and 47th (Senegal). Recorded conflicts were diverse and widespread including disputes over election results and demands for political change that led to civil unrest and political instability, with violent protests breaking out. While, some of the countries like Sierra Leone is one of the world’s poorest countries, affected by regular hunger and undernourishment (25 % of the population) and increased criminal activity, such as in Niger’s border regions (which influenced cross-border armed robbery and cattle rustling in Senegal). Though Ghana is considered a relatively stable country, it still faces consequences: poverty and fractured health care system, the Western Togoland Rebellion Movement and challenges with refugee camps (after Côte d’Ivoire conflict and Sahel crisis). Senegal is a country of emigration and transit migration.

The changing socio-economic situation facilitated by access to internet in Sub-Saharan Africa has meant state monopolies of mass media and information management have reduced. In target countries, most media outlets are privately-owned and there are few newspapers owned by the government or the ruling party.

Research shows that the media in Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone lacks: (a) journalistic education of ethical standards (most media studies do not include this topic into their curriculum); (b) professional upgrading; c) an understanding of minority issues and connections with conflicts, representation of minorities in the workforce, training on safety and security issues and conflict sensitive reporting, ideas on how to report effectively without costly equipment and software, and journalism mentorship schemes.

The coverage of issues is sometimes driven by political partisanship and exposed to corruption, but generally, all seem to view social issues as worthy of coverage. However, conflicts are reported when incidences occur, and not because of careful assessment and investigation, and TV contents are rather poor, mainly relying on content from foreign television stations. Tribalisation of issues become pronounced during elections and political appointments, making people uncooperative with authorities and state issues, contributing to destabilisation.

Similarly, the hostility and violence against minorities that leads to conflict, originates and/or is fuelled by unethical reporting and unprofessional media coverage. In Sierra Leone, a 2020 study on the state of safety policies and practices among media houses published by MRCG-SL identifies that media houses and practitioners regularly face at least one of the following violations: intimidation, harassment, humiliation, arrest, detention, and physical attacks. These events spawn negative media coverage internationally and smeared Sierra Leone's democratic credentials especially in the World Press Freedom Index (ranking 85th out of 180 countries).

One notable thing about all conflicts be they ethnic, linguistic, religious, political and cultural, is that they border on minority groups. Yet even though a disregard for minority issues lies at the heart of these conflicts, minority rights have been marginalized in international conflict prevention. Too many conflicts that have minority rights at their centre are not being understood as such, which results in the flare up of conflicts that could have been prevented if warnings of minority rights violations were heeded. Too often, separating groups along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines has been a way of upholding minority rights and keeping peace between groups. While such solutions might be an easy option in the immediate aftermath of conflicts, in the long term these divisions can entrench old hatreds and wounds.

So, the basic proposition is that an understanding of minority rights is essential for anyone dealing with conflict prevention and resolution. To this end, the high-level media Roundtable was organised by Ghana based Media Platform on Environment and Climate Change (MPEC) in partnership with Uganda based Minority Rights Group Africa (MRG), Sierra Leone based Media Reform Coordination Group (MRCG) and Senegal based Networks for Social Justice Rights (FAHAMU).

**D**ubbed: “High-Profile Roundtable on Inclusive Journalism for Senior Media Professionals and Editors,” the purpose of April 5, 2023 one-day media convocation, was to enhance the abilities of journalists to appreciate, handle and report sensitively on conflicts and minority related issues in ways that contribute to peacebuilding. Hitherto, the subject was one of the seriously underreported areas within the three countries.

The Roundtable was preceded by the “Face-to-Face trip” – an informal training session that enabled participants to visit and interact with some identified minority communities and groups in Ghana. The purpose was for them to witness at first hand and better understand everyday lifestyle, condition and welfare of such people.

The destination of the field trip was: The Gambaga Witches Camp in the North East Region and the Dissah Community in the Savannah Region, both in Ghana. The two areas were selected based on the general definition of a minority being the carrier of challenges not always faced by the majority. And as a result of these challenges, minorities may have difficulty assimilating into the dominant culture or become targets of discrimination based on their minority traits within their communities. The challenges include discrimination and exclusion, restricted social mobility, lack of identity and security, limited access to community services, and greater incidence of poverty.

The trip took place from Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March to Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2023, and provided vital baseline information for the Roundtable.

The main Resource Person for the Roundtable was the Director-General of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Professor Amin Alhassan who facilitated the discussions based on his background as a veteran journalist cum lecturer, with experience in community/minority conflict resolution.





## *Some key takeaways from the Roundtable*

### *Nature of Minorities*

- The subject of who a minority is, needs to be gotten right. So, minorities are a group of people who are not just few in number, but who also face marginalization and discrimination in their daily lives. Because of that they face a number of challenges in their day-to-day lives. This must be differentiated from disabled, which often, has to do more with the categories of disabilities.
- The issue of minorities also has to do with identity and belongingness, and the critical thing about identity is that it is always under construction. Therefore, those that are majority today, were some time back minorities. This means identity has a fluid nature that must always be kept in mind when dealing with issues of minority.
- Every conflict is based on identity, which boils down to the intercession between the psychic and the social. When journalists have that in mind, they will begin to appreciate that altering process which comes with what one thinks about his/herself verses what the society or another thinks about them. It is worthy of note that most conflicts and most differentiations start from this particular intercession.
- Differences are not bad, since they are a natural process. So, journalism must capture the fact that people are different. But the question is, what language or narrative can be used to construct differences in a way that is not agonistic? How do journalists construct difference in a way that is welcoming, tolerant, absorbing, so that the concept of victimhood will move away?

### *The Witches Camp: - Elements that produce accusations of witchcraft*

- Saving victims of accusations of witchcraft have become an industry, especially as Witches Camps can only be accessed through the agency of NGOs that manage the camps. So, while socio-cultural elements are at the heart of what produces the accusations of witchcraft practices, there is also a socio-economic twist to it.
- Witchcraft accusations are also linked to poverty and poverty is sexist because it is mostly women that are poor, or barren who are often accused of being witches.
- The issue of witchcraft is absolutely and heavily gendered. And the characteristics are that in the normal frame of things, if a man is a wizard, he is welcome to boast and tell people that “I am a wizard and you play with me, I will deal with you.” That man will not get banished. Let a lady dare suggest it even without saying that she is a witch, and that is her end, she will be banished. So first of all, the qualifying criteria to be banished is gendered. Men who boast of being wizards are never banished. In fact, they are celebrated.
- Therefore, victims of accusations of witchcraft are not only ostracized, but have to flee their communities, if they cherish their lives. So, the Witches Camps become their sole place of refuge. Overnight they become destitute and desolate – cut off from their homes, children, families and livelihoods.
- Witches Camps seems to have become a kind of business that is that has been left for NGOs to take advantage of the vulnerability of these people?
- With the issue of Witches camps in Northern Ghana, the focus has always been largely on the Gambaga Witches Camp, but in actual sense, there are about five Witches Camps in Northern Ghana. They used to six. And in 2014, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social

Protection in collaboration with other partners managed to closed down one known as the Bonyasi Witches Camp.

***Lack of legal and government intervention for victims of accusations of witchcraft***

- Witches Camps have been in existence all these years and yet the State appears to be missing from it.
- Even though there is a good justice system in place in Ghana, and also the African Union has a mechanism in place where justice can be sought for such accused people, it appears they cannot seek for justice at the law courts.
- The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, has the responsibility to take up the issue of these women. But it is not doing so, because the witches story is one that every government official is running away from. This is because there is a belief that if you dabble in them, they will come for you. Though this is absolutely rubbish, yet the perception is very powerful.
- The government might be doing what it can in relation to the victims, but the issue about the alleged witches is something that you cannot use aggressive means to tackle it.

***Importance of media activism, why and how to change the narratives around minority issues like effects of witchcraft accusations***

- Some of the issues about witches sometimes have to with self-stigmatisation. So, advocacy, public education and media activism are very important in the fight against witchcraft stigmatization.
- Since the media have that power to frame, they should employ it to change the national discourse on accusations of witchcraft. The development of the Anti-Witchcraft Bill supported by some NGOs marks a critical point in the discourse, and the first consultation will begin in the Parliament of Ghana tomorrow.
- There are various ways by which journalists can take away victimhood in the face of the realization that minorities or identity differences will always be there. The journalistic approaches include the following:
  - In reporting on conflicts and minorities, journalists are likely to always come across certain characteristics of minorities such as in communities where media is absent, conflict is bound to arise. In all remote rural communities where conflicts arise, they lack radio and radio is a basic tool. So, encouraging the dissemination of media infrastructure is precisely to help prevent conflict.
  - One way to change the narratives around accusations of witchcraft and the Witches Camps, is to move away from the negative and focus on some of the people who have been integrated in their communities. This can be done through tracing, tracking down and observing what has happened to them after the integration. Such positive stories will enable people to appreciation the changed lives of those integrated back in their communities.
  - Changing narratives also requires journalists to have a second look at news values, why are journalists stuck in old news value? There is the need to break it. Journalism started from defining the function of journalism within the liberal, classical, and democratic framework. So, the media was expected to mediate between the three main blocks of society: the State; the market – the business class, trading, generating wealth, investors;

and then civil society – the free association of people, be it religious, ethnic, geographic. So it is accepted that the classical news values, objectivity, impartiality is derived from this framework. But journalists are now trying to move away from that. You see, journalists like to gravitate towards the State. So, if you take the distribution of journalists in the day for news sources, the state institutions take majority of the news. But their job is how to change that and rather gravitate towards civil society, which is vulnerable.

- The reason why journalists go towards the state is that they are powerful and power makes news. So, if you move away from there and you come to the mundane, the ordinary, how do you convert it to be attractive as news? So, now the function of journalism is to change the narration and gravitate towards civil society and empower it to demand its due from here and there. This is called development journalism, peace journalism, citizen journalism, civic or public journalism and solution journalism.
- Capacity building through activities such as the Roundtable is very important for journalists to understand the issues involved in conflicts and minority exclusion.
- Journalists can change the narrative by beginning to look at it from the angle of changing the dictions used to describe people of minority and using the right words to describe them.
- Journalists should adopt conflict-sensitive approaches to journalism, which is about using words, because words are very powerful.
- Journalists should hold in very high esteem the principle of accuracy and impartiality in their reporting.
- Journalists also need to take a look at the laws that protect minorities and which are not well known, and do news stories around them.
- The media should always remember to give the minority an equal platform, when issues arise that must be discussed.
- There is need to put aside all manner of differences – the religious, the moral, whatever they maybe, and try to speak to the matter. This would help solve most of the issues of minorities.

## Contents

Acknowledgement.....	3
Preamble .....	4
List of Abbreviations .....	5
Executive Summary .....	6
Chapter 1.....	14
Background and Context.....	14
Relevance of the EMMAP for enhanced media capacity on conflicts and minority reporting .....	15
The Pre-Roundtable Activities.....	15
Rationale and Objectives of the Roundtable.....	17
Chapter 2.....	18
Commencement of the Roundtable.....	18
Excerpts of statements at the opening session of the Roundtable.....	19
Chapter 3.....	24
Excerpts of the session with Professor Amin Alhassan, GBC Director Generation.....	24
What is a minority issue? .....	24
Conversation about causes of the Dissah attack .....	25
Characteristic of minority communities .....	26
Recollection of the Gambaga Witches Camp .....	27
How do we go behind the given narrative?.....	28
What discourses are producing the witches?.....	28
Witches camp: A matter of state failure?.....	30
Victimization of alleged witches: A traditional practice violating human rights .....	32
Engaging the power of framing .....	34
Chapter 4.....	35
The Video stories: A practical approach to changing journalism’s narratives.....	35

Chapter 5.....	43
General Discussions .....	43
Who is a minority?.....	43
How to construct our difference without antagonism?.....	44
Action Points.....	50
 Chapter 6.....	 53
Recommendations/Way Forward .....	53
 ANNEXES .....	 54
Annex 1: Sample Published Stories.....	54
Annex 2: Links to some Published News Articles/Features .....	60
Annex 3: Concept on Roundtable .....	62
Annex 4: Roundtable Agenda.....	64
Annex 5: Roundtable Attendance List .....	65

# Chapter 1

## Background and Context

According to the 2020 Global Peace Index, the target countries of this project ranked low: 43rd (Ghana), 46th (Sierra Leone) and 47th (Senegal). Disputes over election results and demands for political change led to civil unrest and political instability, with violent protests breaking out. Additionally, some of the countries in the region were affected by regular hunger and undernourishment (25 % population in Sierra Leone) and increased criminal activity, such as in Niger's border regions (which influenced cross-border armed robbery and cattle rustling in Senegal). Though Ghana is considered a relatively stable country, it still faces consequences: poverty and fractured health care system of Western Togoland Rebellion movement and challenges with refugee camps (after Côte d'Ivoire conflict and Sahel crisis). With its diverse population (78% Muslims, Christians 21%, and about 15 ethnic groups), Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world (HDI 2019 = 181/189) and its citizens often migrate to neighboring countries. Senegal is a country of emigration and transit migration. The changing socio-economic situation facilitated by access to internet in Sub-Saharan Africa has meant state monopolies of mass media and information management have reduced. In target countries, most media outlets are privately-owned and there are few newspapers owned by the government or the ruling party.

Research shows that the media in Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone lacks: (a) journalistic education of ethical standards (most media studies do not include this topic into their curriculum); (b) professional upgrading; c) an understanding of minority issues and connections with conflicts, representation of minorities in the workforce, training on safety and security issues and conflict sensitive reporting, ideas on how to report effectively without costly equipment and software, and journalism mentorship schemes. In Ghana and Senegal, media is relatively free. For example, in Ghana out of 428 radio and 164 television stations, only four media are state-owned. The coverage of issues is sometimes driven by political partisanship and exposed to corruption, but generally, all seem to view social issues as worthy of coverage. However, conflicts are reported when incidences occur, and not because of careful assessment and investigation, and TV contents are rather poor, mainly relying on content from foreign television stations. Tribalisation of issues become pronounced during elections and political appointments, making people uncooperative with authorities and state issues, contributing to destabilisation. Similarly, the hostility and violence against minorities that leads to conflict, originates and/or is fuelled by unethical reporting and unprofessional media coverage. In Sierra Leone, a 2020 study on the state of safety policies and practices among media houses published by MRCG-SL identifies that media houses and practitioners regularly face at least one of the following violations: intimidation, harassment, humiliation, arrest, detention, and physical attacks. These events spawn negative media coverage internationally and smeared Sierra Leone's democratic credentials especially in the World Press Freedom Index (ranking 85th out of 180 countries).

All the world's longest running conflicts are fuelled and fought over ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural issues. All concern minority groups. Yet even though a disregard for minority issues lies at the heart of these conflicts, minority rights have been marginalized in international conflict

prevention. Too many conflicts that have minority rights at their centre are not being understood as such, which results in the flare up of conflicts that could have been prevented if warnings of minority rights violations were heeded. Too often, separating groups along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines has been a way of upholding minority rights and keeping peace between groups. While such solutions might be an easy option in the immediate aftermath of conflicts, in the long term these divisions can entrench old hatreds and wounds. Our basic proposition is that an understanding of minority rights is essential for anyone dealing with conflict prevention and resolution.

MRG has been working on minority issues for over 50 years in all parts of the world. Raising awareness about roots of conflicts, the consequences, the situation of minority groups, migrants and IDPs, based on MRG's experience, is a key element of peace building. Using media to do that, gives a wider reach. The question at stake was if media in target countries fully understand the causes of conflicts in their regions and the dynamics between media work and deeper understanding of the situation. The consultations that were undertaken have identified a low capacity of media to report sensitively on development issues, development aid and conflicts.

### Relevance of the EMMAP for enhanced media capacity on conflicts and minority reporting

The goal of the “Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding” (EMMAP) project, was to raise public awareness of the interconnections between minority issues, community tensions and conflict to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. To do so, the project implementation team has maximised media's potential as a peacebuilding actor, by strengthening the capacity of journalism actors through non-formal education opportunities to report sensitively on conflict, contributing to mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation.

To this end, a number of key activities were rolled out. The first was the six-weeks online course for journalists as well as activities jointly organized by MRGA and MRGI in collaboration with the offices of the partner countries. This programme set the stage for the implementation of other key activities namely: the Face-to-Face field trip and the Regional High-Profile Roundtable, which was a flagship event of the EMMAP project.

### The Pre-Roundtable Activities

To kick-start the implementation of the EMMAP project, MRGA and MRGI organized a six weeks online course to strengthen the capacity of journalists in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal on: “reporting sensitively on minority and indigenous issues, development, and conflict.” The active and successful participation in and completion of the on-line training was the pre-requisite for benefitting from the other EMMAP's activities.



The first of these subsequent activities was the five-day Face-to-Face field trip for a total of 10 selected journalists and journalism students were selected (three from Sierra Leone, three from Senegal and four from Ghana). The selection was a joint effort by the two tutors and EMMAP's Communication Officer to ensure that the criteria for selecting beneficiaries for follow-up were adhered to.

The Face-to-Face trip was an informal training session that enabled participants to visit and interact with some identified minority communities and groups in Ghana. The purpose was for them to witness at first hand and better understand everyday lifestyle, condition and welfare of such people. The destination of the field trip was: The Gambaga Witches Camp in the North East Region and the Dissah Community in the Savannah Region in Ghana.

The two areas were selected by MPEC in consultation with the EMMAP Project Coordinator at MRGA and the Media Officer at the MRGI. The two sites were selected based on the general definition of a minority being the carrier of challenges not always faced by the majority. And as a result of these challenges, minorities may have difficulty assimilating into the dominant culture or become targets of discrimination based on their minority traits within their communities. The challenges include discrimination and exclusion, restricted social mobility, lack of identity and security, limited access to community services, and greater incidence of poverty.

The two areas were also considered in the light of MRG's definition of minority concerns as "disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups, which are fewer in number than the rest of the population and which may wish to maintain and develop their identity." Thus, MRG, understands how discrimination based on age, class, gender and disability can have multiple impacts on disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples.

The trip took place from Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March to Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2023. The 10 beneficiaries of the trip, later became part of the 53 participants including some of their colleagues from the online course as well as some other senior journalists, chief editors, reporters, journalism lecturers and minority activists from the three partner countries, who attended the Regional High-Level Roundtable in Accra on Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023.



To ensure relevant and focused discussions, the organizing team commissioned the Director-General of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Professor Amin Alhassan as the main Resource Person to facilitate the Roundtable based on his background as a veteran journalist with experience in community/minority conflict resolution.

The Face-to-Face trip set the tone for the Roundtable by providing baseline information for staging an animated conversation on positioning journalists for impactful reportage on issues of conflicts, minority exclusion, migration and their associated effects such as under development. The assigned Moderator for the event was the Tema Divisional Manager of the Ghana News Agency, Francis Amiyebor.

### Rationale and Objectives of the Roundtable

The one-day Regional High-Profile Roundtable provided a unique platform for exchange of experiences among senior journalists, chief editors, reporters and activists. It also created an opportunity for journalism actors to enhance their potential to support mediation, dialogue and reconciliation processes.

The theme for the event was: *"Media Response to Conflict, Migration, and Minority Rights: Perspectives on Community Livelihood."*

The rationale underlying the holding of the Regional High-Profile Roundtable was that, among other things, hostility and violence against minorities that lead to conflict usually originate and/or are fueled by unethical reporting and unprofessional media coverage.

The overall objective was to facilitate engagement and cooperation among journalism and civil society actors to address issues of conflict and peacebuilding that impact minorities. The specific objectives of the one-day event were to:

- i. Heighten regional engagement amongst journalism and civil society actors to exchange reporting and counter-narrative good practices.
- ii. Enhance journalism actors' understanding of minority issues and connections with conflicts.
- iii. Increase reporting of conflict issues that support peacebuilding, addressing migration and minorities' aspects in West Africa Media.

## Chapter 2

### Commencement of the Roundtable



The Roundtable formerly started with a general introduction and expression of expectations by the participants. At the end of the dialogue, they wanted clarity on issues including:

- How does the media perceive minorities?
- How the media can ensure minorities are not left behind in their work?
- Who are minorities?
- What constitute minority issues?
- Is there a relationship between minority issues and climate change?
- How are media houses handling minority issues?

In his introductory remarks, the Moderator, Francis Ameyibor reminded the participants and in particular the media of the importance of extending their journalism work to cover all segments of society including the minority and excluded, in line with the global catchphrase “leave no one behind.” His point was that the media is part of the majority with the power to right the wrong of those in minority and cautioned that failure to do that now, they may later find themselves among a minority group as a result of a turn of circumstances. “So, if you do not right the wrong today, tomorrow, if you find yourself in a minority group, you will be found wanting,” he added.

EMMAP Project Coordinator and Executive Director of MPEC, Mrs. Ama Kudom-Agyemang welcomed the participants on behalf of Minority Rights Group International and Minority Rights Group Africa, and on behalf of the two media-related organizations from Sierra Leone headed by Dr. Francis Sowa and the other headed by Tidiane from Senegal.

She used the occasion to talk about the relationship between minority issues and climate change. Using illegal mining and sand winning in water bodies as a case study, Aunty Ama as she is popularly referred to, said climate change impacts are exacerbated by our own actions. She explained that for instance, sand winning in the White Volta tributary of the Volta Basin, now a booming business in Tamale. This was polluting and contaminating the fresh water, which unfortunately, served as sources of water for some people. Her concern was that those activities are also hastening the process of evaporation so much so the quality and the quantity of water were affected.

In the event, those most affected were people in rural communities who do not have any other options for accessing safe water. Aunty Ama argued that “if they had, they would not be fetching that dirty water. If they had, they would not be washing their clothes in there. They are not part of the majority,” adding, “these are people who by virtue of where they are in terms of their livelihoods, in terms of where they are living, in terms of their economic status, cannot afford to buy clean water. So, essentially, they are being left behind, when it comes to access to safe drinking water.”

She said MPEC was grateful for the opportunity to partner MRGA to implement the EMMAP project, towards empowering media to focus on the plight of such minorities in selected countries within the West African Sub-region. Therefore, she was excited to hear the expectations of participants: “People want to know who is the minority? How are we reporting minority issues? Are we even reporting on minority issues at all? And are we reporting it from the right perspective?”

She was confident that through the discussions all those bothersome issues would be resolved and expressed her gratitude to the EU for funding the EMMAP Project.

#### Excerpts of statements at the opening session of the Roundtable

*Geofrey Sabiiti, EMMAP Project Coordinator, MRGA, Uganda*

Geofrey, first of all, commended MPEC for successfully organizing the Roundtable. He then gave a brief about the MRGI and its work around the world including Africa. He said the organization has its headquarters in London, UK, with two sister offices in Budapest, Hungary and Kampala, Uganda. Also, MRGI has staff in about 10 countries and works with ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. Geofrey expressed the happiness of MRGI to have extended its work to the West African Sub-Region where they are working in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Senegal, implementing the project, “Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding.” He explained that the two-year project, which started in March 2022, was being implemented in partnership with the Ghana based Media Platform on Environment and Climate Change, MPEC; Network for Social Justice, FAHAMU in Senegal; and the Media Reform Coordination Group, MRCG in Sierra Leone.

Geofrey noted that a lot has been done and the implementing team was hopeful to achieve more in this second year of the project, which was raising public awareness of the interconnection between conflict, migration and minority exclusion to help build and coordinate sustainable peace in Ghana,

Senegal, and Sierra Leone. He said in order to achieve that goal, the project team was working to maximize media potential as a peace-building actor. “The media, you have much powers, but also you have the voice that other people do not have, and that is why we want to use the media to work and ensure that we protect the rights of the minorities, but also, we amplify their voices to be able to speak for themselves,” Geoffrey explained.

Therefore, the project was trying to improve media coverage of conflict dynamics by strengthening the capacity of journalism actors through non-formal education, opportunities to report sensitively about conflict, contributing to mediation, dialogue and reconciliation. So far, 120 journalists from the three countries have been trained through the online training programme, to strengthened their capacity in sensitive investigating and reporting about issues concerning conflict and peacebuilding, addressing minorities and migration issues.

Additionally, minority activists who were also participating in the Roundtable, were being trained in another online programme to enhance their knowledge about media, and how they could to use media to address a number of issues related to conflict and minorities. He mentioned that some of the journalists have had the chance to participate in field trips, which afforded them the opportunity to evaluate what they had been studying online, and also witness what was happening in the field.

Geoffrey saw the Roundtable as a forum to share their experiences and lessons from the Trip and online courses, and further discuss how best they could report on a number of issues faced by minorities in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Senegal, so that their challenges could be shared worldwide and see how best some of those issues could be addressed.

He announced that there would be more opportunities, where MRG will be able to provide stipends to most active online trainees, both journalists and activists, for their investigative reporting projects, and said that was an activity that had to be done because some issues were not easily seen by all. But for those who go out with their initiatives to look investigate some issues, if they were shared, everybody would understand and the whole world would know what was going on and how they could intervene.

The EMMAP Coordinator believed the Roundtable would be able to discuss the importance of development in journalism; the relevance of media pieces on development, conflict and minorities, migration to target country audience; and the role of journalism in peacebuilding. He was hopeful that the discussions that ensued from the thematic presentation, were really going to help participants to understand the number of issues and how best they could address them.

*Anna Alboth, Media Officer, MRGI*

Anna related that she was working with a lot of journalists all around the world who “go to the field to cover sometimes very difficult stories of marginalized people, vulnerable people, people who are less privileged than many of us,” and admitted the difficulty involved in that very important work they were doing. “Journalists are not politicians. Politicians can change things. Yes, politician can change policies, but politicians do not care about topics if the voters do not care about the topics. And the voters do not care about the topics if the voters do not know about the

topics. And they do not know about the topics if they do not read or watch in TV stories about those places and people.” Therefore, she saw the work of journalists, including herself because of her work as both an activist and journalist, and felt that every journalist covering human rights stories was an activist too because “we are acting in the topics, while covering those stories.” Anna admitted that that kind of work could be frustrating as “this work does not always work,” adding, “but if we do not cover those stories, for sure, nothing will change.”

She has witnessed hundreds of journalists going to the field and considered herself lucky to be strong enough to be a part of trips as that which place in Ghana. The MRG Media Officer could testify that a lot of things change when journalists go and meet people far away in the field, “we might read reports, we might read statistics, we might know a lot of things internally, but meeting a person one-to-one is something completely different,” Anna noted. She recounted that on the return trip to Accra, participants had long conversation about the witches village in the north of Ghana, where they had an opportunity to hear stories firsthand from the women out there and admitted “it was not easy to sleep afterwards.” But knew that the results of reporting from those places could surprise everybody.

Anna was happy that so many people had gathered for the Roundtable. She noted that the participants were from different fields including decision-makers in media – the people who decide if those topics will be covered, the journalists and also the activists, because there was the need to hear their perspective as well.

*Dr. Francis Sowa, EMMAP Project Coordinator, and Director of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), Sierra Leone*

Dr. Sowa remarked that he was not surprised that journalists and activists had been brought together at Roundtable because in the business of minority rights, the two functions could be performed, while within journalism, there was also activism journalism by way of practice.

He recalled that when the Media Reform Coordinating Group in Sierra Leone, (MRCG) was first approached to work on this project, it took them some time to understand and to realize the fact that there had been a dearth of reportage on such issues. And to a very large extent, reporting on such issues were mostly events driven. So, if there is an event on minority rights, journalists would cover them. He said upon reflection, it dawned on him that there was no conscious and deliberate attempt and effort to report on minority rights issues. He said their approach to reporting on minority rights issues, was what scholars like his lecturer Professor Nicol, referred to “as mostly episodic, reporting on issues and events. The Professor was one of the Sierra Leonean participants at the Roundtable.

Dr. Sowa said he realized that the project was supposed to be an eye-opener for the specific fact that: “we are going to venture into something we have not covered deliberately and consciously for a long period of time.” Following that realization, his team began to brainstorm on whether there were minority rights groups in Sierra Leone and the answer was obviously yes, but reporting had been limited to events based. His team then engaged other colleagues and their partners, then

together, “we began to see that if you look at the issue of conflicts, migration, minority rights, they are all connected, and Sierra Leone as a post-conflict country, had experienced all of them, and there were minority rights issues going on in some communities.”

Based on that his expectation was to learn from other countries how they have addressed the issues of minority rights, and replicate the solutions in Sierra Leone. Dr. Sowa was glad for the opportunity to take part in the trip, which he said had granted him an encounter with the entire country, “I said to myself, I have been to Ghana several times, but this time around, I have actually now gone to Ghana. Going to the far end of Ghana, to the Witches’ Camp to interact with the inmates and to Dissah, I have seen firsthand issues of minority rights and know that we may have similar things happening in our country.”

Personally, Dr. Sowa felt the combination of journalism and activism at the Roundtable was the beginning of a new dawn for him and concluded that in Sierra Leone, there were a number of journalists as well as activists with interest and passion to work on such issues. The only problem was that in the past they had seen minority rights as a major issue that should be focused on. But he was convinced that the EMMAP initiative, “will open our eyes, and then beyond the project, there will be several actions and activities and programmes that will help us to address the issues of minority rights by practicing inclusive journalism, which will form part of our daily work.”

*Mouhamadou Tidiane Kasse, EMMAP Project Coordinator and Director Network for Social Justice (FAHAMU), Senegal*

Tidiane commented that the ROUNDTABLE had created the prospect for both journalists and activists to gain a better understanding about what activism entailed, what kind of activists were being referred, and which activists advocated for the minority. He observed that often, such activists were in the offices and spoke on behalf of minorities like persons living with HIV/AIDS as well as those with disabilities. “You won’t see such persons advocating for themselves, but activists do the work on their behalf,” Tidiane said. He asked how a shift could be made, so that minorities could speak for themselves?

He commended the visit to the field, where they were able to meet the minorities and said, it was important that the discussions established the place of minorities and activists in the advocacy.

Tidiane portrayed the media in Senegal, “as an independent body that does very wonderful work, but also do some negative things.” So, there it was important that discussions also focus on how to improve the work of the media in reporting and information sharing.

But because social media also plays an important role in information sharing, we must probe what is shared on social media whether they are relevant information and also think of how we can improve them. Then, what is the impact of the Witches Camp of Gambaga on the community as a whole. This one important question needs answers.

*Joyce Gyekye from Ghana*

She used the occasion to explain the relationship between minorities and climate change with two examples – Incidents like flooding either naturally through heavy rains or when dams were opened to spill excess water, the disabled who were in the minority became victims. In such instances, even the deployment of early warning systems do not help them. She said she appreciated the issue at a workshop on disaster reduction organized by National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) to educate the participants on the importance of early warning systems. Joyce said this was confirmed by a lady from a minority group, who participated in the workshop and confided in her that about how the early warning system could not have enabled her son to escape a flooding incident. Her second example was an incident that happened to migrant fishermen in Shama, in the Western part of Ghana. The fishermen were asked to leave the area because of the rising tidal waves, but they did not heed the advice and refused to leave area. Then the incident happened and it affected them. So, they wanted to leave, but had nowhere to go, because they had no access to land as they were poor migrants, who could not have afforded to pay for the land, even if they had access.

Joyce concluded that poor migrants and people with special needs, were some of the minority groups whose plight was worsen by climate change impacts, hence the need for the Roundtable to also explore the linkage between minorities and climate change.

## Chapter 3

### Excerpts of the session with Professor Amin Alhassan, GBC Director Generation

Professor Alhassan utilized the dialogue and conversational approach to facilitate the meeting and focused on some of the issues that participants noted from the Face-to-Face Trip and visit to the Gambaga Witches Camp. He also showed some video clips depicting the changing narratives in journalism to give voice to the voiceless and help find solutions to their problems.

What is a minority issue?

Professor Alhassan started his delivery by establishing the issue of minority as an issue of identity, whose nature was fluid rather than fixed. “When we talk about minorities, we are into the realms of issues of identity and belonging. What is it that is so critical about identity? Can we banish it? Is it possible to think of life without identity? And if it is so, then is this something that is fixed? No, it is not. It is always under construction.”

Therefore, he concluded that those that were majority today, were some time back minorities. So, the media in dealing with issues of identity should always bear in mind the changing fluid nature of identity and beware of the tendency in journalism to frame them as fixed. Professor Alhassan reasoned that the actual issue at stake was how to develop a narrative to capture the fact that identities are always in a flux based on perceptions – one’s own and those of others, which intersect at a point known as the psychic and the social. “I am what I am, that is the psychic. It is my thought of what I am, and it is not enough. Because if I think so, I will be shocked if I come to know what you think of who I am. And that is the social. And that intercession is always the dynamism,” he explained, postulating that “most conflicts related to identity occurred at this intercession, between the psychic and the social.”

So, journalists should have that in mind, in order to appreciate the altering process, “which comes with what the social thinks of me, what the other thinks about me and get the understanding that most conflicts and most differentiations start from that particular intercession.”

Journalists should further understand that the process of differentiating and assigning meaning to things, was part of the construction people do at all times to create other things, leading to differences among people, which was a natural process. His argument was that even if people were all created the same race, with the same ethnic and the same language, they would still create the differences amongst them in order to understand their environment. And this was a natural process so, differences among people were not bad. Journalism must therefore capture the issue of differences as they would be there – people will always be different from each other.

Professor Alhassan was concerned about how journalist could capture the subject of differences. “But the question is, what is the language, what narratives can we use to construct difference in a way that is not agonistic? How do we construct difference in a way that is welcoming, tolerant, absorbing, so that the concept of victimhood will move away? And I can talk about your difference without any problem.”



He cited the example of how a team that he was part of, over time found very subtle ways of generating certain discourses between the two main Islamic sects: Sunni and then the Tijanniya

in Tamale, who are not seeing eye to eye and could kill each other in the 1970s and 80s, over their differences. The situation was so bad that people got divorced and families separated because of their differences. Then, it got intertwined with the chieftaincy divide, it even got more toxic to the extent of the killing of the Yaa Naa in 2002.

In their work, the team focused on the religious part of the divide, and “now today, the two main sects have turned the differences into jokes, into a joking discourse. Today, their leaders get together, they pray in the same mosque together, and that difference has been converted. It is still there, but one that you can joke about. Yet, in the 70s and 80s, if you identify yourself as that person, you were meant to be beaten up. Yet, today, you can identify yourself, and we joke about it, we laugh about it and that is what our work has to do as journalists.”

Currently, the Professor is working with the Peace Council in Northern Region on how to convert the two chieftaincy divides into one. So, together with the Peace Council, the team meets the people involved and trace their commonalities, things that are common, and shock them with their own common history that they did not know about and discuss how to bring them together.

The media is expected to emulate the work of the team in Tamale, by converting discourses of antagonism to discourses of jokes. So that even the differences maintained by one was not based on conflict. He wondered how journalists could take away victimhood “even as we will always be aware that minorities or identity differences will always be there?”

#### Conversation about causes of the Dissah attack

Professor Alhassan delved into the issue of Dissah, which he was familiar with because he had teamed up with a native of the community, Mr. Abdul-Latif Bavug, whose posture in the aftermath of the attack he described as “fantastic,” and who he joined to raise funds and support in Tamale for the victims. Then, inquired from those who had participated in the field trip what they know about Dissah and what they remembered about the conversation with Dissah?

Ignatius Awuah Tanoë Blay from Ghana recalled that the people said they were attacked by armed men from Daboya who were going to deal with the Saleligu community, near Dissah. On the way as they passed through Dissah, one of them fell off the motorbike he was riding on unknown to the others. His colleagues realized the incident later and returned to look for him, but ended up burning the community down on the pretext that the Dissah community was in league with the Saleligu community.

This was considered as the immediate cause of the attack by Professor Alhassan who probed further for, “the fundamental underlying cause.” Ignatius responded that the people had alluded to a chieftaincy issue at Saleligu to which Dissah had been linked by the men of Daboya. Related to this, was the Fulani matter, which had to do with the payment of tribute. Auntie Ama narrated that the Fulanis who had settled in the area had been paying tribute to the Wasipe-Wura, the overlord of the Wasipe Traditional Area with Daboya as the chief town. Therefore, all the communities in the

area pay tribute to him. Then, Saleligu community installed a chief who happened to be an indigene of Dissah, resident at Saleligu. Somehow, he also began taking tribute from the Fulanis, a development, which the Daboya people were unhappy about.

Following the submissions, Professor Alhassan asserted that that particular tribute – the traditional tax system in the area was an ancient practice and remained the main and the deep cause of the attack. Historically, the issue was a form of indirect rule, in which the people of Dissah were put under the Gonjas, and that was how it all started. During those times, they were obliged to pay tax. Somehow, they were able to stop paying the tax and became a minority. But the Fulanis who travel around with their cattle respected this ancient practice and became part of the majoritarian group – with the Gonjas, committed to enforcing the practice of paying taxes. While, Dissah people said they will never pay the taxes. Therefore, an indigene of Dissah had no business becoming tax collectors over the Fulani.

“That,” Professor Alhassan said, “became a big issue and underlying cause. of the conflict between the major ethnic group – the Gonja, and the minority ethnic group, that is the people of Dissah – the Tampulmas.”

#### Characteristic of minority communities

Professor Alhassan blamed the conflict on the lack of media presence in the area, which according to him, was a key characteristic of minority communities. He said the intriguing thing about the incident, was the noticeable absence of the media. “It will interest you to know that not a single media speaks the language of the Dissah community,” and used the occasion to touch on the importance of radio as a tool for conflict resolution. He recalled how he was involved in starting a community FM station some years back, Simli Radio at Dalon in the Kumbungu District of the Northern Region. “We found that if we could devote 30 minutes to their language, it will reach those areas. And that is how they first got to hear their language first time on radio. Not TV. That was a remote idea.”

“I will give you one thesis. Always mark it. Anywhere media is absent, conflict will arise.” He cited another example in Ghana about the Chereponi remote areas, where conflicts easily arise because they do not even have basic radio station to have a conversation. If they did, issues will have been discussed and trashed out on the radio, so that they will all understand their differences. But because that opportunity is lacking, they end up hanging onto hearsays and conflict will then arise. “Whether it is Dissah or Chereponi, my thesis is that in all remote rural communities where conflicts arrive, they lack radio and radio is a basic tool,” Professor Alhassan emphasized.

He offered that the way out of that challenge, “...is encouraging the dissemination of media infrastructure precisely to help prevent conflict.”

But Professor Alhassan deplored an attitude of the mainstream Ghanaian media in the Dissah issue. “But the question I have for those of us who are in the media scene in Ghana is, how many of us, until we heard it, heard about the Dissah story on the mainstream media? An entire village was burnt down. There is no single headline that came up in the major media. What can be the cause?”

The consensus of the participants was that the media blackout happened because the major media houses do not have representatives there to report. But Professor Alhassan contended that though those media house may not have reporters there to cover such issues, once people get to know about the outbreak of the conflict, they usually send reporters who travel there. He was perplexed as to why nobody travelled there to cover the incident, so it could have at least attracted some humanitarian assistance.

He described the situation as depicting another one of the characteristics and the challenges of being a minority group. And presented a thesis to support his claim. “I will give you a thesis. If a remote Dagbon or Gonja village was bent down, they will get the media coverage, they will get the assistance, because there will be a Gonja or a Dagomba person who will hear of it and who will take the media there to bring the story.” But in the case of Dissah, it was obvious that there was not even a single journalist or even somebody who could access the media coming from that area, so blackout. His claim established the issue of majority advantage even in attracting media coverage.

#### Recollection of the Gambaga Witches Camp

Professor Alhassan wanted to find out from those who visited the Gambaga Witches Camp what their experiences were and also quizzed them about what they thought produces witches?

Dr. Francis Sowa from Sierra Leone said, he saw two things from the trip first: – “a country that has two sets of people. One set of people that still hold on to ancient customs and traditions, and another set of people that is tolerant, that is opened up to those who have been accused of being witches.” While the second was a message that came clearly to him about the resilience of a group of people, amidst the suffering they had gone through, “and yet still believe that they can live and life can still go on.” He thought it was an interesting irony that in a country like Ghana, in the 21st century, people could still believe in all of those things, and banish somebody just on a mere accusation of dream. But also in the same country, once one was driven from their society or group, another was willing and ready to accept them, saying: “that is very dynamic.”

Agreeing with Dr. Sowa’s sentiments, Professor Alhassan said the two worlds that he had painted about the witches situation in Ghana, was quite a very good and interesting way of looking at the issue.

Geoffrey Sabiiti from Uganda reminisced that what he saw was very touching, disturbing and more of torture for the 93 women, 4 men and 26 children. “It was more of wriggling the old women in our community, just because someone has dreamt being bewitched, just because someone said his child is sick, so that old woman must have been the one who has bewitched my child.”

Professor Joshua Philip Ayodele Nicol from Sierra Leone described the situation as a cultural violence against the people as well as a violation of their rights. He wondered how these things were happening in Ghana and what is the media response has been – “or is the media acquiescing or following that tradition, because media is also a byproduct of its sociocultural milieu that is obtained.”

How do we go behind the given narrative?

Professor Alhassan queried if those were narratives journalists wanted to keep, to which Geoffrey replied “that is very dangerous.” The Professor went further to inquire “how do we go behind the narratives the have been given.” Geoffrey called for more sensitization in the communities to enable them understand the negative belief behind witchcraft accusations and how best that can be eliminated. His other suggestions were that there should be a conversation on how best families should be supported to understand the nature of the issues and not always base their actions on rumours as well as how best to protect elderly women in the communities. Additionally, people in the communities should be helped to appreciate their mothers as very important in their lives and the society.

What discourses are producing the witches?

Professor Alhassan directed the discussion to the discourse that produces witches and therefore the need for a Witches Camp, and said it was worthy of note that the media, often access the witches’ camp, through the agency of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) that work there. “Therefore, saving the witches has become an industry. So, as journalists our job is first to understand such developments, and secondly to counter them.” He emphasized that: “journalists also have to reinvent the discourse because at the heart of what produces witches, it is socio-cultural, but it is also socioeconomic.”

Abdoulaye Ibrahima Ann from Senegal, who was part of the group that visited the Gambaga Witches Camp was certain that while issue of witchcraft occurs in almost all countries, having a camp for witches was very peculiar to Ghana. He was puzzled about the non-involvement of the government in the issue, since the setting up camps for witches should have attracted government’s attention; and the institutionalization of a belief system into a camp through which, some people and NGOs were taking advantage of the vulnerability of the victims, by making merchandise of their situation.

On this note, Professor Alhassan briefed the participants on the history of The Gambaga Witches Camp. It started because a Cleric who was travelling in the area doing his own business came across the community “seeing off a witch.” Seeing off a witch meant that once that particular female had been identified as a witch, she was taken to the outskirts of the town and killed. So that Cleric decided to rescue her and told the people he was taking over the matter, so they left her with him. Following that, he built the camp, settled her there, and opened it up to take in other alleged witches who the community decided to “go and see off.” So, initially, the Witches’ Camp emerged as a welfare rescue refuge - a place to seek refuge. It was of good intention. It was better than killing. So, it was a refuge centre. Now it has become so institutionalized that the communities producing them. Hence, the need to investigate what discourses were producing the witches?

Theriyeh Koroma from Sierra Leone saw the whole issue from the point of view of gender, especially the fact that majority in that camp were women, with just four men. It was a case of discrimination against them because they were women, resulting in they being pushed into the

minority category. “Women suffer double discrimination just because they are women. They suffer being marginalized in their communities on witchcraft accusations, so they become minority by virtue of a vast majority decision. So, for me as a minority rights activist, poverty is sexist,” Theriyeh expounded her point, adding that “another basis of the witchcraft accusation that befalls women are those who do not give birth to children. They are often accused of possessing witchcraft powers and using it to eat up other people's babies or bewitching them.”

Therefore, she called for an examination of the critical element of “genderising” witchcraft, saying “the current conversation that has subjected the cultural part of our society to the discourse, is very important and on point.

Professor Alhassan concurred Theriyeh’s view and said “it is absolutely right that witchcraft accusation is gendered – heavily gendered, and there is no debate on it now. That is why you have more women there.” He mentioned the characteristics: “In the normal frame of things, if you are a man and you are a wizard, you are welcome to boast and tell people that ‘I am a wizard and if you play with me, I will deal with you.’ You will not get banished. Let a lady dare suggest it even without saying that she is a witch, and that is her end, she will be banished.” Hence, the qualifying criteria to be banished had become gendered and men who boasted of being wizards were never banished. “In fact, they are celebrated,” Professor Alhassan stated.

Touching on the curiously small number of men in the camp, he explained that it had to do with power play in the community. If you came from a low-end background by your family status and you rise out to also say that you are somebody, they will find a way of taking you to the chief’s palace and you are supposed to be banished even though you are a man. Yet, the number is still small compared to the women because men got to go free. Now, a close examination of the banished woman will reveal that she was probably the second or third wife or the first wife of a particular patriarch. And when that patriarch passes on and she is an obstacle to wealth distribution, one of the easiest ways is the boys could come and start thinking negatively about her. Of course, logically, if one entertained negative about another, chances were that you will dream about that person.

And once, that old lady was seen my dream, there is high probability that the next day I will go to the chief’s palace. In the end, she will be banished, then we will get to have the property we have been wanting to share without her. “So, that is the economic aspect of the gendered witchcraft. It is a way young men dispose of old ladies who are refusing to die. They even discuss among themselves ‘Why is she even alive? She should be dead and gone,’” Professor Alhassan bemoaned, and remarked that on that basis a woman could be accused of being a witch and banished from the community. But his main concern was how journalists could change the narrative once they knew the discourses that produced them.

George Achibra Snr from Ghana wondered what the media could do to change the narratives about witchcraft victims especially as it relates to power play. “What we are seeing today, have you ever seen any of the minister’s mother or sister being sent to the Witches Camp? No. Why, because he is a leader. Gambaga and Walewale is not far. The Vice President of this country is from the place.

But will you dare tell the sister that she is a witch? No, you will not because there is a bigger voice that stands behind her,” he queried.

George also created another scenario, which pointed to the fact people who have experienced modernization and exposure were not likely to fall victim to witchcraft accusations. “... if the first group of witches are taken out of Africa to the USA and stayed there within the environment, are given the best of life support and then brought back, we will immediately stop calling them witches, because we will now see these people differently.” He further cited the example of the success story of one of the little boys his organization rescued.

“The first boy I rescued is now a young educated man and has just returned from the USA after completing his first and second degrees. He is with me here and I am so proud of him. But at the very time I was working towards rescuing them, people were pointing the fingers at me saying I am destroying other people's work, because they bought children for less than \$2 or \$3 and engaged in slavery and the worst type of work.” George’s organization works in marginalized communities and with people in minority. Their focus has been on rescuing child traffic victims brought from near and far and to work as slaves.

Witches camp: A matter of state failure?

Babacar Queye Diop from Senegal commended Professor Alhassan for raising the important issue of the factors that produced witchcraft accusations. He said he had heard about such things in Burkina Faso, but that was the first time of hearing about such witches camps stories in Ghana and never knew such things also happen in Ghana too. But Babacar was also perplexed about the inability of the State to protect its citizens who have been left to their fate, and reiterated an earlier call for “the State as well as civil society and media needed to take action by working together to change this kind of perception.” He pondered over the number of people accused of witchcraft and packed in the camp, and whether they had had the opportunity to go the law court, to seek for justice and posed several questions in relation to that. Does the good legal system in Ghana or in the ECOWAS Region and even the African Union provide avenues for those accused people to seek redress? Cannot the family of those victims take up the matter to the Court of Law?

Awa Faye from Senegal, another participant in the field trip observed that the people of Dissah and inmates of the Gambaga Witches Camp, all had heart rending emotional stories to share, because of injustice. She deplored the situation where accusers take justice into their own hands by stoning the accused in order to resolve their problems, was an indication of State failure, since even the police could not protect victims who look up to them.

“This kind of popular justice is seen in most West African countries and it is our duty as journalist and activists, to sit with indigenous people to understand their reasons of doing such things and also work on our advocacy skills,” Faye declared and called for intensify advocacy in these communities to put an end to the Witches Camp.

Professor Alhassan commented on the issue of state failure, asserting that the failure of the State was an undisputed fact because, "...as the primary guarantor of rights, the State has the primary responsibility to protect everybody, but it has failed on that."

According to him, the establishment of the Ministry of Gender in Ghana during the tenure of office of either President Kufour or Mills, happened because the donor community insisted that one of the conditions for continuous aid was an entire ministry to be created for gender. So, the government was compelled to create it because the donor support was important. And while, the protection of women and children rights squarely rests on that ministry and therefore it was that ministry's job to respond to the issues of the witches, journalists normally do not go there to hold them accountable. This was because even if journalists went there to interview the officials, they would refuse to talk. "But I should tell you that the witches story is one that every government official is running away from. You know why? There is a belief that if you dabble in them, they will come for you. It is absolutely rubbish. But the perception is very powerful," Professor Alhassan noted.

Another dimension of the issue that came up in the ensuing discussion, was the overly focus on the Gambaga Witches Camp. But according to Mohammed Fugu from Ghana, "...in actual sense, we have about five witches camps in Northern Ghana. They were actually about six. And in 2014, the Ministry of Gender in collaboration with other partners managed to closed down the Bonyasi Witches Camp in the Savannah Region, where they were able to successfully reintegrate about 98 alleged witches into their communities."

Mohammed recalled that in 2019, ActionAid in collaboration with other partners and the government also managed to disband the Naabuli and Kpatinga Witches Camp in Gushegu, in Northern Region, and about 55 women were also reintegrated into their communities.

So, in his view, the government was doing a lot concerning the victims of witchcraft accusations, but the issue was not one of those to be tackled with aggressive means because it was embedded in the tradition and culture of the people. "I am a Northerner and I have been in northern Ghana there all my life. Issues about tradition and culture is something that we prioritize over everything. Whether you are a Christian or a Muslim, when it comes to tradition and culture, it is first before the religion you practice. So, when it comes to the issues of alleged witches, it is very difficult for you to impose certain decisions on the traditional authorities," Mohammed articulated.

He added that the belief and practice were binding on government as well – "even if you are a government and you come to do anything in the village, you would not have any problem. But once you come to talk or tackle issues about witchcrafts or alleged witches, you will have problems with them. So that is why the government has been very diplomatic and even the NGOs and development partners when it comes to witches issues and alleged witches, they are very diplomatic."

On the reason why for the surge of women being accused, Mohammed explained that in the traditional home setting, when there an issue cropped up, whereby somebody fell ill or died, it was an old man who would go to consult soothsayers who often lie, about the cause of the misfortunate. Now, perchance he was the culprit responsible for the misfortunes that had hit the family, would

he confess that to the rest of the family? There was high probability that this person would return and tell them the soothsayer identified that old grandmother or widower as the one behind the mishap in the house. And once the old man came back with that report, that would become very big problem for woman, as she would not be able to defend herself, though she might be innocent.

Mouhamadou Tidiane Kasse from Senegal offered that some of the issues about witches also had to do with self-stigmatisation. In response, Professor Alhassan reechoed his earlier submission that entire issue about minorities and witchcraft accusations is linked to identity – which bothers on the psychic and social effects including framing.

“Before you self-stigmatize yourself, you would have been framed by the social environment you are in. So, you do not have a choice,” he said and explained that a person’s opinion about his or herself mostly reflects how others thought of them. So, if the thoughts of others were negative, eventually that individual would also start thinking negatively about themselves. And that would have been a product of what others around them were doing.

“It for this reason,” Professor Alhassan argued, “that as journalists, because we use words, we narrate and we tell stories, we have to find ways of using our skills as storytellers to bring about change. So, that is all we are trying to do here. We do not have the answers, but once we get to understand our role as storytellers that is where we come in.” He continued that journalist knew the problem and knew how witches thought of themselves, but the challenge was how best to construct stories revolving around witchcraft. “For example, if you have ever witnessed the exorcism processes of the witches, you will not even recover for a long time. Of course, finally, the woman will tell people that I did it, I killed this person, I killed this person. And you know it is not true. But she has to say it. And she will say it.”

Victimization of alleged witches: A traditional practice violating human rights

George commented on the importance of media practitioners and activists dialogue on the issue of minorities and witchcraft accusations, saying it had been a very good interactive session, that was helping them to better understand the problem. “We are getting closer to the problem in the sense that our voice must be louder now than it used to be yesterday.” But he felt the media effort should be collaborative or team work rather than an individual pursuit and noted that the man who established the Gabbage Witches Camp was successful because of his background as a cleric and that saved him. George was certain that had he gone there as a media practitioner or somebody within that sector, the story would have ended on differently.

He opined that witchcraft was embedded in traditions and customs with traditional authorities who are mostly uneducated and very superstitious and have basically endorsed the practice of consultation, accusation and ostracizing witches, and said consultations about witchcraft activities were real – “This person is going to do consultation, and in the consultation process, it is either the fowl falls flat on its back or falls on its side. As I sit here, I can bring a fowl here and perform the same oracle and it will talk about you Professor.”



That assertion was concurred by Professor Alhassan, as something he has experienced himself. “Yes, it is true. I have experienced it myself, so he is not kidding. You need to experience them to understand. Beyond that you just have to appreciate them.”

Mohamed Kelfala Sesay from Sierra Leone believed that the need for journalists to intervene is about education because lots of people do not have knowledge of minority right issues. He was concerned about how persons with albinism, have been associated with witchcrafts and they were often killed for rituals, especially in East Africa. This prompted the UN appointment of an independent Expert on Albinism. Mohammed said following the creation of that portfolio, the state of the Albinos was improving.

He urged journalists, to engage people who knew about the issues of albinism for instance, so they could collate appropriate information for packaging, dissemination and public education. That would help reduce the misconceptions and perceptions about albinism such as their body parts being suitable for rituals, which has led to the killing of many of them. Thus, the need for intensive education was crucial because of the massive ignorance among the populace, who just accept anything others tell them, and conclude what that person was saying was the truth.

Kemo Cham from Sierra Leone described what was going on at Gambaga “as one of the violations of human rights,” which should be tackled from the traditional settings where such things emanated from, with the chiefs as the main target, since the fact that most of them were uneducated was a contributing factor to the situation. “So, I think we need put our heads together, identify the chiefs in those areas and focus attention on them. Let us see how we can engage them, sensitize them, let them know that doing this to human, it is not proper, so we can move forward.” His concern was that such practices were giving the perception to people that “in our part of the world, women are not valued. Because if women are valued in the northern parts of our countries, some of these things should not be happening.”

Aunty Ama remarked that unfortunately, the matter was not in the hands of the chiefs. The practice was embedded in their culture. So, some of the chiefs are even victims because some of their wives and relations were victims in the camp and they dare not open their mouths. They will be killed. She related the pathetic story of one man in the camp who had been there less than one year and who happened to be a royal. Therefore, everybody, at one point in time could become a victim. To survive in those communities will require that you pray that nobody dreamt about you. “Because the moment I sleep and I dream about you, the next morning, your head goes.” One interesting observation Aunty Ama made was about the age brackets of the victims – they were mostly about 50 years upward. So, in consoling the women, she urged them not to remain sad, even though their situation was painful, having left their children, because if things remained as they were, one day some of those women will join them there, because someone will also dream about them.

Aunty Ama recalled the story of that woman who used to be a leading trader and a woman of substance in her community. One day, a younger woman woke up from her sleep and accused her of bewitching her younger brother. The older woman because she was financially empowered went and reported the matter to the police, who went to the younger women’s house to arrest her. They were chased out and had they not fled would have been lynched. So that ended the

involvement of the police. Later, she was attacked and beaten with a bicycle locker by a mob led by her accuser's brother and sacked from the community and she had to flee to the camp with her body covered with very bad wounds. So, now she sports a huge scar on her arm.

#### Engaging the power of framing

Professor Alhassan described the bicycle locker as a metal that was used to beat the woman and reiterated that the problem was now well known and the next move was for the journalist to move away from the problem definition, to asking themselves how to effect change. And effecting change had to do with framing. "And one of the things we do every day is framing. We frame. That is what journalists do. Our job is to frame. Any story you want to, even if you were to report on this event, when you come and experience the whole event, by the time you leave this door, you will have to frame the event and pick up an angle. So, our job is to frame," he reminded the journalists.

Making reference to one of the good Theorists of Framing Robert Entman, Professor Alhassan went on to explain framing: "to select aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment and recommendation. That is framing."

He said that process was what journalists do every day. "That is our work and it is a journalistic prerogative. "That is why sometimes when we report an event, somebody will call and say, the journalist misreported. No, he or she did not misreport. That professional has the journalistic prerogative," adding, "you cannot take it away from the journalist. He or she will choose an angle and frame the whole event and the world must see it that way." He charged journalists, to employ the power of framing to change the national discourse on witchcraft.

But he was surprised that throughout the conversation, there was no question about the legal stance on witches. "I wanted to hear somebody say that, what does the law say on witches in Ghana?" Professor Alhassan asked if after all the many years since the country's 1992 Republican democracy started, the government had not seen the need to have that bill, how much is the government doing? He then announced: "That is why the Anti-Witchcraft Bill is going to Parliament tomorrow, and the first consultation will begin in the Parliament of Ghana," and urged all to pay attention to the event.

Giving the background to the bill, Professor Alhassan said it is was a private member bill sponsored by the Member of Parliament for Wa East, Godfred Seidu Jasaw and supported by some NGOs to push it through.

He had been chatting with the MP on how to mainstream the bill and that Thursday April 6<sup>th</sup> was the first pre-stakeholder engagement on it. He explained that there was need for people to understand that it was critical that the bill was passed and urged all to give the needed support to get it on the national agenda for conversation it and to get it passed.

## Chapter 4

### The Video stories: A practical approach to changing journalism's narratives

Professor Alhassan clarified that the essence of the video was for journalists to know that if they want to change the narration, they do not have wait for others to set it for them, but they can set it by themselves. The clip showed a female journalist who had adopted an elderly woman Afua Akoto who was going through very hard times taking care of her two grandchildren. The journalist established a relationship with her and they had gotten to know each other. So, once every two or three months, she passed by her place to check on her. And she used her status as a reporter to mobilize resources to change the woman's life, as an example or a case study, and kept on reporting on the woman's progress as a news story for the bulletin.

Professor Alhassan said that was the kind of change the Roundtable had been talking about and went back to his earlier queries on how journalists would change the discourse, since they now knew the problem and stated: "we now are looking for mechanism and strategies for changing the narratives of poverty, of marginalization, of witchcraft, of Dissah. How do you do it? What kind of narratives?"

Probing further, Professor Alhassan directed the participants to the clip and asked "in the video example, what are we? What is unique about Afua Akoto's story? And urged them to share their thoughts.

Joyce Gyekye from Ghana answered that the journalist Beatrice was using that platform to really change the narrative of Afua Akoto by soliciting for whatever resources she could gather and using the radio medium to publicise the plight of that woman. Alhaji Manike Kamara from Sierra Leone agreed with Joyce, saying: "I think the lady is also changing the narrative for journalists not to wait until events unfold."

Geoffrey Sabiiti saw the narrative in the story in the form of hope for the Afua Akoto. "First of all, there is now hope for that old woman. You can really see hope. And I think the reporter is trying to do whatever she can. Secondly, I saw the changing narrative in relation to the issue of the witches' camp and I am looking at having the story where there is some of the people who have been integrated in the community." He inquired how many times journalist have captured such a story because according to the Pastor, they had integrated some of the women in the community. Geoffrey further inquired if journalists had captured that story. That was because it was very important not only to look at that negative side, but now also at the positive side, so that everyone could look at the picture of the few women who have been integrated into their community and see how life had changed. He noted that if journalists were able to capture that story, it could be a very important tool to also change the minds of other people. However, taking back those women to where they came from, did not really matter, what mattered was whether they were also able to settle in another community and got the needed supported. When journalists captured such a story, depicting the changed lives of the women. "I think that will be the best way of looking at the narrative," Geoffrey added.

Professor Alhassan lauded Geoffrey's suggestion, saying that through tracing and tracking down inmates who have been discharged and integrated into the community to ascertain how they were doing, the journalist would be showcasing a very positive story. On the issue of closing down the Witches Camp, he said all efforts so far have failed because the camp's existence "has become an industry, but the success rate is very poor," and proposed another way of looking at the problem.

"The witches' camp can be turned around into a model village: a settlement converted into a nice community, with amenities such as a nice school and good water system and electricity, that would also become an attractive destination for residents."

Aunty Ama cautioned that because the results of communication were not immediate, journalists delving into new narratives should note that it was a process involving a whole of things. She referred to the Afua Akoto story, and said Beatrice the journalist aimed to change the life of this poor 70-year-old woman scavenger, saddled with the burden of caring for her two grandchildren. Beatrice would achieve her aim of enhancing Afua Akoto's life, but it would take sometime after a series of stories had been done.

Such narratives also necessitate that media and activists, should have a nose that smells stories, else they might miss certain very important stories evolving around them. She observed that some years ago, such stories would be discarded by the editor, and added: "Now, I like what journalism has evolved to over the years, because we want to see the impact of journalism, and this is very exciting for me."

Professor Alhassan noted that making impact has become core in journalism work and that had to do with breaking away from the old news values and adopting new values. He explained that the Afua Akoto story, "breaks the news values we were taught at Journalism School, how to do news story. News stories had never been seen as the values of objectivity and have not seen journalist being in the story." The essence of such a narrative was that the story created by the reporter had a good message. The person they talked about was an ordinary nobody in the public's eye, but through the story, a person like Afua Akoto, will be getting some respect in the community by being the focus of a series on national television. It had and will have an impact, though not immediately, but with time. Professor Alhassan asked journalists to bear in mind that the new narrative was about changing perceptions and also about changing the way certain issues were discussed.

Kemo Cham from Sierra Leone recollected a similar story he did some time last year to change the life of a destitute widow with two crippled daughters who had become a liability. Kemo did an initial story about their plight that attracted people to come to their aid. He even contacted the Member of Parliament (MP) in the area, where the woman lived, but he initially declined. However, when he realized that a lot of people were going to her aid, and getting media and public visibility, he decided to use the occasion of his birthday to assist the family. Kemo urged journalists to pursue such stories even though it might not be profitable to them personally.

Kukua Snead-Michaels, Ghana said Afua Akoto's story was great, so journalist Beatrice should be highly commended, for portraying the new journalism narratives that was being discussed at the Roundtable. "We have moved from packaging our stories and ending on the note of advocating or appealing to government and NGOs to come to the rescue of people like Afua Akoto, to actually immersing ourselves in the story and being the ones advocating for them and soliciting for funds to change the lives of such persons." She emphasized that even though some editors might not appreciate such new narratives, that was where journalism had reached. So, journalists should not rely on other people to follow up on the stories they have done to provide results. "We should accept that we are very powerful people as journalists and that we can also make changes in the lives of the marginalized and then the less privileged," Kukua stated.

Cecilia Alice Sesay from Sierra Leone was impressed with the portrayal of unique actuality in the story – the total unawareness of the visit of Beatrice and her crew to Afua Akoto and her pleasant surprise and response to the visit, which was evident in the tone of her voice and gestures, that could not have been well captured by the journalist. She said that was key in broadcasting, with its potential for creating visibility on minority issues. For instance, broadcasting media could be created to present the actual picture of what was happening in their own voice.

Kofi Adu Domfeh from Ghana said he enjoyed watching the video on Afua Akoto, and announced that the situation whereby editors were not interested in such stories, was no more the norm. His worry was that the story was incomplete, because it did not incorporate the policy drive in terms of handling the destitute and non-existent support of the elderly in society. He was expecting to see in the clip a deeper talk about why that challenge was persisting and the need for journalism drive as a means to change policy or influence policy.

Professor Alhassan responded that within the context of news reporting, the clip was a very short one and if it was a documentary, would have had room to incorporate, issues of policy. He added that the story was being rolled out in a series. So, with time, the journalist should be able to open up the conversation about the policy angle and the children's education. So far, that aspect is not yet captured. Professor Alhassan there must be in the coming series, stories that would talk about the schooling of Afua Akoto's grandchildren, another at some point should open up the question: how did it happen that a grandmother has two kids to care for? This pointed to the fact that narrative should continue building up and over some time, "the Afua AKoto story will always have to feature and we will see a bit of it in the news, which also all boils down to where policy is."

Martha Crentsil Acquah from Ghana was expecting to get hear in the video if Afua Akoto was a beneficiary of Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme or if she was getting any formal support. She was curious about where Afua Akoto's family was, and offered that maybe her daughter or son was in the city and has left her with these two sons to take care of, so she could be remitted. "So, if we empower her, we know it is not because Afua Akoto did not want to work, but because she was disadvantaged genuinely and needed that help," Martha said.

Professor Alhassan noted that the LEAP issue was the bigger policy issue that came up and that the scheme was a token effort that did not really sustain the people. The issue had to do with what

kind of pension arrangement we had for the aged and for the destitute. It also had to do what systems had been put in place to take care of these vulnerable class so that they do not go through these processes.

Donald Erasmus Theo-Harding from Sierra Leone was of the view while the journalist told the story of the old woman, she was actually talking to people at the Roundtable since it was minority issues, which was the focus of the story. He urged all to do likewise.

Professor Alhassan called for a reflection on where journalism started from, where students were told about what is the function of journalism was, and the liberal, classical, democratic framework of journalism and where we were going now.

He thought that was something that all the participants were familiar with, and the it was the media because it was expected to mediate among the three main blocks of society – the State, market and civil society and explained how each of blocks functioned: Once upon a time, there was no media. In a way, it now understood. But as society got developed, and the State, which was the absolute monarch got withdrawn and allowed a space for free minds to think and comment on public issues, to have associations, to have groupings, there emerges civil society. Then again, society moved away from feudal era, environment of entitlement to sharing and trading in goods and raising money, generating wealth with investors, so the market emerged and then civil society characterized by free association of people, be it religious, ethnic or geographic. So, if you studied any democratic society, whether Ghana, Britain, France or Belgium, that framework was what you saw. The society could be reduced to that framework and every democratizing or democratic society could be reduced to that framework: the State or government, market including private business entities and then civil society comprising voluntary organizations, professional association and religious organizations.

Professor Alhassan presumed the framework was a dynamic one, into which the complexity of society had been reduced to and in that state of affairs the media emerged, especially in the 18th century, to mediate among the contending interest of the state, the market and then civil society, with the latter being the core of society. He stated that the interesting about the three, was that interesting thing is that those who belonged to one block could claim to belong to the other and that trait made the civil society vulnerable to capture and to abuse. Professor Alhassan was certain that was one of the weaknesses of modern-day democratic system that was being practice now, along which, all had accepted that the classical news values, objectivity, impartiality was derived from that framework.

Professor Alhassan observed that journalists were now trying to move away from that framework and wondered how many of those at the Roundtable had moved away from that? He also had an issue with journalists, which was that they liked to gravitate towards the State and in doing so, end up rather moving from the centre. Citing the coverage of news in a day, he said “if you take the distribution of journalists in the day for news sources, the state institutions take majority of our news. So, our job is how do we change this?”

Joshua Philip Ayodele Nicol from Sierra Leone said his country practiced liberal democracy and that the State no longer owned ownership over the media within the market. But the market too could dictate what the media covers. So, he agreed with the man who said that had the media been around 2000 years ago, they would have covered the crucifixion of Christ, but not his resurrection, the backbone of Christianity. Because today's media all go for – the sensational aspect of issues, the driver of markets within our society. Professor Nicol asserted that only state media, and public service media, like the GBC, could do the Afua Akoto like stories because they were mandated to do so. But private media would not want to do such stories since they would not bring the necessary cedis into their coffers.

That assertion, Professor Alhassan, thought was true and that that man also alluded to the weaknesses of civil society, whose actors could capture the media, especially if they were based on free market system, because capital was critical in the survival of the media. On the example of public service broadcasting, he said that was also another weakness and illustrated his point by saying, “Ghana has one of the most separated media from the state and as the CEO of GBC, I'm not appointed by the President and he cannot appoint me. The law forbids it.” He was quick to note that before the law came, government would appoint and dictate what one could do or not do. But under the current system if government had a grievance, it could lay the grievance, but not give instructions and declared that: “We have that in Ghana and we are very proud of it.” He was appointed by a constitutional board called the National Media Commission (NMC), whose composition, the President only nominates two out of 18 people. There were other nominees by the journalists teachers and the bar association. Then, when they meet for the first time, they would vote who would be chairman. So power was diffused. It was this Commission of 18 members who would advertise, interview and appoint the head of the State media. Even though, this was a straight forward constitutional process, Professor Alhassan maintained it had become very difficult because of misunderstanding by politicians. “But, this is a very difficult job because the politicians never understand it. They always refuse and they think they can instruct you.” The situation often resulted in a struggle between heads and the politicians.

He contextualized that the African continent's problem had to do with where the media should move towards in the midst of the transitional democratic framework, with systems that were struggling to push down the media and mentioned that more than 90% of heads of institutions were appointed by their heads of state and boards were put in place by the government.

The Sierra Leonean participants admitted that their country was experiencing similar situation. Professor Alhassan explained that the difference between the Ghana and Sierra Leone situation, was that in Sierra Leone, the President directly appointed the media related boards. While, in the Ghana case, boards were put in place by the NMC and not the President.

So, there was the need to pray and hope for the media to function properly and “we must shift it down to the middle,” he instructed, adding: “And when it gets there, our interest here in this room is to see us moving towards building the capacity of civil society – the kind of journalism we just saw Beatrice Senadju do, an attempt to embed herself not towards the state, nor the market, but towards civil society.” He reiterated that that was the job of the journalist and that was the kind of journalism they should be seeking to do. Therefore, “let us remind ourselves and ask ourselves

every day, how many times do I take the mic to the politician and how many times do I take the mic to Afua Akoto?” Professor Alhassan demanded, and argued that if a journalist found his or herself more tilted towards the ministries, then they were going to give content that is not wanted in the civil society arena. “If you find yourself always going to the ministries and talking to the politicians, then you must find out that you are giving us a type of content that we do not want here. We are asking for the kind of content that will change the narration, because the more you give the voice to the politician, the more you are going to listen to their crap.”

He further indicated that politicians everywhere were the same. So, if he Professor Alhassan was made a minister tomorrow, he would change to the extent that his old acquaintances like Auntie Ama who can easily drag him out of his office, would no longer have access to him not even by phone. “When she calls, I will not pick because I would have been changed by the job and my interest will change. My focus is getting reelected, and anything that will get me reelected, I will do it,” he stated and again cautioned journalists that when a politician was giving them goodies and defending them, they could receive that “but remember that your civic responsibility, the kind of solution journalism or civic journalism that we are asking ourselves to do, means that we must deliberately on our own shift towards this society. We must tell ourselves that it is deliberate acts.” However, Professor Alhassan acceded that by nature of journalism, journalists were always going to group towards state and capital or the market. “Why, because fundamentally, when we go to our classroom journalism school – to find out what is news, it will tell you to go to the presidency, the parliament, the judiciary, the elite, and bring the news.”

But he drew the attention of the journalists to the task at hand now, which was to change that narration and move towards civil society. The reason was that when journalists went towards the state, they were powerful and power made news. “So, if you move away from there and you come to the mundane and the ordinary, how do you convert it to be attractive as news?” he inquired.

Auntie Ama had a concern, which had to do with “who pays for the cost of the shift” that was now necessary as journalists gravitate towards civil society. She referred to the Afua Akoto clip and said the journalist was soliciting for support to give back to civil society asked how best to handle that associated cost.

Professor Alhassan answered that ordinarily, the idea in changing the narrative was for them to mediate, knowing that while the state was powerful, it did not own the resources it was handling. He said the issue was that African politicians act big and did not like being confronted with the truth as it weakened them and reminded politicians that did not become an MP or Minister because they had a gun, rather they were in the position because of the law and they were not a military government. So, journalists could also make use of the law and remind politicians that they equally have power and it was a democratic government in place with a President, who was not elected because he or she was the strongest person, but because the very constitution that gave them the power, also gave certain entitlements to civil society and the job of the journalists was to secure those entitlements.



Professor Alhassan reminded the participants of the earlier discussion on the witchcraft matter and how it came out strongly that the State had failed in handling the issue as long as people were still being killed every day and the state had not successfully prosecuted one killer.

Turning his attention to the journalists again, he said in changing the narration and gravitating towards civil society, journalists were expected to empower civil society to demand its due from the State and the market and was the function of journalism. So the issue was not about going there to give them something like in the Afua Akoto story, but it was about going there to build their capacity to demand.

He recalled an incident that a Nigerian friend narrated to him at the time he was schooling in Finland that he would never forget. “One day, my neighbour, a Nigerian student – Ogo, came in and said, ‘Oga, guess what happened today?’ I said, no, what happened? ‘On the train from Helsinki to Tampere, I was sitting there, guess who came and sat by me?’ I said, who? ‘The Prime Minister of Finland,’ he replied. A politician in that society is nobody. The Prime Minister of Finland is travelling from Helsinki to Tampere, he goes by train alone. He enters the train and sits by a black guy in a predominantly white train and he engages him in conversation to understand his problems.”

Professor Alhassan brought up that example to show how ordinary the politicians should be like and that journalists had a job to demystify power play in politicians. “So, when we shift here, our job is to demystify the power of the state, to make it difficult for them to appropriate all the resources for themselves, so that the resources can be properly distributed.” From his perspective asking journalists to shift towards civil society, meant empowering members to demand their share of the national cake, which journalists could do by demanding accountability of all those appointed, employed or elected in a duty-performing function. And once that general framework was done, journalists would have resolved the question of the minorities, the weak and the vulnerable.

He reasoned those countries that have used the same media to build their societies, were more egalitarian and the gap between the poor and the rich was not so graphic. Besides, while there should be wealth, there should also be some minimum guarantee of dignity for all human beings, which should be the responsibility of the State.

Subsequently, the Professor directed the focus of the conversation to the theoretical basis of the discussions, saying it could be called development journalism, peace journalism, citizen journalism, civic or public journalism and solution journalism. But existing literature on all of those topics had common elements, which had to do with how journalists could empower civil society in the dynamic framework, “so that we can grow our democracy.”

He reminisced that development journalism was probably the earliest of all of various forms, which came up in the sixties and seventies just after independence in many African countries. But it was initially abused and later developed properly. Public journalism had similar issues about empowering communities to act and improve public discussions and making sure that the voice is given to the voiceless. Citizen journalism are all within these examples.

On that note, Professor Alhassan invited the participants to watch the second video clip, which after reporting a problem, then looking for solutions to it.

Professor Alhassan led the discussion of the second video saying it was an exposure of a situation in Pru in the Bono East Region, where the reporter traveled to, got the story and had the opportunity to lobby and get some people to respond. And thankfully, First Atlantic came to the rescue and of those in need. So, it involved the process of identification of a problem and getting a solution, which comes up as a solution journalism, which often do not come from the government or state, but from the market. Therefore, the bases for questions stilled being asked about what the state use its resources to do.

He concluded by encouraging journalists to turn the stories about poverty, marginalization, and stigma, to sexy narratives and that would define their professional identity as journalists who had been informed by alternative forms of journalism, be it civic journalism, citizen journalism, solution journalism or development journalism. Professor Alhassan was confident that “whatever form it is, we can do it. And there are many ways.”

## Chapter 5

### General Discussions

Who is a minority?

This was the final session of the Roundtable, and the Moderator, Francis Ameyibor, steered the conversation to first identify who the minorities were in the various countries of the participants.

Mohamed Kelfala Sesay from Sierra Leone said his group, the Disabled Persons Organization (DPOs), was a coalition of different groups involved in minority right issues. He said members included the Autism Association, the group for the aged who were facing numerous challenges and discrimination, and the Sierra Leone Albinism Foundation of which he was the Programmes Officer.

Kemo Cham of Sierra Leone added that minority communities also included the visually impaired persons, widows, even children as well as mothers of twin children could also be classified as minorities because of what they pass through and the cultural issues that are attached to their day-to-day activities.

Geoffrey Sabiiti emphasized the need for all to clearly understand the discussion about minority and indigenous groups. His personal view was that minorities, refer to a group of people who are minority in number, but who also face marginalization and discrimination in their daily lives, and because of that, they face a number of challenges all the time. So, the need for those people to be differentiated from those with disabilities, as that relates to more of types and the categories of disabilities. Geoffrey continued that there were disability-led organizations, with a focus of assisting their members to assert themselves as well as leading and showing others how to be able to work with persons with disabilities.

He referred to a provision in the African Commission Guidelines that said every African was an indigene, which meant that as long as you were an African, then automatically you were an indigenous person. “But it comes from self-identification,” he noted, adding that “that is one of the things that we should look at because this group of people must be able to self-identify themselves as minority and try to ensure that their rights are protected, and make sure that they assert themselves.”

Geoffrey went on to talk about the plight of small ethnic groups of people and other marginalized communities. Explaining the various categories of ethnic communities like Benet and Maragoli who are not mentioned in the 1995 Ugandan Constitution. MRG has positioned itself to intervene and advocate for them working with other key stakeholders. In one of the cases, MRG has collaborated with other CSOs and key institutions to appeal and petition the governments on some of the decisions made against these minorities. Details of the cases other MRG interventions can be found on the organization’s website.

Geoffrey also talked about other national minorities who are at the verge of statelessness who should not be forgotten. He described them as those in a particular country, but who are not recognized and are very few in number and cited the Indian national minorities and Yemens in

Uganda. Till to date, these people are still struggling to be seen as Ugandans and some of them do not know any other country, apart from Uganda. The only country they know is Uganda. So, they want to be also recognized as citizens in that country.

He felt it was important that as journalists and minority activities, they understood the two categories of minority groups and could be identified and noted in the EMMAP project interventions.

Francis, the Moderator thanked Geoffrey for providing such insight on the issue of who minorities were. He cited Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, saying, "it gives every person the right to receive information and express and disseminate opinions and thus, places a responsibility on the media," and wondered if the media was doing that and whether journalists even knew about that article?

He however, interjected that since the journalists and activists at the Roundtable now knew about that provision, there was need to first, discuss some of the problems associated with minorities in the various localities, and second, deliberate on how to help them to come out of those problems, based on the focus of the discussions, which was peacebuilding, identification of the challenges and helping them out of them. Francis reechoed Professor Alhassan's call on journalists to help find solutions to problems faced by members of civil society in the frame of "constructing our differences without antagonism." So, his question to the house was "how can we construct our differences without antagonism?"

How to construct our difference without antagonism?

Mohammed Fugu from Ghana thought that capacity building like the Roundtable, was very important, to keep journalists abreast of issues and the times, to enhance their skills in journalists writing and improve on actual reportage on certain issues. He said in reporting on minority issues, it was crucial that the journalists should always involve the victims to be able to better understand them, get to know the kind of things that they go through, whether they are happy or unhappy or how to describe them. Mohammed recalled a story he did on persons with hearing impairment and how they told him: "They are not happy about the way the media always uses deaf and dumb to describe them, because they felt insulted, and rather preferred the term hearing impairment." His point was that unless, one got closer to them, there was no that individual would understand them better, and urged all journalists, to "... open our doors to always build our capacity so that we can report well."

Martha Crentsil Acquah from Ghana offered that getting to know people in minority also meant establishing a rapport with them and once that happened, "when they know you are for them, they will come to you without any prompting to tell their story." She observed that media portray of prejudices against such people, often make them unwilling to open to us.

"Sometimes as media, before we go to them, we have our prejudice and so we start behaving like they are less of people, before we even go to them. And that makes it difficult for them to even open up to us." She said sometimes the prejudice was evident in the choice of words, even when the story was positive in addition to always presenting the stories about others to them, which they

have to read, list to or watch on television, while their issues remain uncovered in the media. “Therefore, they are lost in the discourse and do not feel any sense of belonging,” Martha added and asked: “...if for instance, after a budget is read, how many of us worry about what the minority groups feel about what is said in the budget, are they given any space in the budget?”

She journalists could change the narratives by beginning to look at the stories from the angles of changing the diction used to describe the and including minorities in the scope of interviewees on national issues that affect everybody like the reading of the annual budget in Parliament, and appealed to all media to: “let us start thinking about them so we can incorporate them and include them in our decision-making about potential personalities for our stories.”

In line with Martha’s submission, Professor Joshua Philip Ayodele Nicol from Sierra Leone, urged journalists to utilize the conflict-sensitive approaches in journalism, which is in relation to being mindful of one’s choice of words “because words are very powerful.” And he signaled participants not to focus sole on the traditional forms of communication – radio, television and newspapers, but to also consider how other forms of media like theatre, drama, comedy and advertising depict people minorities, especially people with disabilities.

Professor Nicol stressed the need for all “to change our mindset in the way and manner in which we handle issues with disability and also minority because they are always the **bot** of jokes in comedy.” He was concerned about the effects of such presentation. “And when we present them in that manner, we reinforce this stereotype, the perception people think about them, that they are no good, they have to be made fun of and joked about.” Professor Nicol called for the mainstreaming into all walks of life of the presentation of minorities and the disabled, so that their rights could be recognized and expected.

For her part, Theriyeh Koroma from Sierra Leone believed that the effects of media presentation of minorities were becoming worrying because of how media personalities have been placed on pedestals and how subconsciously that was perpetrating things like sexism and stereotypes. “But they are just like every other person we have in our society and in many cases,” she said, adding “we are socialized the same way.”

Theriyeh was also of the view that sometimes the problem had to do with “our belief system,” which influenced people’s level of tolerance and stated that there were some journalists whose tolerance level towards LGBTQ persons was very low. Therefore, she questioned how such journalists could be objective when they were covering an issue around the LGBTQ.

The Gender and Minority Advocate saw the Roundtable and ensuing discussion, as an important re-orienting activity, “because it has awakened us, quickened our consciousness and increase our awareness level,” and which should be brought to bear in how we tackle the things happening around us that we had not been paying attention and had not been reporting on them. She conceded that these had been going on, “sometimes not just because we do not know that they are happening, but just because we feel like they are not relevant or we do not just pay attention to them.”

Theriyeh admonished journalists and activists to cultivate the art of being conscious and aware of things happening within their surroundings and around them, and also capacitate themselves to be

able to address those issues. She said being open minded in that wise, was a process that took time, so it was necessary to keep working at it, “because a lot of attributes that we process conflict with, are in the very surrounding that we hope to address.”

Abdul Wahab from Ghana of the Ghana Federation of Disability Organizations felt that in tackling minority issues, one thing that journalists and activists overlooked was what made them minority or vulnerable. “The focus is always on the subject of being minority, but what caused them to be the minority is always missing in the story,” he said, and gave the example of communities in Bono, Eastern and Western North Regions of Ghana “where persons with albinism like me are not allowed to visit.” He narrated an incident where the issue came up at the Akuamufie community and when the media came to interview him as a person with albinism and an advocate, “they are rather talking about my experience as a person with albinism. But I was thinking they would at the community itself, why they not allow Albinos in here, the challenges, what are the issues and how to address them.”

Abdul thought that was an approach that would not solve the problem. Therefore, journalists and activists tackling minority issues, should try to address them from the angle of the causes, pick the perspectives of both the minority and majority, so they can present a balance story.

Kemo Cham from Sierra Leone suggested that the way forward should be to engage minorities in issues relating to them and in which, journalists were interested in resolving, so that together, they could put out a good story for the public.

Kofi Adu Domfeh from Ghana thought there were some uniqueness about minority groups that were often not highlighted, such as things that set them apart and were very helpful. For instance, in doing a story on a group of persons with hearing impairment, he instructed that “you want to go into appreciating how they even communicate, bringing out the things that demonstrate their uniqueness for people to know how this group really exists and function.” Such a narrative would help with that positive reinforcement for people to appreciate that group and also help to brush aside the negative perceptions that people have about them.

George Achibra Snr from Ghana shared a personal example to support the need for journalists and advocates to take the trouble to know the people that they want to help and whose stories they want to share with the public. “I joined the Sightsavers International and was made one of their leading agents. One day, we were at a workshop, discussing the blind and we were asked to share our expectations of the blind. People said: the blind speak too much, the blind does this, the blind does that, instead of delving deeply to know about the characteristics of the blind.”

However, he had now come to appreciate that certain behavioural traits like being a talkative or a drunkard, might not be associated with the condition of blindness at all. Therefore, journalists and advocates need to engage them continuously with a positive attitude and they will get good results in the end.

The Moderator prompted contributors to the discussions to also offer solutions on how to diffuse existing tensions in order to build peaceful communities and co-existence. He supported the view

that the minority group had a genuine case that they had been neglected, while the majority still think that they had the right to own, access and enjoy certain resources.

Fawa from Senegal called for constant engagement, with minorities and stressed the need to them “the space, more space for their voices to be heard.”

Cecilia Alice Sesay from Sierra Leone brought up the issue of legislature and the laws about minority rights and observed that there was more awareness about minorities, than there was about the laws that protect them, which they themselves were even ignorant of. She referred to the Sierra Leonean example of the Disabled Acts that has provided for free education for the disabled, but because they were not aware of that legal provision, they were not benefitting from it. Hence, journalists needed to create more awareness about the legislative laws that protect minority groups. Alice also proposed that journalists should specialize in reporting on minority rights or human rights issues, just as there are investigative journalists, “that is how we should have minority rights journalists or human rights journalists.” She further proposed that human rights journalism should be taught in in universities and professional training programmes.

Emelia Ennin Abbey from Ghana indicated that the first step in identifying who were the minority was very important, so journalists would who they were talking about. She expected that when participants returned to their various countries, they would properly identify the majority groups there to enhance their capacities on them. She reminded participants to take note of the right terminologies to use for them and make the effort to unearth the causes of their marginalization or discrimination in society, by so doing journalists will be able to present the issues of minorities appropriately. Emelia further reminded journalists of the advantage they have to amplify the voices of the voiceless such as minorities also reechoed the need for interaction and engaging minorities, so as to know and better understand the issues affecting them.

Kukua Snead-Michaels from Ghana touched on the issue of the LGBTQ “is something that is staring us in the face, even if we put our heads in the sand or ignore that fact.” She referred to Theriyeh’s earlier submission that if journalists and activists did not understand the issues, they would not be able to even speak for them.

Kukua was surprised about the kind of disparaging and demeaning comments that people including journalists make about LGBTQ person and said she had to caution some colleagues of the inappropriateness of making certain remarks about them on air. “These are not things you can say as an on-air personality, but maybe in the privacy of your bedroom,” she stated. So, she believed in moving forward the first step was understanding who the minority was, understanding why they were the minority, understanding why they felt they were marginalized or was it just a feeling? Was it the reality? “Then, afterwards we will be able to speak for them. Because if you are not in my shoes, you cannot walk in my shoes, how would you be able to speak for me?” Kukua saw it as a long process and not a one-day journey, adding that most of the participants actually fell in one or another category of minorities. She said Ghana maybe very fortunate to not have a lot of religious intolerance, noted “we have them in pockets and it is just that we have been able to hide them for want of a better word and encouraged them to embark on “knowing minorities, understanding them and being tolerant, then we will be able to speak right about them.”

Shawana Yussif from Ghana felt that journalists should endeavour to give minorities equal opportunities. The usual practice has been that when an issue came up for discussion in the media, the first point of call is the majority and the minority do not usually come into the picture. She therefore made a special appeal to the journalists at the Roundtable: “when we go back, we should always remember that we need to give the minority also an equal platform when issues arise that need to be discussed, being mindful about the fact that one day we might be part of the minority.”

She explained that since the aged was identified as a minority group, people should bear in mind that “tomorrow, some days, some few years to come for some people in this room, you will definitely be part of that group. Hence, the time to begin to fight for them is now, so that when you get there, someone can also fight for your own course.”

Rosemond Yaa Kpeiku from Ghana was glad about the consensus to empower minorities, but said beyond empowering and creating opportunities for them, their capacity should also be built in planning, financial management and prudence. She explained that that was essential because a woman can be supported to start a business, but if she does not know how to save, her business will not be sustained and will eventually become marginalized.

Benedicta Folley Gyimah from Ghana believed that in order to make progress, there was need to work collaboratively by putting aside all differences. “When it comes to our work, we have to put our religious, our moral, whatever we have aside, and try to speak to the matter. I think that would help solve most of the issues of minorities.”

The Moderator raised a concern about the usage of the terminology “minority.” He argued that since in addressing the others the term “majority” was hardly used, there was need to reflect on it, especially as journalists were beginning to change the dynamics in their reportage.

Martha Crentsil Acquah from Ghana did not see anything wrong with using the term “minority” as it adeptly drew attention to their special needs for solutions. She said building trust with both sides was necessary in the dialogue process, so they could be brought together to resolve their differences. Martha also mentioned the need for specialized reporting on issues of minorities as it made the journalists build their expertise to delve more into their matters, that will automatically increase and expand the coverage, and help bridge the existing gap between the coverage of majority and minority related issues.

Theriyeh Koroma from Sierra Leone said since journalists are those who feed the public and set agenda for discussion, the first principle they should hold on to “in very high esteem is the principle of accuracy and impartiality in our reporting.” She was concerned that the principle was sometimes over looked in the bid to be the first to put out the news and questioned whether, the news stories on minority groups are very factual, accurate and balanced, or they are impartial, and if the journalists got all the sides needed to talk? Theriyeh charged journalist to be very conscious about that because of how the media play a role in fueling the Rwanda genocide. Insensitive media reportage resulted in escalating tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis, which was not good for the country.



Building on Theriyeh's point Aunty Ama stressed that media workers needed to be careful of commenting on issues on air, saying at times the choice of words and phrases were just too insensitive and inciteful. She used the Dissah and Daboya issue to make her point. Five years after they were attacked by their overlord Daboya, the Disaah community members described the attack as a result of misunderstanding, while the elders of Daboya also classified it as an unfortunate occurrence. Now, in reporting the issue, if one decided to play commentary on it, that is where we create tension instead of building peace, because the two communities, both the overlords and the victims have agreed that it was an unfortunate incident, which they laugh over, even though on the night of the attack when they fled for dear lives, it was no joke. There were roots causes such as the Fulani angle, collecting of tribute and chieftaincy issues, while Dissah is yet to fully recover from the assault, and yet they agree and maintain that it was an unfortunate incident. She observed that while they had understood themselves, the journalists could create serious tension by commenting plenty on the issue, which was now put behind them. But some of the comments made by even news presenters, in the course of news presentation were so insensitive and tend to incite serious sentiments. So, she entreated media workers to watch that posture and quoted Shakespeare to press her point home: "so we do not cause murder in trying to heal wounds. We want to heal wounds. Let us just heal wounds and not cause murder."

Professor Joshua Philip Ayodele Nicol from Sierra Leone added his voice to the issue of the need for sensitive reporting about conflicts. "When we are talking about conflict-sensitive reporting, we are looking at the way and manner in which journalists take cognizance of the impact of their news story on individuals as well as on communities and the nation at large."

He referred to it as Conflict-Sensitive Journalism, and said the way and manner, they choose to do the report or presentation "may increase tension or diffuse tension and then announce the prospects for peace," and that "it also speaks to the ability of limiting the harm or what the interpretation of the news event may cause and does not take sides."

Professor Nicol elaborated that responsibility was the key of conflict-sensitive journalism that embraced the ABC of journalism: accurate, balance credible, all independent and responsible. The media could do that through networking with various rights groups or groups that do protect the rights of minorities, or through collaboration and also assist in what is called civic education. The media is almost completely absent in the aspect of civic education. If there was a very good civic education curriculum that also be mainstreamed in all learning institution, so that students or people go through those institutions, would out with that mindset.

He said people's perception about others were influenced by the agents of socialization: - the family, the school, the religious groups that people follow as well as one's ethnicity. But a good civic education curriculum, could help change the way people saw others.

Additionally, media could create conflict or make a conflict to escalate depending on the way and manner in which the event was reported. If it was not reported properly, others would think that people over there were being attacked and it would lead to the "let us go and revenge culture." So, in taking cognizance of the concept of conflict-sensitive journalism, the media could overlook the prospects of building peace without contributing to further violence. The journalist involved do

not understand the issues at stake, they were going to misreport the issue to their audience. So, the journalists should understand the issue at play. So, they would learn right through the entire trajectory, because conflict-sensitive reporting was a process and not an event.

#### Action Points

Following Professor Nicol's submission, the Moderator asked participants to talk about what actions, they intended to take, once they got back to their various countries.

Kemo Cham from Sierra Leone said one important thing he had learnt from the general discussion session was the understanding of who minorities were. He gave an example about the Gambia situation, being originally from Gambia and sometimes "you are smaller in number, but you will the power, while, those who are bigger in number are actually disadvantaged." He thought that many people fell within that category, but the specific issues that they faced "we do not know because we have not been paying attention to them. My intention now when I return to my country, is to study those groups and identify what issues they are facing and then start reporting on them one at a time."

Alhaji Manika Kamara, Sierra Leone committed himself to embark on more reporting on the minority groups as the National Secretary General of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists. He hinted that the Association normally organizes different training opportunities for journalists and with the forthcoming elections, they have packaged two separate trainings for the media and pledged that one will be devoted to conflict-sensitive reporting, so the journalists will also equipped to do the right kind of reporting during the period. Alhaji further promised to include some minority members and activists in the training.

Mamadou Niass from Senegal said he participated in the Roundtable with the aim to understand the approach to minority issues and take away lessons about best practices in handling the minorities verses majorities issues. He was particularly touched on the subject of journalists being sensitive in their choice of words when referring to minorities to avoid stigmatization. Mamadou also reiterated earlier calls on journalists to develop their capacity to investigate issues in order to be better informed on the problems of minority groups, especially for majorities to understand what stigmatization is all about.

Jonathan Jackson Komeh from Sierra Leone believed that another group of marginalized people were children staying with their stepmothers. Such children were being subjected to all kinds of abuses and are deprived of their rights. So, on his return home, he would consult discuss with his colleague journalists to establish a Radio Platform to discuss the plight of such children on the Community Radio and also hold community engagements to identify the areas where minority groups were located.

Abdul Wahab from Ghana announced that he would organize a training for some journalists on disability-inclusive reporting. This was to be done in collaboration with the Media Caucus on Disability, made up of a group of journalists with interest in disability. The training will update their knowledge and build their skills on reporting on disability issues.

Emelia Ennin Abbey from Ghana referred to Professor Alhassan's announcement of the Parliamentary pre-engagement on the Anti-Witchcraft Bill, the next day, which was Thursday., April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and said her action plan was to follow-up on that, to find out if the pre-engagement would actually happen as well as monitor the outcome of the Parliamentary debate on the Anti-Witchcraft Bill. Emelia explained that following up the Roundtable event was necessary to report on subsequent development to keep updating readers and viewers after the main event, which sometimes drove media reportage.

Mohamed Kelfala Sesay from Sierra Leone revisited the issue of how the laws were not taken into consideration when it came to matters of minority groups. He related an on-going situation at the University of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College, where the provision under the country's Disability Act was being disregarded. The Act provides that all students with disability that are in tertiary institutions accredited by the Tertiary Commission should not pay any fee at tertiary institutions. But according to Mohamed, "... as it is right now, the issue at Fourah Bay College is that disabled students are not allowed to register because they have been asked to pay extra charges, which they cannot afford." His contention was that the Act has provided free education for them at tertiary institutions, they should not be asked to pay extra charges. So, he urged journalists to also concentrate on the laws and raise awareness about them, so the rights of protect minority groups would be better protected.

The Moderator called the attention of the journalists to the influence their profession has given to them over others, "we control the mind, the eye, the heart, and the mouth of people as well as their emotions, so we hold the nation in our hand." Therefore, in whatever they were reporting on, they should be conscious of the people who were receiving the information and what the impact will be on them. So, journalists should not only report on things that make them or their media houses popular.

He also made some submissions for journalists to take note of: First of all, the old paradigm where bad news sells, was gone and replaced with the era of modern-age journalism, hence the need for journalists to change the narratives. The era has changed where in the newsroom, the editor had two or three different sets of pen and anytime he picked the red, then one's script was in trouble. It is now the era of fast-tracked journalistic practice and any unguided reportage by journalists could turn the whole country upside down, so journalists should be very, very careful.

Secondly, it has become very easy for journalists to merge the rural area to the urban city to their reportage. Now, social media reporters and citizen journalists have also come up with practising citizen journalism. "And they are beginning to knock you out of the field because before you get there and go back to your newsroom, they are already on social media and video reporting." So, the difference between professionals and the new breed of reporters "will be the credibility of your news and the facts that you will present." Professional or traditional journalists, should therefore begin to go those people classified as minority groups and the less privileged people to give them the voice. "We must focus on them intentionally."

Next, he touched on the powerfulness of politicians, and blamed that situation on the media. "But who created the politician? It is you the media practitioners. You made them powerful." Francis

therefore, reasoned that with the same pen, they can disarm politicians. “So, you can disarm politicians, because the pen is mightier than the sword and you are holding the pen.”

He commented that unfortunately, majority of journalists were using their pen to destroy instead of building. He alluded to a biblical admonishment to use whatever one has in his hands to stir on journalists to use their pens positively to influence society, “so that tomorrow we will say that there was a change and you started it.”

Francis was certain that the trip to Gambaga and Dissah had left a deep impression on those who participated in it, especially those from outside Ghana. He charged them “to take the issues passionately and see how best together we can change the narratives and the system,” but also maintained that it could not happen by force. “We cannot change systems when we have tagged them and we are reporting in a certain way. We cannot change the narratives that way,” he acknowledged, and added that collaboration and concerted efforts are key. “So let us all work together and build on,” the Moderator concluded.

Aunty Ama wrapped up the session by commending all the participants for their comportment, wonderful contributions and exchanges. know this is just the beginning and one of the ultimate things we want to do is to keep the network going, the exchange of ideas flowing. And what we have done here is going to be replicated in Sierra Leone and in Senegal and I wish you well. I wish you good luck.

## Chapter 6

### Recommendations/Way Forward

- i. The media serves as a mediator among the state, market, and civil society. While it is easy for the media to be geared towards the state (power) and market (for money), journalists would have to make a conscious effort to shift towards civil society in order to cover the stories of the minority and marginalized groups. Therefore, there is a need to encourage the dissemination of media infrastructure across the country, especially in rural areas, to minimize or prevent conflicts within our communities.
- ii. The media would have to focus on storytelling and reporting that demands accountability from the government or state on policies put in place to protect the rights of minority migrant groups, alleged witches, persons living with albinism, the aged, and barren women within our society. By doing so, the media would empower civil society by building their capacity to demand accountability from the state as well.
- iii. Journalism would have to focus not only on reporting a problem but being part of finding solutions by contacting the right authorities and mediating for the state and market to help civil society make the needed impact.
- iv. It is indeed possible for the media to use development journalism, public journalism, and solution journalism to respond to conflict, migration, and minority rights that might affect community livelihood.
- v. Journalists have to familiarize themselves with the terminologies used to identify minority groups in order not to come across as being discriminators or prejudiced.

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: Sample Published Stories

# Anti-witchcraft Bill to undergo pre-stakeholders engagement

Emelia Ennin Abbey & Mohammed Fugu Apr - 06 - 2023 , 07:34



Participants in the workshop on awareness of conflict prevention and resolution in Accra

A pre-stakeholder engagement on an Anti-Witchcraft Bill has begun in Accra as part of efforts to build support for the passage of the bill by Parliament.

When passed into law, it will criminalise witchcraft accusations and related offences in the country.

The Director-General of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Prof. Amin Alhassan, said this at a regional roundtable on inclusive journalism for senior media professionals and editors in Accra yesterday.

It was on the theme: “Media response to conflict, migration and minority rights: Perspectives on community livelihood”.

It was organised by Media Platform on Environment and Climate Change and Minority Rights Group International, with support from the EU Commission.

In all, 30 media professionals from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal are participating in the roundtable discussion to build their capacity on raising awareness of conflict prevention and resolution, root causes of conflicts, their consequences, the situation of minority groups, migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as key elements in peacebuilding.

It is part of a two-year project dubbed “Engaging media and minorities to act for peacebuilding (EMMAP).”

It is being funded by the EU with the objective “to raise public awareness of the interconnections between conflict, migration and minority exclusion to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in the participating countries.

### **Relevance**

Prof. Alhassan said the bill was being championed by the Member of Parliament for the Wa East Constituency, Dr Godfred Seidu Jasaw, through the private member's bill, adding that its passage would further restore sanity and dignity to victims.

He urged journalists to put the bill on the national agenda to facilitate its passage into law.

Prof. Alhassan further said that people accused of witchcraft were often subjected to various inhumane treatment, hence the need for a law to defend and protect such people.

He also called for the transformation of witch camps instead of a total disbandment since they serve as safe havens for victims.

### **Witchcraft**

Witchcraft is any act of magic, casting spells, sorcery, voodoo or black magic with the intention to help or harm other persons.

Although there are legal provisions that deal with assault, murder and many others, witchcraft accusations seem to be an economically viable avenue for some groups of people.

Stakeholders, including some civil society organisations working on human rights, have insisted that enacting a specific law to proscribe witchcraft accusations was the best alternative to curb the cruelty being perpetuated against persons accused or suspected of the act.

### **Role of media**

The Executive Director of MPEC, Ama Kudom-Agyemang, also bemoaned the plight of minority groups in the country and called for efforts to help address their challenges.

She urged the media to continue to amplify the voices of under-served populations, including alleged witches.

"The media have a big voice and that is why we want to build their capacity to use such voice to champion the needs and rights of the minority in society," she said.

Minority groups are persons in society who face marginalisation and discrimination in their daily lives.

## Dissah residents still traumatised - 5 Years after communal attack, arson

Mohammed Fugu Apr - 22 - 2023 , 17:29



*Remains of some buildings that were torched during the communal clash (arrowed)*

**ABU BAVUG, a 45-year-old man at Dissah, a farming community in the North Gonja District of the Savannah Region, had his entire household of about 10 displaced when some unknown gunmen attacked the community in 2018.**

His house, food items, motorbikes and other properties were also set ablaze.



The attack occurred at midnight when everybody had retired to bed. The sound of sporadic gunshots from different angles woke his family and each of them fled into the bush for safety.

Looking dejected and traumatised, Mr Bavug recounted that while the sporadic shooting was ongoing, the gunmen had sprinkled petrol on all the houses and set them ablaze.

“When it happened, all my children and wives run into the bush. It took me some days to search for them in the bush after the situation was calm. I lost about 10 cattle, foodstuffs and other properties,” he narrated to the Daily Graphic.

He said he had to start life afresh after losing everything. Though, he is currently picking up and had managed to put up a shelter for the family, they are always having a flashback of the trauma and experiences.

Just like Mr Bavug, Salifu Mariam, a 50-year-old woman, had a similar traumatising experience. Her son was shot in the process while their entire house was razed down by fire.

She said, “I used to trade and farm at the same time but I lost everything to the conflict and now things are hard for me”.

## Clashes

Mr Bavug and Madam Mariam are part of about 1,000 residents of the Dissah community that were displaced after a communal attack in the area.

On Saturday, June 13, 2018, some gunmen numbering about 20 attacked the community at midnight, fired sporadic gunshots and set the entire community ablaze, a situation which was attributed to a chieftaincy dispute.

The violence continued till Sunday dawn; until an intervention by military and police personnel restored calm to the area.

The incident left several people injured, while properties worth thousands of cedis were destroyed. Following the attack, the police arrested 40 suspects and arraigned them before court.

## Impact

An Elder of the Community, Asafo Bavug Salifu, told the Daily Graphic that the incident has had a toll on the lives of the people in the area.

He described the incident as an unprovoked attack, saying “We didn’t do anything wrong to warrant such an attack because we have been living together with everybody or ethnic group peacefully over the years.”

“It was after the attack that we were told that the Dissah community was not the target but the gunmen were going to attack the Salugu community. However, when they got to Dissah, one of them fell from the motorbike so the rest thought he was attacked and decided to attack us,” he noted.

Mr Salifu added that “it is having a bad effect on our children because anytime they hear sounds like gunshots, they begin to run and shout that the assailants are coming.”

He indicated that though the community members had some support from philanthropists and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), they were still struggling to recover from the devastating incident, both psychologically and financially.

He, therefore, appealed for support for those who were yet to recover from the incident, to help alleviate their plight.

Never again

Five years down the line, the scars, trauma and devastating impact are still glaring on the faces and minds of the victims.

The community, with a population of about 1,000, which was completely razed down, is rebuilding, as several people, particularly men who fled the village, have since returned.

Teachers, health workers and civil society organisations (CSOs) that fled the area have also returned to the community to continue with their work, but the fears and distress still linger on in their minds.

The traditional leaders of the Wasipewura Traditional Area say that never again should such an incident happen because the people of Dissah are peace-loving.

“What happened at Dissah five years ago won’t happen again because we all see ourselves as one people, we have been living together for years and we have even inter-married,” Adam Yakubu, Spokesperson for the Overlord of the Wasipe Traditional Area, said.

He said the traditional council had instituted measures to purge the area of communal clashes, to ensure peace and accelerated development.

## Visit

A team of journalists from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal, with an interest in conflict and peacebuilding reporting, visited the community last week to ascertain the impact of the violence on the people and how they were putting up.

The visit was facilitated by the Media Platform on Environment and Climate Change (MPEC), in partnership with Minority Rights Group Africa (MRGA) and Media Reform Coordination Group (MRCG), with funding support from the European Union (EU).

It formed part of a two-year project dubbed “Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding (EMMAP)”.

The visit allowed the journalists to witness, first-hand, and better understand the everyday lifestyle, condition and welfare of minority communities, to help build and consolidate sustainable peace.

## Media blackout

The Executive Director of MPEC, Ama Kudom-Agyemang, lamented that the Ghanaian media did not give prominence to the communal violence that erupted in the Dissah community, saying “It appears there was a total media blackout on the incident, which even worsened the plight of the victims.”

She, therefore, urged the media to develop an interest in reporting on issues concerning minority groups or communities and the less privileged to help protect their rights.

For the residents of Dissah, without justice being served, their only choice is to move on with life, but the trauma and distress are not erasable.

However, they hope that the community they call their “only home” won’t experience the horrific incident again.

Annex 2: Links to some Published News Articles/Features

<https://gna.org.gh/2023/04/we-are-safe-and-very-comfortable-at-gambaga-camp-suspected-witches/>

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-anti-witchcraft-bill-to-undergo-pre-stakeholders-engagement.html>

<https://ghstandard.com/gbc-boss-urges-media-to-highlight-anti-witchcraft-bill/76360/>

<https://gna.org.gh/2023/04/communal-attacks-disah-community-bounces-back-in-five-years/>

[https://www.pulse.sn/news/international/ghana-cinq-ans-apres-la-triste-nuit-disah-et-daboya-ont-fume-le-calumet-de-la-paix/50c1yqe?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=whatsapp&utm\\_campaign=share-button](https://www.pulse.sn/news/international/ghana-cinq-ans-apres-la-triste-nuit-disah-et-daboya-ont-fume-le-calumet-de-la-paix/50c1yqe?utm_medium=social&utm_source=whatsapp&utm_campaign=share-button)

[https://www.seneweb.com/news/Afrique/ghana-voyage-au-coeur-des-sombres-secret\\_n\\_407627.html](https://www.seneweb.com/news/Afrique/ghana-voyage-au-coeur-des-sombres-secret_n_407627.html)

[https://www.pulse.sn/news/societe/gambaga-au-nord-du-ghana-gite-daccusees-de-sorcellerie-reportage/8j6xgn4?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=whatsapp&utm\\_campaign=share-button](https://www.pulse.sn/news/societe/gambaga-au-nord-du-ghana-gite-daccusees-de-sorcellerie-reportage/8j6xgn4?utm_medium=social&utm_source=whatsapp&utm_campaign=share-button)

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/dissah-residents-still-traumatised-5-years-after-communal-attack-arson.html>

<https://newsghana.com.gh/over-100-migrants-get-refugee-status-at-sapelliga/>

<https://gna.org.gh/2023/04/ngo-calls-for-holistic-approach-to-address-refugee-situation-in-uer/>

<https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/roundtable-discussion-on-conflict-prevention-resolution-for-editors-ends-in-accra/>

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/mion-two-persons-accused-of-witchcraft-lynched.html>

<https://gna.org.gh/2023/05/women-at-dissah-community-get-solar-powered-irrigation-system/>

<https://gna.org.gh/2023/06/management-of-gambaga-witches-camps-calls-for-support-to-refurbish-huts/>

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/features/ghana-news-left-behind-climate-change-threatens-pwds-in-northern-ghana.html>

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-two-jailed-for-lynching-90-year-old-woman.html>

### **Links to Video Stories**

<https://youtu.be/RUo9bMdBZUA>

<https://youtu.be/LE7A1m7xWhc>

<https://youtu.be/EDCUS4jWhmI>

[https://youtu.be/kuHhK\\_DRl2w](https://youtu.be/kuHhK_DRl2w)

<https://youtu.be/HPLxOaZ-BnU>

**Regional high-profile roundtable on inclusive journalism for senior media professionals and editors**

Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Senegal mirror a general phenomenon in the West African region; conflicts are reported when incidences occur, and not because of careful assessment and investigation. The Minority Rights Group International, through its Uganda-based office, the Minority Rights Group Africa (MRGA), believes the situation must change.

MRG's basic proposition is that an understanding of minority rights is essential for anyone dealing with conflict prevention and resolution. MRG has been working on minority issues for over 50 years in all parts of the world.

It opines that raising awareness about roots of conflicts, the consequences, the situation of minority groups, migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is a key element of peace building. What is more? Using media to do that, gives a wider reach. MRG also holds the view that in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal, there is a question of if media fully understand the causes of conflicts in their region and the dynamics between media work and deeper understanding of the situation.

It is against this background that MRG is partnering with three civil society organisations in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal to implement the 'Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding (EMMAP)' project. The two-year intervention, which is funded by the European Union (EU), is running from March 2022 to February 2024.

The purpose of the EMMAP project is "to raise public awareness of the interconnections between conflict, migration, and minority exclusion to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

The EMMAP is coordinated by Uganda-based MRGA and implemented by three national partners namely: Media Platform on Environment and Climate Change (MPEC) in Ghana, Media Reform Coordination Group (MRCG) in Sierra Leone and Networks for Social Justice Rights (FAHAMU) in Senegal.

On Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023, MPEC will host the project partners and more than 30 participants, including senior media professionals and editors, as well as minority activists at a one-day regional high-profile roundtable on inclusive journalism in Accra.

One of the key issues to be addressed is the hostility and violence against minorities that leads to conflict, which usually originates and/or is fuelled by unethical reporting and unprofessional media coverage.

The roundtable follows immediately on the heels of a 5-day field visit by ten journalists from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal to some selected Ghanaian communities that host minority groups.

## **Rationale for EMMAP**

The EMMAP project is conceptualised to address issues concerning exclusion and discrimination of minority and indigenous communities, migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Indeed, all the world's longest running conflicts are fuelled and fought over ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural issues. All of these concern minority groups.

The number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 70 million in 2018, the highest level recorded by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in almost 70 years<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, an understanding of minority rights is essential towards conflict prevention and resolution. Thus, it is imperative to get journalists to understand issues concerning minority groups.

Improving the quality of reporting on minority issues and the inter-connections with conflicts, countering hate-speech and disinformation, and increasing the number of relevant media contents can directly influence attitudes towards minority issues and contribute to conflict prevention and resolution.

## **Objectives**

The overall objective is to facilitate engagement and cooperation among journalism and civil society actors to address issues concerning conflict and peace building that impact minorities.

The specific objectives of the one-day event are to:

- i. Heighten regional engagement amongst journalism and civil society actors to exchange reporting and counternarrative good practices.
- ii. Enhance journalism actors' understanding of minority issues and connections with conflicts.
- iii. Increase reporting of conflict issues that supports peacebuilding addressing migration and minorities aspects, in West Africa Media.

## **Expected Outputs**

It is expected that at the end of the one-day roundtable event:

- i. Journalists would increase reporting of conflict issues that supports peacebuilding and address migration and minorities aspects, in West Africa Media
- ii. Enhanced relationship between journalism and minority activists to catalyse greater collaboration on minority issues and interests.

## **Date and Location**

The one-day roundtable will take place on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at the Monarch Hotel, East Legon, Accra from 8:30am.

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>.

## Annex 4: Roundtable Agenda

### **Agenda for High-Profile Roundtable on Inclusive Journalism for Senior Media Professionals and Editors**

**Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2023**

**Monarch, Hotel, East Legon, Accra**

**Proposed Theme:** Media Response to Conflict, Migration and Minority Rights: Perspectives on Community Livelihood

**08:30am – 09:00am**

**Arrival and Registration**

#### **Session One**

**09.00am – 10.00am**

- Opening prayer

- Introductions

- Welcome address

- Statement by EMMAP Regional Project Coordinator

10:00am – 10:20am

-Group photograph/Snack Break

10:20am – 1:30pm

-Presentation on theme by Prof. Amin Alhassan, DG, GBC

- Open Discussions

**1:30pm – 2:30pm**

- Lunch Break

**2:30pm – 4.00pm**

- Country perspectives from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal on the theme

- General discussions

- Wrap Up

- Closing Remarks from...

- Vote of Thanks

- Closing prayer



Annex 5: Roundtable Attendance List

**ATTENDANCE LIST**

**REGIONAL HIGH-PROFILE ROUNDTABLE ON INCLUSIVE JOURNALISM FOR SENIOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND EDITORS**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>City/Country</b>
1	Alfred Gomis	M	WANEP	NNC	Senegal
2	Ndeye Coumba Gueye	F	AJS	Secretary Executive	Senegal
3	Sadikh Niass	M	RADDHO	SG	Senegal
4	Martha Crentsil	F	Adom FM/TV	News Editor	Ghana
5	Kemo Cham	M	Mono Reporter	Editor	Sierra Leone
6	Adam A. Wahab	M	GFD	Programme Officer	Ghana
7	Zoubida Berrada	F	Minority Rights	Project Assistant	Senegal
8	Anne Alboth	F	MRG	Executive Officer	Germany
9	Femi Coker	F	Women's Voice	Journalist	Sierra Leone
10	Mohamed Kelfala Sesay	M	SL Albinism Foundation	Activist	Sierra Leone
11	Moumadou Biass	M	CESTI	Journalist	Senegal
12	Denis Peprah	M	GNA	Editor	Ghana
13	Mark Obidiaba	M	Vass Consults	Interpreter	Accra, Ghana
14	Diomma Bame	F	Freelance	Journalist	Dakar, Senegal
15	Mohammed Fugu	M	Daily Graphic	Editor	Tamale, Ghana
16	Ignatius Awuah Tanoë Blay	M	Ghanaian Times	Student	Ghana
17	Jonathan Jackson Komeh	M	Radio Gbafth	Reporter	Sierra Leone
18	Kukua Snead-Michaels	F	ATV	Editor	Ghana
19	Shawana Yussif	F	Fula FM	Editor	Ghana
20	Koffi Fambe	M	Interpretation	Interprel	Ghana
21	Awa Faye	F	Seneweb	Chief Editor Adjunct	Senegal
22	Viviane Diata	F	L Info	Reporter	Senegal
23	Jordan Agyeman	M	ESL Technician	Technician	Ghana
24	Robert Ocran	M	ESL	Technician	Ghana
25	Ibrahim Awne	M	Walf	Chief Editor	Senegal

26	Joshua Philip Ayodole Nicol	M	FBI/ML	Leader	Sierra Leone
27	Andreas Kamasah	M	Pulse Ghana	Reporter	Accra
28	George Adinkra	M	PACO DEP	Executive Director	Ghana
29	Cecilia Alice Sesay	F	SLBC	Reporter	Sierra Leone
30	Joyce Gyekye	F	GBC	Editor	Accra, Ghana
31	Alhaji Manika Kamala	M	Awukoo Newspaper	Editor	Sierra Leone
32	Stephen Chifoze Wgamegbulam	M	Apexnewsgh	Editor	Ghana
33	Kwame Anum	M	Adom TV	Reporter	Ghana
34	Donald Erasmus Theo-Harding	M	Guild of Editors	Chairman	Sierra Leone
35	Francis Sova	M	MRCG	National Coordinator	Sierra Leone
36	Kofi Adu Domfeh	M	Multimedia Group	Editor	Kumasi, Ghana
37	Babacan George Diop	M	BESBI	Journalist	Senegal
38	Theriyeh Koroma- Nemeh	F	FUSCA	Team Leader	Sierra Leone
39	Emelia Abbey	F	Daily Graphic	Editor	Accra, Ghana
40	Benedicta Folley	F	Ghanaian Times	Senior Reporter	Accra, Ghana
41	Kwaku Anim	M	ATV	Cameraman	Accra, Ghana
42	Elijah Yaw Danso	M	MPEC	Chair	Accra, Ghana
43	Isaac Ano	M	Adom TV		Ghana
44	Richmond Selasi	M	Adom TV/Radio		Ghana
45	Bernard Nii Nartey Mensah	M	MPEC GH		Ghana
46	Edwin Holm	M	MPEC GH	IT Specialist	Accra, Ghana
47	Andy Osae	M	GBC		Accra, Ghana
48	Joshua Nyarko	M	ETV	Media	Accra, Ghana
49	Rosemond Yaa Kpaiku	M	Rapportage	Rapportage	Accra, Ghana
50	Sabiiti Geofrey	M	MRG	PC	N. Somalia
51	Ama Kudom- Agyemang	F	MPEC	ED	Accra, Ghana
52	Frederick Asiamah	M	MPEC	Project Coordinator	Accra, Ghana