

JUMA, Transparency International partner for training course



By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Journalists Union of Malawi (JUMA) has partnered with Transparency International (TI) to conduct a week-long 'Reporting Corruption Training Course for Malawian Journalists' to be held in Malawi on 12-16 March 2012.

JUMA secretary general, George Mhango told Bizcommunity on Tuesday, 14 February 2012, soon after calling for applications, that the agreement was reached last year when one of the JUMA national executive members attended training at TI headquarters in Germany.

"After a lengthy discussion on various issues relating to corruption in Malawi and other African countries and how journalists cover them, the TI representatives felt the need to do some training using JUMA in Malawi," said Mhango.

Perfect timing for training

He said the training would be the first of its kind, as it comes at a time when much is being discussed in the public domain on how corruption is affecting public and private sectors.

"You should also be aware that JUMA has entered into agreements with many organisations on the need for training. These include, Media Council of Malawi, COSOMA [Copyright Society of Malawi] and other environmental organisations," he said.

JUMA believes that mass media can expose corruption and can keep a check on public policy by throwing a spotlight on government action, only when it has been provided with the right tools like the upcoming training.

Aim of the course

According to JUMA, the training course aims to enhance the competence of journalists in the area of accurate, professional and readership-oriented corruption reporting and to increase the awareness for the media's contribution to the promotion of good governance.

The body has since extended a call for applications or expressions of interest from 'interested and enthusiastic journalists working for print, TV, radio or internet media, who would want to assist Malawi's fight against corruption'.

Criteria

Priority will be given to young journalists that have not done a similar or related course before, with women journalists highly encouraged to apply.

Applicants should have a minimum of two years journalistic experience and will be expected to submit a recent curriculum vitae, a motivation letter (up to 300 words) and a letter from their employer guaranteeing a leave of absence for the week long course.

Freelancers and stringers would have to make a personal guarantee to avail themselves for the week.

Applicants are required to send their complete applications to ajaitner@transparency.org no later than Wednesday, 22 February 2012.

Time to do something...

Mhango said they decided to start doing something, considering that since government put in place initiatives, like the annual anti-corruption day commemoration spearheaded by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), nothing has been achieved.

"When did the president start saying he wants to loot corruption? Have we seen government officials nabbed on corruption charges, maybe Yusuf Mwawa [Malawi's former cabinet minister], but not others whose investigations are just gathering dust," he said

He also mentioned the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) scam, involving Peter Mutharika, which he says no headway on the matter has been made.

"As JUMA, we felt there is something missing, although government is trying all it could, but somewhere the fight is not won. The media mind you, has exposed all these things before, but sometimes lack clear understanding on how to tackle them in an investigative manner," he said.

Mhango said since media is the fourth estate, it has to provide checks and balances to the judiciary, legislative and executive arms of the government, hence the need for the training.

The partnership

For the training to take place, TI has contributed 70% while JUMA has 30% input.

"TI will provide funds for training; meet costs of facilitators and all training needs while JUMA is just arranging it locally by looking for space, participants, designing of the needs for the training and dates, among others," he said.

Mhango said the number of participants is yet to be established and sensing that more journalists might be left out, he was quick to say that those left out should not worry because such training opportunities will keep on coming since JUMA is currently negotiating with a number of other institutions locally and internationally for more training.

Media can help in fighting corruption

According to a 2002 study into perceptions of corruption in the media, commissioned by the Southern African Human Rights Trust (SAHRIT), it is believed that the media can help in fighting corruption by investigating and reporting correctly and professionally on corruption cases of any magnitude.

But in order to achieve such media vibrancy, there is need to equip media workers professionally and materially.

A study done by Levi Zeleza Manda, a media trainer and researcher and Mabvuto Banda, a Reuters correspondent for

Malawi, established that the media have done a lot in unearthing acts of corruption in Malawi as they named and shamed corrupt people but the media has unfortunately concentrated more on the public service than the private sector.

The study also established that the media needed to distinguish corruption from theft, conflict of interest, fraud and false pretence.

Lack of knowledge about the foregoing concepts according to the interviewees, has led to the media sensationalizing matters and defaming people while others have used corruption reporting to advance personal and political agendas by deliberately distorting stories to defame people.

Training in tune

The JUMA/TI training is therefore in tune with the study's recommendations which said the media have the capacity to investigate corruption, but all they need is training into the concept of corruption and ethics so that the reputation of individuals and Malawi is not unduly damaged.

The study further established that Malawian media are mostly owned by politicians, whose agenda is more than educating, informing and entertaining the public as they are based on an ideological and political posture thereby offering nothing in terms of any policy guidelines for journalists.

"As this study has found out, journalists feel nervous about conducting investigations because they are not sure of job and personal security that may come as a result of investigating corruption," the study report says.

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