



Spike or Suffer?

***Jamhuri* and the Bribe Offer**

Case Summary

In theory, journalists should never give in to pressure from special interests to change their stories. But in environments where corruption is widespread, and/or few legal or political structures exist to protect press freedom, resisting outside pressure is often easier said than done. When offered a bribe, for example, journalists must weigh ethical concerns against practical matters such as physical, financial, and legal threats.

The case explores this conundrum through the eyes of the managing editor of *Jamhuri*, a newly launched Tanzanian weekly newspaper, as he weighs his options when offered a hefty sum in exchange for canceling a story. When Deodotus Balile acquires letters proving that Quality Group Ltd, a Tanzanian conglomerate run by tycoon Yusuf Manji, illegally approached key government figures to protest their lost bid for a lucrative public bus company, he knows the story could bring attention and credibility his fledgling newspaper sorely needs. Before publication, in an effort to reduce the likelihood that Manji will retaliate via the courts, Balile approaches him for a response to the allegations; instead he receives an offer for monetary compensation in exchange for spiking the story.

It is not the first time Balile has been offered a bribe and, as he has in the past, he is determined to refuse. But Manji's deputy just increases the offer, which raises Balile's suspicions: if Manji is prepared to offer such a sum—yet is refused—he may well pursue other methods to damage *Jamhuri's* stability and reputation, such as legal action or pressure on advertising. Manji has been known to take aggressive steps to muzzle the press in the past. With press freedom in Tanzania still relatively new and few legal protections for journalists in place, Balile knows such tactics could sink his newspaper altogether.

Moreover, physical attacks on journalists who insist on exposing government and business corruption are not unheard of. Students are left to debate whether the very real physical, financial and legal dangers of refusing the bribe are worth risking.

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Teaching Objectives

Use this case to start discussions about corruption, specifically bribery, in the media; the role of journalism in combatting corruption more broadly; and press freedom in young democracies.

The central tension in this case is between the ethical versus practical concerns that arise when a news organization is offered a bribe to alter a story, especially in a country with few enforceable policies to support and protect journalists should they refuse. Begin the discussion about bribery by asking students if it is ever ethical for journalists to accept money, or the payment of expenses, from sources? Under what circumstances? Do all offers of money constitute unethical bribery?

Students should then focus on the details of this particular case: ask them whether Balile should refuse the bribe and publish the story, or accept the bribe and spike the story. Push them to consider all the possible implications of both options. Even from an ethical standpoint, the answer is less obvious than it at first appears. Certainly refusing all bribes is the ethical ideal, but in this case doing so may lead to legal and financial damage to the newspaper.

These are not minor considerations, especially for such a small, financially precarious operation: legal action or aggressive pressure on potential advertisers could ruin the paper altogether. Is taking the moral high ground on this one story worth risking *Jamhuri's* ability to battle corruption on a broader scale in the future? Perhaps the young publication should concentrate on building its readership and advertising base before taking on powerful foes; once more securely established, it may stand a better chance against them in legal and publicity battles.

Practical concerns, such as the physical safety of *Jamhuri* staff, are also worth considering. Manji has proven he is willing to invest considerable resources to protect his interests, and Balile is aware of earlier physical attacks on journalists who refused to back down from publishing stories that damaged the reputations of powerful figures. Do the potential benefits to *Jamhuri* and the long-term goal of rooting out corruption among Tanzania's powerful business and political leaders really outweigh the potential physical harm to Balile's journalists, or to himself? What is the real news value of this particular story, and does it justify the risks?

On the other hand, if journalists are cowed in the face of such intimidation tactics, corruption will continue to thrive. Ask students to consider the ethical and practical benefits to refusing the bribe and publishing the story: first, obviously the story contributes to the ongoing public service goal of exposing corruption in Tanzania, a major social issue. Second, both refusing bribes as a general rule and publishing this particular, exclusive story, build credibility and respect for *Jamhuri*, a brand-new publication that badly needs to increase its readership and visibility. If a

news organization begins accepting bribes to alter or suppress stories, how can the public trust anything it writes? Is accepting a bribe at this early stage setting a dangerous precedent?

Instructors should also ask students to consider whether there might be some middle ground between the two extremes of accepting the bribe and spiking the story, or refusing the bribe and publishing it. For example, is there benefit to refusing the bribe, but delaying publication until the paper is more securely established? Or might there be an alternative path, such as publishing a story revealing that the bribe has been offered—or is that too risky? Encourage students to be creative in brainstorming alternatives.

After weighing the pros and cons of accepting the bribe, ask students to consider the decisions Balile made throughout the case. At any point could he have taken steps to avoid putting himself and his paper in the risky position in which they find themselves at the case's end? For example, should he have approached the authorities at the first offer of a bribe? Should he have published the story without going to Manji for a response first, despite the potential legal risks? Or did he do everything he could have to reduce the various threats to his organization while still pursuing its public service mission?

This case also provides an excellent basis for a more general discussion about the themes of press freedom and corruption in young democracies. Ask students what they believe should be the role of the press in rooting out corruption, and what structures should be put in place to help ensure that they are able to do so effectively. For example, what is the role of journalistic training in helping reporters resist bribes and other pressures? What about the financial structure of news organizations? After all, even a well-trained journalist may be susceptible to bribery if he is struggling to feed his family. The case mentions a lack of legal support for journalists who expose corruption, especially in the government. Is it fair to expect them to expose malfeasance among the powerful if doing so may mean lengthy court battles and financial ruin?

The case recounts that the Media Council of Tanzania has concluded that journalists alone are not to blame for corruption in the media; government and business interests share responsibility, so they must contribute to the resolution of the problem and the promotion of editorial freedom. Ask students to consider whether this is a realistic proposition and, if so, how they see these entities pitching in to end the problems of bribery and press manipulation in Tanzania.

Class Plan

Use this case in a class on journalism ethics, business reporting, newsroom management, editorial decisionmaking, and relationships with sources or subjects.

Pre-class. Help students prepare for class by assigning the following question:

1) Should Balile publish or spike his story? Justify your answer.

Instructors may find it useful to engage students ahead of class by asking them to post brief responses (no more than 250 words) to questions in an online forum. Writing short comments challenges students to distill their thoughts and express them succinctly. The instructor can use the students' work both to craft talking points ahead of class, and to identify particular students to call upon during the discussion.

In-class questions: The homework assignment is a useful starting point for preliminary discussion, after which the instructor could pose any of the following questions to promote an 80-90 minute discussion. The choice of questions will be determined by what the instructor would like the students to learn from the class discussion. In general, choosing to discuss three or four questions in some depth is preferable to trying to cover them all.

- a) What are the pros and cons of refusing the bribe and publishing the story? List on board.
- b) What are the pros and cons of accepting the bribe and spiking the story? List on board.
- c) Might there be a middle ground between a) and b) above? What other options should Balile consider?
- d) What is the news value of this particular story? Does it justify the risks?
- e) If Balile does decide to publish the story, what steps should he take to protect the financial, reputational, and physical wellbeing of himself, his staff, and his newspaper?
- f) Consider the decisions Balile makes throughout the case. At any point could he have acted differently to avoid putting himself and his newspaper in the difficult position they find themselves in at the end?
- g) Is it ever ethical for journalists to accept money from sources or subjects? Under what circumstances?
- h) Ideally, what should be the role of the press in exposing government and business corruption?
- i) What parties (e.g. journalistic, business, political) do you believe contribute to the problem of bribery and corruption in the Tanzanian media? Should these same groups be involved in resolving the problem and, if so, how?
- j) To what degree do you believe the professional and financial circumstances of Tanzanian journalists contribute to the problem of corruption in the media? For example, would more formal training of journalists help? How might the financial strain on journalists be relieved?

Suggested Readings

Denis Mpgaze and Robert A. White, "Tanzanian journalists' ambivalent perception of their ethics: A 'Jekyll and Hyde' occupation," *African Communication Research*, Vol. 3., No 2, December 2010.

SYNOPSIS: This whole issue of the journal *African Communication Research* addresses the rampant problem of bribery in African journalism, including articles focused on the problem in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The article on Tanzania, which is cited in this case, is based on interviews with journalists working there and finds that they come under ongoing pressure, including bribery, from organizations and individuals concerned with keeping up appearances, including NGOs, business leaders, foreign companies, and politicians. While the authors conclude that it is difficult to determine what percentage of journalists actually accept bribes, since they are not likely to all self-report truthfully, it is clear that they "are poorly instructed regarding 1) the ethics of bribery, 2) what constitutes bribery and 3) the distortion in news reports caused by bribery."

http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1057&Itemid=103

Tom Rhodes, "How to Survive in Tanzania's Press," Committee to Protect Journalists, December 23, 2011.

SYNOPSIS: This blog post concisely summarizes Tanzania's political and legal climate as excessively litigious and hostile to journalists, and notes that under such circumstances it is surprising that some journalistic institutions do, in fact, criticize powerful players. The author cites Yusuf Manji, the chief executive of Quality Group Ltd discussed in this case, as example A of a powerful businessman apt to use the court system to muffle unfavorable press.

<http://cpj.org/blog/2011/12/how-to-survive-in-tanzanias-press.php>

Martin Sturmer, *The Media History of Tanzania*, Ndanda Mission Press, 1998.

SYNOPSIS: This book, based on the author's doctoral dissertation and now available for download as an E-book, provides a comprehensive history of the media in Tanzania for those interested in expanding their knowledge of that aspect of this case. Sturmer goes into detail about the four major phases in the development of Tanzanian media: German colonial rule, British colonial rule, post-colonial socialist rule, and the transition to a more independent press.

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/57827947/The-Media-History-of-Tanzania>

Website and Code of Ethics of the Media Council of Tanzania, 2011.

SYNOPSIS: Explore the website for the Media Council of Tanzania, established in 1995 and described in this case. It includes various resources for the general public and working journalists in Tanzania, including a code of ethics that prohibits the acceptance of bribes. The Council's annual reports are also posted on this website and provide good background on their efforts as well as the current media environment in Tanzania. Their website also hosts the 2011 Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Editorial Freedom, Independence, and Responsibility (DEFIR), referred to in this case, which summarizes contemporary media challenges in Tanzania and proposes enlisting media owners, business people, and political entities in the promotion of press freedom.

Media Council website:

http://www.mct.or.tz/mediacouncil/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=409&Itemid=496

DEFIR:

http://www.mct.or.tz/mediacouncil/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&download=30:the-dar-es-salaam-declaration-on-editorial-freedom-independence-and-responsibility-defir&id=1:downloads&Itemid=867.