



Reporting Business and Human Rights

**A HANDBOOK FOR JOURNALISTS,
COMMUNICATORS, AND CAMPAIGNERS**

WITH SUPPORT FROM



PART ONE

**understanding
the issue**

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**reporting business
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Reporting on business and human rights is a challenge, and not for the faint-hearted:

Perhaps you'll cover fairer conditions in the workplace? Or the environmental impact caused by the production and disposal of profitable consumer goods? Maybe you'll look at the illegal activity in a particular supply chain, or the way in which a company manipulated data or dodged tax?

Either way, you are likely to upset powerful people, and will bring to public attention issues that some people would rather were kept quiet - if you are doing your job properly, that is.

On the one hand, the basic skills which apply to all good, ethical journalism should apply. You have to be accurate, fair, balanced, and to be able to separate fact from opinion. You will need to carry out sensitive as well as challenging interviews, and nurture and protect your sources. And your desk research will be second to none.

But you'll also have advanced skills, as well as specialist knowledge and professional behaviour. To be able to read budgets and spot anomalies, for example, or to be able to understand complex legal issues well enough to write about them in plain language.

You'll have to 'sell' the story to your audience too. It may not be an 'interesting' topic to them: many would prefer to read about the latest showbiz stories, or to hear what cricket or football stars are doing, rather than the people who made their boots. You'll need advanced storytelling skills.

Others may feel that criticism of a particular local industry will put jobs at risk; shareholders in the company whose oil spills you are reporting on might be one of your key advertisers.

Business leaders, investors, and government officials are amongst the people who might not want you to discuss business and human rights issues. In some cases, your editor might be nervous too.

And there are several practical challenges for journalists covering business and human rights issues.

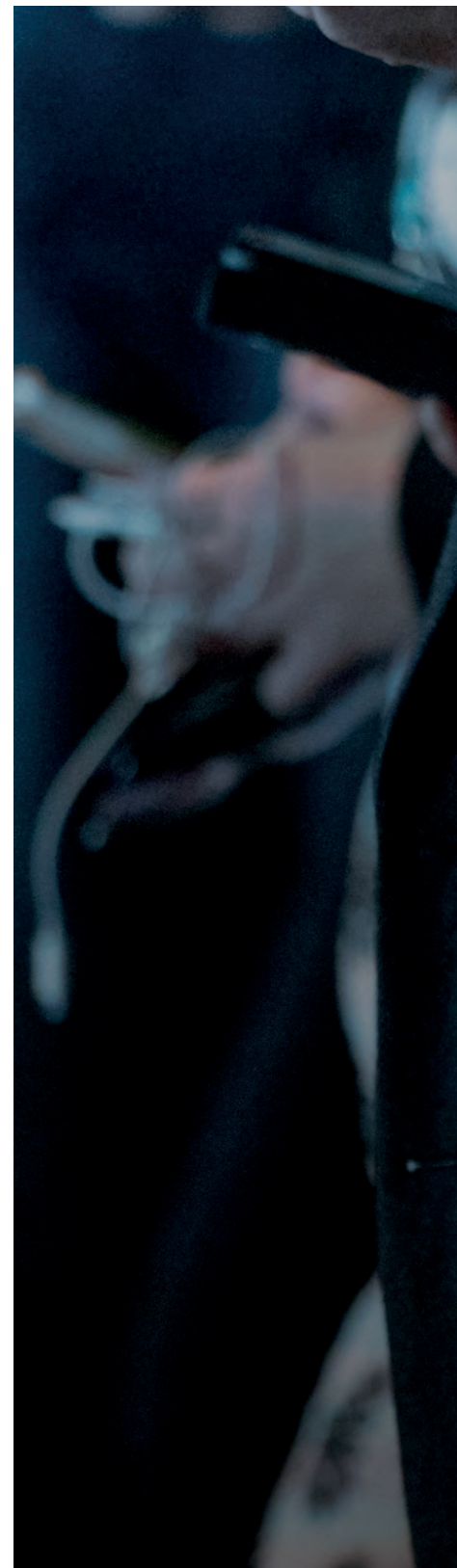
It can be risky reporting on, or communicating about, conditions in factories where clothing is made, and not just for you as a reporter. There is the real risk that the people you interview might get into trouble, or lose their job.


It can be daunting for journalists, programme-makers, and other communicators. It can be all too easy for them to avoid the topic completely.

What we choose to communicate, report on, or make programmes about, can have a real influence on the lives of people: on the factory floor, in the office, and in ships, shops, mines and plantations.

If we ignore labour rights abuses we contribute to a 'culture of impunity' in which, at its most extreme, those guilty of crimes like industrial manslaughter can get away without punishment or censure.

If poor working conditions are not mentioned in the media, we can limit the available information for survivors of industrial accidents who will miss out





negatively influence the way in which judges and juries perceive the issue if we avoid the topic.

We can also make it harder for campaigners to change these conditions if the subject stays off the public and political agenda.

Or to put it another way, the media can play a positive role in making sure that those responsible for industrial accidents are brought to justice. We can help play a role in improving compensation for survivors of accidents, and contribute towards better, fairer conditions in the future. It can be all too easy for journalists

to avoid the topic, or to report it in such a way that no change is ever likely.

And yet we need to make sure this kind of story is in the public domain. The media have a role to play in creating change

Whether legislation is about equal pay for women, safety in the workplace, or compensation for victims of land theft, it is only when these issues are in the public domain that justice can be done.

Harpreet Kaur,
UNDP, Business and Human Rights
Specialist, Asia-Pacific Regional Centre.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Reporting business and human rights is a big topic; suggestions for further research will appear throughout.

For a wider introduction to the subject, the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights is a good starting point, and a knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is useful.²

PART ONE

Understanding the issue

IN SUMMARY

Business and human rights stories can be complicated. Reporting them will involve both developing your own contacts of people who can talk confidently about specific subjects, and excellent online research, plus an understanding of the law and bodies which deal with it.

Skills needed

- Strong interview ability
- Nurturing sources and building relationships with subject experts
- Investigative journalism, accurate reporting
- 'Desk' research skills and data journalism
- Understanding and evaluating sources, spotting PR fluff
- Learning acronyms, turning jargon into plain English

Challenges and opportunities

This is a big and interconnected topic, so you've got some work to do. You might be covering labour law and land rights for one story, and recycling or big data for the next. And you'll need to understand media law. But once you've understood the relevant

This handbook has been produced by the United Nations Development Programme Asia-Pacific Regional Hub in Bangkok.

This handbook is intended to be practical, and aimed at working journalists, and programme-makers working in any media. Whilst some examples may be specific to a particular medium (such as radio or TV), the core topics and skills (such as media law and interview skills) are relevant to all.

It has been produced with the understanding that not all reporters who cover business and human rights stories will have an extensive background in the topic.

It mentions editorial team meetings and newsrooms, but it is understood that many people will be working alone, or in non-newsroom environments - although, it is likely that journalists can benefit from learning outside of their discipline. Journalists today may start out in newspapers, but end up producing podcasts - and vice versa.

It hoped that it will also be useful for communicators, campaigners, and others who work with the media in order to communicate business and human rights topics.

About this handbook

The second part looks at the practicalities of **reporting business and human rights stories**: from finding ideas and spotting stories through to the process of research and carrying out interviews.

The third part looks at how you can **tell business and human rights stories**, and 'sell' them to your audience and editors.

Whilst some media law is discussed, it is as general introductory information only and should not be construed as or relied upon as legal advice.

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