



COVID-19 INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM ONLINE SURVEY

BACKGROUND

The Action for Transparency (A4T) project aims to contribute to strengthened democratic accountability and transparency in Kenya through citizen monitoring of government expenditure, in order to uncover suspected corruption and mismanagement of public funds. By developing and implementing a set of secure tools and methodologies for carrying out citizen monitoring of Kenyan government budgeting and expenditure, journalists, community leaders, civil society activists and local civil servants will be empowered to monitor government funds and report suspected mismanagement in public administration, in order to defend their human rights to education and health care.

Since March 2020, the novel Corona virus has brought about an effect on all sectors including the practise of professional journalism. The containment and preventive measures implemented by the Government including cessation of movements, curfew in parts of the country, mandatory quarantine for those flouting the laws and regulations, among others have had unprecedented impact on the media.

Within the same period, several instances of journalists facing harassment and intimidation mainly from security agencies while covering the COVID-19 related events, have been reported. With an impact to the economy, there have been reports of many journalists having been rendered jobless and some working in difficult circumstances with half pay. These are some of the challenges affecting the freedom of media during this period. In-depth investigative journalism is essential in a time like this to highlight health response mechanism, to secure human rights and promote accountability of COVID-19 funds.

As part of an ongoing programme to assist journalists through learning opportunities and investigative grants and mentorship, the A4T conducted an [online survey](#) in order to understand the effects of COVID-19 on investigative journalism and corruption reporting in Kenya. The survey also sought to get insights into how investigative journalism can be sustained or improved during COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was administered between 24th April 2020 to 15th May 2020, through an anonymous online questionnaire, that had a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions.

SURVEY FINDINGS

RESPONDENTS PROFILE

There were 62 respondents to this survey, majority of whom are reporters who work in Nairobi (66%), followed by editors at 16%.

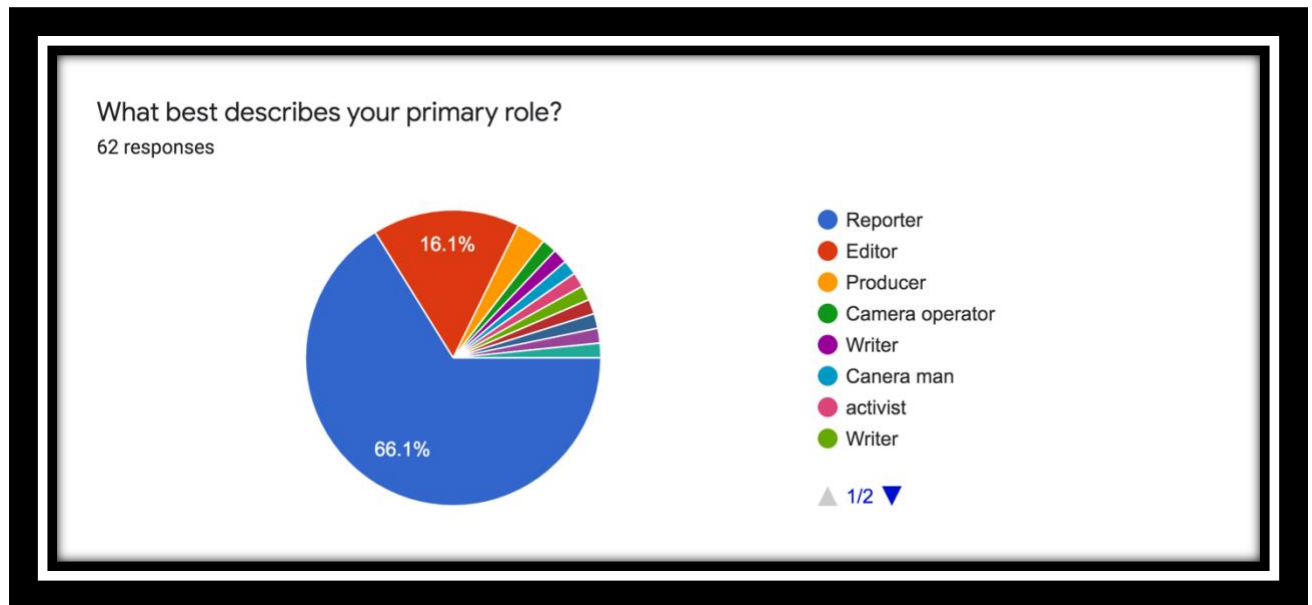


Chart 1: Career categories

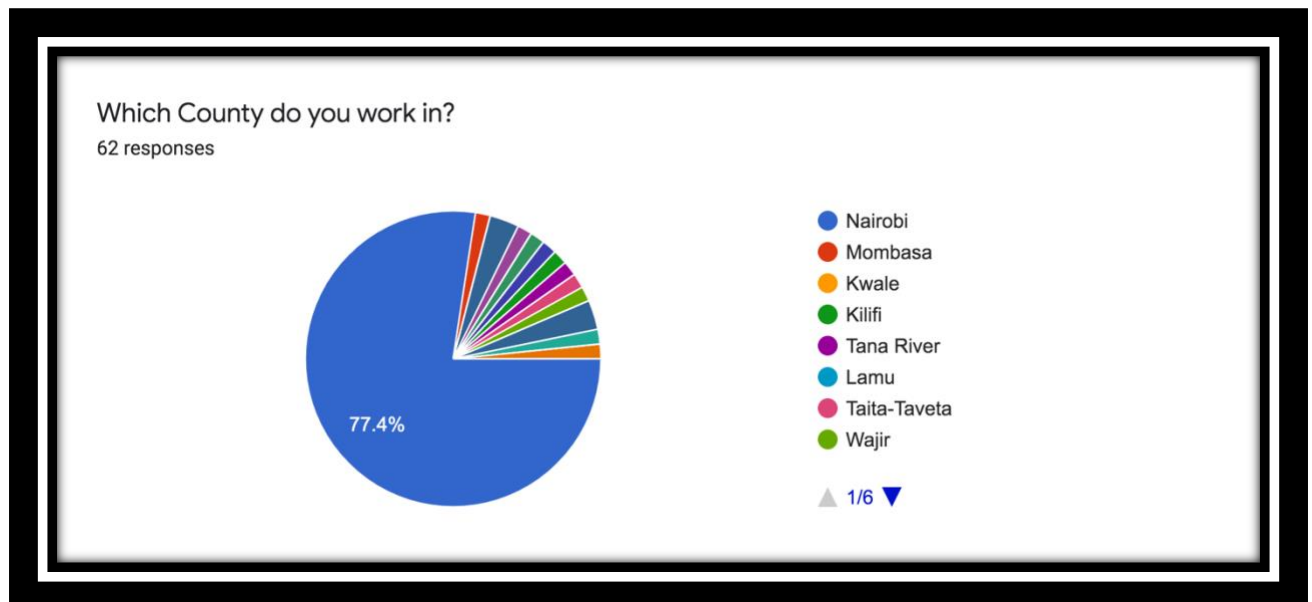


Chart 2: Area of work

Out of all the respondents, most were online journalists, followed by radio journalists, print and TV journalists at 48%, 29%, 25.8%, and 17.7% respectively.

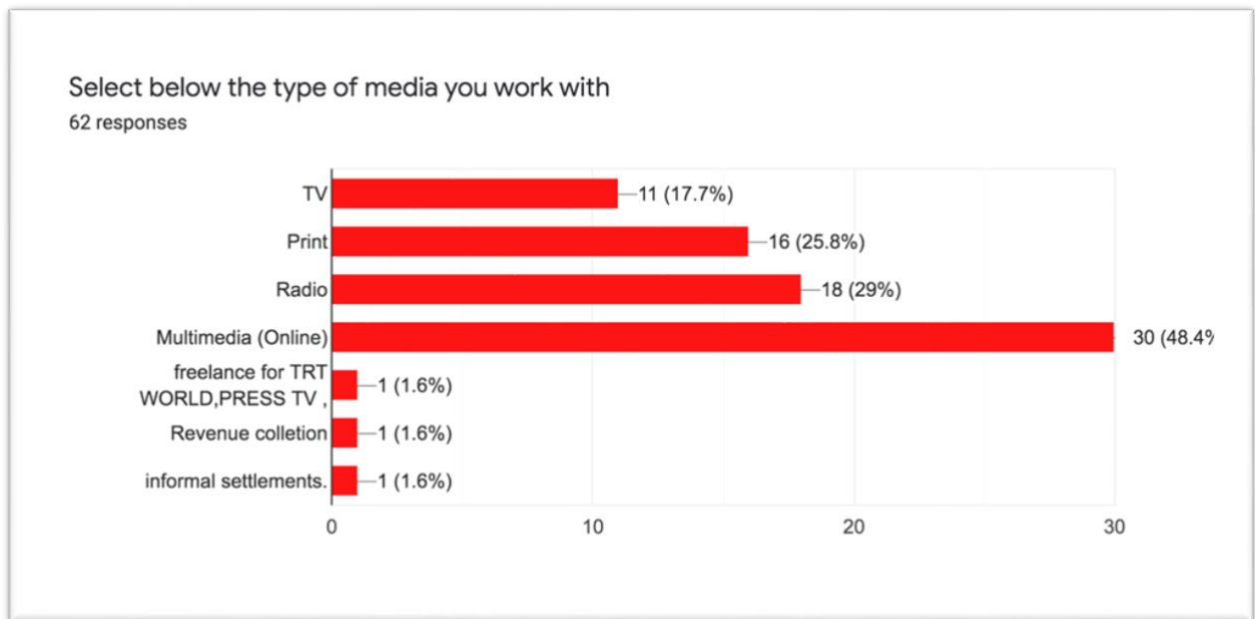


Chart 3: Type of Media

Half of the respondents indicated that they are in full time employment, while 41% others indicated that they are freelancers.

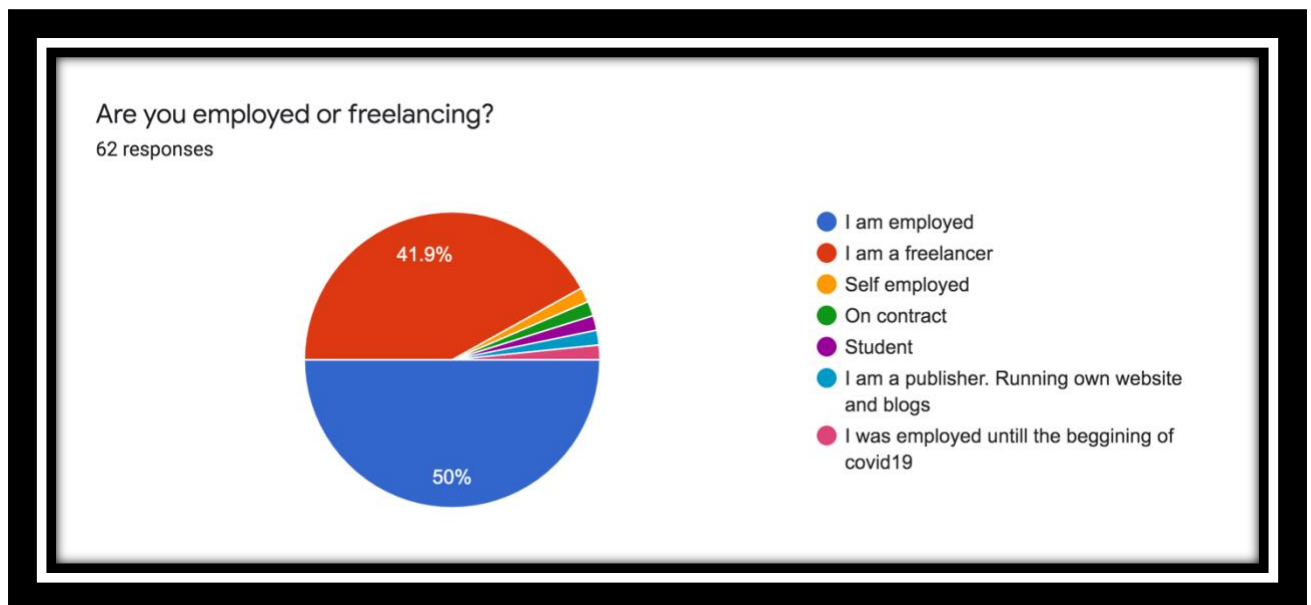


Chart 4: Employment status

EFFECT OF COVID-19

It was evident that the Covid-19 pandemic had affected journalists in Kenya. Below is a graphic of the response given by journalists when asked if they were affected by COVID-19

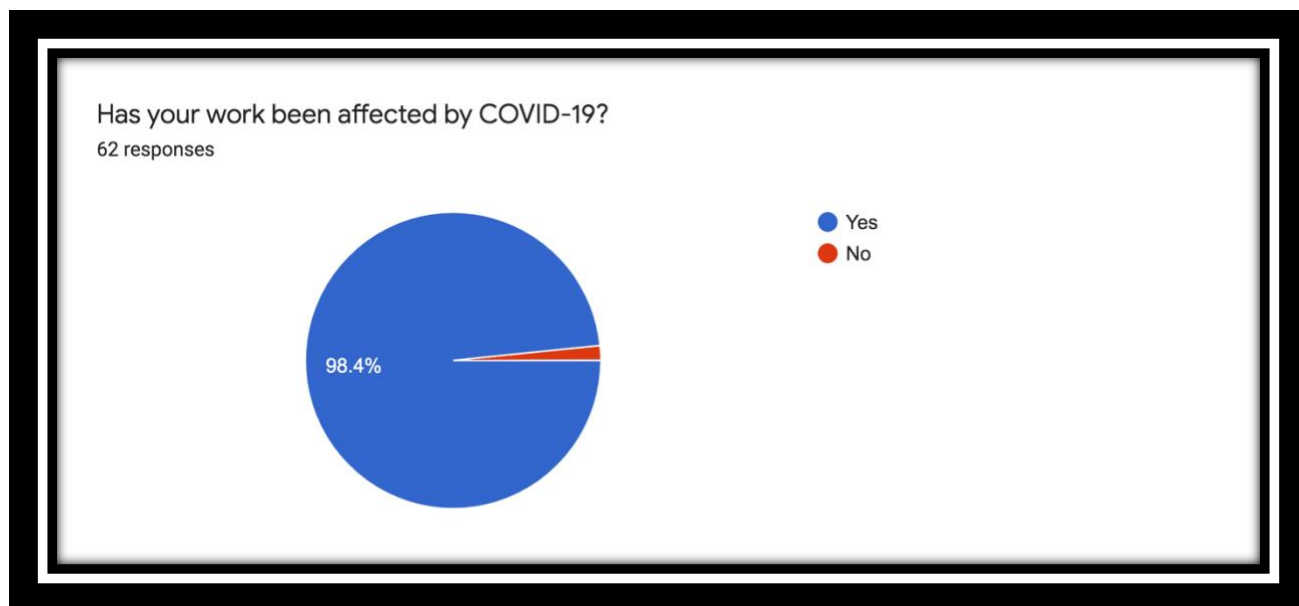


Chart 5: Effect of Covid-19 on work

When asked about the mechanisms put in place by media houses, some of the journalists said the following:

Unpaid leave have been given until the pandemic is over

My media house has let reporters including myself work from home. There is nothing much I have done apart from resorting to phone interviews to generate content which isn't effective since I am an investigative journalist.

I have not produced any media report for the last 40 days which means I am not going to earn anything since I am a freelance content producer.

Limiting Movements in and out of the studio, laying off other staff to

SUPPORT NEEDED TO INVESTIGATE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ISSUES

The respondents were asked to state what would effectively help them investigate transparency and accountability issues presented by COVID-19. The top three recommendations were on:

- Access to investigative grants and mentorship (suggested by 67% of the respondents);
- Training/Capacity building on safety and security (suggested by 64% of the respondents); and
- Investigative journalism training (suggested by 51% of the respondents).

Other suggestions included: Training on Fact-checking (50%); access to tools and resources for Investigative Journalism (45%); Data journalism training (38%); Access to equipment like cameras or voice recorders (38%); Mentorship (35%); and Psychological support (34%).



Chart 6: Areas needing support for journalists

AREAS FOR INVESTIGATION

The Covid-19 funding and expenditure was highlighted as a key issue that the respondents indicated they would want to investigate if they had access to the support or resources listed above. Some of the other listed areas include:

- Investigating human rights violations -61%
- Investigating government response to Covid-19 -50%
- Investigating corruption/bribery -48%

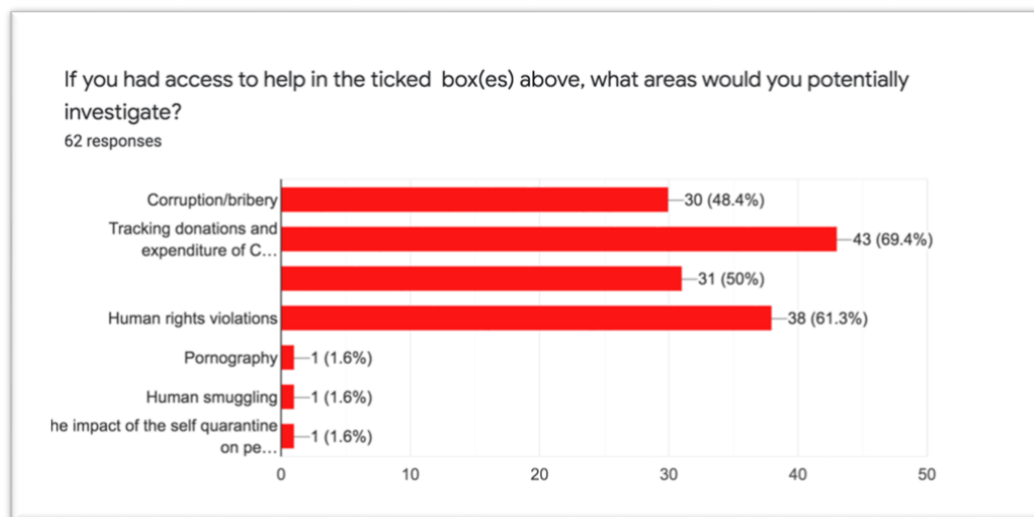


Chart 7: Areas journalists would investigate

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN KENYA?

Finally, the journalists were asked to name one thing that should be done to improve investigative journalism in Kenya. Below is a summary of their suggestions.

- Availing adequate funds investigative journalism
- Empower newsrooms to set up investigative desks
- Have a protection body for investigative journalists
- Keeping track of Government spending during this pandemic, including monitoring grants coming into the country
- Emphasise media freedom, that way journalist won't be held back from publishing their findings for fear of getting eliminated or face threats
- Protection of witnesses proper witness protection for those providing information, media houses to air the story without fear from government
- Access to information
- Better training for investigative journalists
- Continuous mentoring
- Should be provided with equipment, lack of equipment bars one from accessing information from sensitive areas
- Support data journalism

SUMMARY OF KEY LESSONS

From the outcome of the survey, it is evident that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the practise of journalism, similar to other trades in Kenya. In this survey there were 62 respondents, majority of whom were youthful (84%) reporters who work in Nairobi. The pandemic has majorly affected most journalists through restriction of movement. Meaning

journalists are not able to freely move around to conduct their investigations like before. This could be due to social distancing measures where many would avoid moving around, going to public spaces or using public transport. It may hardly be due to the lockdown because journalists have been listed as essential service providers and could therefore traverse any part of the country to do their job.

Even though there has high publicity of possible loss of jobs, forced leaves and pay cuts, few respondents indicated that they had lost a job (1%), had salary scaled down or forced to take unpaid leave. However, by end of June 2020, (after the survey period) there were reports of job losses in major media houses. The Kenya Editors Guild stated in a press statement that 300 journalists had lost their jobs.

Other challenges reported include but are not limited to; fear of contracting Corona virus, inaccessibility of normal working conditions and lack of equipment.

Majority of the responses at 67% suggested that the A4T project support in investigating transparency and accountability issues presented by COVID-19, could mainly be done through provision of grants and mentorship programme. Safety training when covering Covid-19 (64%), Investigative journalism training (51%) and training on factchecking (50%) were the other most popular needs amongst the respondents.

With the suggested support from the A4T project given, the respondents proposed that they would wish to investigate donations and expenditure of Covid-19 funds (69%), human rights violations (61%), government response to Covid-19 (50%), and corruption related stories at 48% respectively.

At least all respondents suggested one or more areas that they would be interested to investigate, showing there is much interest to conduct in-depth investigative journalism. This indicates that the Investigative Journalism programme by the A4T project is still considered very relevant by both freelance and employed journalists, to enable them investigate various forms of transparency and accountability issues. Other notable areas include, trainings (Safety, fact-checking, Investigative journalism, data journalism), mentorship, and access to equipment.