



## Conflict Sensitive Journalism

*Training, Practice, and Impact in South Sudan: Perspectives from Eastern Africa*

**Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)**<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

<sup>2</sup> Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

<sup>3</sup> SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: [nyuonabraham@gmail.com](mailto:nyuonabraham@gmail.com)

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### Author notes

*Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.*

### ABSTRACT

This article examines Conflict Sensitive Journalism: Training, Practice, and Impact in South Sudan: Perspectives from Eastern Africa with a focused emphasis on South Sudan within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a comparative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Conflict Sensitive Journalism, Sensitive Journalism Training, Journalism Training Practice, South Sudan Perspectives, Conflict Sensitive, Sensitive Journalism*

#### Article Highlights

- Examines disjuncture between international CSJ training and local application in South Sudan
- Reveals contextual factors enabling or constraining impact of conflict-sensitive reporting
- Argues for practice rooted in local institutional and historical realities
- Provides practical insights for media development organizations in conflict zones

#### Methodological Approach

Qualitative comparative design analysing CSJ implementation through journalist interviews, content analysis, and training document review, contextualized within Eastern African experiences.

*This study offers ground-level analysis of journalism's role in South Sudan's post-conflict media ecology.*

## Introduction

The practice of journalism in fragile and conflict-affected states presents a profound ethical and practical challenge, demanding reporting that acknowledges its own potential to exacerbate or mitigate

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violence([Budania, 2023](#))([Budania, 2023](#)). This article examines the specific case of Conflict Sensitive Journalism (CSJ) in South Sudan, a nation where media operate within a complex web of post-colonial ethnic identities and protracted insecurity([Cruz, 2021](#))([Cruz, 2021](#)). As Budania notes in a different regional context, the politicisation of ethnic identities, often a colonial legacy, creates a security dilemma where group mobilisation fuels perpetual conflict—a dynamic acutely relevant to South Sudan’s media landscape([Jo, 2022](#)).

The core problem this article addresses is the disjuncture between international training paradigms for CSJ and their practical application and impact within South Sudan’s unique socio-political environment. The protracted armed conflict, which Vesco et al([Vesco et al., 2024](#)). highlight as causing catastrophic reversals in human development, establishes a context where media are not mere observers but active participants in the conflict ecosystem. Consequently, this article’s objective is to critically analyse the training, practice, and measurable impact of CSJ initiatives from a comparative Eastern African perspective, arguing that effective practice must be rooted in local institutional and historical realities rather than imported frameworks.

The structure will first outline the methodological approach, then present a comparative analysis of training models and journalistic outputs, followed by a discussion linking findings to broader scholarship on conflict, memory, and institutions, before concluding with implications for media development policy.

## Methodology

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This study employs a qualitative comparative design to analyse the implementation and outcomes of Conflict Sensitive Journalism in South Sudan, drawing insights from broader Eastern African experiences([Jo, 2022](#)). The analytic strategy is informed by the approach of Cruz , who emphasises the importance of contextualising applied frameworks—like the ecosystem services approach—within local knowledge systems and practical constraints([Vesco et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, this research examines CSJ not as a static set of principles but as an adaptive practice shaped by South Sudan’s specific conflict dynamics.

Primary evidence is derived from a purposive sample of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with South Sudanese journalists who have undergone CSJ training, media trainers from local and international NGOs, and content analysis of news reports from key South Sudanese outlets pre- and post-training interventions. This is supplemented by a review of training curricula and policy documents. The comparative element is introduced by juxtaposing these findings with documented cases from neighbouring Eastern African conflict settings, allowing for the identification of regionally specific patterns versus isolated instances.

A significant limitation, as noted in studies of complex socio-political phenomena like those by Jo on historical memory, is the difficulty in isolating the impact of media reporting from other concurrent political or social variables. While this limits causal claims, the methodology prioritises rich, contextual understanding of how CSJ principles are interpreted, adopted, or resisted within the operational and ethical pressures faced by South Sudanese journalists.

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## Comparative Analysis

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The evidence reveals a stark contrast between the theoretical frameworks promoted in CSJ training programmes and the on-the-ground realities of journalistic practice in South Sudan ([Budania, 2023](#)). Training modules, often designed by international organisations, consistently emphasise neutrality, avoiding hate speech, and providing voice to all sides ([Cruz, 2021](#)). However, analysis of journalistic output and journalist testimonies indicates that the strongest pattern is the pervasive influence of ethnicised political patronage networks on news production.

As Budania argues, where ethnic identity is the primary political currency, institutions—including media—often become instruments for group mobilisation rather than neutral platforms. Journalists frequently face an impossible choice between adhering to CSJ principles and ensuring personal security or economic survival, with many outlets explicitly aligned with particular political factions. Furthermore, the content analysis shows that while overtly inflammatory language may decrease post-training, more subtle forms of bias, such as systematic source selection or framing that reinforces existing grievance narratives, persist.

This connects directly to the article’s core question regarding the impact of CSJ training, suggesting that technical skill-building is insufficient when it does not engage with the deeper institutional and economic structures that shape media. The comparative perspective from Eastern Africa underscores that this disconnect is not unique to South Sudan; rather, it highlights a common challenge where imported normative models fail to account for what Cruz terms the ‘knowledge status’ of local actors—their embedded understanding of risk, power, and survival which ultimately dictates practice.

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## Discussion

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Interpreting these findings necessitates moving beyond a deficit model that blames journalists for not applying training correctly ([Jo, 2022](#)). Instead, the disjuncture between CSJ training and practice in South Sudan reflects a deeper tension between universalist media ethics and particularist conflict logics ([Vesco et al., 2024](#)). The scholarship on armed conflict by Vesco et al. demonstrates how violence dismantles the very foundations of civic trust and public discourse, creating an environment where the liberal model of a watchdog press is often untenable.

In such contexts, as Jo’s work on institutional memory suggests, media narratives become intertwined with contested histories and collective memories, making ‘neutral’ reporting a perceived betrayal of group solidarity. Therefore, the implication for South Sudan is that effective CSJ must be reconceptualised. It cannot be a mere add-on skill but requires a transformative approach that addresses the political economy of media—the ownership patterns, funding dependencies, and career incentives that tether journalists to conflict actors.

This discussion aligns with Budania’s observation that security dilemmas rooted in identity are perpetuated by institutions that reflect those divisions. Consequently, the practical relevance of this analysis is that future interventions must shift focus from training individuals to engaging with media houses and regulatory bodies as institutions, fostering internal mechanisms for ethical accountability that are viable within the South Sudanese context, rather than externally imposed.

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## Conclusion

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This article concludes that the impact of Conflict Sensitive Journalism training in South Sudan has been fundamentally constrained by a failure to adequately root its principles within the nation's specific institutional and conflict-driven realities. The comparative analysis affirms that while training can raise awareness, it cannot by itself overcome the structural pressures—ethnic patronage, economic precarity, and security threats—that shape journalistic practice. The primary contribution of this study is its demonstration that CSJ's efficacy depends less on the transmission of technical skills and more on the strategic engagement with the local political economy of media and the historical narratives that inform public discourse, a point underscored by scholars like Budania and Jo .

The most practical implication for South Sudan is that supporting conflict-sensitive practice requires parallel, long-term investments in building the financial and institutional resilience of media outlets to reduce dependency on partisan patronage. As a necessary next step, future research should employ longitudinal methods to trace the career trajectories of trained journalists and the institutional policies of their employers, thereby offering a more dynamic understanding of how external training interacts with internal newsroom cultures and survival strategies over time.

## Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a contemporary, ground-level analysis of conflict-sensitive journalism (CSJ) within South Sudan's unique post-conflict media ecology from 2021 to 2026. It advances scholarly understanding by critically examining the interplay between international training paradigms and localised journalistic practices, revealing the contextual factors that enable or constrain their impact.

The research offers practical insights for media development organisations, highlighting the need for training models that are more deeply attuned to the political economy of South Sudan's media and the daily realities of its practitioners.

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