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Moro! for better TV inserts

Report from workshop with SNTV staff
3. – 7.5. 2017
Mogadishu, Somalia



Abdi Musse Mohamed and Andreas Wirth teaching the rule of thirds to camerawoman Sadiyo.

Background

This was my second assignment to SNTV in Mogadishu. In May 2016 I was facilitating a workshop with the aim of improving the quality of TV news inserts in SNTV programming (attachment 1). This Moro! workshop was a follow-up of that 2016 seminar, in order to see what improvements had been taken place and in order to further develop the quality of the inserts.

Facilitators

I was facilitating the workshop with broadcast technology consultant Andreas Wirth and Finnish-Somalian journalist Abdi Musse Mohamed who did the English-Somali-Finnish translations. Andreas took responsibility of the technical side of news insert production, myself of the journalistic point of view. But most of the time we worked together, as the journalistic content and the technical issues are unseparable in tv-production.

Trainees

SNTV had assigned to the workshop 25 journalists, cameramen, editors and producers from SNTV News, Radio Mogadishu and Sonna News Agency (list of participants, attachment 2).

Approach

In the training we went into the very details of TV production, talking about the techniques of attaching a lavalier microphone to your interview or importing video and audio tracks to the timeline of a news insert. But the ethos of the workshop was not of details, it was about professional identity. We wanted to strengthen the identity of SNTV personnel as public broadcasters, in service of the Somali people.

The news items in SNTV News have in the past not been always chosen according to journalistic principles. Rather, they have been given as orders by the government officials and politicians or through financial enticement by private organizations. The salaries of SNTV staff are pretty modest and in many cases the bigger part of their income comes from *sharuur*, the money which is paid to the working journalists by external organizations. To an extent that the Ministry of Finance which cannot provide adequate budget for SNTV is paying *sharuur* to SNTV journalist covering conferences or meetings arranged by the ministry itself.

The results of this system of political steering and *sharuur* have been unprofessional in many aspects. The contents of the main news broadcasts in SNTV News have been dominated by inserts from seminars, workshops and conferences. The evening news broadcast of Monday the 2nd of May, for example, lasted for 50 minutes and contained 15 inserts out of which 11 were from different conferences, meetings or seminars.

This also results in work overload, as the SNTV staff has to cover such a number of conferences each day. And it also results in the corruption of journalistic work ethics and motivation, as the working journalists are not given a proper chance of doing their job according to the standards of the profession.

My main recommendations after last year's seminar were

- 1) Less inserts from meetings.
- 2) Better inserts from meetings.
- 3) Get the cameras out there!

A public broadcast journalist is in the service of the people. He/she should not be driven by political or commercial interests. He/she should always look for the topics that are of importance, value and interest for the viewers, listeners or readers. Part of the meetings and conferences are definitely newsworthy also from the audience's point of view. But most of the important and interesting things in public life are to be found outside the meeting rooms, in the real life of the people. A public service broadcast journalist should be out there, "looking for the heartbeat of the society".

Already in 2016 I noticed that the SNTV staff is very motivated and capable of improving the quality of the TV news inserts. After this year's workshop I am even more convinced that the will and professionalism is there. Given the chance and resources SNTV staff is able to produce journalistically and technically excellent contents – for the benefit of Somali people.



Journalis Faysal Musse Mohamed interviewing the "climate change specialist" Andreas Wirth on the roof of SNTV building. Excellent quality was created with Canon 5D camera and wireless Sennheiser lavalier microphone.

Excercise one: Better inserts from meetings

As the bulk of the news still is conference news, we took up the task of making these news inserts better and more relevant to the viewers. We arranged a dummy press conference in order to get a chance to consider the journalistic approach and technical methods without the normal time pressures or political pressures. This fictious conference bore the name Conference on Drought and Hunger Situation in Somalia (CODHSS). The main speakers were a German world-famous expert on climate change (role played by Andreas Wirth), the representative of Finnish Foreign ministry (played by Pasi Toivonen) and the Somali government representative (played by Abdi Musse Mohamud).

The basic idea was that a meeting, seminar or conference in most cases does not qualify as a news topic as such. The topic for the journalistic work should rather be the theme of the conference – if it is relevant to the Somali people.

The participants we devided into three groups, so that there were representatives of all relevant professions in each group (producer, journalist, cameraman/woman, video editor). The groups were provided with 50 minutes of video footage from the refugee camps for Internally displaced persons (IDP's) near Mogadishu. This material had been recorded by Finnish Broadcasting Company's reporter Antti Kuronen in the beginning of April. The assignment was:

- 1) Use material both from the press conference and from the IDP camps.
- 2) Do not use the podium speeches.
- 3) Find your own point of view to the topic and make your interviews in the conference according to that.
- 4) Ask the questions that you think are most relevant to your audience. Ask difficult question from all the interviewees so that they get a chance to give their best answers.

We also emphasized the structural recommendations from last year:

- 1) Make your insert have a beginning and an end.
- 2) Don't start your insert with a voiceover.
- 3) Don't use muted video behind voiceover or interview. Always use the natural sound on a reduced audio level.
- 4) Use a narrative story. Voiceovers and interviews can be placed to in-betweens of such a story.
- 5) Use live effects. They will give expressive power and rhythm to your insert.

On Thursday morning we had editorial meetings of the groups. They prepared a draft script and questions to the interviewees. The cameras and microphones were adjusted and the groups were planning the visual look of their insert. In the afternoon we had our imaginary CODHSS conference with podium speeches and interviews of the keynote speakers. The working groups shared the materials from the podium speeches and Antti Kuronen's material from the IDP camps but made each their individual interviews with the keynote speakers. The inserts were edited and ready for screening on Friday afternoon's session.

I strongly recommend that all the journalistic leaders in SNTV and their superiors in the Ministry of Information find time to look trough these inserts. To me they prove that the SNTV staff is motivated and capable of doing better inserts from the meeting rooms - combining the themes of

the seminars/workshops/conferences with material from real life and creating their own point of view to the topic.

As always, there was also room for improvements in the inserts produced. My detailed comments and recommendations can be read in attachment 3.



Group 1 planning for the insert on traffic lights.

Exercise two: Get cameras out there

On Saturday morning we had again editorial meetings of the groups. The idea was to plan, film and edit an insert on a chosen topic with a rather realistic news/current affairs timetable. These inserts were supposed to be ready for screening in our final session the following day, on Sunday afternoon.

I must say I was impressed by the planning work of the groups. In less than an hour we had three groups out there, working for an insert that had an interesting topic, a particular point of view and a plan for the casting and narration. These were the topics and plans of action:

- 1) **Traffic lights in Mogadishu.** Why are they not functioning? How are they being replaced by traffic policemen? What is the impact on the road safety? What can be done about the problem? The main character of this insert could be the “human traffic light”, a police officer directing the traffic in Mogadishu. The narrative story could be him coming to work, doing his job and leaving the crossroad after the working day.

Other possible interviewees would be the Chief of Traffic police, representative of Mogadishu City Council, pedestrians and car drivers in the crossroads.



- 2) **The first female car mechanic in Somalia.** How has she made her way to this male dominated profession? What does she think about her work, how do other mechanics and car owners take her? What kind of a role model can she be for the Somali girls and women? Protagonist would be the car mechanic herself, narrative story would cover her workday or show the process of repairing one car. Other possible interviews the owner of the garage, workmates and customers.
- 3) **Getting a Somali passport.** A positive news of a bureaucratic process being made a lot quicker and smoother. What earlier took three months can now be done in just three days. How does the process work, what lessons can be learned from this improvement? The protagonists could be two citizens, one submitting the application and another receiving the ready made passport. With them it would be possible to build a narrative story of the process of getting the passport. Other possible interviewees could be ministry representative, an officer responsible of the passport office and the people producing the passports in the printshop.

The two first groups were able to carry out their insert more or less according to this original plan. The third group could not get the cooperation of the passport office at this short notice. But they had an excellent plan B, making a follow-up report on two refugee mothers that SNTV crew had interviewed four weeks earlier. Both women gave birth on the refugee camp and the idea was now to visit them again and see how they have survived in the rough conditions of the IDP camp.

The planning work in the passport topic was by no means wasted. This insert will be done as soon as the passport office shows green light.

It is not only the political steering and *sharuur* that make it difficult to produce news from outside the meeting rooms. The SNTV film groups are always taking a security risk while working in public areas. They deserve all the respect for their courageous work - and all the possible safety precautions that can be taken by their superiors to make their journalistic work as safe as possible.

The three inserts were ready in time and were screened in the final session of the workshop. They have probably already also been broadcast in SNTV news.

Again, I strongly recommend that the decision makers in SNTV and in the Ministry of Information find time to look these examples and give them a thought. SNTV is service of the Somali people. It has the obligation, more than any other media organization, to go out there and record the true life of Somali people. These inserts show that this can be done, if only the priorities are set correctly.

The detailed comments and recommendations on these inserts are also to be found in attachment 3.



Screening the ready made inserts. Always look for the positive in other peoples work – it will create room also for constructive criticism.

Recommendations

Together with Andreas Wirth we have given an amount of detailed technical and journalistic recommendations to the trainees of this Moro! workshop. They are well understood and the staff in SNTV is so ready to improve the quality of TV inserts.

But the bigger problems are often of structural nature and more difficult to solve. There is no way going around them, if we really want to get better public service television for the Somali people.

I know I am an outsider and not properly informed of all the facts affecting SNTV and Somali media in general. But these are the points I would like to raise for sincere consideration by SNTV leadership, Ministry of Information even the highest holders of political power in Somalia.

1) Get rid of *sharuur*.

Journalistic choices cannot be done on basis of somebody paying cash for coverage. The money being channelled through the *sharuur* system should be made official, turned into budget money or invoiced income to SNTV. The journalists and other professionals in SNTV should get a salary that enables them to cover their living costs without the need of taking *sharuur* for journalistic services.

2) Less is more.

Limit the amount of inserts in TV news and set a fixed time for the news broadcast. Cover only the topics that are newsworthy according to the journalistic assessment made by the editors at SNTV. Take a journalistic point of view to everything you do in the news and current affairs programming: What is news? Why is it newsworthy? If there is a problem, what can be done about it?

3) Cash for coverage.

SNTV could still sell air time for the organizers of meetings, conferences and seminars, but outside the news broadcasts. There could be a daily magazine of the conference news - but the organizers would be officially invoiced by SNTV for that air time. The organizers would provide the video material to SNTV like the advertisers provide their materials for TV ads. This would transform the *sharuur* money into official income for SNTV and free SNTV staff to real journalistic work.

4) Money for running costs.

SNTV receives only 2,500 dollars for its monthly running costs. This means there are practically no resources to pay for even the smallest necessities of TV production. It is impossible to collect broadcast quality audio without broadcast quality microphones, for example. There is a set of Sennheiser microphones and one Canon 5D camera in use now. And looking at the quality of video and audio being produced with these equipment one can say: SNTV could do so much better, when given the proper equipment.

5) Editorial meetings.

The new director of SNTV has started a routine of daily editorial meeting with the producers. I strongly support this idea and wish that it will continue. The journalistic line of SNTV has to be drawn independently by the editor-in-chief and his immediate subordinates. Each producer should also keep editorial meetings with his/her staff in order to collect their ideas and further develop the assignments given by the leadership of SNTV.

6) Planning calendar

To my knowledge there is no organized planning system in the SNTV News. The simplest way of doing this would be to have a shared document in Google Drive, iCloud or some other data cloud service. This document could contain the plans for each broadcast day: what stories are suggested, which are already in production, who are the responsible persons working on each topic. The editor-in-chief and the producers would have editing rights to the document and the journalistic staff reading rights.

Acknowledgements

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The biggest thanks and warmest thoughts will go to each and every one of you participating in Moro! workshop. The best moments were the ones when I kind of felt that you kind of felt that we were there for a reason.

Mahadsenid!

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MORO!

Attachments

- 1) Somalia workshop report 2016
- 2) List of participants
- 3) Detailed comments on inserts
- 4) Andreas Wirth's technical report

Links

The home page of my current project "Perjantai" (Friday)
<http://areena.yle.fi/1-3768892>

The Facebook page of "Perjantai"
<https://www.facebook.com/yleperjantai?ref=bookmarks>