



Journalist Fellowship Paper

Media coverage of police brutality in Kenya's informal settlements

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Contents

Introduction	3
Police brutality: the numbers	4
Putting a face to the numbers	5
A brief history of informal settlements	7
Media depictions of Informal Settlements	8
A brief history of policing in Kenya	11
Forms of police brutality/police violence	13
Media coverage of police brutality in the informal settlements	14
How do the media rationalise their poor coverage of police brutality?	16
Framing: saviour officer vs dangerous criminal	16
‘No ordinary victim’	17
Reading from the same script	19
Does the media have a role to play in accessing justice for victims?	20
Recommendations	21
Engage with residents of informal settlements	21
Employ reporters from informal settlements	21
Always consult more than one source	21
Crowdsource evidence	21
Avoid audience fatigue	22
Keep following up	22
Undertake in-depth investigations	22
Mind your language: rioters or peaceful protestors?	22
Sensitivity training	23
Conclusion	25
Acknowledgements	26
Kenya: Protesters clash with police in Nairobi over Covid curfews, brutality	23

Introduction

Michael Maina, Vincent Owide and James Muriithi: these names may not ring a bell to many Kenyans, but for the friends and families of each man, 2020 left a scar.

Though living in different parts of Nairobi, they have three things in common: they were young men, lived in informal settlements, and were all victims of police brutality.

Vincent suffered a massive head injury, Michael was clobbered on the head and lost his eye, and James lost his life to three bullets fired by a police officer. The ugly reality of why their names might not ring a bell to many Kenyans is that police brutality has become so normalised in the country that their stories were not covered by the media.



Aerial shot of Kibra informal settlement in Nairobi. Photo: Author's own

When Kenya announced its first COVID-19 case, the government announced various measures – such as a night curfew, cessation of movement in three counties and mandatory wearing of masks to contain the spread of the virus. The enforcement of these containment measures proved deadlier than the virus itself, and precipitated another chapter in a history of Kenyan police brutality as old as the country itself.

Police brutality: the numbers

Three years ago, a group of human rights organisations, Missing Voices, began collecting and tracking cases of police violence in Kenya. They have recorded 500 deaths since they began.¹ In 2019, they documented 145 cases of police killings. In 2020, 158 people were killed by police, and 10 disappeared in police custody. In 2021, the number of victims shot up to 219 cases of police killings and enforced disappearances.

Their data showed that the most vulnerable people to police brutality are men, aged 18-35 and living in informal settlements.

Yet there is so much impunity for police brutality in Kenya that George Kinoti, director of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, felt comfortable [telling an audience](#) in June 2022 that when you demean an officer taking care of you – “an officer who is ready to give his life, his blood for you and who holds a fully loaded

¹ Missing Voices, 2022. [online] Missingvoices.or.ke. Available at: <<https://missingvoices.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/MV-2021-annual-report-digital-2.pdf>> [Accessed 7 May 2022].

firearm” – he may [be provoked to] commit a felony. “And when circumstances are analysed, he may not be held criminally responsible.”^{2,3}

It is absurd that, in a place with a serious police brutality issue, the head of one the nation’s three police departments would feel it appropriate to make such comments. How did we get here?

Putting a face to the numbers

Michael Maina, the victim who lost his eye, lived to tell of his encounter with the men and women in uniform. Does he hope to get justice?



Michael Maina. Photo: Author’s own

“Where is that justice being served? It should have started by now because everything is there, all the evidence. What is not there? The officer knows what he did to me. I don’t have anything to say to him, but I just want him to put himself in

² We may have low qualifications, but respect our work— Kinoti
<https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2022-06-08-we-may-have-low-qualifications-but-respect-our-work-kinoti/>

³ Don’t Provoke Cops, They May Shoot You And Nothing Will Happen: Kinoti
<https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2022/06/dont-provoke-cops-they-may-shoot-you-and-nothing-will-happen-kinoti/>

my shoes: suppose I was the one who hit him or did what he did to me? What would he want from me? What kind of justice would he want?” Maina told me.

What role has the Kenyan media had to play in the continuation of this violence? To answer that question, I considered the histories of both informal settlements and policing in Kenya before analysing coverage from 10 major outlets and, wherever possible, interviewing the journalists who cover these stories.

Having done so, it is my belief that we have failed the public we serve. The situation, however, is not irredeemable.

A brief history of informal settlements

A note on language: the words “slum” and “informal settlements” are often used interchangeably. I believe the word “slum” has negative connotations and promotes stigmatisation of people living in those areas. In this paper, unless quoting a source, I will refer to “informal settlements” rather than slums.

Before the British set up shop in East Africa, Nairobi was grazing land – a boundary between the Maasai and Gikuyu communities.

In 1899, the chief engineer of the East African railway moved its headquarters to Nairobi, making it a commercial hub of the British East Africa Protectorate.⁴ Over the next three years, the population of “illegal” African settlers would grow due to the introduction of a “hut tax” designed to force subsistence farmers into the workforce to satisfy the demand from white settlers for cheap labour.⁵

Nairobi had been developed as a city for ‘whites only’, with no legal residence allowed for Africans. British and Asian communities living on Western side of the city, while the Africans lived in the Eastlands, with no access to coordinated services in housing, water supply, roads, or electricity.

From these roots in the early 1900s, today’s informal settlements in Nairobi face many of the same predicaments they did in 1963 when Kenya finally gained independence: they are home to mostly low-income earners, most of the landlords and ladies of the houses/structures have quasi legal right of occupation or no rights at all, the structures are mostly constructed on temporary material like cardboards

⁴ Mitullah, W., 2022. The case of Nairobi, Kenya. [online] Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/pdfs/Nairobi.pdf> [Accessed 10 May 2022].

⁵ Yenjela, Wafula. “The Nairobi Prostitution Histories: Perspectives from Kenyan Novels.” *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 16–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2019.1677141>. [Accessed May 11 2022].

and iron sheets, the majority are let on a room-by-room basis, and most households occupy a single room.

The major informal settlements within Nairobi and its environs include Mathare, Korogocho, Mukuru kwa Njenga, Mukuru kwa Ruben, Gathogoro, and Kibera. Successive governments have failed to upgrade the living standards of the ever-growing populations here.

Media depictions of Informal Settlements

There has been much stigmatisation in the depiction of informal settlements by both the local and international media. News happening in these areas tends to carry an aspect of negativity and condescension, irrespective of the nature of the story. Phrases like “hotbed of violence” and references to crime abound, even when the story has nothing to do with either.

Researcher Wangui Kimari analysed stories from the *Daily Nation* newspaper containing the word “Mathare” (one of the informal settlements) between the early 1960s until 2016. She found the majority focused on criminal activity and overwhelmingly reaffirmed what is viewed as the poor character of residents.⁶

“Even a basic discourse analysis will make out the endurance of particular negative words throughout the decades: crime and/or criminal, alcohol, prostitution and slum. These stubborn characterizations have ossified and gained ground every year, and the collateral of these discourses is widespread and has particular bearing on its youth, who are subsequently criminalized because of these sedimented depictions.

⁶ Wangui Kimari (2020) War-talk: an urban youth language of siege in Nairobi, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 14:4, 707-723, DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2020.1831847
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2020.1831847>

[...] These deleterious depictions endure, and help entrench Mathare residents as the exemplars of urban living gone wrong,” she noted.

Take for example this positive story from *The Star*, *Goat slaughterhouse driving Kiamaiko slum economy*, about an abattoir creating job opportunities:⁷

Unlike the majority of Kenyan slums where unemployment, insecurity and crime are rife, Kiamaiko has seen more jobs and small businesses flourish as a result of the goat market.

Stigmatisation has led some journalists and media houses to perpetuate theories with no grounding other than the illusory truth effect (information repeated so often it is taken as truth). For instance, it is common to see stories in the media calling Kibera ‘Africa’s largest slum’.

This AFP story was published by [Forbes India](#), [Global Times](#), [The Express Tribune](#), [Malay Mail](#) and [Taipei Times](#) to name a few:

Kenya video gamers face an uphill battle to make their mark

For years, the virtual world of video games was the only place where Kenyan gamer Brian Diang’a felt safe from his abusive, alcoholic father and their unhappy home in Kibera, Africa’s largest slum.

Example two comes from *Deutsche Welle*:⁸

⁷ 2017. Goat slaughterhouse driving Kiamaiko slum economy. [online] Available at: <<https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017-01-05-goat-slaughterhouse-driving-kicamaiko-slum-economy/>> [Accessed 11 May 2022].

⁸ The young poet bringing hope to Kibera
<https://www.dw.com/en/the-young-poet-bringing-hope-to-kibera/av-61597262>

The young poet bringing hope to Kibera

Hope Wambui is on a mission to bring change to Kenya's biggest slum, Kibera. She raises issues from cancer to teen pregnancies and female sanitary products.

Example three from the *New Humanitarian*:⁹

Slum Survivors, IRIN film released

Worldwide, more than a billion people live in slums, with as many as one million in Kibera, Africa's largest such settlement, in the Kenyan capital Nairobi.

According to Kenya's population census 2019, conducted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the sub-county of Kibra (where Kibera is located) has a population of 185,777.¹⁰ That is less than Mathare (206,564), another informal settlement in Nairobi. Soweto in South Africa is home to over 1 million, while Khayelitsha is home to 2.4 million.

⁹ Slum Survivors- IRIN film released

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2007/10/24/slum-survivors-irin-film-released>

¹⁰ KNBS, K., 2019. *2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census: Volume I*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.knbs.or.ke/download/2019-kenya-population-and-housing-census-volume-i-population-by-county-and-sub-county/?wpdmdl=5615&refresh=629cf0c70fb051654452423>> [Accessed 5 June 2022].

A brief history of policing in Kenya

When COVID-19 containment measures were introduced and the heavy-handedness of police implementation was [captured on video](#), most Kenyans condemned their actions.¹¹ But was this the first time the police used excessive force against ordinary citizens? Absolutely not.

According to George Musamali, a security and safety consultant who served as a police officer for more than 10 years, police brutality in Kenya is not a new phenomenon. It has been a feature of the force since its inception, and people from low socio-economic backgrounds bear the brunt of this culture.



A photo of Kenya police. Photo: Author's own

¹¹ *Police killed at least 20 Kenyans while enforcing coronavirus rules. Hopes for justice are fading.* Max Bearak, Washington Post. December 20, 2020
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/coronavirus-kenya-police-shootings-curfew/2020/12/20/deb81d5a-3efc-11eb-b58b-1623f6267960_story.html

“There has always been a wide gap between how police deal with the people from different classes. And you can tell that by how the deployment of police is skewed towards the informal settlement whereby you will find a lot of police deployed and also brutal force is being used on the residents as opposed to people who live in the middle class and upper-end estates.”

The Kenyan police was established in 1896, staffed by British and Indian personnel, primarily to quash dissent over the British construction of the Kenyan railway.¹² In their paper *Democratizing Security or Decentralizing Repression? The Ambiguities of Community Policing in Kenya*, Mutuma Ruteere and Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle argue that the Kenyan police was born with marks of a “punitive citizen containment squad”. The selection of locals into the force was skewed towards those perceived to be not hostile to the white settlers:

“Within the urban areas, the police force was engaged in implementing an unpopular agenda of keeping Nairobi safe for the settlers who viewed the many unemployed Africans illegally resident in the slum areas of Eastlands as a ‘source of crime’ and evidence of ‘growing disorder’.”

Musamali said the problem begins at the training stage: “Recruits are brutalized in the name of being trained, so at the end of the day when they graduate, they extend the same brutality they received during training to members of the public because, there’s a belief that members of the public are enemies of the police.”

Add to this a culture of impunity that has enabled police officers to treat civilians in informal settlements as “guilty until proven innocent”, and not face any repercussions. Most cases of violence go unreported and, when reported, very few

¹² Ruteere, Mutuma, and Pommerolle, Marie-Emmanuelle. "Democratizing Security or Decentralizing Repression? The Ambiguities of Community Policing in Kenya." *African Affairs* (London) 102.409 (2003): 587-604. Web.

will be investigated or result in action taken against the accused officer. Ideally, a victim is expected to report the issue to the nearest police station where the incident occurred, but in most cases the perpetrator works in the same station.

Police have also been accused of protecting fellow officers accused of police brutality. According to Dr. Patrick Mutahi who has done extensive research on police brutality and human rights, there is a “blue code” among police officers whereby they look after their own. It is because of this “blue code” that reported cases are not recorded, some are recorded and not investigated, and in some cases victims threatened by other officers when reporting.

Forms of police brutality/police violence

Some of the forms of violence used by police against civilians in Kenya are:

- **Enforced disappearance** These are incidents where someone is taken into custody or is last seen with police officers, but they are not booked into any police station, meaning there is no record of the arrest. Some victims disappear for ever, in other cases the body of the victim is recovered, and in a few cases the victims return home shaken and reticent to speak about what happened to them.
- **Extrajudicial killings** This is when a police officer executes a suspected criminal. Some extrajudicial killings happen in public places, sometimes witnessed by ordinary citizens.
- **Beating** This is the most common form of police brutality, and some Kenyans accept it as normal.
- **Harassment and extortion** Young men in informal settlements report facing this regularly: arrested on flimsy reasons and forced to pay a bribe to the arresting officers or face time in custody and, in some instances, being taken to court on trumped-up charges.

Media coverage of police brutality in the informal settlements



Newspaper headlines graphic. Photo: Author's own

According to the data by Missing Voices shared earlier in the paper, in 2021 there were 219 cases of police killings and enforced disappearances. At this rate, you might expect to find a story about police violence in the media every two to three days. This is not the case.

Instead, media coverage was limited to a handful of extreme cases. It is true that coverage increased during the pandemic to highlight the heavy-handed enforcement of restrictions. But, even then, it was often the same extreme stories involving a murder that were chosen for repetition by multiple outlets.

I spoke to Kenyan journalists about why police brutality in informal settlements is not widely covered. They told me:

- **Normalisation.** As stated earlier in this paper, police violence has been normalised to the point it is not considered newsworthy because it is not unusual.
- **Bias.** Stereotypes that label young people from informal settlements as criminal suspects have filtered into newsrooms. For many, a young man killed by a police officer in an informal settlement must be part of a criminal enterprise. They think: ‘The police are just getting rid of a menace.’
- **Avoiding duplication.** Many cases of police brutality share similar details. “There are many cases that the media haven’t covered because of similarity to those covered before; editors avoid duplicating stories with similar plots,” one journalist told me.
- **Editors’ lack of empathy.** Some editors have become numb to these kinds of reports and do not assign or approve stories unless they are extraordinary. One journalist shared with me his frustration after covering a police brutality case only to be told by his editor it wasn’t approved. “My editor asked me: ‘So what? So they have been killed by the police... so?’”
- **Lack of reporters in informal settlements.** Very few reporters in the mainstream media live or report in the informal settlements in Nairobi. Reporters mostly go into an informal settlement for a particular story and then leave. The result of this helicopter approach is that most stories from the informal settlements lack context and nuance required to give the whole picture of a situation or event.
- **Inaccessibility (location).** Some journalists I spoke to mentioned a lack of accessibility to the areas. Reporters may need a fixer or security to take them to various places in an informal settlement. This is an extra cost that most media companies are unwilling to part with.
- **Inaccessibility (people).** Due to previous bad experiences or coverage, many residents of informal settlements are hesitant to speak to journalists. In cases

of police brutality, some officers have been accused of threatening families and victims to remain silent or face further violence.

How do the media rationalise their poor coverage of police brutality?

Framing: saviour officer vs dangerous criminal

Like the police themselves, some in the media accept the lazy framing of all who live in informal settlements as a criminal threat, and all police as “the good guys” trying to maintain order. Of course, real life is not that straightforward: where you live or work is hardly a reliable indicator of character or motive.

When lazy framing is practised in a newsroom, official police statements or public opinion can take precedence over the job of asking questions.

Consider the example of a video that went viral in April 2017 of a police officer [publicly](#) executing suspected thieves.¹³ No extensive reporting has been done about that incident. Instead, stories – and even documentaries – have been made about the officers involved and their fight against criminal elements in Nairobi.

One example is this story carried in the *Sunday Nation: Why officer filmed killing teenager is ‘loved’ in Eastleigh*.¹⁴ “The police officer in plain clothes who was captured on camera gunning down a youth he had arrested is a darling of many residents of Eastleigh, the *Sunday Nation* has established,” says the lede. It goes on to share the opinions of individuals who supported the extrajudicial killings. Another part of the story reads:

¹³ Video: Kenya's Dirty Harry? Outrage over plain clothes policeman filmed shooting two suspected gang members dead in the street in Nairobi
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-1441441/Plain-clothes-policeman-shoots-robbery-suspects-dead-Nairobi.html>

¹⁴ Why officer filmed killing teenager is ‘loved’ in Eastleigh
<https://nairobinews.nation.africa/officer-filmed-killing-teenager/>

Police-taunting gang

If social media reports are to determine who the slain youths are, then they belonged to flamboyant police-taunting gangs, whose members posted pictures of bundles of money and healed bullet wounds on their bodies which they sustained from their dangerous adventures in the dark world of crime.

This is one example of *many* where journalists have rationalised the use of force or extrajudicial killings in informal settlements.

'No ordinary victim'

When extensive investigation and questioning *is* undertaken by journalists, it's often to establish the "true nature" of the victim and their ties to criminality. Rather than reporting the facts of the incident at hand, stories will dig into a victim's past. A recurring trope in this genre: quoting family or neighbours about how the victim had been warned about their criminal ways but did not heed the warnings.

Some examples of this can be found in coverage of the [abduction of four men](#) in April 2021. Human rights organisations believed police might have been involved.¹⁵ The bodies of three were recovered, but one is still missing. When it happened, there were several media reports about the missing men but coverage then evolved to focus not on the investigation into their whereabouts, but on the missing men's criminal histories. This first example from [Daily Nation](#):¹⁶

¹⁵Four men missing in suspected abduction in Kitengela
<https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2021-04-25-four-men-missing-in-suspected-abduction-in-kitengela/>

¹⁶Missing Kitengela Quartet Lived Life on the Fast Lane
<https://allafrica.com/stories/202104290080.html>

Missing Kitengela Quartet Lived Life on the Fast Lane

The four men who mysteriously disappeared in Kitengela on April 19 lived in the fast lane and had a history of run-ins with the law. The Nation has established that the quartet lived large and spent their fortunes on fast cars, women and alcohol.

Benjamin preferred "the finer things in life" and was always out with his friends partying, his younger brother said yesterday. "My brother owned several SUVs, which he hired out regularly. The business could sustain his lifestyle; he was not a criminal. It's true he has been to several police stations, but that had to do with his business. He lost three vehicles mysteriously between 2016 and 2017 to clients," said Mr Imbai.

Police records, however, place Benjamin at the centre of a crime committed on January 11 last year when a gang of seven broke into a car and stole Sh900k at a yard on Ngong Road.

And from *People Daily*:¹⁷

Missing friends were abducted in Kitengela, detectives reveal

Sources yesterday told *People Daily* that security agencies were concerned about the involvement of some of the members of this group that included a former convict who had served an eight-year jail term.

The gang leader was identified Brian Oduor, popularly known as "Kompe". One of the missing men, Amache Imbai, had cases pending before Mavoko and Kibera Law Courts.

¹⁷ Missing friends were abducted in Kitengela, detectives reveal
<https://www.pd.co.ke/news/missing-friends-were-abducted-in-kitengela-detectives-reveal-73677/>

New information like this is often disclosed to the media by “anonymous sources”. Looking at the types of information disclosed – how many times a victim had been arrested, at which police station and for what crime – it is fair to assume that these “sources” are the police. Are journalists aware they could be quoting someone involved in an extrajudicial killing?

Reading from the same script

Journalists have always relied on official police accounts. This becomes extremely complex when reporting on cases of police brutality. In the event that the use of force is captured and shared on social media, the official response is almost always: “We do not condone any form of excessive use of force by officers, therefore we are investigating the incident”. However, in most cases, the officers involved continue serving and the media does no follow-up on the outcome of the investigation.

Official social media pages for the police have also become an unquestioned source for news stories, especially the Twitter page for the [Director of Investigations-DCI Kenya](#).¹⁸ The page recently adopted [a new style](#) of informing the public about criminal activities or criminals arrested in true-crime thriller novel style.¹⁹ These threads are finding their way into news stories.

The problem with reporting official statements or Twitter threads without questioning or interviewing other sources is that the media is then nothing more than a co-opted platform for police communications. This is not the role of journalism.

¹⁸ DCI Kenya

https://twitter.com/DCI_Kenya

¹⁹ Kenyan police are using Twitter to become known as crime fighters, not killers

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/03/01/kenya-police-dci-twitter/>

Does the media have a role to play in accessing justice for victims?

The journalists I spoke to had divergent views on whether media coverage has any impact on access to justice for the victims of police brutality in informal settlements. As some rightly pointed out: the judicial system is an entirely different and autonomous body, with its own methods of operation.

However, I do believe journalism has a role to play in rule of law, and helping people access justice. Reporting is not (and should not be) prosecution, but through its role in informing the public, bearing witness to injustice, and acting as a public watchdog, reporting on police brutality has the power to:

1. **Make victims visible.** Reporting on police brutality puts a face to the victim statistics, and can make individual cases visible and memorable.
2. **Put pressure on authorities to investigate.** Journalists have the ability to directly question authorities about the investigation of police brutality accusations. When reporters constantly ask for answers, authorities may be compelled to investigate.
3. **Put pressure on the judiciary to prosecute.** Legal proceedings take time in Kenya – some cases can drag on for years. The impact of a slow pace on some cases can be the loss of key evidence or witnesses. Everyone, including the prosecution team, slowly moves on to other “more urgent” matters. Only the victim or their family are left to pursue justice. When journalists follow up on cases consistently, it can compel the judiciary to ensure cases are not buried and victims have their day in court.

Recommendations

How can journalists in Kenya do a better job covering police brutality in informal settlements?

Engage with residents of informal settlements

When reporters engage with residents, they will understand the communities better, which will help in creating fair coverage of the informal settlements. It will also help them overcome the prejudices and stereotypes that may have unconsciously informed their stories about issues affecting informal settlements.

Employ reporters from informal settlements

Individuals living in (or who have lived in) informal settlements have a better understanding of the areas and are in a better position to report on issues residents face. Employing reporters from informal settlements will not only enhance the standard of reporting but also the diversity of the newsroom.

Always consult more than one source

When reporting on police violence, journalists should not just quote the official police statement. Finding witnesses from the scene where the violence happened will help the journalists tell a more balanced story. For instance, when reporting about a protest, find protestors and have their accounts included in the story.

Crowdsource evidence

Most police brutality incidents in informal settlements happen in front of witnesses who used their mobile devices to film. Journalists can gather eyewitness reports and videos for evidence-based stories. Videos can also be used to corroborate witness statements, and can help journalists when questioning the police about particular cases. Setting up a SecureDrop or Signal account may make it safer for witnesses to

share video evidence anonymously without becoming targets of retaliation. See this paper by [Paul Farrell](#).²⁰

Avoid audience fatigue

The issue of police brutality warrants more coverage, but with more coverage comes audience fatigue – especially when incidents of violence share the same basic details. The human cost of violence, however, is almost always unique. Be dogged in asking about the personal consequences of each case. Cases of police violence should also not be treated as stand-alone cases: when reporting a new case, give a background on previous cases your outlet has covered in the same area or circumstance. Establishing a searchable database or archive of cases that your reporters and readers can consult may be helpful to this end.

Keep following up

Follow up with the relevant authorities and with the victims and their families. Highlight the progress of investigations or prosecution.

Undertake in-depth investigations

Set aside resources for in-depth reporting of police brutality in informal settlements: stories that give the public more context and a better understanding of the gravity of the issue. Look for repeat offenders: rather than investigating the criminal history of the victim, what does the service record of the officer look like?

Mind your language: rioters or peaceful protestors?

Police violence is also often deployed against protestors. Reports on clashes between protestors and police will often focus more on the violence than the issues being protested. Remember that under Article 37 of Kenya's 2010 Constitution: Every

²⁰ What big media can learn from small startups about digital safety in newsrooms
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/what-big-media-can-learn-small-startups-about-digital-safety-newsrooms>

person has the right, peaceably and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket, and to present petitions to public authorities.

Beware of language and framing that fails to recognise that all citizens of Kenya have this right. Remember to ask witnesses and consult footage to establish whether the violence preceded police forcefully dispersing a legal protest.

Beware of using labels like “rioters”, “looters”, “chaotic”, “clashes” unquestioningly. For example, from [Africanews](#):²¹

Kenya: Protesters clash with police in Nairobi over Covid curfews, brutality

Dozens of angry protesters clashed with police in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi on Wednesday as they demanded an end to lockdowns and curfews put in place to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

Demonstrators also called for an end to what they say has been “police brutality” in the country, particularly towards younger people.

Police responded to the demonstrations by shooting live bullets into the air and throwing tear gas. Officers also made several arrests.

I am by no means justifying the use of violence by protestors. However, I believe that the media can do better reporting on protests, highlighting the issue, and weighing whether police action was legal and measured.

Sensitivity training

My recommendations for better reporting of police brutality in informal settlements would not be complete without calling for sensitivity on the part of journalists. Just like any other form of violence, police violence is traumatic for the victims and their

²¹ Kenya: Protesters clash with police in Nairobi over Covid curfews, brutality
<https://www.africanews.com/2021/07/07/kenya-protesters-clash-with-police-in-nairobi-over-covid-curfew-and-restrictions/>

families. It pains me to have to remind journalists: the poor are not more resilient to trauma, and deserve to be handled with care as you would someone in the suburbs. Do not push or insist on responses – especially when the victim is not comfortable, or safe to speak.

Think about how your interviews impact the victims. For instance, you might ask: what state will this person I am interviewing be in after I finish the interview and leave? Should a family member be there to offer support?

Conclusion

I thought a lot about the purpose of journalism while writing this paper: being a watchdog, exposing injustice, bearing witness and record to current affairs and providing context, setting the tone for public discourse...

In many ways, the media has failed in these duties while reporting on informal settlements, and especially on the issue of police brutality. We have failed to reflect the severity of the issue as it is on the ground.

We have been part of stereotyping victims based on their backgrounds, and unquestioningly parroted accounts given by the police. We have become part-and-parcel of normalising police brutality in informal settlements. Violence should not be normalised in any society.

We do our readers a disservice when we do not contextualise the issue of police brutality in informal settlements: the history of the force and these settlements.

There was a brief spike in interest during the pandemic, but that interest has faded and the violence continues. Every day, young men are harassed and money extorted from them – or worse. We must engage with the residents of informal settlements to rectify this.

With better and continued reporting, our stories might lead to safer living spaces for the young people who are always at risk of becoming victims. Whether it does or does not: it is still our mandate as journalists to report this information accurately.

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