

Covering stories and making an impact; the role of journalism with David McKenzie

 By [Emily Stander](#)

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Journalism is not a single-faceted pathway of either writing, editing or interviewing. In fact, being a journalist begs you to understand many aspects of life - including how to interact with people who do not have the same background as you do.



David McKenzie

David McKenzie, CNN's international correspondent who is based in Johannesburg, covers the breadth of Africa and other places for all of CNN's platforms. As such, McKenzie has significant experience in this interaction with those who do not come from the same perspective of understanding.

"I have a special interest in deeply reported television and digital stories," said McKenzie. "The most gratifying and challenging part of my work is uncovering under-reported stories and the impact of injustice on real people's lives - especially when helping to illuminate this to an international audience."



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McKenzie started a journalism masters at New York University a few days before 9/11 and has been working professionally ever since. After initially working behind the camera as a producer for documentaries in the USA, he moved back to South Africa where he ended up working in the media unit of Unicef as a cameraman, editor and producer. After two years of travelling throughout the continent, he was hired by CNN as their Nairobi-based correspondent.

We spoke with him to find out more about working in international correspondence, and the coverage of the new and extremely harsh anti-LGBTQ laws introduced in Ghana...

International correspondence

"Someone once said that working in our field is 80% logistics and 20% journalism," said McKenzie. "While I don't think that

is quite true, we are working in difficult circumstances frequently and getting access to places where governments don't always make it easy to work or want us there."

This is what McKenzie pointed out as one of the most significant challenges of being an international correspondent. However, he also pointed out that this problem pales in comparison to what their locally based colleagues need to deal with.

"Journalistically, we always strive to make our reporting accessible to an international audience without falling into the worst tropes of foreign correspondent reporting and writing," said McKenzie. "That can be a challenge if journalists don't appreciate the layered nature of the story."



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To overcome these challenges, the CNN team - often in collaboration with a locally based colleague - brings their experience to find a solution to operating in challenging and occasionally hazardous environments, according to McKenzie. When it comes to editorial, it is pivotal to draw from this experience and collaboration - and always keep an open mind to differing perspectives.

The trouble with Ghana

Recently, McKenzie was in Ghana speaking with people from the LGBTQ community about the challenges they are facing with the new and extremely harsh anti-LGBTQ laws introduced in the country. McKenzie spoke to navigating speaking to the people who are facing these challenges, and could possibly be in a dangerous position by speaking with journalists about the topic.

"We often have those discussions before we leave, and we are careful to explain to the people we interview how we will use the material and that it will be broadcast globally," he said. "We use camera and editing techniques to hide the identity of our subject."

In the case of Ghana, McKenzie said that victims of violence and activists wanted to tell their story - with the hope that their stories would have an impact on the law locally and internationally. "It does keep me up at night to tell their stories, but they are the brave ones," he said.



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This story was meant to shine a light on the impact it is having on the LGBTQ community in Ghana, and the prospect that it could get worse if something isn't done. "I hope that international governments and moderate Ghanaian lawmakers will take notice," said McKenzie.

The role of journalism

International reporting, according to McKenzie, can broaden the horizon of a global audience. At worst, international correspondence can narrow prejudices that already exist. Journalism can be an act of being a voice for the voiceless, especially in areas where restrictions and a lack of access are a problem.

But how do you decide which stories are important to tell?

Part of finding the right topics is looking for emerging trends, and the other part is gut feel, said McKenzie. "I always try tell stories that take our audience somewhere they wouldn't be able to go or understand something better that they might not have been aware of."

In essence, there will always be a story to tell - and it is often up to journalists to know which ones will make the right kind of impact. Choosing the right story will be up to understanding the world we live in and what state many are living in - and bringing their stories and strife to the forefront in an attempt to incite positive change.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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