



Nigeria: A **mentorship programme** for journalists in Borno 'broadens their horizon'

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Free Press Unlimited supports a mentorship programme for journalists writing about Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict. A mentor and mentee talk about how it has helped them find fresh angles and improve their reporting.

In northeast Nigeria, a decade of violence between insurgents Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces has killed thousands of people and displaced more than 2 million. During the conflict, women had to take on new roles and responsibilities in a heavily male-dominated society.

Free Press Unlimited supports the Nigerian NGO PAGED Initiative, which seeks to open up public debate about traditional gender roles in Borno State. As part of the project, [Reporting Gender for Inclusive Development](#) journalists from Nigerian national media and local journalists from Borno received training in how to write stories that are gender-sensitive and look at the human impact of the Boko Haram conflict. The senior national reporters also mentored the participating local journalists.

Ene Osang, a reporter for Blueprint Newspapers in Abuja, coached Muhammad M. Ali, a local journalist for Yerwa Express News based in Borno's capital Maiduguri. We caught up with the duo and asked what they learned from the project - and from each other.

Human interest

Ene Osang: "I have been a reporter for about nine years now and I have an interest in women's issues. So when I heard about the opportunity to participate in [the project] I applied and was picked as a mentor. I learned so much from it! I learned that writing a human interest story doesn't necessarily mean that you have to make the subject of your story pitiful. You can also talk about how the victims [of the conflict] are trying to survive in difficult conditions."

Muhammad M. Ali: "The training broadened my horizon. I learned what makes a feature story and what makes a human interest story. I learned which questions to ask. I'm seeing such an improvement [in my work] - I hope to be an editor in a few years."

Osang: "[Muhammad] is a very hard-working person. He turns out so many stories. When you see a writer like that, you know that they are very passionate about their work. It motivated me too."

Ali: "My mentor [Ene] and I are very close. Any time I'm having problems I can contact her and she'll go through my drafts. She advised me to use a laptop to avoid little grammatical errors and to read articles from people whose writing I admire. I have learned a lot from her."



Osang (L) and Ali are still regularly in contact to exchange information and advice

Frontpage news

Osang: "To my surprise, the human interest stories I wrote about Borno started making front pages. That taught me you don't have to write about defence or the presidency to make it to the cover. I wrote a [story](#) about a female victim of Boko Haram who has been trying to reduce the number of girls who are raped in camps for Internally Displaced People. I asked her lots of questions and the interview made it to the front page."

Ali: "One day I was walking by a field where the Red Cross was handing out equipment to farmers. I stopped and interviewed a woman. She lost her husband during the insurgency period and had to sell everything she owned to invest in farming. She is doing everything she can to make sure her kids get an education, despite the hardships. I was very touched by her [story](#) – I think it was my best one."

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