Seen, Heard and Engaged: From Reporting About to Reporting with Children

Child Rights Reporting Media Awards Ceremony

Concept Note.

1) Background

The media plays an important role in shaping public discourse, influencing social norms and drawing public attention to issues affecting children. In The Gambia, journalists and media outlets regularly report on issues such as education, health, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), abuse and exploitation. However, reporting on children does not always apply a child rights lens or adhere to ethical standards that protect children's dignity, privacy, safety and best interests.

There is therefore a need not only to strengthen the capacity of media practitioners, but also to recognize and reinforce good practice in child rights reporting and media engagement. While inaccurate, sensationalised or exploitative reporting can expose children to further harm and reinforce harmful stereotypes, accurate, ethical and constructive reporting can raise awareness of children's rights, influence public attitudes and contribute to greater accountability for violations of those rights.

Against this background, IHRDA, with support from UNICEF The Gambia and in collaboration with the Gambia Press Union (GPU), will in November 2026 host a dedicated Child Rights Media Awards session to recognize outstanding media content and engagements that contribute to the promotion and protection of children's rights in The Gambia. The awards will provide a dedicated platform for identifying and celebrating journalists and media houses that demonstrate excellence in reporting on children's rights and in using media to promote greater awareness, understanding and action on issues affecting children.

The awards will also provide an opportunity to showcase positive examples of child rights reporting and engagement**,** encouraging wider adoption of ethical, accurate and child-centred approaches within the media sector. This will complement the broader programme's efforts to build the capacity of media practitioners, provide practical guidance on ethical reporting and strengthen the engagement of media actors in the promotion and protection of children's rights.

Eligible journalists and media houses will be invited to submit relevant media content and evidence of child rights-related engagements for consideration by a judging panel with relevant media and child rights expertise**.** Selected entries will be recognized at a dedicated awards ceremony, providing visibility to good practice and reinforcing the role of the media as an important partner in advancing children's rights in The Gambia.

2) Objectives

The main objective of the award ceremony is to recognise and celebrate outstanding media content and engagements that contribute to the promotion and protection of children's rights in The Gambia, and to promote sustained commitment to ethical and child centred media practice.

Specifically, the award ceremony aims to:

- Recognise and celebrate journalists and media houses that demonstrate excellence in promoting and protecting children's rights through their work.
- Highlight and showcase good practices in child rights reporting and media engagement, including content that meaningfully reflects children's voices, views, experiences and perspectives.
- Promote ethical, accurate and child-centred media practice that respects children's dignity, privacy, safety and best interests.
- Increase public visibility and awareness of children's rights and issues affecting children by showcasing high-quality media content and engagements that contribute positively to public discourse.
- Encourage sustained media engagement in child rights promotion and protection, including continued application of the knowledge and principles promoted through the wider IHRDA-GPU-UNICEF programme.

3) Eligibility

The awards will be open to:

1) Journalists employed by registered, Gambia-based media outlets;
2) Freelance and independent journalists residing in The Gambia;
3) Journalists working for international or regional media outlets and based in The Gambia;
4) Community media practitioners and journalists;

5) Photojournalists, broadcast journalists, digital journalists, podcast producers and multimedia storytellers;
6) Student journalists and journalism students in The Gambia; and
7) Independent content creators producing public-interest journalism in The Gambia.

Eligibility submissions must:

- Have been produced on children's rights, protection, welfare or issues affecting children in The Gambia;
- Focus substantially on children's rights, protection, welfare or issues affecting children in The Gambia;
- Demonstrate adherence to relevant ethical and child safeguarding standards; and
- Be submitted by the journalists, media practitioners, media house or content creator responsible for the work, or with their authorization.

4) Award Categories

The Child Rights Media Awards will recognise outstanding media content and engagements that demonstrate excellence in the promotion and protection of children's rights. The proposed award categories are:

I. **Best Print and Online Reporter:** Recognizing outstanding articles, features, opinion pieces, investigative stories and other written journalism that meaningfully incorporate children's voices and perspective.
II. **Best Radio and Podcast Series**: Recognizing compelling radio programmes, features, interviews, documentaries and podcast that demonstrate ethical and meaningful participation of children.
III. **Best Radio Jingle on Children's Rights**: Recognizing a creative, engaging and impactful radio jingle that raises awareness of children's rights, promotes children's participation, or addresses issues affecting children in the Gambia.
IV. **Best Television and Video Reporter**: Recognizing television reports, documentaries, interviews and other video-based stories that place children's experiences, views and perspectives at the centre of reporting
V. **Best Gender and Child Rights Reporter**: Recognising outstanding journalism that addresses gender equality and children's rights, particularly issues affecting girls and children, while meaningfully and ethically incorporating the voices, experiences and perspectives of children and young people.
VI. **Best Photography and Visual Storytelling Reporter**: Recognizing powerful photographs and photo essays that highlight children's rights and experiences while protecting their dignity, privacy, safety and best interests.

5) Submission Requirements and Process

Eligible journalists, media practitioners and media houses will be invited to submit their work for consideration under the relevant award category. Nominations may also be submitted by journalists, media houses, professional associations, civil society organisations or other individuals with knowledge of the work. In such cases, the nominated work must still be submitted for consideration and meet the applicable eligibility and ethical requirements, Submissions will be made through an official awards submission form and must include the following:

- The media content or work being submitted, in an accessible format or through a link to the published/broadcast material;
- A brief description of the submission, including the issue addressed, the approach taken and its contribution to the promotion and protection of children's rights;
- Date and platform of publication or broadcast;
- Name of the journalist(s), media practitioner(s) or media house responsible for the submission;
- Relevant supporting materials or evidence, where applicable; and
- Signed consent and/or assent documentation, where the submission features the voice, image, personal information or testimony of a child.

Submissions must comply with the awards' ethical reporting and child safeguarding requirements. Any submission that fails to meet the required safeguarding standards, including failure to provide the necessary consent or assent documentation where applicable, may be deemed ineligible for consideration.

The organisers will conduct an initial eligibility and compliance review of submissions before forwarding eligible entries to the judging panel. The judging panel will assess submissions against the established award criteria and select the winning entries in each category.

Submission Period

The awards will be launched through a public call for submissions. The submission period will remain open for a defined period following the launch, after which no further submissions will be accepted.

6) Safeguarding and Ethical Standards

Given the focus of the awards on media content and engagements concerning children, all submissions must adhere to applicable child safeguarding and ethical reporting standards and uphold the dignity, safety, privacy and best interest of the child.

Where submissions feature the voice, image, personal information or testimony of a child, the submission must be accompanied by the appropriate signed consent and/or assent documentation, as applicable.

Journalists and media practitioners are responsible for ensuring that children featured in their work are not exposed to harm, exploitation, stigma, discrimination, retaliation or unnecessary identification as a result of the reporting, production or publication of the submitted work.

Submission should demonstrate respect for:

- the best interest of the child
- children's privacy and dignity
- children's right to be heard and participate, where appropriate;
- protection from harm, exploitation and discrimination;
- confidentiality and protection of sensitive personal information; and
- applicable child safeguarding and ethical reporting standards.

Any submission that does not meet the required safeguarding and ethical standards, including failure to provide required consent or assent documentation where applicable, may be deem ineligible for consideration.

The organisers and judging panel reserve the right to exclude or disqualify a submission where there are reasonable concerns regarding the safety, dignity, privacy or best interests of a child featured in the work.

7) Judging Panel and Assessment Criteria

An independent judging panel will be constituted to review eligible submissions and select award recipients in each category. The panel will comprise individuals with relevant expertise in child rights, journalism and media, ethical reporting, safeguarding and communications. The composition of the panel will seek to ensure a balance of technical expertise, professional experience and gender representation.

Judges will be required to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest and will not participate in the assessment of any submission where such a conflict exists.

The judging panel will:

- review submissions that have passed the initial eligibility and safeguarding screening;
- assess submissions against the agreed criteria;
- score and rank eligible submissions;
- determine the award recipient(s) in each category; and
- provide brief justification for the selected winners.

Assessment Criteria

Submissions will be assessed against criteria appropriate to the relevant award category. The assessment will consider:

1. **Child rights perspective** – the extent to which the submission demonstrates an understanding of and contributes to the promotion and protection of children's rights.

2. **Ethical and child-sensitive reporting** – the extent to which the work respects children's dignity, privacy, safety, best interests and other relevant ethical standards.

3. **Meaningful representation and participation of children** – where applicable, the extent to which children's voices, views and experiences are meaningfully and safely reflected.

4. **Accuracy, quality and depth** – the quality of research, accuracy of information, depth of analysis and clarity of presentation.

5. **Public interest and impact** – the contribution of the work to public awareness, understanding, dialogue or action on issues affecting children.

6. **Innovation and creativity** – the originality of the approach, storytelling format or engagement strategy used to communicate child rights issues.

7. **Potential for broader influence** – the extent to which the work demonstrates potential to influence media practice, public discourse, policy or action relating to children's rights.

8. Award Process and Timeline

The Child Rights Media Awards will be implemented through the following stages:

Stage	Key activity	Proposed Timing
Launch	Public launch of the Child Rights Media Award and dissemination of the call for submissions through GPU, and IHRDA.	5th November 2026
Submission	Eligible journalists, media practitioners and media houses submit their work through the designated submission platform.	16th November 2026
Eligibility and safeguarding screening	Review of submissions to confirm eligibility, completeness and compliance with the awards' ethical and child safeguarding requirements.	17th November 2026

Judging and selection	An independent judging panel assesses eligible submissions against the established criteria and selects award recipients.	18th November 2026
Shortlisting and finalist notification	Finalise shortlisted entries and notify finalists to facilitate their participation in the awards ceremony.	23rd November 2026
Awards Ceremony	Dedicated Child Rights Media Awards ceremony to publicly recognise and celebrate selected journalists, media practitioners and media houses.	TBC

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Stakeholder	**Key Responsibilities**
IHRDA	Overall coordination and management of the awards; development of the awards framework and submission materials; coordination of the call for submissions; eligibility and safeguarding screening; coordination of the judging process; logistical and administrative arrangements for the awards ceremony; communication and visibility; documentation and reporting.
Gambia Press Union (GPU)	Support outreach to journalists, media houses and media networks; disseminate the call for submissions through relevant media networks; support mobilization and engagement of eligible media practitioners; support coordination of the judging process; provide media-sector expertise to the process; support publicity and dissemination of the awards and recognized work.
Judging Panel	Independently review eligible submissions; assess entries against the approved criteria; identify shortlisted entries and award recipients; declare any conflicts of interest;

	and provide recommendations on award selections.

10. Awards and Recognition

Seven awardees, corresponding to the seven award categories, will be recognized at the awards ceremony. Each awardee will receive a cash prize, an award crystal and a certificate of recognition. The awards will celebrate outstanding media content and engagement contributing to the promotion and protection of children's rights in The Gambia.

11. Expected Outcome

The awards are expected to increase the visibility and recognition of quality media engagement on children's rights and encourage journalists and media houses to sustain ethical, accurate and child-centred reporting and programming. By showcasing good practice and recognizing media actors making meaningful contributions to child rights promotion and protection, the initiative will contribute to increased and more effective engagement of the Gambian media in advancing children's rights.

12. Where to Submit

All submissions must be made through the **official submission form**: here

Participants are required to complete all relevant sections of the form and upload their submission and any supporting documents, including the required consent forms where applicable.

Only submissions received through the official submission form will be considered.

Participants are encouraged to submit their entries **latest 15th November 2026** to allow sufficient time for the organizers to review the submissions and address any technical issues that may arise.

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