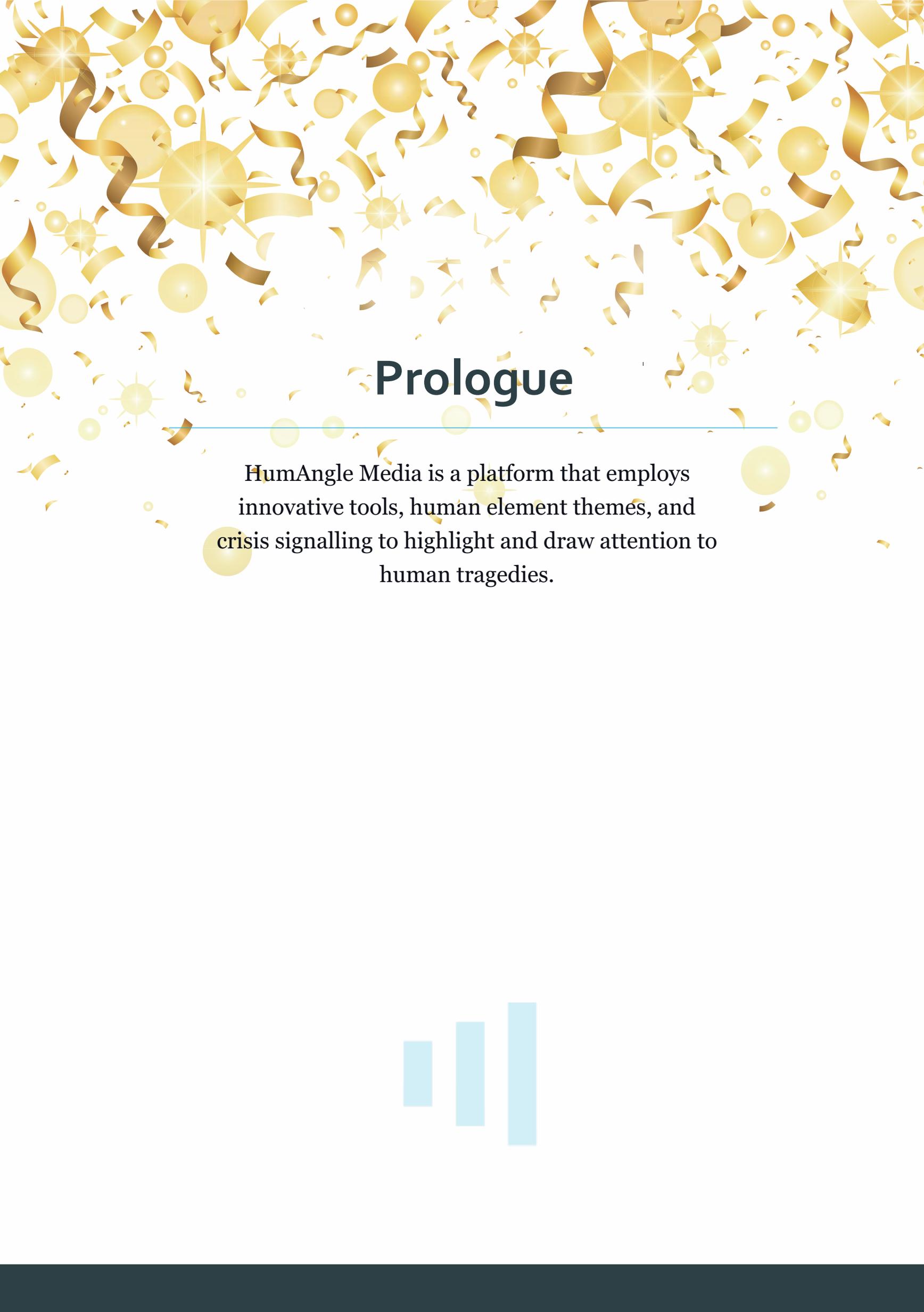




**HumAngle**

**At One**

What Starting A Niche Media Platform In A Pandemic Looks Like



# Prologue

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HumAngle Media is a platform that employs innovative tools, human element themes, and crisis signalling to highlight and draw attention to human tragedies.



***W**e launched in March 2020. The platform's goal has been to focus on the broad issues of insecurity, crisis, and their impacts on individuals and societies.*

*Our reporting focuses on the growing cases of terrorism and insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin/Northeast Nigeria, Northwest, and other zones in Nigeria. HumAngle also has reporting footholds in West and Central Africa, reporting the multiple conflict situations in these areas.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic, no doubt remains the single biggest threat to livelihoods; we fought our way through it and reported the pandemic while keeping our eyes on other stories that matter.*

*By our forecast, 2021 will likely be challenging for Nigeria's economic and security climate and many parts of Africa. You have our word that we shall be with you during these difficult times to investigate and report complex and opaque issues. We will be deploying ethical and solution journalism to push for safer environments for people in the world's youngest continent to thrive.*

*A big thank you to my colleagues - some of whom have shared their personal experiences in the past year here - for stirring our audience to rely on HumAngle. And to our esteemed readers, thank you for your investment of trust in our professional ability to deliver to you news that is timely and credible.*

*As we cross into our second year, we will keep our promise of bringing to you independent and credible reporting. We appeal to you to also support our journalism.*

**Ahmad Salkida**

**CEO**

# The HumAngle Journey: Passing Through The Eye Of The Needle

By Obiora & Ahmad



**A**t 3.10 pm on March 3, 2020, we uploaded the first content on the HumAngle domain portal announcing the birth of the “African Daily Newspaper reporting insecurity and promoting humanitarian values.” Two weeks afterwards, Nigeria announced a lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We did not see this coming. Nobody did. Among the editorial staff with us, some were greenhorns with no prior Newsroom experience, and we were only just drawing up in-house editorial training modules before the lockdown was announced.

We quickly altered our operating system and structures at unanticipated heavy overhead costs. Despite the lockdown, we

had to fund reporters' presence and follow-ups in fields across the nation, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest crisis-stricken regions. The environment of relevant news occurrences became more fluid, complicated and required special skills and nuances. We designed and stepped up our in-house mentoring responsibilities for our young newsroom Turks to swiftly cater to the observed gaps.

Our experience since early 2020 has been like the proverbial Camel passing through the eye of a needle. Without ready funds and no financier bankrolling the journey, we became accustomed to the brutal torrents and fierce lashes of the weather from the onset.

The ease of doing business policy hardly recognises our energy and dedication among its list of those active in the investment flow within the national economy. In fact, in 2020, the push within government circles to tighten the noose and strangle digital media operators under what is referred to as the social media regulation got more impetus. Notably, one of the provisions of the recently amended Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020 is section 839 (1) that empowers the government's regulatory body to "suspend the trustees of an association and appoint an interim manager or managers to manage the affairs of an association" where it reasonably believes that it is acting in "public interest."

But for us, there were arguably even bigger problems dogging our steps. Perhaps for the reason of the field of focus of our reporting, powerful institutions with an agenda were already putting us under their watchlist. Our reporting strategy that prioritises a bottom-up approach to news rendition and significantly emphasises the amplification of victims' voices was quickly criticised by officials and tagged "doomsday reporting."

It did not stop there. Overt pressures were mounting daily to get our platform to forfeit our thematic emblem of reporting insecurity and humanitarian issues to "focus on general interest news like other newspapers," turning members of the team into targets of official and unofficial threats and social media trolling. We have also been victims of careless narratives promoted by obscure and mainstream media platforms in reaction to our critical publications.

A different page was soon opened in the sustained harassment of our team as some hirelings took turns to issue statements and address the press to principally criminalise our work and threaten our team members. As we managed the attendant trauma associated with these, the terrorists in the Northeast issued threats against our team and platform. Abubakar Shekau, on two occasions, issued verbal warnings against HumAngle and the team's lead. But we continued to press on.

One of the challenges we encountered in

the past year was running news and editorial content without adverts. Loss of revenue opportunities are painful, and particularly so for start-ups without some measure of sustainable funding. But it was not all gloom as the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), and African Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF) saw our quality early enough and extended hands of partnership with project grant support.

We are excited to launch a solutions journalism desk that will not only explore solutions in conflict, climate change, out of school children, maternal health etc. but look inwards on sustainability drive and how newsrooms can best relate to donors without being bogged down by so much paperwork that often distracts journalists from their core mandate.

We are picking our steps steadily and painstakingly across the regional territories. Our reports are helping to gradually lift the veil that has covered conflict issues in West, Central Africa, and the Sahel. Many of our readers thank us for assisting them in understanding the nuances better.

Our focus areas also include all forms of humanitarian crisis, environmental disasters, developmental interventions, human rights, and the intersection between these and the average person's experiences on the street. In addressing these grand issues, it is easy to overlook the person who is directly affected, but our mandate is to amplify the voices of these people.

We have also dedicated scarce resources to engage in crisis-signalling, through which we aim to prevent the loss of lives and properties by pointing out early signs before disaster strikes. As we advance, we hope to invest more in solutions journalism that aims at de-escalating conflict rather than merely reporting them. We hope to find the silver linings in the clouds of gloom that hover above our heads and direct the world's attention to them. Most importantly, as we continue to prioritise objective and accurate reporting, we also hope to give more room to hope and optimism rooted in truth.

***Obiora & Ahmad are Co-founders of HumAngle***

# The Many Faces Of Building A Newsroom During A Pandemic

Anita Eboigbe

**P**icture this – a lot of investments and time had gone into setting up a company with a niche Unique Selling Proposition (USP), the founders eventually found young minds to share in the dream, and just as soon as everyone is familiarising themselves with the tasks and motions, a lockdown happens.

For many organisations, there was already some shared familiarity with the people and

the processes that were built from constant in-person communication before they had to switch to remote work. HumAngle Media, at the time, did not have the same luxury.

After studying the mission and vision, then deciding that I wanted to channel my skills towards its realisation, I had no pre-warning that a pandemic was going to add extra strain on my job – which is primarily to make sure that every piece of editorial work



is at its finest. The team is continually evolving to provide editorial value to our esteemed audience.

Everyone who followed the news knew there was a virus raging through China and some parts of the world, but at the time, Nigeria was exempt. Next, the virus had entered Nigeria, and there was an entire dance on nipping it in the bud by the Nigerian government, which did not happen hence the need for a lockdown by April 2020. There is no need to get into the details, but you and I are familiar with this story.

The first order of business for me when we all started to work from home was to convince strangers to carry on with their work as a unit, as if nothing had changed.

I was kidding myself because something did not just change; a lot had. I worked with the team to initiate a work-from-home protocol mainly based on the trust that every person's character would do the heavy lifting. On this, they came through. We swung into action fast, seeing as we had a website to fill up with quality content.

Our initial ideas had to be rolled into a more

point out that some of the team's reporters had not been employed as journalists before but had come in as experts in their various sectors.

Training these experts to take on reporting, in all its glory, was done on-the-go, which was not the original plan. Like real troopers, they learnt on the job and fast too. Editorial decisions were taken over Zoom meetings; progress tracked via Trello, urgent banter on Instant Messaging apps, and limited use of emails to reduce the seriousness of an already severe situation.

By the third week into the lockdown, we had found our rhythm. Our article views were flying, the idea bank was overflowing, and the audience took a particular liking to us. Every day, we brainstormed in groups on ways to beat the last piece. We were a small team, and there was an intimacy of purpose that was building fast. We recognised that our work was not perfect, and as individuals, each of us needed to build individual capacity so we could deliver the best as we went along. We stayed focused on serving value by reinventing ourselves.

When I thought we had got the new process's hang, things started happening individually to shake the dynamics. A month into lockdown, I started getting messages and calls from some team members that indicated fatigue.

At this time, I think almost everyone in Nigeria was bored and tired. Many people were doing the same things, going through the same cycles, and most were resting. Their boredom had come from too much rest. For us, we could not relate to the rest banter on social media. We were kicking off a media company, and it was no joke. We were working.

Let me paint you my picture – I wake up at 6 a.m., prepare like I am going to the office, and pick my laptop after my morning routines; I am checking emails and messages, while taking at least five phone calls from an editor, reporter, or someone in IT asking for something about a story, a person or the other.

I will then settle down to edit reports, work on my reports and check on team members to ensure that all is well. Then I have research to do on various subject matters daily. This will go on till our last story is published at 8 p.m. Afterwards, I stay up to make a list for the next day, track progress from the work apps and give recommendations before I turn off

the lights.

Soon, other members of the team started suffering personal hits. From losing family members, tending to sick family members over the phone because there was a travel ban during the lockdown, falling sick themselves, to just generally being unable to access the things that gave them little escapes. There is just so much motivation that can be done over the phone or talks you can give to let people know you are on their side.

I was tired, but I could not afford to show fatigue as it would weaken the morale of the other team members. I switched tactics and gave reporters breaks instead, finding ways to spread their work around or simply take it up myself. In all these, the co-founders made it easy for me to make certain transitions because they were on hand to guide and advise. I had never managed a media team of this scale before and I still have a lot to learn. But this journey has been fruitful thus far.

I remember some team members were worse hit than others and just shut themselves off from the world. They had no fortitude to do anything. There was already an uncertainty that hung over most Nigerians' heads, and battling a pandemic does not make one immune from other battles. The world already had its hard moments but it has never stopped life from happening before so it kept on.

I have learned that support is important and that work culture needs to take every member of the team into consideration and institute processes that help everyone be the most relaxed when they work. Hire people whose skills you trust and who have upstanding character because one holds the other up. More importantly, never miss an opportunity to let people know they are valued. You might pay a great salary, but you still have no idea what personal issues they have to shelve to deliver value on your behalf.

It is remarkable how far we have come and how much we have done, but the real success for me is seeing several young strangers decide to build another family outside theirs. The dedication and attention my colleagues give to work, and each other is outstanding. I have never seen anything like it. The base of HumAngle is to tell things from a humane perspective, and it requires human beings who are in touch with their humanity. We got the best of these people working here.

***Anita is the Managing-Editor of HumAngle.***

# COVID-19 Pandemic: Defining Moments For Newsrooms In Nigeria

Yekeen Akinwale



**G**lobally, the outbreak of COVID-19 was a defining moment. Governments, individuals and institutions have had to find and adapt to new ways of living. It was one unexpected experience, yet the world had to find a way around it and move on.

Like many other human endeavours, journalism experienced one of its most trying and dramatic moments with the outbreak.

There has never been a time that many professions – journalism inclusive – have come under such a threat, putting practitioners on edge. Many jobs were lost, and a lot is still being lost. Many newsrooms are currently struggling to continue as finances dwindle.

“Newsrooms worldwide are under intense financial, physical and psychological pressure during this pandemic,” said Emily Bell, Founding Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School, in a report.

There is no denying that the pandemic has transformed the daily business of news gathering and publishing.

## News-gathering during the pandemic, journalists' experience

News-gathering and reporting under the pandemic are as difficult as reporting the pandemic itself, which the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) says is arguably one of the most important and complex stories of our time.

As nations were forced to impose lockdown to contain the spread of the virus, journalists could not afford to move around, even when there were issues to cover, deadlines to meet, and new grounds to break. Reporting under COVID-19, according to Onyedinefu Godsgift, a Nigerian journalist with Business Day newspaper, was tedious.

“Reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic was initially tedious for me because everything went virtual,” says Gift, whose daily beats include reporting on health. “I was used to the physical reporting method, so adapting was initially difficult.”

Many journalists across newsrooms agree there has been no time they have been on

edge in the course of discharging their duties than in the months following the outbreak of COVID-19. News-gathering and reporting and the need to protect themselves were critical and competing needs.

“There were difficulties accessing sources for interviews face-to-face because some wouldn't want close contact with reporters”, laments Chukwu Chidinma, a journalist with an online newspaper, Platinum Times.

“Ministries, departments and government agencies now invite just a few persons for briefings/events to adhere to social distance principles,” she adds.

With the new realities, newsrooms, event organisers and newsmakers evolved new approaches to organising events, including press conferences. Technologies intervened. Virtual meetings became vogue. Telephone interviews, calls on Skype, Zoom, and Google Meet became the new world order for journalists and, of course, governments and the private sector.

“Most events are now virtual,” Chidinma says, before quipping: “You must have money for data to sign in. So it is cost-consuming.”

The COVID-19 pandemic comes with a barrage of challenges for journalists across Africa, says Abiodun Jamiu, a student reporter. As a greenhorn in the business of reporting, he describes the health crisis as overwhelming.

“As a student journalist, I was not exempted. It was overwhelming, especially due to an inadequate support system for journalists of my ilk,” Jamiu says.

“Apart from working remotely, which comes with its ordeal, especially for those that could hardly work without supervision, there was no personal protective equipment which constantly exposed me to risk of contracting the virus.”

## Impediment to reporters travelling.

The lockdown and movement restriction impeded journalists' access to sources for their reports, and investigative journalists were more affected.

“Personally, it was challenging for me because the restriction in movement limited my movement in gathering sources for my stories, considering I travel mostly out of my area of residence to meet sources for my stories,” says Amos Abba, an investigative journalist at the International Centre for Investigative Reporting.

“This affected my input as an investigative reporter because I had to resort to more feature stories and analysis reports in a bid to keep my writing quota on my beat.”

Jamiu, who is also into investigative reporting, corroborates this. At the peak of the pandemic, when government ministries and departments were closed as part of the measures to contain the spread of the virus, journalists complain they had difficulty getting other angles to balance their reports.

“As a U-monitor with PTICJ, which required that I visited these ministries to access information, getting information to balance my reports was a journey from heaven to hell as most of them hardly responded to letters sent to their ministries, citing COVID-19 restrictions. And when they replied, it would be too late for the report,” the young journalist recalls.

But all was not gloomy for the profession and practitioners as, according to Abah, the pandemic has also changed the face of digital journalism.

“It made me more critical about presenting data in useful and relevant ways that audiences can connect to more easily.”

“My approach to investigative reporting at the height of the COVID-19 restriction involved sifting publicly available government records to track down government spending on COVID-19,” he says.

This also comes with its challenges too, though temporary, says Godsgift. “I was not conversant with these virtual platforms. I experienced several hitches like poor network, power supply, and not to mention the high data needs.”

## Generating contents in a pandemic

The pandemic led to a decline in filing daily news, especially as it limited reportage to health, education and economic issues. But

journalists have since adapted to the new realities.

Christain Baars, a journalist with NDR, a state-owned radio in Hamburg, Germany, says he has been working “almost exclusively from home for a year now.”

“The positive thing is that many things are now possible that were previously considered difficult. For example, many press conferences or background discussions now take place online via video conferences.”

“That makes it possible for us to follow all this flexibly,” says Oda Lambrecht, who works with the television station of the NDR. Like many others in Nigeria and across the globe, they can now conduct interviews for radio and television almost exclusively via video calls at the moment.

“The technical quality is not very good, but acceptable. Sometimes you even save time and money because you don't have to travel,” Baars notes.

The duo, however, laments that the direct contact with colleagues and the personal conversations with other people, which journalists otherwise often had during events or, for example, before and after interviews, is, of course, missing. “And that is, of course, a very important factor,” Lambrecht says.

Angela Atabo, a reporter with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), believes that the COVID-19 pandemic shook the foundation of everything in the world and the various sectors of the economy. The media sector is not left out; she observes.

“For instance, before the pandemic, I was covering daily news events almost every day, but during the lockdown, such events were shut down and even after the lockdown was eased, most organisations could not continue with the

events,” Atabo says.

But she says the pandemic has led to the increased publication of special reports, features, opinion writings and community reports.

“Nevertheless, the pandemic brought some positive technological changes to the media space; for instance, it fostered the use of social media in reportage and news coverage as many organisations took to social media like Skype meetings, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, among others to hold meetings,” she concludes.

Godsgift believes the pandemic has, in the end, made the work easier for journalists. She remarks that the lesson learnt is that the world is going digital and “we reporters have to adapt.”

## Difficulty in funding

Many newsrooms struggled to stay afloat as revenue dropped due to the economic meltdown occasioned by the pandemic.

The pandemic further led to the loss of jobs for a lot of private-sector media practitioners because of the decline in stories and advertisement, which crippled income.

Newspapers print runs were reduced, pages slashed, salaries cut, and workers were told to go.

It has been such a precarious situation for the media industry as it is for other sectors.

By the turn of 2020, major media outfits in Nigeria such as The Punch Newspaper, The Nation, Daily Trust and AIM group (owners of Nigeria Info., Cool FM, Wazobia, and Arewa) had implemented one policy or the other that led to the loss of jobs for their staff or conversion from permanent staff to freelancers.

“

HumAngle was just born when the pandemic struck. The impacts are better imagined than experienced, but we survived the shocks, despite the vulnerability of being a newcomer.”

”

Non-profit newsrooms whose operations are supported by funders are also experiencing dwindling funding as the pandemic continues. Funders are reviewing their spending globally, affecting their beneficiaries due to the economic recession that the COVID-19 unleashed on the world.

## The HumAngle experience

HumAngle was just born when the pandemic struck. The impacts are better imagined than experienced, but we survived the shocks, despite the vulnerability of being a newcomer.

The journey was bumpy and smooth. And looking back after one year as a newsroom working amidst a debilitating pandemic that threatens human existence, and succeeding at the same time means a lot to us.

Everything came under threat – newsgathering, reporting, physical meeting in the office and of course funding – and

against all odds, we are, one year after, moving on with the 'new normal'.

The credit goes to the editorial team that rose to the occasion when newsgathering and reporting seemed impossible.

Like many newsrooms across the world, we resorted to remote work – the safety of our reporters was necessary as much as our desire to be the first in conflict-reporting in Nigeria and indeed in Africa.

Adjusting to the 'new normal' has brought us this far, thanks to our readers' belief, trust, confidence, and support. As the effects of the pandemic eases and genuine normalcy is restored, we will continue to gather and report events that resonate with our DNA—conflicts, crimes, human rights, development and humanitarian issues across the region. We will continue to live by our motto of breaking boundaries and exceeding limitations.

***Yekeen is the Head of Newsroom at HumAngle.***



# One Year Of Reporting At HumAngle And Why We Should've Started Sooner

'Kunle Adebajo



Branded HumAngle shirt and mug. Photo: Twitter/Muhammed Akinyemi (@theprincelyx)

Gaps—

It doesn't take time to realise those are the most fundamental problems we face in Nigeria and, of course, many parts of Africa. Gaps in law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Gaps in school enrollment, curriculums, and actual learning. Gaps in tax collection. Gaps in voter registration and voter turnout. Socioeconomic gaps between the rich and the poor, between electors and the elected, and 101 other parallel groups. What we do not talk about enough are gaps in reporting. More specifically, the focus and depth of reporting. Nigeria is home to great journalism. We have some of the largest newsrooms in the region. Our reporters go the extra mile to clinch highly coveted international media awards every year. Despite challenges with press freedom and lack of financial independence, we still manage to churn out

plenty of critical pieces. But, as with almost every sector, there has always been something amiss in the media space. A little over a year ago, when I got the opportunity to be part of HumAngle, I immediately saw it as a means of filling a significant part of this void. Why not? If the Global Peace Index were a huge pot of jollof rice and all the countries of the world lined up to get a share based on how secure they were, Nigeria would be at the end: 147 out of 167 people on the queue. If there were any rice left when it got to our turn, it would be some of those burnt portions scraped from the bottom. Nigeria is home to numerous cracks in security, with every region having its species of conflict. The decade-old Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast has led to the emergence of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Security is not just another theme like education or health or finance; it has become so important we just

cannot delay properly addressing it a moment longer. Only the living have the luxury to worry about lingering health conditions, access to education, and the gross domestic product.

So, it was high time a media organisation sprung up to expertly document the causes and effects of the country's conflicts and caution against potential crises before events spiralled out of control.

As an investigative reporter, my job was laid out for me: visiting conflict-ravaged regions, interacting with victims, and telling their stories as accurately and interestingly as I could. My shoes were dusted, and my phone's memory was cleared. I was warming up to hit the road. Then, as you would have guessed, COVID-19 dropped its anchor on the shores of Lagos in late February.

I was confined to my studio apartment in Abuja for many months before the lockdown protocol was relaxed. The

pandemic took centre stage. Journalists who had worked on investigative stories delayed publishing them because all the country cared about was this strange infection that has suddenly made us sceptical of the slightest coughing. And those who wanted to go to the field for in-depth reports either had to repurpose their trips to fit into the pandemic or suspend their plans. That is even if you still had a job months into the crisis.

Meanwhile, the pandemic presented an opportunity to highlight issues such as the poor treatment of frontline health workers, worsening food insecurity, how the spread of misinformation was affecting the country's response to the crisis and the availability of essential drugs, how Nigerians living with HIV coped during the period, how non-essential workers could bribe their way through getting lockdown exemption in Abuja, and so on.



Finally, on Saturday, Sept. 26, I boarded a plane going to Maiduguri, capital of Borno State, and did not return to Abuja until Tuesday, Oct. 13. Within those two and a half weeks, I interviewed 16 people—mostly IDPs, gained a much better understanding of the insurgency from different perspectives, took over 500 pictures, and set a personal record of the longest kaftan-wearing streak. In that period, End SARS demonstrations ignited

across the country, especially in the southern region. I followed the developments intently from my Twitter account as I clung to tricycles jetting through Maiduguri's dusty roads. It was a lot to handle, immersing oneself in stories of grief and loss, both online and offline. When I returned to the capital city, the first report from the trip I had published was about Adam Modu. His health was treated negligently by prison authorities despite having been

diagnosed with abdominal tuberculosis for several years. Less than a month later, we published the extraordinary story of 25-year-old Balu Agah, a displaced woman abducted by Boko Haram while on a mission to fetch firewood and, while pregnant for one of the insurgents,

managed to escape.

On Sunday, Nov. 29, we published the first part of the 'The Deradicalised' series, which looks at former clients' various experiences of the federal government's deradicalisation programme, Operation Safe Corridor. We have since gone on to release three other



Many friends have acknowledged that reading these stories broadened their understanding of the crisis too, as listening to them did mine. And I hope, at HumAngle, we can report and publish a great many more stories that will do just that—demystify the insurgency and other conflicts; bring attention to the deep, underreported problems left in their wake; and ensure that as a people we learn from the mistakes of the past as we draw blueprints for the future.

The visit to Maiduguri crystallised my conviction that assumptions, half-truths, and screaming headlines will not help us in solving our problems. We rather need a deep understanding of the issues driven by curiosity and bravery and patience and humility, conversations driven by journalists who embody these virtues. We need institutions, like HumAngle, whose calling is to tell these stories because the more they do so, the better at it they get. We need a gang of people who sacrifice their biases and impulses on the altar of peace and security as they narrate balanced stories of victories and defeats, fears and

hopes, displacements and disappointments, gains and losses, births and deaths. We need journalists dedicated to diving beyond what is obvious to what is true about soldiers' experiences, grievances of civilians, governments' efforts, and the lives of displaced people.

We do not need multinational corporations to tell our stories for us when those fighting at the war fronts and getting gunned down or macheted for no fault of theirs are our brothers and sisters, our neighbours and business partners.

As we cross into our second year, we must acknowledge that we are not even close to scratching the surface despite the great work we have done so far. And though we may have distinguished ourselves in a field of journalism that long ached for recognition, the job of filling gaps in this country and continent is a lifelong one.

***Kunle is the investigations editor & head of the internal fact check desk.***

# We Are Standing Tall Because Of Support From Development Partners

Hafsah Abubakar Matazu

It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that many organisations such as HumAngle have experienced a turbulent past year. After launching in March, the COVID-19 pandemic hit with full force, putting life as we know it at a halt, with all expectations and targets having to suffer setbacks.

It is also no news that media organisations, both old and new, have experienced great financial difficulty.

In times like these, acknowledging and appreciating the efforts made by development organisations is more important than ever. In the case of HumAngle that was launched exactly a year ago, the level of success reached can only be described as remarkable. Apart from the efforts made by management and all the staff to keep the dream of HumAngle alive, it goes without saying that without the helping-hand stretched by organisations such as the Open Society Initiative for West

Africa (OSIWA) and the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF), carrying out the vital work HumAngle has mandated itself to do would have been a lot more difficult.

The grant from ATJLF, a public charity established in 2018 by the MacArthur Foundation, supports transitional justice efforts across Africa, with \$1.5 million in funding to 42 West African organisations, with the grants announced in two batches during the peak period of the COVID-19 pandemic, in February and July 2020.

The partnership between ATJLF and HumAngle has produced, more notably, the stories of IDPs in Borno State, especially the women whose husbands have been taken away or killed by members of the terrorist group Boko Haram. These reports have gone a long way in narrating the plight of one of the most vulnerable populations in Nigeria.



OSIWA similarly works towards promoting fair and independent justice and protecting the human rights of vulnerable groups, also in line with the reporting objectives of HumAngle.

The organisation's emergency support which lasted from March to December, was also a huge pillar during the pandemic by providing funding to media organisations such as HumAngle to ensure they stayed afloat.

Partnering with OSIWA ensured the public remained informed on the latest information concerning COVID-19, countering misinformation about the virus, as well as later moving towards other aspects threatening society such as the #EndSARS campaign, which occurred towards the end of last year, and the Lagos panel enquiry that followed shortly after.

The past year has proven how partnering with

development organisations can help the media to achieve great strides in reporting issues that continue to plague Nigeria and the African continent, such as insecurity, human rights, development and reform; giving room for both sectors to achieve their goals without influencing or interfering with one another, with accountability and transparency driving the mutually beneficial relationship between the two.

The pandemic has also shown us that the traditional ways of keeping media organisations alive is not enough anymore. Seeking support from the development sector is now crucial. Building continued growth, development and peace is the recipe to success for even more fruitful and productive years ahead.

***Hafsah is a senior reporter at HumAngle***



# Lack Of Awareness Making Conflict Reporting An Unsavoury Beat In Nigeria

Aliyu Dahiru Aliyu

**N**ews is one of the mirrors of reality that tells a consumer about interesting happenings around him with the potential of changing his views and influencing his decisions. It deals with how we understand contemporary issues and relate to our conditions.

In news stories, what others may consider an interesting and important story may be read by others with casual indifference. The first image of a black hole was a milestone in the scientific community but is of no significance to an Almajiri roaming the streets of Sokoto.

However, among all the categories of news shaping the conditions of individuals and altering their views, the tragic stories of violent attacks, horrifying massacres, terrifying displacements and series of abductions are particularly taken more seriously by everyone — including those who prefer lighter or less serious reports.

Conflict is ubiquitous and that makes its reporting a huge field in journalism. It starts from when tensions between two or more parties start, to post-violence and resolution stages. Like in quantum theories, our emotional lives are seldom disconnected. An attack in the vast forest of Sambisa, Borno State, has an indirect impact on businesses and economic activities in Delta State.

My one year experience of working at HumAngle has taught me the good, the bad and the ugly side of conflict reporting. My reports on Boko Haram and translation of videos were appreciated by many readers and followed by troll attacks from other angles. Others questioned my “controversial job” without knowing what it entails and loved ones have often asked me to quit due to its narrow escape route when there are possible push backs from the terrorists and the terrorised.

The accusations of being mouthpieces of terrorist organisations and the allegations

of undermining the success of government forces have been some of the major sources of concern for conflict reporters who are most familiar with happenings at the frontlines. While the service we offer intends to raise the voice of the voiceless and to portray the real image of the victims, some readers, intentionally or unintentionally, decide to overlook the hard work we do.

Conflict reporters are faced with the deepest dilemma of professionally reporting the true picture of happenings that have direct consequences on the lives of people and extinguishing terrorist propaganda who are looking for the media to disseminate their messages. Reporters weigh the consequences of hiding the stories and making them known so that ample attention is given to the voiceless victims of terror.

In my one year with HumAngle, I came to understand that the main objective of portraying the human angle of conflict reporting and the stories of resilience, hope and successes in the hardest-hit areas are often looked at with contempt. The first knowledge illusion of the propaganda targeting its publisher worked in distorting the real image of what it has been doing.

As an African media outlet and the first of its kind in Nigeria, if not the whole continent, HumAngle has a deeper understanding of conflicts occurring in communities where our reporters, fixers and freelancers belong. Our in-depth reports have gone beyond the distorted version of secondary sources promoted by wheelchair researchers and foreign journalists.

I and other colleagues at HumAngle have often discussed how people are being misinformed by the distorted reality and our attempts to make the record straight were followed by trolls and allegations of sympathy for terrorists.

The ordeals of a conflict reporter  
Conflict reporters are constantly providing opportunities for parties in conflict to

communicate, not only with each other but also with people who are not directly involved in the conflict. They amplify the works of the mediators and narrate the stories of unarmed victims who are always on the ground that suffers the fights between two elephants.

By speaking to people on all sides of a conflict, a reporter has the capability of acting as a bridge until peace reigns, for the benefit of victims that include women, children and elderly. This, as we know, does not mean bringing them together face to face, but rather offering them a platform for communication.

However, in most cases, parties involved in conflict attempt to use the media as a way of getting their point across and applying pressure on their opponents without giving the other a chance to communicate. While this is clearly a form of communication, it is not necessarily constructive. Conflict reporters have always been faced with this kind of dilemma from both angles.

To allow one party to hijack and use your platform for propaganda and concealing truth is against contributing to peace-building in communities. A conflict reporter is expected to provide fair, balanced and accurate coverage without becoming pawns in someone else's strategy.

In Nigeria and Africa, conflict reporters trying to contribute their own quota in peace building come across different potholes in conveying their messages. Their attempt to ensure peace and stability through conflict-sensitive reporting have often faced different demands that are against their professional ethics.

In the war against insurgency in Nigeria, for example, authorities in the

country consider conflict reporters a nuisance who detract from the "efforts" being made to respond and extinguish the fire of violence, by releasing more stories on conflict outbreaks and portraying the country as "ungovernable". The political authorities who rely on propaganda to achieve domination think conflict reporters holding them accountable are obstructing their ways to permanence in political office.

Professor Johan Galtung has acknowledged the importance of the conflict reporter. He, according to him, is an outsider who "very often sees things the parties [involved in conflict] don't see themselves as they're too close... You may wonder whether the people will be willing to talk with you, and my experience is they are, because they love to talk about their conflict, and they love to try to explain what's going on."

"Each time you listen to a new conflict party, the conflict changes colours and you see it from a new angle, and a new angle, and once again a new angle. And since they often don't talk with each other, the mediator gets a much better overview than they have themselves."

However, instead of appreciating the works of a journalist making efforts to resolve a conflict or build a bridge between opposing parties, an honest piece attempting to narrate about happenings can be interpreted by some groups as strategic manoeuvring to support one group over the other.

While we all know the first stage of solving a problem is understanding it, an honest and unbiased report aiding people to understand conflicts as they occur might be seen as an insincere attempt to legitimise or sympathise with the activities of terrorists.

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Ahmad Salkida, the Editor-in-Chief of HumAngle, is a very good example of how conflict reporters face double jeopardy from two groups looking for media domination. His social media accounts are full of hate comments and allegations of being the spokesperson of the same group that issues threats on his life.

In May 2020, Abubakar Shekau, the factional leader of Boko Haram, publicly and specifically threatened Mr Salkida and the HumAngle team after a report on the success of the Nigerian army against the

terrorist group was published on the platform.

Shekau decided to issue the threat in public after his soldiers sent numerous threat messages to the reporter on the phone and social media platforms.

The Boko Haram threat came four years after Mr Salkida was arrested by Nigerian authorities for the false allegations of having ties with terrorists after he released a video showing the abducted students of Chibok.

## Human-angle journalism



As from the coinage of its name, HumAngle concentrates on the human interests in conflict reporting. Our stories resonate with the members of conflict-affected communities. The aim is not to amplify the stories of violence and move on to another story. It is about making the voice of the muted, heard.

HumAngle stories have been at the forefront of raising the concerns of common people and exposing the conditions of hard-to-reach communities and the internally displaced persons (IDPs) who tell their own stories.

From the highly misunderstood Almajiri child to the women in the Knifar movement looking for their husbands, HumAngle projects victims of conflicts and human

rights violations in their own stories, and gives them a platform to send first-hand information in turn shared with different audiences.

While some platforms report conflicts and move from one story to another, HumAngle follows victims and amplifies their message until their voices are heard, given the attention they need, and they get responses to their demands.

Instead of top-down news release journalism, we prefer to follow the bottom-up approach to make the angle of the victim more visible amidst the narratives of the perpetrators.

***Aliyu is a senior reporter at HumAngle***

# Battling The Triple-Impact Of COVID-19, Crime, And Conflict

Murtala Abdullahi

While Nigeria was struggling with underdevelopment and unabated violence across different regions, the country was suddenly confronted by an invisible and vicious enemy: the COVID-19 pandemic. Since Nigeria reported its first COVID-19 case in Feb. 2020, cases have grown steadily, moving from an imported case to community transmission, and more than 100,000 Nigerians have tested positive for the disease while about 1,900 deaths have been recorded.

In response to the pandemic, the Nigerian government adopted measures such as enforcing social mobility restrictions to curb the spread of the virus and flatten the curve. But this had a ripple effect on the economy and also led to the reassignment of security forces, thereby contributing to national fragility and particularly stretching the military thin.

Although the general security posture in the

country appeared to have remained the same during the lockdown, different gangs, armed with machetes and other weapons defied the police and terrorised some communities in Nigeria's economic capital, Lagos, forcing some residents to set up vigilante groups in response to the upsurge in violent crime.

In Oct. 2020, several people descended on warehouses containing undistributed stockpiles of COVID-19 relief supplies and, in some cases, private facilities were looted. This was amid escalating unrest across Nigeria in the aftermath of the protest against police brutality and the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The waves of palliative raids across the country were attributed to the impact of earlier social restrictions and increasing economic insecurity.



This highlighted that beyond the health risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic uncertainties and disruptions posed a threat to human and economic security, and could have a long term impact on the resilience of citizens.

COVID-19 and security operations  
As we witnessed an escalation in military

actions to obliterate terror and criminal groups, as well as more airstrikes on armed groups in the Northwest and Northcentral, the most significant offensive against Northeastern jihadist groups, in recent years, began last month particularly due to the injection of additional troops and hardware.

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#### COVID-19 and security operations

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The outlook for the coming months indicates that the government will need to implement robust policies to stimulate the economy and improve the resilience of citizens to curb insecurity. At the same time, efforts are required to truly reform the police and rejig the military.

#### COVID-19 and conflict reporting

For reporters like myself, COVID-19 was accompanied by constraints on the ability to travel and resources available to follow up

on the stories of victims of violent crimes and conflicts, the underlying factors responsible behind them or the government's response to the numerous threats.

Developing innovative and safe alternative plans like the use of digital technologies (social media) was essential to adapt to the new challenges induced by the pandemic and ensure the public is aware of security trends and that interested parties, including policymakers and development agencies, can access the necessary information to respond effectively to threats that undermine human security and stability in the country and Lake Chad Basin.

However, the same way social media has made communication and access easier, it has introduced a lot of vulnerabilities and risks to reporters in Nigeria including activities of regime trolls attempting to bully and scare reporters from telling untold and uncomfortable stories to risks of cyber intrusions and misleading information.

***Murtala is a climate & security reporter/researcher at HumAngle***



# Working From Home, Working With Strangers, And Still Getting Work Done

Hameeda Buhari

It's one thing to struggle as a new company in a large market, it's a different gameplay when you are hit with a global pandemic as soon as the company kicks-off. As a recruit with little work experience, my first assignment involved working with each department to understand their roles and processes, a deliberate decision taken by management to ensure maximum learning experience in the first few months

before settling into my primary role as Admin/Human Resources officer. Working with the editorial department involved interacting with different reporters with varying expertise ranging from investigations to climate and cybersecurity; it also included fieldwork participation, collating data and statistics through questionnaires and interviews, and understanding the essence of storytelling.



Moving to the IT department, I understood the basics of infographics, image editing, data mining, cleaning etc., and had the opportunity to attend the Dataphyte #OpenDataDay training. Barely one month into the online news platform's official launch, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was announced, derailing our plans and prospects, making us ill-equipped and unprepared for such an extreme and life-altering historical

occurrence. With the lockdown, remote work was imperative, which from an employee's perspective sounded like a semi-holiday; no nine to five, reduced workload, no transportation costs, etc. However, remote work during a global pandemic for a media company meant so much more. From an employer's perspective, it involved drawing up a systematic plan to smoothly transition all employees into a work-from-home mode while ensuring productivity.

It was a hands-on approach a week into the lockdown. Each department worked tirelessly towards creating synergy within, to pull resources, information, churn out stories, and content for the company's small but growing audience without having the luxury of fully settling into roles and responsibilities, and attending training and orientation to familiarise employees with the company's expectations and mission.

It also meant managing diverse individuals from the comfort of your home and theirs, making coordination quite tricky and giving rise to fluctuation in productivity.

A new phenomenon that has never been experienced before on such a large scale, the lockdown shed light on components that employers and HR needed to be cognizant of, that is; mental, emotional, and physical well-being often overlooked or downplayed. Three weeks into the lockdown, there was a crippling sense of despondency, as most individuals were not used to being cooked up at home for a prolonged period, giving rise to tension, anxiety, and emotional strain, most especially for individuals living alone, thus making it imperative for the company to take an empathetic approach towards employees.

Once we were back at the office after the lockdown, management created brief and one-on-one sessions between the CEO and employees to establish a harmonious relationship. Being back at the office, yielded better results and allowed for training that could not be held during the lockdown period.

One year into the company's official launch, remarkable milestones have been achieved regardless of the pandemic, and the lack of preparedness for its impact. However, there is a lot that can be done as we continue to manoeuvre through the waves of the pandemic.

### **Health and safety**

COVID-19 brought a lot of attention to hygiene. It exposed us to our lackadaisical attitude with regards to personal hygiene and safety, from something as simple as washing your hands throughout the day, how we cough or sneeze, to the flouting of COVID restriction protocols.

The alarming death rates across the globe

and the virus' side effects also set in motion a worldwide conversation on staying safe to prevent infection. At the same time, the medical world worked tirelessly for a vaccine.

This also made the company aware of its responsibility to keep its employees as safe as possible within the office environment by ensuring the use of face masks at all times, social distancing, and provision of hand sanitiser stations around the office.

### **Remote work**

One of the pandemic's new effects was remote work for all employees across many sectors. Some companies were able to adapt quickly to remote-working requirements, so much so that there has been increased chatter of a possible surge in remote work in the future. However, it is still doubtful whether daily remote work is as effective and guarantees productivity as working from an office.

Regardless of remote work being an appealing option instead of office space, the transition may take years.

### **Communication**

One of the biggest hits the company took was in terms of communication gaps, making it difficult to find ways of addressing issues that arise between employees. This led to understanding how miscommunication and lack of communication can be detrimental to the company and its employees. It has also caused the company to take a more practical and considerate approach to solve issues of miscommunication, consistently have clear discussions and conversations with employees and employers, and harness the power of incentives to boost morale.

### **Technology**

The pandemic revealed the power of technology to businesses and organisations; the ability to be productive while a killer virus was running amok was both expected and astounding at the same time. It showed that companies that can move towards the digital space could secure and strengthen their respective sectors' positions and prove invaluable to their consumers.

***Hameeda is HR & Admin Officer at HumAngle***



  
**HumAngle**

