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GHANA

Two key developments in 2012 influenced the state of the media in Ghana. The first was presidential and parliamentary elections held on December 7. While the Ghanaian media were already noted for their blatant partisanship, the highly contentious character of elections in the country brought bipartisan polarization into even sharper relief. Parties and their candidates unleashed their arsenals of political propaganda, battle lines were drawn, and the electoral contest was reduced to a bare-knuckle, verbal slug match between the two dominant political parties. The media became witting pawns in this negative campaigning, with the consequence that media professional standards and ethical norms were tested and compromised.

The second significant development was the death on July 24 of President J. E. A. Mills. President Mills's death provides a poignant illustration of the observation, as collectively expressed by the MSI panel, that the freedom of expression and media rights guaranteed under the constitution are bracketed by important social and cultural constraints. The sensitivity to cultural norms and the specter of social censorship seem to have frozen the partisan rhetoric in time; the otherwise stridently critical opposition press became temporary bedfellows with the pro-government media in their collective eulogizing of the late president and generally easing the typically adversarial rhetoric.

Perspective is important when considering the significance of these developments within the media sector. Prior to the 1992 constitution, only about 13 newspapers made sporadic appearances on the newsstands. The broadcast media were also limited to the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's (GBC) three national short-wave networks (Radio 1 and Radio 2, and the erratic External Radio Service) and three state-owned FM stations (Radio GAR in Accra, URA Radio in Bolgatanga, and the Apam Community FM station).

Since 1993, a set of constitutional provisions and regulatory enactments have combined to produce a media landscape that is quite liberal, relatively pluralistic, and increasingly vociferous. There are currently—according to a combined listing of the National Communications Authority (NCA), the National Media Commission (NMC), and the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA)—up to 466 registered newspapers, magazines, and journals; 286 FM radio stations; and 28 free-to-air/subscription television stations registered in the country. In addition, there are, according to the official tallies, as many as 59,086 Internet hosts in the Ghanaian domain and six cellular service operators catering to more than one-half of the total national population.

Overall, Ghana outperforms many countries in the region but still falls short of having a sustainable media system.

GHANA AT A GLANCE

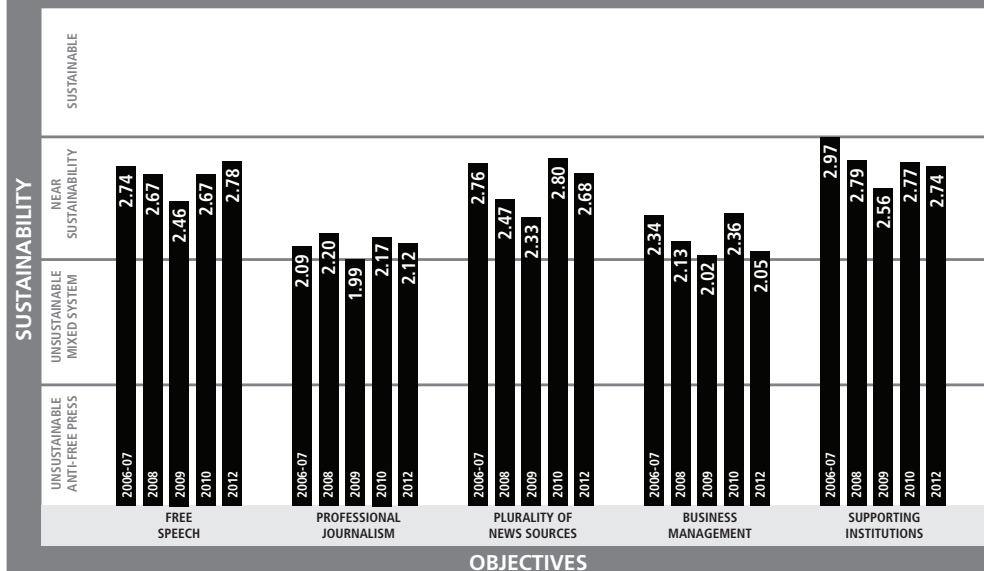
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 24,658,823 (2010 Population and Housing Census, Ghana Statistical Service)
- > **Capital city:** Accra
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Akan 45.3%, Mole-Dagbon 15.2%, Ewe 11.7%, Ga-Dangme 7.3%, Guan 4%, Gurma 3.6%, Grusi 2.6%, MAnde-Busanga 1%, other tribes 1.4%, other 7.8% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 68.8%, Muslim 15.9%, traditional 8.5%, other 0.7%, none 6.1% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Asante 14.8%, Ewe 12.7%, Fante 9.9%, Boron (Brong) 4.6%, Dagombe 4.3%, Dangme 4.3%, Dagarte (Dagaba) 3.7%, Akyem 3.4%, Ga 3.4%, Akuapem 2.9%, other 36.1% (includes English (official)) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** \$35.11 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$1,820 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **Literacy rate:** 76.9% (male 84.3%, female 69.8%) (2005 estimate, UNESCO database)
- > **President or top authority:** President John Dramani Mahama (since July 24, 2012)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 466 total publications, including 11 national daily newspapers (National Media Commission, December 2006; BBC World Service Trust-AMDI 2006); Radio Stations: 286 licensed; 225 on air (National Communications Authority 3rd quarter statistics, 2012); Television Stations: 48; 19 on air (National Communications Authority, 2011)
- > **Newspaper circulation:** Top three daily newspapers: *Daily Graphic* (state-owned), *Daily Guide* (private), *The Chronicle* (private) (BBC World Service Trust-AMDI 2006)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Ghana News Agency (state-owned since 1957)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 1.297 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX GHANA



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Ghana Objective Score: 2.78

The lessons of Ghana's checkered political history seem to have informed the framers of the constitution about the imperative of a free and pluralistic media—and freedom of expression generally—in securing a lasting culture of democratic participation. Notably, Article 21 (1) (a) provides the universal right of “freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media.” The result is a media landscape that is normatively pluralistic and palpably belligerent.

However, media work is substantially constrained by laws and edicts flowing from the country's reactionary colonial and military past. For instance, the colonial political authorities in the period prior to 1957 entertained little room for the expression of divergent (typically dissident) political views. This is reflected in the prediction of Sir Arnold Hudson (who is credited with introducing radio into the Gold Coast in 1935) that centralized control was necessary to draw the attention of the early band of independence agitators away from “mischievous pabulum.”

After gaining political independence from Great Britain in 1957, the government of Kwame Nkrumah (the first post-colonial president of Ghana) also raised legal barriers against freedom of expression and the democratic imperatives of media pluralism. These included the State

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Secrets Act (1962, Act 105), Preventive Detention Act (1958), Publication Censorship Law (1960), and the Newspaper Licensing Act (1963). The Nkrumah regime was overthrown in a coup d'état on February 24, 1966; for the next 26 years the fortunes of Ghana's media were as tenuous as the two edgy spells of constitutional rule (headed by K. A. Busia, 1969-1972, and H. Limann, 1979-1981) until the ushering in of the (current) Fourth Republic by the 1992 constitution.

The fundamental human rights of free speech and expression and of a plurality of views and media are guaranteed under Article 21 (1), Article 41, and Chapter 12 of Ghana's 1992 constitution. In particular, Article 162 (3) stipulates that “there shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media”; Article 162 (4) seeks to insulate “publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media” against editorial influence or control; and Article 163 imposes a particular obligation on the state media to “afford fair opportunities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions.” These provisions are functionally enabled by a number of legislative instruments (notably Act 449 of the NMC and Act 524 of the NCA).

These far-reaching legal/constitutional protections compare favorably with international requirements and standards (notably Articles 19 and 21 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights). As panelist Regina A. Dzathor, media manager of Buymedia (a media buying company), noted, “These constitutional provisions satisfy international requirements for the free flow, expression, and dissemination of news and opinions.” She argued, further, that “the Ghanaian media are perceived as the most unrestricted on the African continent, as they often carry criticism of government policies without fear or favor.” Echoing these positive sentiments, Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng, a member of Ghana's media regulatory authority (the NMC), observed that “the current legal and political environment is relatively supportive of media freedom.” Freelance journalist Kofi Akpabli concluded, “Overall, Ghana scores high here.” In addition to the elaborate legal provisions, there is a free expression constituency within civil society that is constantly on the alert to repudiate any infringements on media rights and freedoms.

On the other hand, the panel identified a number of social norms and cultural mores that they contended are detrimental to free expression of critical views, particularly of traditional institutions and practices as well as persons in positions of social influence. As freelance journalist and law student Samuel Awuku Bartels pointed out, “While the constitution guarantees free speech, social and cultural norms such as [when, who, and how to announce] the death of a chief sometimes shape what can be published or commented

upon.” Gyan-Apenteng seconded this sentiment, explaining that Ghanaians in general are socialized to respect authority. Moreover, while there are no codified injunctions or express sanctions against such views, which run against accepted and societal norms, Dora Mawutor, program contract staff at the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), argued that reporters and their editors often feel compelled to comply by the prospect of being censored by the public.

All business enterprises and income-earning organizations in Ghana, including media institutions, are expected to register with the Registrar General’s Department, and they are all subject to tax. The tax regime is nondiscriminatory, a situation that the panel attributed to a growing dominance of the media space by richer commercial interests and politically connected individuals. Licensing is not a requirement for newspapers or online media outlets.

The editorial independence of the media is guaranteed under the constitution. However, as the panel observed, although the constitution seeks to insulate “editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media” from “control or interference by Government” (Article 162 [4]) and obliges the state media in particular to allow a diversity of shades of views (Article 163), vicarious control can often be observed in biased and even sometimes completely fabricated stories that are carried in the public media and are mostly intended to put the government in the best light. Emmanuel Dogbevi, editor of the online business journal GhanaBusinessNews.com, cited an incident in which a story was carried by the state-owned *Daily Graphic* newspaper, which said that the World Bank had approved funding for Ghana to complete an important road. The World Bank denied the story. It turned out that an official in the office of the president had planted the story in the newspaper.

Panel members felt that the processes for obtaining licensing for broadcast media were not sufficiently fair, transparent, or apolitical. The perception was that granting broadcast licenses is often influenced by political considerations. Yaw Owusu, reporter with the *Daily Guide* newspaper, observed, “There is growing public perception that these regulatory authorities grant broadcast licenses to cronies of ruling political parties. That is how come almost every radio station is in the hands of politicians.”

The panel noted a number of insidious threats to constitutional provisions protecting freedom of expression. The most ominous, it would seem, is the Criminal Offenses Act (Act 29 of 1960), sections of which are antithetical to the normative principles on free expression. Panel members pointed to Sections 207 and 298—and in particular Section 208—which forbid the “publishing [of] false news with intent to cause fear or harm to the public or to disturb the

public peace.” This provision has, over the year, been the pretext for government officials (through the police) to confront and intimidate journalists and social commentators because of their opinions. The specter of these anachronistic statutes continues to pose a clear and present threat to free expression. An example of this was seen on March 12, 2012, when Ernest Owusu-Bempah, described as a disaffected member of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) party, was arrested and detained at the Bureau of National Investigation for comments he had made on a radio talk program alleging that First Lady Ernestina Naadu Mills had received a \$5 million bribe from a businessman said to be a financier of the NDC party.

Edmund Kofi Yeboah, journalist with the state-owned *Daily Graphic* newspaper, also cited an incident on February 22, 2012, when a group of opposition New Patriotic Party apparatchiks barged into the studios of Asempa FM, an Accra-based radio station, “demanding the blood of a panelist [on the station’s political talk program] for making what the group considered to be unpalatable comments against their party.”

It is not only extremist elements within the political establishment who are guilty of the abuse of media rights. Members of the MSI panel gave anecdotal accounts of how some businesspeople and institutions use placement of advertising and sponsorships to compromise the professional judgment of journalists and media. In other cases, some pull strings within the corridors of power to intimidate or instigate reprisals against “nosy” journalists. Dogbevi recounted:

“A journalist with *Ghana Business News*, Pascal Kelvin Kudiabor, who was investigating the activities of a Canadian mining company in Ghana, Emmaland & Cardero Resources Ltd., had gone to their offices after prior communications and appointment with the public-relations officials of the company on July 16, 2012, and was arrested by the Ghana police Criminal Investigation Department [CID] when the managing director of the company made a phone call to the police claiming that someone was ‘prying into their privacy.’ The CID officials arrested and detained Kudiabor for three hours. They released him only after the intervention of his editor and after he had been made to write an ‘ordinary statement.’”

Bartels also referred to an incident in August 2011 when a well-known leader of a charismatic religious sect was alleged to have intruded into a live program on Hot FM (a radio station in Accra) and vandalized their equipment because he had been the subject of critical comments in an earlier program. Mawutor was particularly concerned that the processes of redress for such violations are unduly slow. She

cited the incident of a journalist with the *Daily Graphic* (who is also a regional chairman of the GJA) who was allegedly assaulted by some policemen in June 2012. The case has been pending since then.

Although criminal libel has been repealed, the civil libel process, which in Ghana tends to put the burden of proof on the defendant, rather than the accuser, makes the need for a right to information law even more urgent. However, the panel lamented the apparent lack of political commitment to the passage of the freedom-of-information legislation, the process for which dates back to 2001. In 2009, the freedom-of-information bill was given cabinet approval, fulfilling a major promise by the ruling NDC government. Since then, however, the parliament of Ghana has delayed its passage into law, usually voicing the need for further “stakeholder consultations.” This, as Dzathor noted, “vacates the liberties granted to journalists and the media under the constitution.” It places access to public information and documents at the discretion of government officials and public authorities, and it undermines the constitutional obligation on the media to promote “the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana” (Article 162[5]). Gloria Hiadzi, operations manager of the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, also observed that “access to public information sometimes depends on the reputation of the journalist and the amount of clout he or she wields—although according to the letter of the law all journalists have apparently equal access to information.” In the words of Akpabli, the effect has been that “reporters are compelled to use subterfuge, or publish the teasing half-truth, before politicians or government agencies become forthcoming with the facts.”

Access by media outlets to international news and information is open and unencumbered—the only potential limitations being those imposed by the availability and affordability of subscription portals. There are also no prior registration requirements for access to the Internet, and neither the government nor the responsible agency (the NCA) blocks or otherwise proscribes access to Internet sites or features.

Entry into the media profession is unrestricted. The GJA, the professional association of journalists, has defined prerequisites for entry into, and obligations for recognition as, a journalist. Specifically, the GJA constitution defines a journalist as “someone who by training or qualification in journalism and job specification collects and disseminates news and information for public consumption.” Panel members thought that there ought to be more clearly defined entry points for membership of the profession and more scrupulous minimum obligations for recognition

as a professional journalist. They pointed to incidences of impersonators and charlatans purporting journalistic credentials and gaining access to media events.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Ghana Objective Score: 2.12

The year was particularly auspicious for media activity. Due to the presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2012, there was a blitz of media coverage. Even the perennial newspapers that had long ago gone into hibernation reappeared and joined the cacophony of partisan political propaganda. Broadcast stations abandoned normal programming in favor of political talk and phone-ins by party-sponsored “serial callers.” In Ghana, politics, particularly politics of the tart-tongued stripe, makes a good sales pitch.

Outside of the political beat, most media content could be characterized as entertainment. Hiadzi explained that “entertainment is the name of the game and the outlet that does not provide entertainment loses out on market share. To this end, some electronic media give an entertaining twist to their news items.”

In relative terms, the state-owned media may be deemed to be fair and objective and to provide well-sourced news stories and features. Not as much could be said about the privately owned media, however, which, on account of their stakes in the elections, have become no more than political-party propaganda megaphones. They tend also to focus on sensation and scandal, rather than serious, well-sourced, and contextualized coverage of issues and events that transcend

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

immediate politics. Examples of such media would include Oman FM, Radio Gold, *Daily Guide*, *The New Statesman*, *The Ghanaian Palaver*, *Daily Democrat*, *Ghanaian Lens*, and the *Searchlight*.

The feisty nature of adversarial reporting in the media leads to the conclusion that neither journalists nor editors practice self-censorship. On the contrary, the editorials and general content of some private newspapers are quite openly caustic, even often blatant.

While the media may have profited financially from the seasonal political windfall, professional standards and ethical norms are tested and too often compromised by propaganda and slander. The panel was unanimous in their concern about a palpable rise in the frequency and crescendo of insults, distortions, and utter falsehoods in and by the media. This, as Gyan-Apenteng explained, is because “too many of our journalists are [beholden] to partisan brokers.” As a result of 2012 being an election year, the media became either instrumental accomplices—or victims and unwitting pawns—in trading negative propaganda and fear mongering between the two main contenders in the December elections.

In addition to the blatant partisanship, the panel noted a host of reasons for the observed poor standards of professional practice throughout the Ghanaian media sector. The burgeoning of the media industry since the return to democratic constitutional governance in 1993 has not been matched by the pace of competent skills training; as a result, many media outlets in the country are operating with serious professional handicaps. The MSI panel echoed a growing public concern about the country’s standards and quality of reporting and analyses in both the print and electronic media.

The GJA has a 17-point code of ethics for practitioners that should provide industry guidance to self-regulate. However, because membership in the association is voluntary, not all practitioners belong to it. Accordingly, there seems to be no sense of obligation to comply with the tenets of the GJA code of ethics. Even for members of the association, the panel noted that violation of its code of ethics attracts no more than the moral sanction of public condemnation. However, the panel noted that sanction is rare and is not a sufficient deterrent. While the weakness of this self-regulation was discussed, the panel (informed by the lessons of Ghana’s media history) was wary of opening the door to statutory regulation by any external agency.

A curious common occurrence within the year, as Akpabli noted, is the phenomenon of news sources disclaiming attributions made to them—often to the effect that they either did not make the statements attributed to them or were misquoted or reported out of context. There have

even been voice recordings of leading political and religious figures, the purported owners of which have protested that their original statements were doctored or that their voices were mimicked to implicate them.

Apart from a handful of iconic figures in the profession who draw large audience numbers and consequently earn premium wages, “salaries and emoluments of journalists in Ghana can be said to be among the worst in the world,” Owusu remarked. He added, “Due to the lack of competitive remuneration in mainstream journalism, the best practitioners are quickly creamed off by the communications outfits of multinational companies.” Kwasi seconded this sentiment, adding that, “Journalists’ pay is very bad, especially in the privately owned newspapers. Even well-known columnists writing for established state-owned newspapers are paid the equivalent of less than \$5 per article of more than one thousand words.” A survey conducted by the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice indicated that some journalists were paid as low as GHS 20 (about \$12) per month.

To a large extent, low pay levels within the profession are exploited by political power brokers and commercial interest groups. Thus, it would seem that the motivation to cover an event correlates with the weight of inducement encapsulated in a *solli*, industry jargon for “solidarity” payment, made to reporters for their consideration when crafting coverage of a subject or event. As Hiadzi put it, “The low pay levels tend to compromise the professional objectivity of journalists, as the survival instinct makes them report on what will earn them a living, rather than what is necessarily factual.”

The express constitutional guarantees against censorship suggest that journalists and their editors should feel sufficiently enabled and emboldened to exercise their gate-keeping functions based on objective news values. In reality, however, the same partisan-cum-financial considerations, rather than issue salience, suggest that media content is dominated by programming that appeals to the lowest common denominator in terms of audience numbers. Apart from news bulletins that are broadcast throughout the day, there are few documentaries or other daytime informational programs. Instead, advertisements, music shows, soap operas, and reality shows take the preponderance of space and time.

The majority of the private press houses are poorly capitalized, one-man-owned endeavors in which the proprietor is often also a pseudo-politician operating under the guise of a journalist. The duties of the other staff, if there are any, are not well defined. The proprietor is the editor-in-chief, sub-editor, and business and financial manager. Even those newspapers that have a semblance of an organization do not operate according to a

functional structure. These dysfunctions also reflect in poor capitalization, and as a result most newspapers operate with the very barest of equipment and resources, such as a couple of computers and recorder(s) and no more. By and large, equipment in the print media is neither modern nor efficient. The picture is not so different for the broadcast media, some of which rely on mobile-phone handsets for recording voice and taking photos.

With the exception of the state-owned television network, which has nationwide coverage, the private television stations have limited transmitter capacity, broadcasting only to urban areas and excluding far-flung regions and rural communities.

With the notable exception of sports (specifically soccer) and to a lesser extent business/finance, there is little quality niche reporting. The majority of journalists engage in episodic reporting based on press releases and news conferences by political actors. Few outlets run reports initiated by enterprising journalists, as most reporting is purely event-driven. This low level of niche reporting, according to the panel, is partially attributable to the low professional capacity of practitioners, partially attributable to the low institutional capacity of newspapers in supporting specialized desks or beats, and partially attributable to the fact that politics tends to be the default staple of most media in Ghana.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Ghana Objective Score: 2.68

The constitution of Ghana defines an instrumental role for the media in enabling the free and open contest of opinions in the marketplace of ideas. The panel was quite satisfied with the consequent availability and diversity of news sources in the country, reflected in the comparatively strong score for the first indicator under Objective 3.

The latitude of these freedoms is, however, substantially undermined by an observable web of interrelationship among a trinity of Ps: press, politics, and purse-strings. The media tend to reflect the orientations and promote the vested interests of those who own or fund them. Invariably, these interests converge with, and are an expression of, the same political/middle-class views. In fact, the panel noted that the owners and benefactors of the private tabloids in particular tend to be social and political allies; they share the same broad perspective and sometimes even share office premises and equipment. Not surprisingly, there has, not infrequently, been a curious coincidence in their news scoops and even headlines.

Thus, availability in Ghana does not necessarily amount to accessibility. The majority of international media (print and broadcast) requires a direct subscription and tends, consequently, to be an index of socio-economic class differentiation. Even for the local or indigenous media, the commercial imperative means that the preponderance of (private) newspapers and radio stations tend to gravitate toward the capital cities of Accra and Kumasi, to the relative exclusion of the majority rural populations. Most of these private media stations also do not have correspondents in all regions of the country, much less internationally. Television reception in certain parts of the country is very poor and in some cases is restricted to only the state-run GTV (Ghana Television).

Mawutor noted, "Increasingly, more and more Ghanaians, especially the youth, are resorting to the use of social network tools for news and information sharing using their mobile phone." Dzathor pointed out, however, that the social network platform as a news source is a minority elite phenomenon. "While the use of the Internet is growing... access rate remains low at 8.55 percent of the population," she explained. The panel observed that social networking and the Internet are used primarily for entertainment and networking and less as mainstream news sources.

There is only one official indigenous wire service, the Ghana News Agency (GNA), which was established in 1957 by the nation's first president, Kwame Nkrumah to provide more balanced representation of local, national, and continental news. Reuters initially provided guidance and technical assistance, but the GNA became fully Africanized in 1961.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

The GNA has always struggled to stay solvent in the face of dwindling state financial support. A number of international news-gathering services, such as Reuters, AFP, AP TASS, PANA (PanAfrican News Agency), and Xinhua, are available on various subscription terms by broadcast and print outlets in the country. According to Dogbevi, the cost implication—as much as the lack of professional capacity—is responsible for “a growing trend of plagiarism whereby news organizations liberally cull their international stories from the BBC and other open-access Internet portals,” often without proper citation.

The state-owned media cover the activities of the various political factions fairly, as indicated in a recent report by the Ghana Integrity Initiative, the local chapter of Transparency International. To further ensure equity in coverage of electoral issues, however, the NMC has developed a publication titled *Guidelines for Fair and Equitable Coverage of Political Parties by the State-Owned Media*. With regard to the length and breadth of coverage, the state television’s “Regional Dairies” program, as well as the state broadcaster’s regional FM radio stations, provides comprehensive development news from all 10 political regions in the country.

Most media, both public and private, generally produce their own news programs. There are, however, more than 20 independent production companies that principally produce sponsored television infomercials, documentaries, and live shows. Notable among them are Charterhouse Productions, Channel 2 Productions, Sparrow Productions, Eagle Productions, Village Communication, Premier Productions, Point Blank Media Concept, Deltrack, Bullseye, 4Syte TV, Roverman Productions, and Sapphire Productions.

Media ownership is a matter of public record, accessible both at the Registrar General, where all business registrations are cataloged, and at the two regulatory institutions in the country (the NMC and the NCA). There is a growing trend of multiple ownerships and affiliations in the FM radio sector, according to which semi-urban and rural FM stations often form “network partnerships” in order to improve their audience outreach and establish greater market presence. A number of FM radio stations and literally all television stations also rebroadcast international news from networks such as the BBC, CNN, Deutsche Welle-TV, Al Jazeera, and Voice of America. The opportunity cost, as Bartels pointed out, is that “the phenomenon of syndication of programs and affiliation...kills news coverage on local developments.”

Local and community radio stations broadcast in the principal language(s) of their area of dominant influence, thus providing substantial opportunities for audience input and participation in the radio programming. In the print media sector, however, there remains only one local-language

newspaper, the *Graphic Nsempa*, with limited circulation within Kumasi, the capital city of the Ashanti region of Ghana. There is no legislation or policy on the use of minority languages, as is the case in other countries.

While the media do cover issues such as gender, religion, and people living with disabilities, the frequency and depth of such programming is far less than for mainstream political developments. Gender and ethnic balances are comparatively decent in the field, though women are more likely to work as reporters than as producers or editors. Some radio stations are gradually opening up to employing people with disabilities as news anchors. Community media outlets generally use local languages and have programs that try to respond to some of the needs of their localities. These outlets tend to favor rebroadcasting the major news broadcasts and other programs that their urban affiliates provide.

The public has unencumbered access to local, national, and international news from local media outlets, most of which build their foreign news reports by curating foreign media channels. The lack of human-resource capacity, financial strains, and logistical challenges has tended to constrain most media houses, which then resort to the use of citizen reporters and eyewitnesses, often raising questions of credibility and professional prudence.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Ghana Objective Score: 2.05

Of the five major MSI objectives, the panel gave the lowest assessment to business management in the media sector. Gyan-Apenteng summed up the collective sentiment, observing, “Media outlets in Ghana seldom operate as efficient businesses; many of them are the political wing of other businesses or the plaything for the rich and fame-seekers.” Because most of the private press operates on a shoestring, they are unable to employ qualified staff and acquire the requisite logistics for operating as efficient and well-managed enterprises. As Gyan-Apenteng noted, “They do not often hire staff for the business, preferring family and political allies.” In the face of the stark reality of dwindling newsstand sales and increasing production costs, the panel again flagged the specter of political patronage. Broadcast outlets tend to be in better shape, though even here, the rural stations tend to operate on minimal technology and staff budgets and manage to just barely break even on operational costs.

Most of the media in Ghana rely on advertising to support their operations. The advertising industry is fairly developed. Companies employ all forms of advertisements, including

commercial, classifieds, holiday greetings, and congratulatory messages, for their marketing purposes. The major advertisers in Ghana are the telecommunication companies, most of which are international organizations. Even though media outlets set the rates for advertisements, they do negotiate based on frequency, periodicity, and standing relationships with the clients or their advertising agency. Both local and international advertising agencies operate in Ghana.

Both state and private media rely on advertising revenue. Approximately half of the content in the most widely circulated newspapers comprises advertising or paid announcements. Less popular newspapers devote fewer pages to advertisements. Broadcasters have also diversified funding streams for their reporting. Some segments of morning radio programs and television news bulletins are sponsored by a specific advertiser, for example.

For the first time in the media history of Ghana, the government announced in its 2012 budget the grant of a GHS 2,000,000 (\$1,000,000) annual media development fund. If independently and efficiently disbursed, it should provide invaluable backstopping for improving the journalistic skills of practitioners and the operational capacities of press houses.

The outlook is much more promising for the broadcast stations. They generally attract more advertising and sponsorship revenues than the print media. Generally, the large urban-based stations are more professionally managed (and attract more advertising and sponsorship revenue) than the smaller, remotely located stations—which tend to depend more on stipends from funeral announcements, music request coupons, and congratulatory messages. Generally, private newspapers with known or perceived political leanings

toward government attract more state advertising and sponsorship revenue than critical and pro-opposition private newspapers. On the other hand, as the panel noted, the critical, pro-opposition press are also being sustained by their political benefactors and sympathizers.

The apolitical media rely more on corporate advertising accounts for revenue. As Dzathor observed, “Only a few media outfits consider alternative revenue sources, such as sponsorships, subscription, special events, and so on.” Unfortunately, the exclusive reliance on advertising power has led to an overbearing influence of business over editorial decision making. Because ratings data are not readily available or reliable, the panel concluded that media buying decisions are not based exclusively on hard-nosed business principles. As Owusu pointed out, “That is the reason why multinational companies—particularly those in the telecom, banking, and mining sectors—are untouchable in Ghana.”

Only the large, well-funded media houses can afford the prohibitive costs of independently generated market research data to advise their output and scheduling. Other media outlets occasionally make unverifiable ratings claims, but the credibility of their figures is compromised by their vested interests in such studies.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Ghana Objective Score: 2.74

The burgeoning of media institutions and facilities, coupled with the enabling democratic conditions for freedom of association, have led to journalists and media operators organizing themselves around associations of common interests to represent and promote the goals and aspirations of their members. The GJA is the umbrella association of professional media practitioners in the country. The GJA tries to organize journalists into a common front. It also pursues advocacy for press freedom and has been quite vocal and forceful when it comes to speaking out against attacks on press freedom.

In addition to the GJA, there are other associations and affiliations of media and communication practitioners, such as the Editors Forum, the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, the Ghana Community Radio Network, the Institute of Public Relations, the Advertisers Association of Ghana, the Film Makers Guild, the Association of Women in the Media, Women in Broadcasting, the Internet Society of Ghana, West Africa Journalists Association, Sports Writers Association of Ghana, Sports Broadcasters Association, Environmental Club of Journalists, Economic and Financial

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

News Reporters Association, the Association of Past Broadcasters, Communication Workers Union, and the Ghana Association of Writers. All these unions and associations work to preserve their professional integrity and to advocate the interests and welfare of their members. Gyan-Apenteng revealed that some of these associations actually have representation on the NMC and have used their collective leverage to press for freedom-of-information legislation.

There are also a number of media and advocacy NGOs that have been pivotal to the deepening of media freedom, professional development of practitioners, and institutional growth of the field. Notable among them are the Media Foundation for West Africa [the organization responsible for preparing this study –ed.], the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the GJA, and the other associations of media practitioners noted above.

These institutions and pressure groups, together with the NMC, which serves as umpire and ombudsman, ensure the freedom and independence of the media, however tenuously. Together with a vibrant and vociferous civil society, institutions of state, and professional associations, such as the Ghana Bar Association, KAB Governance Consult, and the Centre for Democratic Development, the media in Ghana are sufficiently bulwarked against potential threats to their independence and free-expression rights.

There exist, also, at least a dozen media/communication and journalism training institutions in the country, including the graduate School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana, the Ghana Institute of Journalism, African Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication, National Film and Television Institute, Manifold Academy, Jayee Professional Institute, Ghana Telecom University College, and GBC Training School. Access to these training institutions is open, with the only conditions for entry being the general requirements for admission into other secondary or tertiary institutions in the country. While the quality and accreditation of some of these institutions cannot always be vouchsafed, credit is certainly due to the majority of them for the progress made so far in journalism training in Ghana. In addition, a number of professional groupings and institutions organize short courses in journalism with a view to honing the skills of practicing journalists and young graduates seeking careers in the profession. Hiadzi observed, however, that "availability of short-term and in-service training institutions is woefully inadequate, and thus journalists are not able to easily access such facilities to upgrade or acquire new skills."

The availability and provision of newsprint and printing and distribution facilities is very much driven by economic imperatives and is absolutely free from political interferences or restrictions. This partially explains why urban commercial centers are inundated with media production and distribution facilities while few entities locate within or address the media needs of the rural areas. Thus, newspapers often take more than 24 hours to reach some parts of the country. With the possible exception of the state-owned press, newspapers hardly reach beyond the regional administrative capitals.

Limited television coverage excludes a large segment of the citizenry from being well informed and participating fully in the decisions affecting national governance. Kumah Drah, news coordinator of the GCRN, called for state support by way of subsidies, tax rebates, or logistical support to private investors who might be interested in attending to deprived, rural community needs. This, they insisted, would be government's way of putting into practical effect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of all citizens to freedom of expression and the media.

List of Panel Participants

Edmund Kofi Yeboah, journalist, *Daily Graphic*, Accra

Gyan-Apenteng, member, National Media Commission, Accra

Samuel Awuku Bartels, freelance journalist and law student, Accra

Regina A. Dzathor, media manager, Buymedia, Accra

Yaw Owusu, reporter, *Daily Guide*, Accra

Emmanuel K. Dogbevi, editor, *Ghanabusinessnews.com*, Accra

Affail Roland Monney, vice president, Ghana Journalists Association, Accra

Kofi Akpabli, freelance journalist, Accra

Timothy Quashigah, lecturer, Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra

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The Ghana study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Media Foundation for West Africa, Accra. The panel discussion was convened on September 28, 2012.