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RWANDA

With a government that still uses the country's history of genocide to suppress media freedom, Rwanda's journalists continue to work in a difficult environment. Rampant abuses of journalists' rights persist—with security personnel seemingly the greatest offenders. In 2012, a number of journalists reported being beaten and harassed by security officers.

Journalists working for private and government media all suffer, although it is believed to be worse within the private media. Furthermore, the abuse continues in the presence of several Rwandese media associations that fail to condemn such acts or stir to help their colleagues in trouble. Some journalists attribute this paralysis to fear by the leaders of these associations, while others believe many of these leaders are vulnerable to government influence.

Journalists who are critical of the current government continue to flee the country, fearing for their lives. Many of those who remain follow what Rwandese journalists call "play it safe journalism," only filing stories that praise the country's leadership.

Alongside the dwindling numbers of critical journalists, no serious opposition leadership remains in Rwanda after the arrest of Victoire Ingabire, the leader of The Unified Democratic Forces in April 2010. Last year, he was sentenced to eight years in jail, a penalty that serves as a chilling warning to potential challengers to President Paul Kagame's government.

Despite these serious concerns, MSI panelists acknowledge that state-inspired crimes against journalists have fallen compared with previous years. They also point to other improvements on the government's part in observing press freedom, in comparison with previous years. Most significantly, on a few occasions government officials have stepped up to order the prosecution of soldiers who harass journalists. Still, such cases end up taking years, with seemingly endless investigations.

RWANDA AT A GLANCE

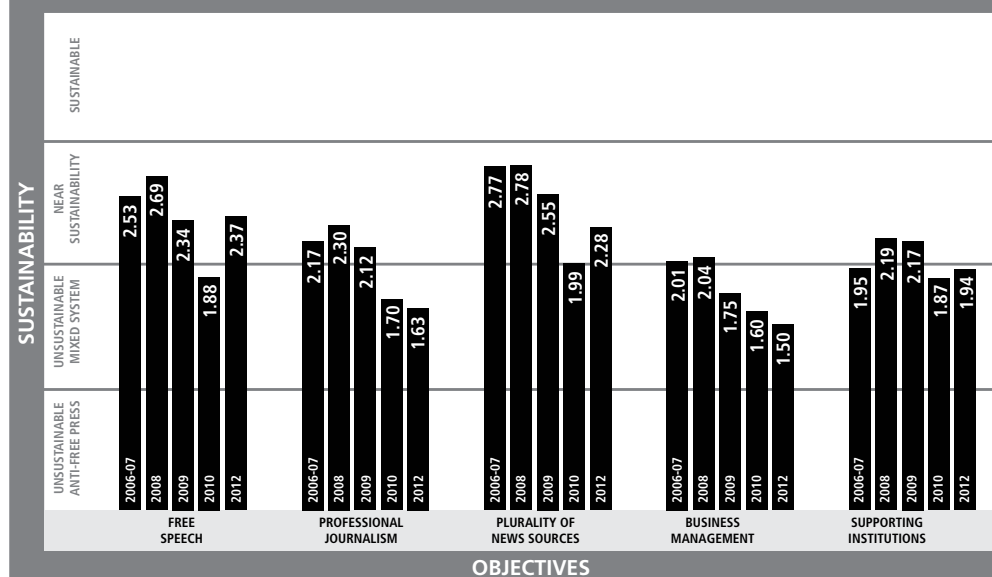
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 11,689,696 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Kigali
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Hutu (Bantu) 84%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 15%, Twa (Pygmy) 1% (*CIA World Factbook*); however, many scholars believe Hutu and Tutsi to be class distinctions rather than actual ethnic groups
- > **Religions (% of population):** Roman Catholic 56.5%, Protestant 26%, Adventist 11.1%, Muslim 4.6%, indigenous beliefs 0.1%, none 1.7% (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Kinyarwanda (official) universal Bantu vernacular, French (official), English (official), Kiswahili (Swahili) used in commercial centers (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** \$6.223 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$1,240 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **Literacy rate:** 70.4% (male 76.3%, female 64.7%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Paul Kagame (since April 22, 2000)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 39 newspapers (Ministry of Information); Radio Stations: 31; Television Stations: 1 (state-owned)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *Imvaho Nshya* (state-owned bi-weekly), followed by *The New Times* (private English newspaper and the only daily publication), Umuseso (privately owned), and *Kinyamateka* (Catholic Church-owned weekly); none has a circulation in excess of 10,000.
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top radio stations: Radio Rwanda (state-owned), Contact FM (private), BBC (international)
- > **News agencies:** Rwanda News Agency (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 450,000 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX RWANDA



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

Rwanda Objective Score: 2.37

Rwanda's constitution guarantees press freedom and freedom of speech, and there are good supporting media laws in place. In practice, though, without support from the authorities, these ideals prove elusive.

"The constitution addresses freedom of speech and press freedom, while supporting media laws emphasize and expand upon these freedoms to pave the way for access to information. However, without enforcement, they amount to mere documents," commented one panelist.

The leaders of journalism associations, who might be expected to be the most powerful advocates to ensure that these laws are upheld, are often darlings of the government, the panelist added.

Both government and the public are to blame, the panelists believe. The government has not made efforts to sensitize Rwandans about these provisions and their rights. Likewise, the public has not taken the trouble to learn its rights.

Many of the independent journalists still work in a climate of fear, unable to express their views freely, or provide a voice to the public. As much as some panelists said that the situation has changed and journalists work freely, those who fled the country two years ago have not returned for fear of being arrested. One panelist offered a different view, however,

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.

commenting, "They fled the country because of the biased and false stories they published, not because they were critical of the government as they claim."

When violations occur, the public is concerned, but rarely reacts to the situation, because they fear reprisals as well. There is little public faith that the judiciary is independent, despite government ministers who maintain that it is unbiased.

The panel was sharply divided on the issue of licensing of the media. Some panelists believe that the process is fair, while others see signs of government influence. "When you consider the high number of radio stations and new newspapers that have launched, it is clear proof that the process is fair, transparent, and open to whoever wants to start a radio station," commented Mark Akankwatsa Ramba, editor-in-chief of *Umuseke*.

Other panelists maintain that the process is unfair, noting that there are some investors who applied for a license many years ago, and never received one.

The Rwanda High Council of the Media is charged with licensing all media in Rwanda, and the Rwanda Utility Regulatory Authority (RURA) is charged with allocating frequencies to broadcast media outlets. The government appoints the leader of RURA, and most of the members of the council; thus, its influence cannot be ruled out.

In terms of the fairness of market entry for new media houses, the panelists detailed a few positive steps as well. The government introduced an incentive to potential investors in the media sector by scrapping all the taxes on imported equipment for any media industry. The government also removed the VAT on all newsprint, computers, and materials used in media production, which the panelists believe was a move to persuade people to invest in the media sector.

On the other hand, the panelists complained about printers who continue charging a VAT on newspapers, and the VAT charged by the government on all advertisements placed in these newspapers. The rest of the taxes are the same across the board, panelists noted, adding that they expect new changes in the tax law that could prove more beneficial to the media.

Still, the government continues to charge a tax of five percent on all publications printed outside Rwanda—on top of the 30 percent income tax already charged on these publications, which they said was unfair.

As noted above, the panelists have the sense that state-led crimes against journalists are declining. However, Reporters Sans Frontières underscored some persistent problems in

its *World Press Freedom Index*. "The regime's hounding of journalists forces them into exile or often results in their arrest. The editor of *Umuvugizi*, Jean-Bosco Gasasira, fled in 2010 and ran the paper online from abroad. He continues to receive threats and was sentenced in June 2011, in his absence, to two and a half years in prison. Agnès Uwimana Nkusi, editor of the privately-owned paper *Umurabyo*, was arrested in July 2010 along with one of her journalists, Saidat Mukakibibi, and in early 2011 they were given prison sentences of 17 and seven years. The sentences were later reduced to four and three years respectively."¹

Furthermore, some individual security personnel continue harassing journalists. Typically, these agents escape any form of punishment, and the authorities typically fail to prosecute.

When such cases occur the media writes about them, which panelists believe is helping the public to start appreciating the dangers that Rwandese journalists face.

Public media enjoy little freedom from the government, which funds it fully. Public media managers and editors are appointed by the minister of information, who is appointed by the president. For the last three years, there has been no board guiding state media. Instead, the minister of information appoints the managers. Although many of those appointed are professionals with all the knowledge and skills required to deliver effectively, they are pushed and regularly given directives by ministers.

The panelists said that while both government and private media are governed by the same media laws, the reality is that the government favors public media indirectly in many ways, especially when it comes to access to public information. Government press releases, presidential exclusive interviews, and government advertising are only given out to state and government friendly media and media houses that are seen to be critical of government are left out, noted the panel.

However, the panelists expressed hope that in the expected reforms, the public media outlet *Orenfo* will be turned into a true public broadcasting corporation. Others said that even with those expected changes, political influence could remain a significant problem.

Libel is still treated as a criminal offense, and the burden of proof remains on the media or journalists. Those proved guilty of libel are subject to six-month prison sentences and financial penalties.

The panelists were reluctant to comment about the independence of the judiciary, but a few expressed their

¹ "Rwanda," *World Press Freedom Index*. October 2012. <http://en.rsf.org/report-rwanda,38.html>

doubts, saying that the judges and magistrates have always sided with the authorities that appointed them.

Access to public information remains a big hurdle to the media in Rwanda, with still no law to support journalists' access. Although a draft law was developed four years ago, the government has shown reluctance to enact this law. Typically, journalists attempting to get information from various government offices are simply referred to higher authorities that also refuse to give them information. However, the panelists noted that those working for state media can access public information more easily than their colleagues in private media.

Access to international news sources and international news is free and the government has placed no restrictions on such access. Media are also free to reprint what has been published in foreign news. In fact, the panelists reported that most newspapers in Rwanda obtain stories from foreign news sources and use them without any problem. However, many of them do not bother to comply with intellectual property laws.

However, the panel noted that the government has blocked some websites, especially those constructed and manned by Rwandese dissidents, for fear of spreading information.

Entry into the journalism profession is free in Rwanda and the government does not have any restrictions in place over the same. However, the panelists noted that national press cards issued by the Media High Council, used as permits to cover public functions, are still in place and the ban on some media houses from attending such functions is still in place. The rest and majority of the journalists use press cards issued by their respective media houses.

The panel noted that government does not restrict entry into journalism training colleges. Anyone who wishes to join these schools is free to apply.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Rwanda Objective Score: 1.63

According to the panelists, most media in Rwanda lack objectivity. Most journalists carry out their sourcing from their desks, which often results in very one-sided reporting. The panelists concluded that this problem cuts across all platforms, although it is perhaps most common with print media. As a result, a number of media houses have been sued and forced to pay damages. In addition to sloppy sourcing and ethical lapses, advertorials are frequently presented as news.

The panelists attribute these problems to a number of factors, including poor management of media houses, poor training among media professionals, a lack of funding to give journalists the tools and support they need to work professionally, as well as greed and corruption.

However, the panel noted that despite these shortcomings, there is still a small group of journalists who take proper care sourcing their stories, turning out solid, objective work.

Media stakeholders developed, approved, and published a code of ethics, which does not differ significantly from the standard codes for other countries. Although many journalists are aware of the code, very few of them follow and respect its principles. Common violations include accepting bribes from potential sources either to publish positive stories, or kill negative articles.

This problem persists in all sectors of the media, although some large media houses have devised clear policies to fight the problem, and journalists caught taking bribes are fired.

Self-censorship still exists and is on the increase, as journalists and editors are fearful of offending those in power. An assortment of forces lead to self-censorship, including journalists' fear of losing their lives or their jobs, and corruption.

Media are relatively free to cover most key events, although security issues are considered off-limits. Journalists who attempt to investigate security lapses may face serious problems. Editors have been known to block journalists from covering certain events that veer from the accepted agenda. For example, one panelist said, "On most of the issues related to security we are spoon-fed, and if you go beyond what

you have been given you are in trouble. Stories about the detained opposition leader, or riots in Kigali and Congo are not well covered in the media for one reason: journalists fear the outcome."

Pay for journalists remains very low in Rwanda, and the panelists believe this has affected the profession adversely—driving many of the most skilled journalists to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Most private media journalists do not pay their workers, and many of them depend on sources for survival, which has aided the increase of corruption in the media.

However, there are exceptions. Some big media houses pay their journalists better than even teachers or workers of other professions. "Media houses like *Rwanda Times* pay as much as RWF 350,000 [\$550] to reporters, and editors earn RWF 700,000 [\$1,100], which is a decent wage by Rwandan standards," one panelist noted. In contrast, most freelancers earn only between RWF 100,000 and RWF 150,000 (\$155 and \$235). Furthermore, the disparity between editors and reporters in all media houses, both public and private, remains high.

Entertainment takes the biggest share of airtime in private broadcast media, while in public broadcast media the managers try to balance the time allocated to news and entertainment.

The panelists noted that FM station listeners tend to show more interest in music than news or information, and radio stations that tend to broadcast more news have lost listenership. However, the panel noted that, in print media, news takes the biggest part and entertainment is given little space.

The panelists reported that in all sectors of the media, the country still lacks the equipment required for professional work, and modern equipment is too expensive for most outlets. "Furthermore, media owners fail to see the need to invest in modern equipment, leaving us with very old-fashioned equipment," noted one panelist.

Niche reporting is still in its infancy, largely because of the lack of investment in training. While some journalists have received initial training, for the most part it has not proved substantial enough to give them the confidence to practice their skills. Some of the larger media houses, however, are trying to invest in specialized reporting with training programs for their journalists.

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).

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Rwanda Objective Score: 2.28

Multiple news sources exist in the country ranging from print, broadcast, online, and social media. Blogs and SMS media are also popular. However, new media journalists are not immune to the same self-censorship and government intervention that afflicts more traditional media.

The government does not restrict access to either domestic or international media. It is primarily the cost that limits full access. As for access to online media, in addition to the high cost of the Internet, panelists reported other challenges related to the speed and shortcomings of the government's distribution partner.

Furthermore, most of the newer media options are urban-centric, and not affordable to those living in more rural areas. Most rural dwellers depend on radio and broadcast media for news and information, reporting that it is cheaper and more convenient.

Foreign print editions are available on the Rwanda market. They cost slightly more than the local newspapers, but are still affordable.

The government fully controls Rwanda's state or public media, which spends most of its time covering government issues, programs, and political parties that are friendly to the ruling party, the panelists reported. And yet, when it comes to election cycles, the state media tries to balance reporting

by giving airtime and space to the opposition candidates, in keeping with electoral laws.

Public media, panelists conceded, fills the gap left behind by commercial radio stations by dedicating reasonable time to programs that cover public-interest issues such as health, education, culture, and environmental protection.

Rwanda News Agency is the only private news agency, but it is not independent. Furthermore, it sells news to only to media house that subscribe to it at a rate of \$800 per month. Very few media houses use their services, according to panelists. Instead, most media houses depend on their own reporters, who are distributed widely in the different parts of the country.

There are several international news agencies, including AP, AFP, Reuters, and MENA, which supply video, printed materials, and audio.

The panelists reported that most media houses produce their own news programs, which they consider fairly high quality. Production is costly, though, leading some stations to opt to select stories that have already been published in other newspapers or aired on radio stations.

In terms of content, news programs produced by private media differ greatly from those produced by state or public media. Unlike the private media, the state media tends to concentrate on government interests and propaganda. Community broadcast media exists, producing programming that suits the needs of individual communities.

Media ownership has not changed greatly from previous MSI studies. It is not difficult to obtain ownership information, and media outlets are subject to laws of disclosure upon registration. Ownership information is available at the office of the registrar of companies and at the Rwanda Development Board. The panelists agreed owners sometimes influence editorial content.

The panel reported that social issues are covered fairly well across all media platforms, and there are no restrictions imposed by either the government or media owners. Several community media outlets and district newspapers across the country cover minority issues, as well—although minority languages are not an issue, as one language is used in Rwanda.

The media cover all news, ranging from local, regional, national, and, at times, international news. Public media are often able to devote more time to news coverage, since these have correspondents in all the major parts of the country.

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.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Rwanda Objective Score: 1.50

The panel reported that most media houses, especially private and online media, are poorly managed and lack professionals in most of their departments—and often end up folding.

Owners typically fail to prepare proper business plans, lack professional management skills, and frequently employ unqualified relatives.

However, the panelists agreed there are exceptions. Some major media houses are well managed, with proper business plans, structures and qualified people, they said. These media houses have proven successful, generating enough revenue to turn a profit. One panelist commented that on this front, the public media may be ahead, noting, “State media employs professionals who have boosted performance, especially in areas of financial management.”

Community media mainly depend on donor funding, but they also supplement this funding with a small amount of locally generated business. In contrast, bloggers in Rwanda, panelists agreed, do not make money.

There are multiple sources of revenue for private media ranging from advertising, sale of copies, supplements, and bank loans, and the panelists feel that some of these sources influence editorial lines.

The most intense pressure comes from big advertisers, who demand positive coverage about their companies or products and ensure any stories that could lead to unfavorable portrayals are killed. Panelists reported that politics matter

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.

when it comes to soliciting advertising, especially from government ministries and departments. Media outlets viewed as critical of the authorities never win government advertising business.

The advertising industry has changed dramatically in Rwanda in the past year. According to the panelists, all the foreign advertising agencies that once dominated the business closed down, largely because of the economic climate. Many of these firms were Kenyan, and by the time they left, they were not making enough money in the Rwandan media market to sustain their operations.

Even the few local firms that had launched were affected and closed down, while media houses maintained their strategy of soliciting advertising from advertisers through well-trained and skilled staff. Some of the major advertisers include mobile telephone companies, breweries, and soft drink companies.

In print media, it is not uncommon for editors to feel forced to drop stories for advertising. Some newspapers are referred to as seasonal media, because they only come out when they receive advertising business. In addition, broadcast media tend to run a lot of commercials to raise revenue—at the expense of quality programming.

Government subsidies for private media are nonexistent, although government-friendly media houses are favored and rewarded with advertising. The panelists reported that at a national retreat for government officials, attendees decided that all media critical of the government should be denied business—a decision that apparently still holds.

Panelists agreed that only a few big media houses carry out research to plan properly and attract more revenue through advertising. Research also helps the media houses to tailor their products, learn about their listenership from electronic media, and determine which way to go for better results. One panelist noted, “Media houses that undertake such research have been very successful in growing their listenership, audiences, and readership.”

However, a majority of the media houses, especially electronic media, do not see the need for surveys and research. In 2012, only two media houses, Radio Flash and *Ishema*, conducted such research. Some of the methods employed in this kind of survey include call-in requests, questionnaires, and samplings.

In terms of ratings, panelists agreed that currently there is no credible independent organization that could carry out research that would be acceptable to all media houses. As a result, many media houses, both print and electronic, have claimed they hold leads in the industry.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Rwanda Objective Score: 1.94

Several media owners' associations exist in Rwanda, but there is no collaboration among them, even though some of them serve the same interests and members. There are also new organizations that formed to fight for interests of media owners and industry investors.

Some of the older associations include the Editors Forum and the Press House, which caters to the interests of media owners. According to the panelists, they tend to be concerned primarily about taxes and the rights of a few individuals, but not the welfare of the whole profession.

Others include the Forum of Private News Paper, with about 20 members, which lobbies the government for media independence, and the independent Online News Publishers Association.

There are also 36 publications working with a private sector foundation to set up a Media Chamber, and the Rwanda Broadcasters Association, which lobbies RURA on many issues such as reduction of the fee charged for frequency and antenna use.

Several professional media associations representing individual media practitioners exist in Rwanda, although they do not meet the expectations of their members, according to the panelists. Among others, they include the Network of Journalists for the Promotion of Human Rights, which advocates for members whose rights are violated, Rwanda Press House, Rwanda Editors Forum, Association of Rwanda Journalists, Rwandese Independent Journalists Association,

Rwanda Female Journalists Association, Association of Rwanda Journalists Against AIDS, Environment Journalists Association of Rwanda, and many smaller organizations representing particular sectors of the media.

Panelists observed that as much as the associations are big in numbers, they are not as active as expected because they lack funding. Members do not pay fees as regularly as they are required, for example. Membership to all these associations is by application and payment of a small initial fee, then later the annual subscription, which many do not pay.

Some panelists called into question the independence of these associations, as many of them depend on the government for funding. "We still have a long way to go. Our associations are weak and need support, both financial and strategic, and we need to bond together and come up with one strong association to fight for our most pressing needs, including funding and training," concluded one panelist.

Some panelists complained about the government's continued refusal to register the only independent association that launched a number of years ago, which they think may be in the best position to fight for the rights of journalists.

A majority of the local NGOs that exist in Rwanda neither fight for nor defend journalists' rights; they only use the media to mobilize funds for their leaders, complained the panelists. "We have had them claiming to be fighting for our rights, but when we are in trouble they disappear. They only use our name for fundraising purposes," one panelist noted.

However, there are international NGOs with representatives in Kigali that come out and speak about violations whenever they occur, including the Bar Association of Rwanda.

Rwanda has quality media training institutions, both public and private, which offer degrees, diplomas and certificates. The panel agreed that while these institutions exist, most of them put more emphasis on theoretical training than practical. As a result, they graduate students who are unprepared and face a lot of resistance when they go out looking for jobs.

One exception, according to the panelists, is National University, which has a radio station and Internet facilities to train its students. The on-site facilities have helped journalists who were practicing before, but lacked qualifications, to return for training.

Other training institutions available in the country include Mount Kenya, National University of Rwanda, Catholic Institute of Kabgayi, Great Lakes Media Centre affiliated with Butale University, and other small colleges spread out in the country.

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.

Training opportunities abroad only benefit a fortunate few. Most of them return home after the course, although a few find better opportunities abroad.

There are also workshops and short-term trainings organized locally with the assistance of donor funds and NGOs, which have benefited a sizable number of journalists. The most popular courses are basics in journalism, but the courses most needed are media ethics, interviewing and investigative skills, story sourcing, writing skills, and ICT related issues.

The panel reported that there is no restriction on the importation of materials used in news production, and the only challenge may be taxes charged on them.

When it comes to printing of newspapers, the panel noted that the only affordable printing facility belongs to the government. Furthermore, it is poorly managed, and refuses services to newspapers critical of the government. "We find it easier and cheaper to print our newspapers in Uganda, where there are no hurdles, apart from paying a small tax of five percent at the border," said a panelist who owns a private newspaper.

There are no harmonized distribution channels for newspapers in Rwanda. Each media house has and manages its own distribution network. Most of these media houses depend on agents and vendors to sell their products, and they have been successful in this. However, the panel reported that the government, much as it does not control the distribution of newspapers, only subscribes to its own media.

On transmitters, the panel said that whoever needs to can buy and install them, and later ask for permission from government to use it. It is only the affordability that may restrict people to access transmitters.

The panel also commended the government for the efforts it has put into Internet distribution in the country, resulting in improved access, especially in urban areas. The demand still exceeds the supply, however. The panel noted that the current ICT infrastructure is not yet sufficient to fully meet the needs of the media and the citizens, and the government needs to allocate more resources in that area.

"Basic infrastructure has been put in place, but the Internet is still slow, and a higher bandwidth comes with a high cost. Now, it is like the government and its partners have provided pipes without water. Optical cables are in place, but without bandwidth," commented one panelist.

The panelists also appealed to all stakeholders, including Internet service providers, to help in the awareness campaign on the use of the Internet to reduce online illiteracy. The Internet has helped increase citizen's access to media, and

many Rwandans, especially in urban areas, can now read news on their mobile phones and send and receive news via SMS. Mobile phones are widely available and affordable across the country.

List of Panel Participants

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