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SUDAN

The events leading up to, and following, the secession of South Sudan in 2011 had a significant negative impact on the media sector in Sudan. Scores for all five objectives fell significantly from the previous MSI study in 2010. Partly, this is a correction from the fact that the previous study considered both parts of the now divided country. But moves to crush independent journalists in the wake of the secession, border violence, and a domestic protest movement caused significant deterioration in Sudan's own media environment.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 (CPA) between the two regions' dominant political parties, the National Congress Party (NCP) of President Omar Al Bashir and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) of South Sudan provided for a referendum to take place in 2011, and more importantly, the drafting of a constitution in which the people's rights are respected. The 2005 Interim Constitution includes a provision that addresses the freedom of speech and expression, but this clause is restricted in practice. The CPA fostered the constitutional bill of rights and the positive political environment that prevailed before the 2010 elections, and these developments established some measure of stability in the media sector by decreasing harassment and human rights violations at that time.

However, the government took aggressive action against recalcitrant journalists as a result of the conflict in the Nuba Mountains and South Kordfan, which erupted between the Government of Khartoum and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in June 2011. Any attempt to criticize the government over the conflicts is banned. A number of journalists were suspended from publishing, and some were brought before courts for charges of defamation or dissemination of false information detrimental to national security. Access to public information is extremely difficult, and whether or not to grant such access is at public officials' discretion.

The loss of three-fourths of the former Sudan's total oil production as a result of the South Sudan secession incited great angst and resentment within the Sudan regime. Austerity measures were the primary cause of the 2012 June–July protests against the government. Harassment of the press increased in step with their attempts to cover these events.

A new and more restrictive draft Press and Printed Press Materials Act will replace the slightly reformed 2009 version, which still fell short of international standards. The new draft affords the National Council for Press and Publication (NCP) the power to withdraw journalists' accreditation and other licensing. The draft also gives NCP the right to suspend any newspaper for up to 10 days without a court decision, further bolstering its authority over the media. In addition, NCP would gain the power to suspend journalists for up to two months.

Given the increased pressures and crimes against journalists—domestic and foreign alike—that practice in Sudan, the country retains one of the least sustainable media environments in the world.

# SUDAN AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

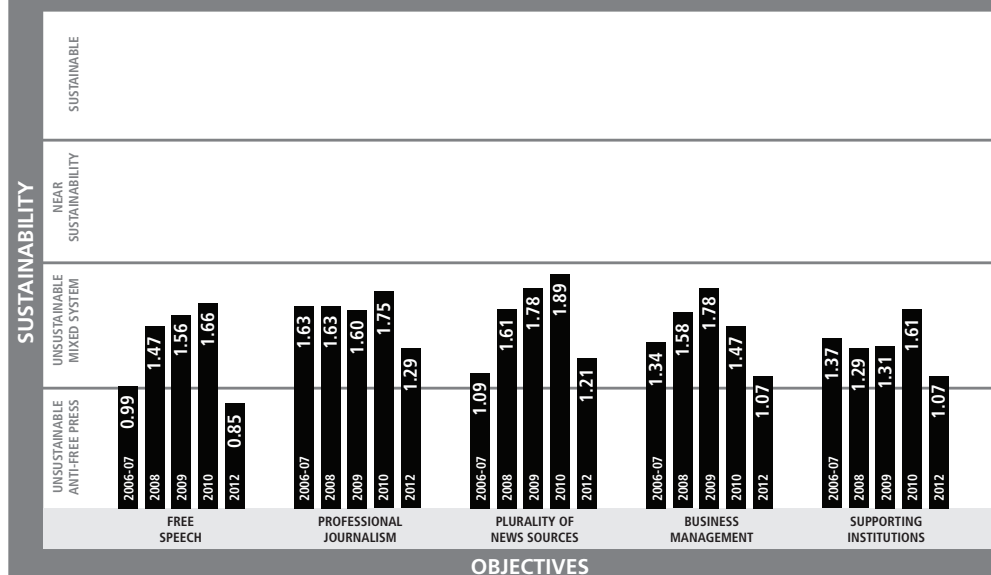
- > **Population:** 25,946,220 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Khartoum
- > **Ethnic groups:** N/A
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim, small Christian minority (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Arabic (official), English (official), Nubian, Ta Bedawie, (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** \$56.656 billion\* (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$2,020\* (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **Literacy rate:** 61.1% (male 71.8%, female 50.5%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Umar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir (since October 16, 1993)

\*Includes South Sudan

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 26 daily newspapers; Radio Stations: 15 FM stations; Television Stations: 9 satellite stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top four by circulation: *Al Intibaha*, *The Al Mighar*, *Akhir Lahza*, and *Al Sudani* (all private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Sudan News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** N/A

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX SUDAN



### 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

### Sudan Objective Score: 0.85

Since South Sudan's 2011 secession, freedom of speech in Sudan has declined from its already abysmal state.

Sudan's Interim Constitution of 2005 stipulates freedom of expression and of the media, clearly stating that "Every citizen shall have an unrestricted right to the freedom of expression, reception and dissemination of information, publication, and access to the press without prejudice to order, safety or public morals as determined by law." The constitution has further provided in Article 27(3) that "all rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights treaties, covenants and instruments ratified by the Republic of the Sudan shall be an integral part of this Bill."

However, this codification of a legally binding treaty reduces its legal force in actuality. As one MSI panelist put it, "International conventions that Sudan ratified are an integral part of the constitution, but these provisions are negated [by the Constitution], which subjects them to legal regulation."

Legislation in force already circumvents speech rights by assigning broad power to government officials to police vague offenses. Freedom of speech is guaranteed as long as it does not contradict the existing laws and regulations, thus leaving the government with a great amount of latitude to apply the law and interpret its provisions. One of the

#### 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.

*War and instability also afford the regime excuses to restrict press freedoms, as the government "uses the active state of emergency in several states to justify censorship," according to one panelist.*

panelists gave an example of the Communications Act of 2001, which has a censorship clause that bans "pornography and 'disgraceful' websites," he said. The government used the clause in June 2011 to ban several expatriate websites, including *Al Rakoba*, *Sudaneseonline*, and *Hurriyat*, out of fear of potential spreading of anti-regime demonstrations. Even during the height of the protests, the government left unblocked several pornography sites supposedly targeted by the law, the panelist said.

War and instability also afford the regime excuses to restrict press freedoms, as the government "uses the active state of emergency in several states to justify censorship," according to one panelist.

The criminal code includes articles outlining imprisonment and fines as punishments for "defamation" and the distribution of "false news." Further complicating legal proceedings related to the media is the National and Intelligence Security Service (NISS) and its influence over the judiciary. NISS retains the ability to shut down newspapers, as it did with *Al Midan* and *Rai Alshaab* at various times throughout 2011 and 2012. In December 2012, *Al Midan* claimed that NISS had seized 84 editions of that year's print run. A year earlier, the agency detained and held 10 *Al Midan* staff members in isolation without charge for weeks.

The licensing process is essentially a vetting scheme for screening a proposed outlet's contents and the political affiliation of those applying for the license. The panelists said that finance is a limiting factor as well. As one panelist described, "Licensing for print media requires high fees, and is so difficult for broadcasters that even the ruling National Congress Party registered its TV channels, including *Al Shiroog*, in UAE rather than Sudan."

Another panelist posited, "Licensing fees are high because [the government] wants to decrease their number... and make sure that they are able to carry out their activities properly."

The panel also noted that NCPP has the power to withhold licenses without any cause. "The NCPP has the authority to withdraw licenses, controls appointments of editors, and has

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previously rejected some newspapers' board nominations merely for political reasons," one contributor summarized.

The government and its entourage control Sudanese industry, just as with other areas of society. In this sense, the government's effective domination of the media differs little from its control of other industries.

Political parties—particularly opposition parties—do not own television channels. Most of their newspapers have closed, either due to financial difficulties (*Saot Al Umma*, for example) or because of an NISS ban. The panelists noted that the capital necessary to start a news outlet is in short supply.

The government further controls media outlets through its advertising spending and interference with print distribution. As one panelist said, "Post-production censorship of newspapers by NISS is also an economic constraint." Panelists gave two examples: *Al Sahafa* newspaper, which reported a write-off of about \$5,200 from confiscations of print runs in September 2012; and *Al Gerida*, which reported a confiscation write-off of around \$2,700.

While they contended that crimes against journalists are infrequent, the panelists noted some extreme crimes, remembering the still-unsolved 2006 kidnapping and murder of *Al Wifag* editor-in-chief Mohamed Taha Mohamed Ahmed. Physical intimidation remains common, one panelist said, lamenting, "Life threats to journalists are not dealt with seriously, and official bodies might sometimes be behind these threats."

State media outlets are fully politicized and serve the goals of the ruling NCP. This should come as no surprise, one panelist said, as "all the directors of the official media outlets are appointed based on their loyalty to the government."

Libel has been a criminal offense since 1991. As one of the panelists described, "Journalists and chief editors are burdened with high fines or imprisonment when found guilty of libel; it is their burden to prove their innocence in such cases."

Sudan has taken measures to legally control weblogs. The IT Crimes Act of 2007 provides for prosecution of bloggers for defamation, but as one panelist noted, "Despite calls from officials requiring prosecuting bloggers, prosecuting them is not yet common."

A number of laws restrict access to information; among them are the Criminal Act 1991, the National Security Forces Act, the Law of Workbooks Deposit, the Law of National Archives, the Law of Literary and Artistic Works, the Law of the National Library, the Law of the National Research Centre, and the Law of Sudan News Agency.

Following the CPA, some stakeholders attempted to address the issues of free access and drafted the Classification and Access to Information Act. But one panelist described the act itself as restrictive, and pointed out, "Most media stakeholders were not part of the drafting process and discussion." The act has not yet been ratified.

To illustrate the state of information access, one panelist described an incident from May 2011: "Journalist Abualgasim Ibrahim was detained for hours by guards of the minister of finance. Ibrahim was carrying an official document that revealed the salary of an official—the director of Khartoum's stock exchange markets. When Ibrahim showed the document to the minister, the official burst into anger and ordered his guards to arrest him until he revealed the source of the document. The minister insisted that Ibrahim violated the law, since it criminalizes circulation of official documents." This event exemplifies how information access is actually inverted—the journalist must divulge where he/she obtained a document in order for an official to comment on any questions that the document raises.

International news agencies distribute information on Sudan that is accessible online and, in some cases, in print. Some political issues, news on Darfur, and Al Bashir's ICC indictment remain banned from media coverage, and the government attempts to restrict state information on these topics from being released.

In addition, the current Press and Printed Materials Act and the Law on Literary and Artistic Works ban some columnists, writers, and journalists from commenting to foreign press agencies on internal events that the government classifies as important to national security. One panelist pointed out that an instructional document circulated by NCPP requires outlets to comply with information "issued from the ministry of defense with regard to the Sudanese Armed Forces and military operations against armed insurgents."

Journalists must pass a government-mandated accreditation exam. Failure to pass entails being shut out of correspondent and reporter positions. "Even op-ed columnists sometimes require licensing," according to one panelist. He also explained that "additional requirements are needed for top editors, such as minimum experience of 10 years, and a rigorous political selection process controlled by the NCPP, with NISS's seen as having an impact." Even after a media professional receives accreditation, NCPP can suspend the accreditation at any time.



## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Sudan Objective Score: 1.29

Journalists and media practitioners try to meet professional standards, panelists said, but often efforts are stymied by technical and political constraints.

The panelists said that in general, journalists attempt to report objectively, using a variety of sources, consulting technical experts, and conducting background research. However, journalists often lack capacity and time, and are under severe budget limitations.

Sudan's 2009 ethics charter and 2010 code of conduct penned by editors and the journalist unions have not stopped poor practices, such as conflict of interest, payments for reporting, and op-ed writing. At some press conferences, one panelist noted, "journalists are given per diems to encourage positive reporting."

NISS officials often warn reporters, editors, and op-ed writers not to cross red lines—usually regarding issues that NISS classifies as national security concerns, as referenced above. One of the panelists described her experience as an op-ed writer. "When I signed my employment contract with *Alahdath* newspaper in 2008, I was warned verbally that if NISS banned any of my articles, I will not be paid for it," she said. The same was true when she signed on with *Al Ray Alaam* in 2011, as the editor in-chief warned her away from certain critiques, such as of the president. As a result, she had to write two versions of each article—a self-censored one for the newspaper, and an uncensored one for publishing on Internet websites and forums.

#### 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).

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Other panelists also elaborated on the censorship culture. "Self-censorship is common for top editors, though not journalists, since [editors] fear publishing something that will cause problems with the NISS," one panelist said. Another clarified the reason for the fear: "According to the Media Act, [editors-in-chief] are the first ones who will be detained and questioned about anything [objectionable] that their newspapers publish."

Some of the privately owned television channels, while maintaining close ties with the NCP, are starting to cover key events that the state media do not address. However, there are some events and issues that no one covers. For example, reporting on the HIV/AIDS epidemic has grown, while the ICC indictment of President Bashir, the June/July 2012 protests, and the Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile conflicts all remain taboo. The coverage of any topic or major event is regulated by NISS, which makes decisions based on safeguarding national security. One panelist added, "Despite these coverage restrictions, online media cover most of the key events that the print media cannot."

Journalists and other media professionals are better off with regard to pay levels as compared with other professions, such as civil service and education. But still there is "a disparity between the different levels of journalists and media players, and it is considered high," according to one panelist. Editors-in-chief are paid fairly in general, and some op-ed columnists attract high salaries according to their popularity. On the other hand, as one of the panelists stated, "junior journalists suffer not only from insufficient salaries, but also from payment delays of months." Such was the case of the newspaper *Alahdath*, which shut down and failed to pay its journalists their salaries for many weeks. The panelists said that *Alahdath* was not the first instance of this, as delays have occurred at *Soat Al Umma* and *Al Adwaa*, among others.

Television and radio channels prioritize entertainment over informational content. There is a deeply rooted notion prevailing amongst broadcasters that people prefer entertainment over social, economic, and political discussions. As one of the panelists explained, "I participated several

times in TV programs on National TV and other channels. It is common for the director of the program to advise participants to be 'light' and not very serious, so that they can attract their audience." According to one panelist, a great number of program directors add songs to their discussion programs at intervals, "believing that Sudanese will be bored from the discussion of serious issues and need musical entertainment to keep them watching or listening to the program."

Imbalance of news and entertainment is not an issue with newspapers; news content is considerable. However, quality and professionalism are lacking. News coverage is focused highly on Khartoum, with less than 10 percent of space devoted to other areas. The panelists also estimated that 60 percent of news comes from anonymous sources or websites without attribution, and that crime news contributes more than half of all content, due to its popularity. One panelist submitted that entertainment programs increased in the period after the conclusion of the CPA in 2005 until the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

Sudan News Agency has an ambitious plan to integrate modern technologies into its reporting operations, according to one panelist. In 2010, the Agency joined the MINOS system, which was established by the Union of Arab Radio Stations. This partnership has improved its means of gathering and distribution of news. However, one panelist decried the retention performance on the agency, describing it as "an expeller, with most of its established staff outside the country or aging, and with few youth personnel." He lamented that the Agency lacks sufficient funding to distribute professional reporting from all parts of the country.

In Khartoum, computers, Internet access, cameras, and mobile phones are generally available to journalists. Media members in remote areas do not have the equipment or technical support required for operating in the modern media industry. As described by one panelist, "in most of the rural villages, electricity and the Internet are rarely available. In some, even mobile phone coverage is not sustained during the day."

During the recent global economic crisis, some niche magazines emerged, such as *Eliaf*, and health sector publications. In addition, sports newspapers and social tabloids have been established.

Resources and technical capacity necessary for investigative reporting are lacking, and is at times blocked by the explicit instructions of NISS. In one recent development, the Sudanese Association of Investigative Reporters was formed, and is blogging quality investigative reports on a wide range of issues. Despite being confined to the Internet, the group is introducing the country to the concept of investigative journalism.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Sudan Objective Score: 1.21

On the surface, Sudan hosts a selection of news sources. But their coverage remains narrowly focused on non-controversial issues. Peripheral regions and highly sensitive questions, particularly related to conflict areas, remain unattended.

Sudan has state television broadcasters as well as privately owned channels, including *Blue Nile*, *Al Shiroog*, and *Omdurman*. One panelist tallied six social newspapers (down from seven in 2010), nine sports journals (down from 13 in 2010), and 26 daily newspapers (down from 29 in 2010). Two newspapers are in English and the rest in Arabic. Despite this diversity, the panelist said, "People tend to look for news from foreign media." During the June-July protests, Sudanese citizens largely followed *Al Jazeera*, *Al Hurra*, *Al Arabia* and BBC's Arabic channel's foreign press coverage of events in their own country. Officials attempted to bar foreign media coverage during the protests, using harassment, confiscation, and detention of foreign journalists and stringers.

When NISS sets out to communicate a determined message, all media outlets are prohibited from conveying alternate points of view. For example, in a forum held in July 2012, Bukhari Aljaali, a prominent figure in the Democratic Unionist Party, complained that news outlets had expunged statements from a government official about the participation of his party in government when the statements turned out to be false.

#### 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.

Social media networks have become news sources during the unfolding of events, including the June protests, despite government attempts to shut down domestic websites during crises. Facebook groups and Twitter feeds devoted to the protests proliferated quickly. With the independent website *Al Rakoba* receiving 1,700,000 hits daily, NISS moved to shut down that site and other independent websites, as threats to national security.

In the run-up to the secession of South Sudan, the state media were more attentive to the interests of the broader political spectrum. This was a rare occurrence, as the state media are largely pro-government and private outlets are generally partisan.

A decade ago, some foreign broadcasters were banned and sometimes jammed. The government restricted and confiscated satellite dishes at private homes. Now, such receivers are available even in poor villages and in far-flung provinces. One panelist recalled seeing a satellite “club” while in Marzouga, a poor village in the Nile province. “People collected money to put up a shelter and buy an electrical generator, TV, and satellite receiver,” the panelist explained. “BBC radio was popular, and there was an agreement with local authorities to broadcast BBC Arabic radio from four terrestrial sites in Sudan (Khartoum, Port Sudan, Wad Medani, and El Obeid), but it was halted in August 2010.”

State media is composed of the national state television channel, several territorial state channels (including Khartoum and Red Sea State, which converted to satellite-only broadcasting), *Omdurman*, *Quran*, FM100, and Sport 104. *Blue Nile* television is considered a de facto public media broadcaster due to the government’s major shareholdings. Its operations are under the control of the executive offices. Although the government is now composed of several parties and described by the ruling political party as a government of national unity, the state and state-held media are effectively under NCP’s control.

One panelist pointed out, “Most of the private media outlets are owned by the NCP personnel.” An exception he cited was *Al Ayam* newspaper, and noted that *Al Sahafa* and *Al Jareeda* were commended for adopting more professional and apolitical reporting standards.

One panelist maintained that state’s control of media was a major issue when SPLM had a share in the government until July 2011. As he explained, “I was representing one political party in the Joint Mechanism [that implemented the peace agreement] for the use of media during the 2010 elections, and there were other five party representatives... but not the NCP.” The NCP did not participate because its leadership did not need it, he said—the public media were effectively

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advertising for NCP in their news reporting and discussion programs all the time.

The Sudan Media Center is a nominally independent news source, providing reports for rebroadcast by local news outlets. However, the panelists said that they consider the Center to be an NISS tool, however, serving the interests of the ruling party. As one panelist recalled, during the supposed coup attempt of November 21, 2012, the center issued a news report assigning responsibility to opposition political parties, but the next day it was clear that NCP officials had taken part in the coup.

All newspapers have their own reporters, though few have correspondents in outlying provinces. Online sources began mostly as amalgamators, but eventually they developed their own reporters. The website *Al Rakoba*, which gained popularity quickly before being blocked, was considered the best in quality. The *Hurriyat* online news website started in 2010 and is headed by a prominent journalist, Al Haj Warrag. It has its own reporters and editors, and one panelist asserted that this website never plagiarizes. The Sudaneseonline News and discussion boards were the country’s first live crowd-sourced news service, as they involved thousands of bloggers from all around Sudan and in all countries. In addition, the website of radio *Dabanga* covers news from Darfur and provides three hours of daily coverage.

Ownership structures are opaque in most cases, and Sudanese media receive no significant foreign investment.

Despite the territory of Sudan having about 70 native languages (even after the secession of the south), national media outlets devote no attention to native languages, and instead focus on Arabic. One panelist said that state broadcasters “show very little respect to indigenous languages while reporting news,” with a few exceptions. Those include *Dabanga* and *Radio Nubian*, which started in 2012. Both stations are targeted by the NISS and “their reporters suffer from arrests and torture,” according to the panelist.



*Sudanile, the first online magazine, established in 2001, began collecting donations from readers and activists. That innovative approach eventually led to advertising gains, making the site sustainable.*

Media outlets have no hiring policy to ensure ethnic equality. One panelist described the newspaper *Intibaha* as discriminatory, but maintains that it escapes criticism as it is considered pro-government.

The panelists said that minority concerns remain underrepresented in Sudanese media. One panelist maintained, "Some officials, journalists, and bloggers have continuously resisted raising ethnic and gender issues, or consider them imported concepts from the West." Another noted, "Homosexuality is a very sensitive topic and newspapers cannot discuss it."

As mentioned previously, Sudan's centralized media system devotes less than 10 percent of coverage to peripheral areas. While some newspapers have sections for provincial news, they struggle to gather information and photographs in a timely manner. "Distributing newspapers in remote states is another problem," one panelist said. "They never reach some rural areas, or ...they reach them, but after days."

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

#### Sudan Objective Score: 1.07

Print and online media outlets depend on advertisements to large extent. Advertising is not distributed under market principles, and government advertising buys are biased.

As one panelist said, "Media outlets try to develop adequate accounting and financial practices, and prepare to follow profitable business plans," but they face enormous financial and economic difficulties—particularly the press. A great number of newspapers were hit by financial hardship in recent years, with *Al Ahdath* a central example.

Several online media outlets are improving their business profiles. *Sudanile*, the first online magazine, established in 2001, began collecting donations from readers and activists. That innovative approach eventually led to advertising gains, making the site sustainable. Another example is *Al Rakoba*, which was unprofitable for years and sustained by exiles in Saudi Arabia, but since 2011 has been profitable based on

advertising. One panelist noted, "Google advertisements alone cover all its expanded expenses as it moved to a larger server and started to pay for protection companies to minimize the damage from NISS hackers." Some sites, including *Hurriyat*, rely on donor funding, but most have plans to convert to paid advertising.

Advertising is well developed in Sudan, particularly for the telecommunications and food and beverage industries. But according to one panelist, "There are some who think that advertising prices in newspapers are low." Another panelist pointed out that cellular companies routinely get discounts of 20 to 35 percent. They generally prefer broadcasters over newspapers and online sources. Cellular companies such as ZAIN, MTN, and *Sudani* compete for market share, and are innovative in their advertising methods, but they are not immune to politically based decision making.

Some of the panelists cited reports that advertising has declined precipitously for newspapers, but classified advertisements, holiday greetings, congratulatory messages, and other forms of advertising have proliferated.

State media outlets receive support from government subscriptions, direct government subsidies (which are controlled by NCP), and profits from selling advertising space. A number of panelists commented on the unfairness of government advertising. One panelist argued that the state's newspapers devote too much content space to advertising. BN TV was also singled out for extensive advertising that crowds out programming. Another panelist said that the "government's advertisement is biased, and that private companies follow government footsteps." One editor-in-chief stated that "in 2011, and without any reference to market

#### 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.

considerations, a preferred newspaper enjoyed 386 government advertisements, while another one had only one." Another panelist explained, "Advertisements are a very efficient tool in taming newspapers, or otherwise let them go bust."

Wealthier advertisers prefer front-page reporting. But as one panelist argued, "If a newspaper is ready to sell its front page, then it is ready to sell everything!" The panel admitted that sales are not nearly sufficient to sustain newspaper operations, so selling advertisements and other paid content on the front page may be unavoidable.

Media outlets perform demographic research in an ad-hoc fashion—"in their editorial board meetings," as one panelist said. Some channels use interactive programs that give rudimentary viewer information. But the standard tools of audience demographics research, focus groups, and surveys to formulate media strategic plans are not seen in Sudan.

In practice, NCPP is tasked with releasing circulation figures for newspapers. Generally, these figures are "accepted by journalists, while some challenge them, stating that they are based on the figures provided by each newspaper and thus lack accuracy and credibility," as one panelist said. Another panelist pointed out that distribution companies issue their own reports, which vary from the NCPP figures as well as the newspapers' own.

Google Analytics provides reliable reporting on the audiences for domestic websites. Some sites, such as Alexa, provide data on traffic. One panelist acknowledged that owners and advertisers recognize the importance of this data and are increasingly conscious of its terminology. In contrast, however, circulation figures do not play a significant role in newspapers' advertising, as other political factors outweigh market rationale.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Sudan Objective Score: 1.07

The media sector is divided between those that serve the government and those that serve the public, and the same is true of the Sudanese unions, associations, and other institutions intended to support the sector. NGOs struggle to provide services in a strict environment where foreign influence is a cause for suspicion. Training for young journalists remains insufficient to meet the need.

The only national trade union in Sudan is the Sudanese Workers' Trade Union Federation. The federation is an umbrella organization for 16 sub-unions, and was established

*A number of NGOs support freedom of speech, but their work is still subject to NISS's continuing harassment.*

in 1992 after all other unions in the country dissolved. As one panelist described it, the federation is considered widely to be "a mere government tool." One of its sub-unions is the broad-reaching union that covers the press, as well as many other professional sectors.

Sudan is a member of some regional trade unions, such as the Arab Broadcasting Union, which itself is a member in the World Broadcasting Union. Sudan's participation in these bodies is not through the Federation, but rather through the executive branch, in the form of the Sudanese General Corporation for Radio and Television Broadcasting. One panelist noted that Sudanese broadcasters "can take advantage of [the Arab Broadcasting Union's] limited capacity-building activities." But in general, as another panelist said, "The work of these unions is not intended to support the profession, and coordination is absent among them." He added, "A great number of the members are from outside the media profession."

Sudan has several journalist associations. One is the Sudanese Journalists' Union (SJU), which one panelist described as "under government control." The Sudanese Writers' Union, by contrast, is independent, as is the online-based Association of Investigative Reporters.

Several panelists commented on SJU's challenges. One panelist noted, "SJU provides journalists from all media formats with capacity building opportunities. For example,

## 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.

it is now offering English language training. But this is very limited and granted according to political preferences.” The panelist added, “SJU’s elections are always embroiled in fraud accusations and boycotted by many.” According to another panelist, “SJU usually remains silent when journalists’ rights are violated, but sometimes intervenes to save face for the government—such as in the infamous Lubna Husein case, when [SJU] intervened and paid a fine on behalf of Hussein after she embarrassed the government by refusing to pay, proclaiming she was ready for whipping.”

Another contradiction in SJU’s work involved its appeal for the release of Egyptian journalist Shaimaa Adil in July 2012, in which SJU criticized the “strong ties between Sudanese and Egyptian journalists’ unions, and between the sister countries.” Two Sudanese journalists, Mohamed Al Asbat and Marwa Al Tigani, were arrested with Adil but not mentioned in the appeal, as one panelist noted. Many journalists denounced SJU’s focus on Shaimaa and not its own members.

Sudan has an active civil society, with a great number of independent NGOs. There are also many government-owned NGOs. Their work is governed by the Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act of 2006, which created the Humanitarian Aid Committee to monitor NGOs. A number of NGOs support freedom of speech, but their work is still subject to NISS’s continuing harassment.

One of the panelists described the current environment for NGOs. “Many protests [are] organized by the Sudanese Journalists’ Network and others defending freedom of speech. They usually occur during periods of journal closures, arrests of journalists, and intensification of pre-censorship practices.” In May 2012, he continued, “many NGOs and media bodies—including the Sudanese Writers’ Union, the Sudanese Film Group, the Sudanese Defense of Rights and Freedoms’ Committee, Al Khatim Adlan Enlightenment Center, and Teeba Press—participated in a successful protest at the NCPP’s premises, advocating on behalf of prominent journalist Faisal M. Salih in the face of NISS’s grilling.” Junior journalists usually take part in these protests, while prominent journalists (particularly editors-in-chief) remain absent, one panelist said.

New entrants to the profession receive training that is generally provided by their prospective employers, and focuses on practical elements. One panelist noted the tendency for employers to seek free labor in the process. “The trainings last for long periods, which is tantamount to exploitation of these young journalists, since they are not paid for their work,” he said.

According to another panelist, “Students in high schools and universities publish their own bulletins and occasionally

even print magazines.” For example, students of *Alahfad* University for Women publish *Alahfad* magazine under faculty supervision, which gives them the opportunity to gain practical experience.

Most who complete study programs fail to find jobs in the sector. The number of graduates in the field keeps increasing, while individuals from other sectors that are struggling to find work have shifted to the field of journalism as well. One of the panelists explained the effect of the reduced talent pool. “The quality of graduates is poor in all higher education institutions, not only media colleges. Media outlets are usually not satisfied with the quality of graduates,” the panelist said.

Limited free short-term training is provided by NGOs such as Teeba Press. Nasaq Media Center also provides some training opportunities. The politicized SJU provides free training opportunities, albeit subject to political considerations. Panelists also mentioned international institutions such as the National Democratic Institute and other USAID-funded organizations, and noted in particular their work leading up to the 2010 elections. Some outlets, particularly online news sites, have tried to provide journalism training for their teams. *Hurriyat* organized a four-day training workshop for its journalists in January 2012.

Equipment sources are not as politicized they once were. One panelist commented, “In the past, a photocopier was treated like a machine gun” by the authorities. Now, economic stagnation and high taxes and customs duties from which “the government’s friends are exempted” are more important equipment issues for the independent media, he said.

The panelists noted accusations from some in the press of ties between NISS and some of the top printing houses, and that the connection may be behind some selectivity evident in the print services that they provide to journalists. One panelist said, “The newspapers which are supporting the government’s political stance are given opportunities to print on later deadlines, so that they can include the latest news updates. On the other hand, newspapers that are anti-government have to print early, so that they miss any new news—which affects their sales.”

Some panelists noted that the distribution of newspapers does not correspond to their audiences, despite the desires of their publishers. For instance, *Soat Al Umma*, which has ties to the Umma National Party, complained that distributors send a great number of its copies to bookshops in places where its membership is minimal, and very few copies where membership is great. Another panelist stated flatly, “Distribution is subject to political considerations.”

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ICT infrastructure is developing steadily, but Internet connectivity is still slow, particularly outside the capital. "Mobile Internet is very popular now, particularly with the increasing use of smart phones in Sudan. However, there is significant disparity between Khartoum and the provinces, and between urban and rural areas in general," one panelist summarized.

## **List of Panelists**

*Due to the oppressive political environment, panelists for Sudan agreed to participate only on condition of anonymity. The panel discussion was held on December 10, 2012.*