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MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2017

DEVELOPMENT
OF SUSTAINABLE
INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN
SRI LANKA

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2017

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Sri Lanka**



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2017

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Sri Lanka

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SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka

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But in 2015, with the election of President Maithripala Sirisena, the government created new opportunities to improve media independence, freedom, and diversity. As an election promise, the present government re-launched investigations of the murders and disappearances of former journalists—though none of the cases have been resolved thus far.



SRI LANKA

Photo: Raveendra Pushpakumara

Three decades of ethnic war in Sri Lanka have resulted in a divided nation and a polarized media sector. Both the Sri Lankan government and the separatist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) used the media as a tool for restricting information and promoting propaganda, violence, and suspicion. Many journalists working for Sinhalese, English, and Tamil media outlets were killed during the war. Those already isolated by the conflicts, living in the north and east of the country, have been further marginalized. The fear cultivated among journalists during the war has led to the culture of self-censorship practiced by the media today. Media organizations were placed under strict government control at the height of the final phase of war in 2007 and 2008. And in the immediate aftermath, after the brutal murder of *The Sunday Leader* editor and founder Lasantha Wickrematunge, many Sri Lankan journalists fled the island, fearing for their safety.

But in 2015, with the election of President Maithripala Sirisena, the government created new opportunities to improve media independence, freedom, and diversity. As an election promise, the present government re-launched investigations of the murders and disappearances of former journalists—though none of the cases have been resolved thus far. The government has shown a willingness to engage in media reform, with rights groups mobilizing a base of support for such initiatives. Websites previously blocked arbitrarily and illegally for political reasons have been unblocked, and social media are now playing key roles in addressing governance issues. But journalists and politicians alike are critical of social media’s sensationalist coverage, unprofessional use of sources, unreliable research, and lack of accuracy.

The government also recognized access to information as a fundamental right, through the 19th constitutional amendment. The minister and deputy minister of parliamentary reforms and mass media have promised to usher in progressive solutions that support community media, asserting their commitment to free speech. The political dynamics of the country have clearly altered the overall context of the media industry, providing unexpected immunity to exercise the freedom of expression.

The overall score for the Sri Lanka Media Sustainability Index (MSI) reflects the current landscape. Despite political and economic progress, the media face increasing political influence and financial instability that threaten the future. This year panelists affirmed the current financial crisis that the media industry is facing. They noted its impact on media freedom and progress, as it relates to ownership and transparency. Panelists also highlighted the evolution of digital technology, a proliferation of online platforms, and a lack of accountability as the emerging issues affecting the industry.

SRI LANKA at a glance

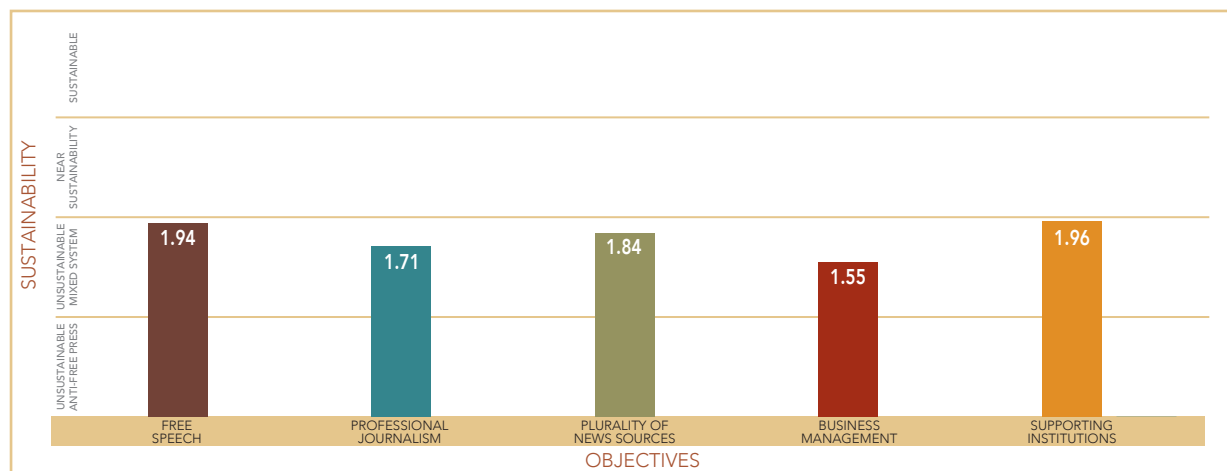
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 22.235 million (2016 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Colombo
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Sinhalese 74.9%, Sri Lankan Tamil 11.2%, Sri Lankan Moors 9.2%, Indian Tamil 4.2%, other 0.5% (2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religion (% of population):** Buddhist 70.2%, Hindu 12.6%, Muslim 9.7%, Roman Catholic 6.1%, other Christian 1.3%, other 0.05% (2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Sinhala (official and national language) 74%, Tamil (official and national language) 18%, other 8% (2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2015-Atlas):** \$79.6 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **GNI per capita (2015-PPP):** \$11,500 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **Literacy rate:** 92.6% (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Maithripala Sirisena (since 2015)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 12 daily, 36 non-daily (Pressreference.com); Television Stations: 22 (Lanka Market Research Bureau, 2015); Radio Stations: 51 (Lanka Market Research Bureau, 2015)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** top five daily: *Lankadeepa* (Sinhala, 250,000), *Divaina* (Sinhala, 156,000), *Virakesari* (Tamil, 140,000), *Ada* (Sinhala, 110,000), *Daily News* (English, 88,000) (self-reported as collected by Wikipedia entry)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** \$520 Million (Nielsen, 2013)
- > **News agencies:** Lankapuvath
- > **Internet subscribers:** 6.09 million (internetworldstats.com)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2017: SRI LANKA



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.

Scores for all years may be found online at <https://www.irex.org/msi>

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Sri Lanka Objective Score: 1.94

The brutality of the civil war in Sri Lanka and its aftermath have impacted free speech and engendered fear and psychosis among the public. However, panelists said that the country has seen a notable improvement in legal and social norms. They cited the Reporters Without Borders Media Freedom Index¹, which ranked Sri Lanka 141 in 2016, up from 165 in 2015. The panelists also noted that Freedom House assessed the status of press freedom in Sri Lanka to be “Not Free” in 2016, although “improved sharply after the January 2015 election of President Maithripala Sirisena.”²

Pradeep Weerasinghe, a senior lecturer at the University of Colombo and chairperson of the National Secretariat for Media Reform, noted that the Sri Lankan constitution refers to the importance of freedom of speech. Article 14 (1) states that “every citizen is entitled to freedom of speech and expression, including publication.” However, he explained, Article 15 restricts these rights when in the interests of “racial and religious harmony or in relation to parliamentary privilege, contempt of court, defamation and incitement to an offence.” The extent to which a person can exercise free expression is not well defined, Weerasinghe added.

¹ Reporters Without Borders. 2016 World Press Freedom Index, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

² Freedom House. Freedom of the Press 2016 – Sri Lanka Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/sri-lanka>

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.

Freedom of speech was restricted further when the government imposed the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Emergency Regulations under the Public Security Ordinance. The regulations empower the judiciary to prosecute if it deems speech a threat to national security. According to the panel, these laws and regulations have been used indiscriminately to censor the media, seize printing presses, and jail journalists. The Prevention of Terrorism Act also specifically prohibits printing, publishing, or distribution without the prior written approval of a competent authority, and prohibits publication of any matter that might incite violence. However, panelists said that there have not been many cases in the recent past in which journalists were formally prosecuted for violating this law.

Panelists highlighted the bias of the judiciary, with the Jayaprakash Sittampalam Tissanayagam case as an example. The High Court sentenced him to the maximum prison term for publishing articles criticizing the government’s treatment of Sri Lankan Tamil civilians affected by the war, and for raising funds for the magazine under the guise of promoting terrorism. He was granted bail in 2010, and soon after pardoned by former President Mahinda Rajapakse. But the case reflected the flaws within the judicial system, given the court’s complete disregard of evidence to support the defendant.

Even though journalists have long been harassed or even murdered, the persecution of journalists had been very limited in recent times, with few cases to capture attention. However, journalists that report alternative points of view and criticize the government have been branded as traitors. Over time, this has resulted in negative psychological effects and self-censorship.

Sivasubramaniam Raguram, a senior lecturer at the University of Jaffna, commented, “The government treats journalists as criminals and tries to create a sense of guilt in their minds, to make them question their actions. For example, when journalists take photographs of certain events, the military tries to seize these photos and tries to portray them as criminals.” Thevanayagam Premananth, chief editor of *Uthayan* newspaper, agreed, and described his experience working for a Tamil newspaper in northern Sri Lanka. “Journalists are not seen as offenders, but as criminals—and sometimes terrorists—and there is no protection for us in the north.”

Political intimidation remains a universal issue, affecting freedom of speech and permitting political power to be used as a tool used to censor the media. Premananth shared his experience: “If politicians want to threaten us, they will invoke the defamation law. I have been prosecuted under the defamation law in eight cases from 2012 to 2013. Four cases were filed by politicians, and the remaining by the military. The law is interpreted in a manner to prosecute and jail journalists if the government wants to.” Premananth went on to cite another example: a case against his paper filed by a northern military

commander. The officer demanded that the paper republish an article to state that a person of interest died of natural causes, when in fact the body was found near the army camp.

Licensing and registration of media outlets in Sri Lanka remains controversial. The Ministry of Parliamentary Reforms and Mass Media (MPRMM) is the regulatory body tasked with issuing licenses, under the authority of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Act No. 37 of 1966 and the Sri Lanka Rupawahini Corporation Act 6 of 1982. MPRMM also enforces and operationalizes the National Media Policy, which was created under the previous government. The policy was highly criticized by international organizations, including the International Federation of Journalists.

After receiving a MPRMM license, all radio and television stations need to obtain a frequency, which is allocated by the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL). TRCSL has the mandate to control and regulate radio frequencies and has the power to withdraw or suspend use. Kanchana Dassanayake, editor of *Ada* newspaper, explained that TRCSL has been issuing frequencies for its “friends.” As an example, he said, a few years ago the chairperson of TRCSL reportedly issued eight radio frequencies to his brother.

Mohammed Fairouz, chief editor of *Vidiwelli*, an online Tamil weekly, emphasized that licensing for radio frequencies is under serious threat, as political supporters or financially robust organizations are prioritized. “It’s apparent that the people in Sri Lanka cannot own an outlet unless they are affiliated with politicians, businessmen, or a political party,” he said.

In Weerasinghe’s view, “Radio waves and television frequencies are public property and a limited resource, and should be administered in a way that is transparent that benefits the people.” He added that Sri Lanka is “diverse and pluralistic, and therefore the ownership should reflect this diversity. An open-tender system could foster greater transparency, but in Sri Lanka, the distribution of frequencies is not transparent, and influenced by political friendships. Electronic media stations are not established based on public demand, but based on political affiliations.”

All news websites and online platforms are required to register with MPRMM. In 2011, the director general of the government’s information department issued a press release stating that all websites carrying news about Sri Lanka would be required to register with MPRMM for accreditation. However, this move was largely criticized, and at present, the ministry requires a registration fee of LKR 20,000 (\$130) and an annual fee of LKR 10,000 (\$65) for online news sites.

The panel reported that MPRMM considers all unregistered websites unlawful, and that the Sri Lankan apex court has granted permission to continue with its request to register

websites that disseminate news and information. The Supreme Court also ordered the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) to conduct a full inquiry into websites operating in Sri Lanka and register them with MPRMM. However, the ministry has been widely criticized by international and national organizations, as some advocates believe that it keeps registered websites under government surveillance.

Roar.lk chief editor Gazala Anver disagreed, explaining that he sees registration “as a necessary evil. It is a bit too early to say whether registration is used against media outlets. Within the online media space, anyone can publish anything; therefore, there is a necessity to see some form of accountability. Registration helps to know who is working in this space, as dissemination of information online is sometimes chaotic. There will be scrutiny, whether you register your website or not.”

Panelists referenced the International Federation of Journalist’s Ninth Annual Press Freedom Report, which stated that an increasing number of media houses are coming under government control through political maneuvering. Media owners have become government MPs or ministers, and editors have become close affiliates of powerful ministers, with licenses for television and radio given to political allies. Thus, a large number of companies form policies and produce content in favor of the government or certain politicians. M.J.R. David, a former producer with the BBC and senior lecturer at University of Jayawardenapura, observed, “The legal and social mechanism needs to be supported by the people of the country, and they should be aware that freedom of expression is a fundamental right that will allow them to make informed decisions. Pressure from citizens can foster a culture of freedom of expression.”

The market entry requirement for the media industry is dependent on a potential company’s revenue strategy and business proposition. Like other companies in Sri Lanka, media entities must be registered under the company registrar and abide by the Companies Act. However, panelists noted that tax regulations grant significant concessions for media companies, including tax-free ink for printing newspapers, no added tax for importing media equipment, and no tax levied on news distribution. These benefits do apply to private media companies, but government media institutions are far more privileged, with duty-free status to purchase their equipment, for example.

Furkan Be Ifthikar, a senior journalist with Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), also shared that village-level gangs are known to make threats and intimidate journalists. Sulochana Ramiah, deputy editor of *Ceylon Today*, said, “Even during the post-war context, the fear psychosis remains prevalent in our writing.” She also stated that intimidation is exerted through phone calls that continue to foster fear among journalists. Other panelists agreed, noting that when journalists report on the military, they often receive

complaints by phone—which leads many journalists to believe that they are under surveillance.

Panelists concluded that Sri Lanka has no public media sector, and no policies to govern the relationship between state media, influence, and the government. All key positions within state media organizations are filled by government officials. People working for state media organizations are treated as government employees and are expected to be loyal to their employer. Darshana Ashoka, news editor at SLBC and visiting lecturer at the University of Colombo, observed, “In Sri Lanka, what we have is state-owned media, as they do not fulfill the criteria of providing a public service.” Raveenda Pushpakumara, former journalist of *Irudina*, commented, “It is clear that government-backed media organizations face a significant amount of political interference, which undermines their editorial independence.”

Previous governments have strongly enforced laws on libel and slander as related to criticism of public officials. Some libel cases have been prolonged for years, which places a burden on media entities financially and timewise. Therefore, many outlets employ self-censorship policies on topics such as national security, corruption, and human rights violations. Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum Director M.C. Rasmin explained that “until 2002, defamation was a criminal offense in Sri Lanka, with a two-year jail term under the penal code. However, it was repealed under the Ranil Wickremesinghe government, under growing pressure from media rights groups and associations who advocated for the abolition of section 479 of the penal code.” Rasmin added that Sri Lanka has emerged as a trailblazer—one of the first countries in the region to repeal its criminal defamation laws. Such cases are now handled by civil courts.

Today, such cases claim damages averaging LKR 50 million (\$325,000). Government officials and political figures continue to bring civil cases, sometimes involving excessively large fines against press outlets.

In 2007, MPRMM released a National Media Policy brief, which establishes guidelines to prevent the media from harming the Sri Lankan national identity, and subjecting any person or community to contempt, insult, disgrace, or hate speech. Media observers noted that the focus once again is on the responsibility of the media, rather than on the government’s role in balancing media freedom with the protection of other social interests.

Sri Lanka has seen considerable progress with the right of access to information, reinforced by the present government’s commitment. On February 3, 2017, the government implemented the Right for Information Act, ensuring state office transparency, preserving citizens’ rights to active engagement in governance issues, and promoting accountability for the

Sri Lankan public. Despite these positive overtures, panelists pointed out Transparency International Sri Lanka’s statement that accession rights can only be exercised if the public is aware of its rights. The government continues to be criticized for not increasing access to information, and Anver also indicated that comparatively, journalists that represent online media platforms have a greater challenge to access information. They are not taken seriously by public officials, given their reputation to be ruthless—which further undermines their legitimacy.

With the evolution of technology and telecommunication, the media are privileged with many sources that provide information. They include foreign sources and digital and online media platforms and there are no restrictions placed by the Sri Lankan government on their access or use. Strong copyright laws also prevent media companies from recklessly using material without permission. Given the minimal restrictions on accessing local and international news and news sources, this indicator scored the highest of all indicators.

The state does not impose restrictions on becoming a journalist in Sri Lanka, and the panelists did not note any legal regulations for practicing the profession. Journalism is now a popular field, with the advancement of online media; and the new “hot topic” is citizen journalism, introduced to capture issues in communities.

However, Pushpakumara indicated that access to state events and programs is restricted to the number of media IDs that the government grants. For a journalist to obtain an accreditation card, the government requires a minimum of one year of documented field experience. Editors submit lists of journalist names for accreditation to attend government events, but the government limits the number of IDs it issues to private media organizations. A number of media professionals are excluded simply because they are freelance journalists. The situation is worse and cumbersome for writers at online media platforms.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Sri Lanka Objective Score: 1.71

Panelists awarded low scores for the quality of journalism in Sri Lanka. They noted that journalism quality and professional standards correlate with the low plurality of public and private news sources (discussed later in Objective 3).

Historically, the Sri Lankan government and private owners have controlled media ownership. These owners include politicians, business leaders, religious leaders, and their affiliates—but not the public. According to Weerasinghe, “The public service model is not practiced in Sri Lanka. Even state media [have] become the voice of the ruling party, even when

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).

the government changes. State media [don't] offer a platform for opposing or different views."

In many instances, there is evidence that objectivity has been abandoned in reports, and panelists declared this to be an unethical practice. "Most of the newsrooms use press conferences and press releases as their only source of facts, and they do not double check with another source," Weerasinghe said. "It doesn't seem like journalists in Sri Lanka are using multiple sources and checking facts before publishing or broadcasting news."

The panelists noted that entry to other professions often requires a GCE (General Certificate of Education) Ordinary Level pass, but even that is not the minimum qualification to become a journalist. As a result, media outlets face the challenge of maintaining a level of professionalism among journalists. Raguram commented from the perspective of a regional journalist, noting that most regional or rural journalists are freelancers, working part-time for media and at full-time jobs elsewhere.

Sri Lanka has a widely accepted code of professional practice, which is governed by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL). PCCSL has been the only self-regulatory body to receive and settle complaints against print media—making history as the first self-regulatory body of the press in Asia. The National Association of Photographers has also developed a separate code of ethics for photojournalists. In addition, MPRMM introduced a national media policy recently, but it was highly criticized by media freedom groups locally and internationally.

In Ashoka's view, many journalists are unaware of the ethical reporting standards and universal journalism norms on impartiality, accuracy, and diversity of sources. However, Dassanayake and other panelists held that Sinhalese- and

English-language media outlets are aware of standards, but grapple with putting them into practice, as they have vested commercial interests. Weerasinghe agreed, saying, "The code of ethics is not just a problem for journalists, but also for owners and managers. All media institutions have a code of ethics, but the journalists have difficulty abiding by these ethics, due to the pressures they face."

Raguram also highlighted the lack of training available for journalists. Most of the new recruits "struggle with language proficiency and basic concepts in reporting. Some journalists don't even have the faintest idea about how to distinguish between feature articles, news writing, or op-ed pieces." The panelists also lamented the wide gap between professional media training classes and Sri Lanka's market requirements.

Panelists noted that the emerging use of social media, particularly by youth, also poses a threat to professional standards and journalism quality in Sri Lanka. Ramiah said that young and emerging journalists are often more competitive in the social media space, which is not governed by ethics codes or editorial policies.

Censorship has been an issue in Sri Lanka, most notably during the civil war. The government and LTTE propagated a culture of fear, including making threatening phone calls to journalists; as a result, journalists would not report on the "full truth," according to the panelists.

"Self-censorship is a way of life for journalists in Sri Lanka," Ramiah said. She described the cycle of producing stories: "When we choose an interesting topic, we first look whether we can write about it. Then we try to balance the story—making it politically correct. And when we inquire [with] the interviewee, he or she will bully us and call up the management to lodge a complaint. The management intervenes and demands that we revise our story."

Premananth asserted that he practices self-censorship "all the time" to safeguard his younger journalists. He said he has lost all his senior editorial journalists—some have been killed, and others have left Sri Lanka to seek asylum.

Sukumar Rockwood, director of the PCCSL, reaffirmed that the owners of many media organizations are politically connected, and if a story does not align with the political ideology of the organization's "friends," then journalists are asked to revise their stories. Rockwood explained that self-censorship is very often seen as a symptom of the lack of media pluralism, as well as the ethnic conflict. However, panelists noted that religion, culture, local administration, politicians, and community leaders also influence the milieu of self-censorship.

Panelists maintained that journalists do cover key issues and events, but struggle with the decision of what issues to cover as they tussle with media owners. Journalists are largely interested

in political parties and politicians, and the overall political climate in the country. However, most media cover issues that are more urban-centric; rural issues are rarely covered, as they are not regarded as “popular,” panelists said. Media based in the capital of Colombo are very much dependent on provincial correspondents for reports on outer areas. Whether the issues or events get covered depends on a correspondent’s interest level and political orientation. Many media outlets have their own specific target market segments, and are not able to cover all issues and events.

The panel members also discussed the role online media have played in what topics are covered, and the public’s access to the information. Online media are regarded as a threat to more traditional outlets and have increased competition. Rasmin explained, “There is an emerging trend: online news websites are increasingly becoming popular in both languages. In the last year alone, more than 100 news websites have emerged. They often cover regional issues far better than mainstream media, despite the quality of journalism. Governance, peace, reconciliation, transparency, development, local health issues, and education are covered—issues that are not covered by Colombo-centered social media sites.”

Journalists are not paid enough in comparison with other professions, and the majority of the panelists noted that pay is a key issue for media in Sri Lanka. Media companies continue to struggle to generate revenue and motivate their staff members to remain. Due to the financial burdens many journalists encounter, they often choose to maximize income by working as freelance agents for multiple organizations and outlets.

Fairooz explained that parents invest LKR 200,000 (\$1,300) for a journalism diploma, which could possibly lead to an entry-level job at a monthly salary of LKR 10,000 (\$65). By comparison, if parents invest in an IT diploma, the monthly pay for an entry-level position in this field would be LKR 30,000 (\$195).

The Sri Lanka media sector is experiencing a surge in entertainment programming, with viewership steadily growing. The public is increasingly interested in gossip and tabloid-driven content. This trend has influenced the way outlets present news, as they seek to appeal to the general audience. Fairooz gave an example: the popular television channel, Derana, has moved its regular news broadcast time from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., due to viewers’ demand for its series on *Mega TV*. Fairooz said that this is a competitive move, as other channels broadcast their news programming at 8 p.m.

The panelists discussed how newspapers also adapt similar strategies to stimulate consumption and increase revenue. The panelists explained how the media sensationalize celebrity news, which is perceived to be the most interesting information for public consumption. David commented, “Important issues remain sidelined, and we have lost a wide range of information

because of our interest in entertainment news.” Ramiah said, “Many newspapers tend to publish a serious issue on the front page of their publication next to a gorgeous model” as a way to increase the appeal of the publication to the potential consumer. Ashoka added, “Infotainment is not a bad thing. But celebrating and dramatizing the news is not good.”

The availability of facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news is dependent on the media company’s purchasing capacity. The panelists said that to produce and distribute news, outlets use modern equipment such as smart phones, laptops, and the latest software, along with social media platforms that are often free. However, Raguram noted that regional newspapers in Jaffna still use letterpress to print their papers, and commented that having technology itself is not enough to improve the quality of a media outlet. “Attitudes play a major role. And in Jaffna, we still do not want to change our technologies, even though there is access to these new technologies,” he said.

Niche reporting and programming exist in Sri Lanka; however, small media companies try to maximize their resources by using the same journalist to cover all subject matter. Niche subjects receive minimum attention, and particularly so in radio.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Sri Lanka Objective Score: 1.84

In Sri Lanka, information and news are reaching audiences faster than ever, as citizens are accessing content online. This level of access has led to what the panelists describe as “an overload of information.” Overall the score for Objective 3 reflects gaps in reliability and plurality of news in the current landscape. The panelists concluded that a majority of the Sri Lankan media are quoting very limited sources, and are not exploring multiple viewpoints. Reliability and objectivity are not principles adhered to by outlets, and the commercial orientation of media, lack of diversity in media pluralism, and lack of professional standards often compromise objectivity.

As a result, social media activists have launched their own platforms to criticize the authenticity and reliability of news. Such social media activists make their own video documentaries to keep public aware of how mainstream media mislead them with false information. David explained, “The lack of plurality in news is an issue in Sri Lanka. Reading newspapers, watching television, and listening to the radio [are] difficult, as the content is not reliable, and you have to read a number of different papers to verify the content.”

Some panelists noted that despite these poor practices being normal, a few news outlets do more research on the press release and factual analysis before publishing a story. David

commented, “We don’t see different points of view in the media. We only get a limited version of views. There are a number of people in Sri Lanka who would welcome different perspectives; however, our media are politically polarized.”

In the past year, more than 100 village based news websites have begun to operate as media sources for citizens. These websites mostly translate news contents from mainstream Sinhala and English platforms. These websites do not function with permanent staff, and do not independently send journalists to gather information. Panelists also noted that the majority of such news websites are supported by regional politicians or businesspeople. There is no identifiable model followed to generate income, except most websites accommodate advertisements. There are promising digital-first startups such as Roar.lk, Aniwa.lk, readme.lk and Aniwa.lk. However, continuous intervention is required to strengthen these websites, and the capacity of these sites to be the primary source for rural populations is questionable.

During the war, many media outlets were banned, censored, or restricted in some form or another, thereby affecting citizen access to information. Online news portals that carry alternative political views were also restricted. On the eve of the 2015 presidential elections, several Sri Lankan news websites (including Lankaenews.com, Lankanewsweb.com, Infolanka.com, and Srilankaguardian.org) were also blocked for several hours as the results were announced. Citizen journalist sites such as Groundviews.org and Vikalpa.org were also blocked in 2011. While a number of outlets were directly speaking to the diaspora, the government of Sri Lanka justified its censorship by stating that the media was inciting communal disharmony among domestic citizens.

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.

Nonetheless, the current regime has taken a step forward by removing these restrictions once placed upon outlets to increase citizen access to information, although the panelists noted that some of these outlets remain under government surveillance.

The circulation figures of newspapers are impressive, according to the panelists. They cited that 493,000 copies of daily newspapers are in circulation, and 720,000 Sunday newspapers. This amounts to approximately 25 copies of dailies and 36 copies of Sunday papers per 1000 inhabitants.³ According to Dassanayake, the Sunday paper costs LKR 60 (\$.40) and the daily newspaper LKR 30 (\$.20). Panelists said that they believe the cost impacts citizens’ access to newspapers and their motivation to access free information online—particularly among youth, who seek to use new technology and to save money.

In rural areas, not everyone embraces technology, and it is still not affordable to go online, so international news and outlets are still out of reach. Dassanayake confirmed, “There are no legal restrictions to access domestic and international media. Even though we have smartphones and can access many websites, downloading time is an issue, and the cost of data is an issue. Many young people on Facebook only check headlines, and often don’t click on the link to read the story, because if they click on the link, they will incur a data charge.”

Raguram described the accessibility situation in Jaffna: “For the Tamil audience, magazines come from Tamil Nadu in India, and these magazines are costly due to import costs—thus making it difficult for middle class Sri Lankan Tamils to access this information on a regular basis.”

Weerasinghe commented that state media outlets and organizations do not fill the informational gap left by commercial media; most represent the voice of the political party or the government in power. The state media are biased in their reporting and will refrain from reporting news that is potentially harmful to the government. However, as the panelists explained, recently the government has urged state media outlets to adopt independent views in their reporting. But this has led to some instability and confusion regarding these outlets, which have only ever aligned with the government. State media outlets are unable to embrace the recent development, and citizens have lost interest in state media. They regard them as unreliable sources of information, and view them as an arm for government propaganda.

In Sri Lanka, outlets do have access to international news agencies, such as Reuters, AP, and AFP. The country’s only local independent news agency is Lanka Puwath, which is active but not quoted regularly. Premananth noted that there are no agencies in Tamil that produce news. According to Raguram, during the civil war, one agency in the north had provided

³ World Association of Newspapers, World Press Trends, 2006 (2006), at p.406.

alternative points of view on the conflict, as a counterbalance to Lanka Puwath. However, financial constraints make independent news-gathering agencies an unviable model in Sri Lanka.

Businesses and politicians own most of the country's private media organizations. Some private media organizations are completely sustained by revenue generated from circulation and advertising sales. The majority of private media organizations are operated by a group of companies, the revenues of which are directed to the media outlets. According to the panelists, generally the public is unaware of the ownership of private media. Even in the case of transparent ownership, the public cannot always discern the driving agenda. Panelists indicated that ownership of online media platforms is even more ambiguous, which creates issues around trust and credibility. Rasmin noted that when the media ownership is widely dominated by a limited number of actors, and driven towards political benefit and profit, fair and objective reporting is compromised.

With regard to catering to social interests and minority issues, panelists shared the sentiments of Mano Ganesan, a Sri Lankan trade unionist, politician, and minister at the Ministry of National Co-existence Dialogue and Official Languages. He stated that the Sinhala press is more interested in publishing political stories and does not show much interest in highlighting the numerous abductions or other problems faced by minority communities.⁴ The panelists noted that media outlets are inclined to be aligned with their ethnic bases, and do not share news from the rural areas or other regions. Most media outlets focus on a unique segment of the country, therefore bi-lingual or tri-lingual channels rarely exist, out of fear of losing the market share of the target audience.

News reporting varies between print, electronic, and community media. The panelists debated on the extent to which media equally cover all areas. Ashoka noted, "There is a question of whether we can be satisfied with the balance of the local, international, and regional news. It depends on the media organization, and in Sri Lanka, the importance given to international news is a bit low. There are instances [where] the international news gets dropped to cover local news."

Most of the editors that participated in the panel agreed that 60 percent of news coverage comes from regional journalists. This may vary for some English newspapers. However, Samanmalee Swarnalatha, a community media activist from Matara, noted that most of the local and national news are covered by regional journalists that are driven by political interests. Any incidents that have political connections become deemed "good news." Swarnalatha added that print publications sometimes contain separate pages for local, national, international, and regional

⁴ Natarajan, Swaminathan, *Media Freedom in Post War Sri Lanka and its Impact on the Reconciliation Process*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. 2012.

news coverage. Rasmin observed that Tamil newspapers separate space allocated to cover issues from the north, east, and upcountry (central), but expressed doubt that news articles are fully representative of the issues affecting a cross-section of these communities. Newspapers in Jaffna, for example, provide little coverage of Vanni issues, even though the population and infrastructure of the Vanni were severely affected by the civil war.

Weerasinghe said that outside the mainstream media, Sri Lanka has regionally run radio stations that cover local issues. A few media organizations operate in the regions: in Negombo, for example, there is a small radio station and a newspaper; and in Bandarawela, there is a community radio station. Rasmin commented that regional radio stations are broadcasting in all of the regions, but the reach, quality, and subjectivity of local news offered are problematic.

Fairooz added that many villages in the Northern Province have created their own websites to cater to Sri Lankan diaspora communities. These websites promote village news, such as celebrations and local sports matches.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Sri Lanka Objective Score: 1.55

The panelists gave Objective 4 the lowest score of the MSI, stating that the situation can only worsen if no significant changes are introduced. Most media companies are barely surviving, with day-to-day operations under threat, as these organizations struggle to find solutions to self-sustain. The panelists indicated that this has been an issue for most media companies over the last decade, and will likely remain so in the coming years.

For media in Sri Lanka, most income is garnered through advertising. Media businesses are driven by the idea of making money, so the priority for many is to increase advertisement placements. Yet, the panelists noted that even state-funded media outlets are operating under heavy losses every year. Media budgets are growing rapidly, but very little revenue is generated through advertisements by comparison. Historically, Tamil media outlets have not been profitable businesses. One exception is *Uthayan*, a newspaper that is solely sustained through advertising income. A few new trends are emerging from Jaffna, where media are being funded by the diaspora. Even those media are unable to survive for more than a few months.

Internet continues to remain the fiercest competition for traditional media outlets, as the overhead for a web page startup is limited to a server and developer, the panelists noted.

Some sustainable media outlets, such as the *Sunday Times* and *Ravaya*, try to be relevant to the current context and more

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.

appealing to their consumers in order to increase circulation. Strategies such as including advertisements for educational opportunities or employment opportunities broaden the segment of readership. Businesses channel funding to certain media outlets—especially Tamil media. Members of the Tamil diaspora provide the necessary funding to sustain these outlets.

Many media outlets try to use innovative methods to generate income. Panelists observed that mainstream media have used social media effectively to promote their newspapers and television stations. They use Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram to engage with consumers and make their content more interactive.

Many television stations are producing reality shows that showcase talent and drama to increase viewership. According to the panelists, this trend has captivated a large audience for the last decade, and they predicted that it will continue.

Revenue generation is at its peak during election times, when many politicians can wield robust budgets to advertise their message, and maximize their reach. Panelists said that the current president prohibited the government from providing special subsidies to the media, during his birthday for example. But still, many advertisements and feature articles were published—a clear indication that the government continues to use media to its benefit.

David observed that providing special subsidies to the media is one way in which organizations influence editorials. This influence is becoming increasingly common. Fairouz shared an example: when journalists criticized the Fonterra brand, the company provided advertising opportunities to other newspapers, and funded foreign trips for journalists. Premananth said that because “Jaffna is becoming an industrial city, and many multinational and urban-based companies have

started to set up businesses in the city,” these businesses are paying for newspaper advertisements and in return do not want to see any news criticizing their products.

Weerasinghe said that the advertising industry in Sri Lanka is limited to several multi-national companies, which have a stronghold in Colombo. They include Ogilvy, Leo Burnett, and Sach. He confirmed, “International advertising firms, particularly Indian companies, do meet professional standards.”

Panelists agreed that many agencies systematically pick and choose the media companies with which they want to work, thereby giving the agencies bargaining power. Regionally, many media outlets build partnerships directly with small business owners to fund their companies.

There is no regulation that stipulates how government money should be utilized, distributed, or planned in a manner that benefits media outlets equally. Media and editorial staff are vulnerable to the influence of government and the private advertising sector. Ramiah noted that the worrying factor for many media companies is that they must operate with very little margin for error.

The Sri Lankan government has not stipulated any regulations on how many advertisements can be published on a page or how many advertisements can be broadcasted per minute. However, the election period saw some instances in which the government and election commission controlled advertising, to regulate politicians and media outlets.

The panelists stated that a media outlet that is a friend of a minister, or has an active interest in a ministry, will be granted direct access. The ministry will provide news and advertisements upon request. If the media company chooses a different path, with little or no inclination towards building a relationship with the minister, then the ministry grants absolutely nothing.

Given these conditions, the system of government-subsidized advertising is a prevailing issue. The panelists noted that state institutions spend a significant amount of money annually on advertising and marketing—far more than private-sector companies spend. However, the new government policy of not providing any advertisements by state bodies has created a vacuum for some media companies, which are seriously affected as a result. According to Premananth, “There is no policy for the government of Sri Lanka to provide subsidies to regionally based newspapers like ours. But to ensure local people have access to information, local media who meet certain criteria can be subsidized.”

The government has appointed a committee to understand the viability of the advertising industry, and to offer observations and recommendations. It has made several attempts in the past to conduct this research, without success. Media companies cannot afford to conduct market research themselves, as it

requires an understanding of statistics and how to recalibrate decision-making processes. Moreover, research and development requires a large investment that many media organizations cannot afford.

Panelists questioned the reliability of existing broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics. Ashoka said that some organizations pay a dividend to these research organizations, in order to increase their rating figures and in turn their advertising revenue. The rating system in Sri Lanka is very much limited to one or two actors, such as the Lanka Market Research Bureau Limited and Lanka Survey. The media sector has no developed rating system for print and social media, except internally generated data on “reach.” Weerasinghe observed that ratings organizations are not transparent, and noted issues with methodology and sample size, so their ratings reports are not accepted by the media industry.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Sri Lanka Objective Score: 1.96

This is the highest scoring objective for Sri Lanka. Looking at the broader perspective, the supporting structure for journalists is still in the development stage, despite many outlets having existed pre-independence. Various media support organizations are functioning in Sri Lanka. They include professional journalist associations, the PCCSL, university programs, media policy advocates, NGOs, and international media development organizations. However, the panelists noted that most of these organizations are based in Colombo.

Professional media associations advocate for freedom of the press. They include Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU), Free Media Movement, Sri Lanka Tamil Journalists Alliance, Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF), and the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association. FMETU, which is an alliance of six trade unions, claims to be the largest and most active non-partisan organization of journalists, with a membership of nearly 2,200. The Sri Lanka Working Journalists’ Association, established by the Parliament Act in 1987, has a membership of more than 1,200. Its goals include standing up for rights of expression and free media, protecting the rights and the dignity of journalists, and enhancing professionalism. SLMMF started in 1995 and now has more than 500 members. Its stated mission is to educate and bring together Muslims involved in print and electronic media and the communication industry.

However, Weerasingha noted that none of these organizations are professional trade unions; they are associations and organizations established to achieve various goals in their respective domains. Their memberships consist of journalists and a few freelancers, he said.

The Sri Lankan Professional Web-Journalist Association started operations during the past regime to exclusively advocate for online freedom and recognition of professional online journalists. The Young Journalist Association formed recently, and is composed of progressive young journalists that feel that their interests are not represented by other Colombo-based media associations.

The Newspaper Society of Sri Lanka, The Editors’ Guild of Sri Lanka, the Free Media Movement, and the Sri Lanka Working Journalist Association later formed Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI). Its mission is to provide direction and leadership in media-related activities that govern Sri Lanka College of Journalism (SLCJ) and PCCSL. The Professional Newspaper Artists Association and the Sri Lanka Media Photographers Association are two organizations working in the specific interests of their industries.

Membership in these organizations is not open to all journalists. Panelists noted that these organizations have been very vocal when journalists and media organizations are under threat, and are effective in expressing discontent and demanding justice through instant advocacy. However, they do not offer ongoing programs to support free speech or freedom of the press.

Ashoka explained that state media, particularly SLBC (radio) and SLRC (television), do have journalist unions; however, they are often aligned with political parties. These unions are formed by people of various professions, such as producers, engineers, and editors. These state-based unions often represent political interests, and most of their demands are neglected without negotiations. Online media outlets also have formed a journalist union, with little information yet available about their capacity. On the other hand, it was mentioned that publishers’ associations provide a support system for the publication owners, which operates comparatively strongly.

Although national-level associations and unions appear to be weak, Raguram indicated, “On a regional level, Jaffna functions well, with more than three active associations, such as Jaffna Press Club and the Jaffna Journalist Association.” The Jaffna Journalists Association, he added, launched in 2017 with dissidents from the Jaffana Press Club. “These associations function as a lobby with the vision to uphold the standard of journalism.” The only issue for these associations is that they are managed by freelance journalists, and most mainstream media outlets prohibit their employees from obtaining membership with these associations, Raguram affirmed. As a result, these organizations are not well positioned to directly support the employment of journalists and raise their voice in support of free speech, media freedom, and the overall enhancement of media professionals.

NGOs that advocate for free speech and independent media include the Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF, the organization that implemented this study), an organization that

is working to further the country's democratic gains, promoting pluralism, transformation and reconciliation; and Parthia Media Networks, a regional community media center catering to the disadvantaged in the Matara districts. The National Secretariat for Media Reform is a collective of media policy advocates that has been working with international media development organizations, including International Media Support. To support the collective strength of Sri Lankan media, several organizations are offering media education, training, and guidance on conducting research. However, the panelists pointed out that no organizations are dedicated to offering exclusive legal support for journalists.

Universities offer undergraduate and post-graduate programs on media and communications. Weerasinghe said that six universities offer programs in journalism, media, and communication. The schools include Sri Pali Campus, Trincomalee Campus, University of Keleniya, University of Sri Jayawardanapura, University of Colombo, and the University of Jaffna.

However, students who obtain degrees in these fields largely are educated on theory, and lack the hands-on training to help them in their careers. David observed, "Almost 95 percent of the students who obtain the degree don't pursue jobs in the media industry, and out of the five percent who pursue a career, 90 percent leave the industry altogether after, as they are disappointed with the salaries offered." David added that Hiru TV has advertised vacancies for journalists with minimum qualifications but who have the ability to write well-articulated posts on social media. In David's view, online media have demoralized qualified and trained journalists, underscoring how most universities do not possess the requisite resources and equipment to adequately teach journalism.

The Sri Lanka Foundation is considered to be an academic organization that falls under the presidential secretariat,

and offers diploma and higher national diplomas on various topics including media and communication. In addition, the government has introduced "Mass Media" as a subject in the General Certificate of Education Advance Level for students who wish to pursue media as a profession. However, teachers at these schools also lack the necessary qualifications to teach media studies, so the panelists questioned the quality of education provided.

Among non-academic governmental organizations, the Sri Lankan Media Training Institute (SLMTI), previously known as the Sri Lanka Television Training Institute, SLBC, SLRC, and the Ministry of Mass Media are offering a variety of journalism courses. Most of the courses offered at SLMTI are in film and television. The standards of Tamil-language media studies are considered to be lower than Sinhalese studies, the panel noted. SLBC has started the Kothmale Media Academy to provide broadcasting training for new entrants, in both Sinhalese and Tamil. SLBC runs an audio engineering certificates program in its Colombo office, but only in Sinhalese, and SLRC only offers training for its employees. The Ministry of Mass Media conducts diploma programs as well, and the state information and communication technology (ICT) agency offered a series of e-journalism courses to provide ICT education for mainstream and regional journalists.

The SLCJ and the Media Training and Resource Centre in Jaffna are considered independent professional training centers that focus on providing practical training for journalists and new entrants to the field. SLCJ runs a 12-month diploma course, full-time studies, part-time refresher courses, and training programs meant for provincial journalists. It has trained more than 600 young people. However, SLCJ is dependent on donor funding, and due to high course fees, student enrollment has decreased. The courses offered in Tamil have halted altogether. The panelists noted that it is a great failure that SLJC has not been able to come up with a self-sustaining model.

When short-term skill development programs are offered to journalists, they consider the return on investment. If the program results in increased wages, or professional development that could lead to a promotion, journalists are largely uninterested. Panelists indicated that many programs are not designed to close the gap between theory and practice, which is a critical need for journalists in Sri Lanka today, and the training that is available does not provide this in-depth instruction.

To uphold the quality of developmental and community journalism, a few institutions provide specialized training. One is the Sri Lankan Environmental Journalists Forum (SLEJF), an independent, public interest media organization. SLEJF was established in 1987 with support from the Sri Lanka government, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the

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.

Pacific, the United Nations Environment Programme, and some media-related bodies. SLEJF has trained more than 10,000 journalists in partnership with SDJF, which launched in 2009.

The panelists said that during the war and post-war period, many NGOs stepped forward to support the media, protect them from harassment, provide information literacy, and offer training. For example, Transparency International in Sri Lanka conducted a series of effective investigative reporting training programs. Although there is a generally negative public perception that NGOs are promoting a possible hidden agenda, the panelists agreed that the support that NGOs provided during these difficult periods have strengthened journalism in Sri Lanka.

Fairooz noted that international and national NGOs such as the United Nations Population Funds, SDJF, Prethiba Media Networks, and Viluthu Resource Centre are now conducting several training programs for journalists. SDJF offers specialized training programs on various media tools, such as digital storytelling, radio drama, techniques in community video, and investigative video journalism. Young Asia Television conducted a series on investigative techniques for regional reporters, and Viluthu Resource Centre offered a continuous certification course for new entrants, with funding from Dutch NGO Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation.

The law places no specific restriction on private media to purchase media equipment. At present, Sri Lanka has no system in place that offers subsidies for media printing houses. However, Ifthikar noted that government media and printing outlets have always had access to government funding. State media is often supported by various development schemes within the government.

The channels for media distribution can be categorized into urban and rural, as many rural communities use cheap antennas to access signals. But for citizens in urban areas, cable television and satellite television are accessible. In Jaffna, Dish TV is popular, and consumers use it to access mostly Indian channels, with no local channels.

Within the Internet and mobile data space, many citizens are purchasing smart phones, which is improving their access to information. As connectivity and mobile phone usage increases rapidly, the government has taken measures to increase the tax on mobile phone data and usage. Charges are up to 40 percent of the total expense, which often prevents students from accessing the Internet. Ashoka also reminded panelists that the government promised to provide free wi-fi to citizens to increase connectivity. but that plan was unsuccessful, due to the lack of infrastructure required for implementation. Swarnalatha explained, "There is a great mismatch on how the government deals with this issue. For example, on the one hand, the government promotes ICT infrastructure, and use of mobile phone to increase citizen access to information. But on the other

hand, it has been increasing the cost for texts for mobile phones and data." Pushpakumara observed, "When we say we have a 25 percent penetration rate, it also means that 75 percent of the people are not connected. Even though many citizens have access to mobile phones, this does not translate into an increased access to information."

List of Panel Participants

Gazala Anver, chief editor, Roar.lk, Colombo

Darshana Ashoka, news editor, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, Colombo

Kanchana Dassanayake, chief editor, *Ada News Pape*, Colombo

Michael J.R. David, senior lecturer, University of Jayawardenapura, Colombo

Mohammed Fairooz, chief editor, *Vidiwelli*, Batticola

Furkan Be Ifthikar, senior journalist, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, Colombo

Thevanayagam Premananth, chief editor, *Uthayan*, Jaffna

Raveenda Pushpakumara, former journalist, *Irudina Weekly*, Colombo

Sulochana Ramaih, deputy editor, *Ceylon Today*, Colombo

Sukumar Rockwood, CEO, Sri Lanka Press Complaints Commission, Colombo

Sivasubramaniyam Raguram, senior lecturer, University of Jaffna, Jaffna

Samanmalee Swarnalatha, community media activist, SARU community radio, Polonnaruwa

Pradeep Weerasinghe, chairperson, National Secretariat for Media Reform (NSMR), Colombo

Moderator and Author

M.C. Rasmin, director, Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum, Colombo

The Sri Lanka chapter was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum. The panel discussion was convened on March 13, 2017.

The panelists asserted that the media show a clear lack of inclusivity, poor professional standards, ongoing politicization, and continued marginalization of disadvantaged communities.



SRI LANKA

Photo: Alexanthar Kamilash

Sri Lanka's media have an opportunity to make the best use of new freedoms, a government that appears willing to open the information space, and peace that allows media professionals access to all parts of the country. These opportunities also provide an opportunity for the media to establish themselves in an unprecedented public service role, with news and information that meet the needs of the public first and foremost.

However, to date the media have made little progress in that regard. The overall score for Objective 6 underscores media outlets' failure to provide citizens with useful and relevant news that fosters public debate. The panelists asserted that the media show a clear lack of inclusivity, poor professional standards, ongoing politicization, and continued marginalization of disadvantaged communities. All of these shortcomings impact the quality of information.

Based on these observations, panelists had a few recommendations for Sri Lanka's media going forward:

- Use the collective strength of media for a common goal. Invite media to re-work the 2006 Weligama Declaration, which called on media to work toward national unity, and adapt this into a strategy to meet present challenges. Media outlets should audit themselves to identify and filter content that undermines reconciliation. Capacity building efforts should focus on developing media's role in reconciliation.
- Capture stories of how communities are working together as part of the reconciliation process while recognizing and respecting diverse social and cultural identities.
- Be sensitive in dealing with land issues, accountability, missing persons, and security.
- Cover issues that affect marginalized communities, promoting dialogue and debates to foster trust, empathy, and confidence.
- Promote the inclusion of "peace-minded" journalism in the curricula at universities and at media training institutes could be a way to prepare the next generation as agents of change by promoting ethics, standards, and the importance of not promoting hate speech—all critical to reconciliation through public dialogue.

Objective 6 is a separate study from objectives 1 through 5 of the Media Sustainability Index. This objective is measured using a separate group of panelists (listed at the end of this section) and unique indicators (described at the end of this section).

OBJECTIVE 6: SERVING PUBLIC NEEDS

Sri Lanka Objective Score: 1.53

Panelists said that the media mostly focus on presenting political news with little social and economic perspective or context. Mainstream media rarely cover the prevailing social issues that are relevant to people from the regions (topics such as violence against women, poverty, local governance, education, migration, and issues affecting farmers). Sharanya Sekeram, a peace activist based in Colombo, argued that there is significant “dissatisfaction as to how mainstream media handle sensitive issues; for example, issues affecting women. When women are raped [and] abused, and their rights are violated, the media work fast to make it news. But I don’t believe the media fulfill their role to help bring justice to victims.”

Issues of importance to minorities are often treated with a political angle. Yaseer Arafath, a doctor at a national hospital in Nuwareliya (Central Province), gave the example of Wilpattu, where many communities have resettled. People are returning to find that their homes that have been razed, and this has been

THE MEDIA SERVE CITIZENS BY PROVIDING USEFUL AND RELEVANT NEWS AND INFORMATION AND FACILITATING PUBLIC DEBATE.

- > The media promote and facilitate inclusive discussions about local, national, and international issues (social, political, economic, etc.) that are important to citizens.
- > Reporting and discussion in the media support democratic policymaking, government transparency, equitable regulatory enforcement, and consumer protection.
- > News and information provided by the media is relevant to, and informs, the choices and decisions (social, political, economic, etc.) made by citizens.
- > Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflects reality.
- > It is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such.
- > Editorial and partisan media content is a constructive part of national dialogue; media refrain from including “hate speech” content.
- > The media expose citizens to multiple viewpoints and experiences of citizens from various social, political, regional, gender, ethnic, religious, confessional, etc., groups.

sensationalized as an ethnic issue, rather than reported as a story of general national interest.

Thirukumar Prema Kumar, president of International Youth Alliance for Peace, agreed that most of the Sinhala media tend to politicize issues affecting ethnic minorities. Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum Director, and panel moderator, M.C. Rasmin commented, “It is the responsibility of media to build trust in people, mobilize the social capital of people, foster hope and confidence, while making them capable of voicing their rights.” Activist Lasanthi Daskon commented that, “Media sometimes become insensitive to certain key issues. For example, when LGBTQ issues are raised, the media sensationalize these issues and foster an environment that criminalizes minorities within the LGBTQ community.” Jehan Perera, a human rights activist with the National Peace Council observed, “There is more hate speech in Sinhala and Tamil content, and less so in English mediums.”

Arafath said that some outlets provide forums for public debates to discuss certain issues, but they do not include much public representation. Perera explained, “There is little analysis offered by journalists when covering social issues, and a lack of discussion around the social and political implications of their stories. Unfortunately, most commentary is biased towards a particular political party or ethnic or religious community.”

Perera continued, “The media [are] taken very seriously by the general public, as they generate strong and vibrant public opinion. The problem is that most people, even if aware of media bias, tend to digest news without a critical lens. This gives the media the power to and potential to mislead the people, especially in regards to ethnic, religious, and political issues.”

Platforms such as television and social media provide a space for public opinion, the panelists noted, but newspapers and radio are regarded as the most detached from public sentiment. The panelists also commented that the media could be playing a critical role in fostering vital public debate, particularly around issues central to the post-war reconciliation process. These issues include accounts of missing persons; constitutional, institutional, and land reform; and accountability and truth in the reconciliation efforts. But thus far, these topics remain largely absent in the media, or are presented in a controversial tone, furthering mistrust and suspicion among communities.

Sekeram held the view that two different agendas drive media in Sri Lanka, and the sector clearly lacks pluralism and middle

ground. She added that even “alternative media” platforms such as Roar.lk and Groundviews “don’t reach the masses, and remain a very niche market.”

Panelists said that social media have played a vital role in reporting on the country’s democratic gains, and how to further democratic policymaking, engender transparency, and increase consumer protection. During the presidential election in 2016, it was evident that social media were at the fore, providing the public with information on the electoral process. The panelists also observed that on many occasions in recent times, social media have revealed certain government actions that led to public protest and more citizen engagement. With the emerging presence of livestream and webcasts, several sites have launched that focus on governance issues.

Social media can also have its drawbacks, the panelists added. Sometimes readers are unable to discern the authenticity of the information presented and/or understand the intent of the story—whether it is to provoke violence or to raise awareness.

Ramzi Deen, an activist with Open House International in Negambo, noted that social media have become very effective in addressing local issues, such as the small-scale bribes that often take place in passport offices, hospitals, and other government institutions. Sometimes citizen journalists report on public servants’ ignorance, policy bribery, and the black market, for example. But for mainstream media, these issues may not be considered newsworthy. According to Deen, viewers that support the government likely watch state-owned SLRC television, while those not in favor of the government watch Derana TV, Sri Lanka’s entertainment channel.

Most television channels use the morning slots to present informative programming. These shows are focused on educating citizens on health, nutrition, and consumer goods, with the aim of improving overall livelihoods. However, Fathima Sanaz, a civil society activist and filmmaker from the University of Colombo, insisted that media have the space to include more stories on how women across professions are rebuilding their communities, or engaged in social work and reconciliation efforts, given that 51 percent of the population is women. Lasanthi Daskon noted, “In Sri Lanka, the media at times do not prioritize issues affecting the people—for example, on constitutional reform—and other issues that affect all the citizens.” Sekeram observed that social media have a similar lack

Perera explained, “There is little analysis offered by journalists when covering social issues, and a lack of discussion around the social and political implications of their stories. Unfortunately, most commentary is biased towards a particular political party or ethnic or religious community.”

of depth, and Facebook uses algorithms to determine the user’s feed, only furthering the news “echo chamber.”

Panelist opinions were mixed on the question of the public’s ability to discern fact-based news from editorial content. According to Sekeram, “There is no difference between editorial, news reporting, opinions, or columns, as they are all the same, and therefore impossible for citizens to recognize the difference, as there is little nuance.” Sanaz agreed, stating that ultimately, media literacy is low among citizens. “Citizens are unable to distinguish between partisan, editorial, and advertorial content, and therefore unable to understand the political and corporate interests that drive the news,” she said. However, in Ramzi’s view, “Most people are aware of what they read, even when there are no clear distinctions, particularly in advertorial content.”

Panelists also disagreed about whether hate speech is a growing concern for the Sri Lankan public. Some members of the panel cited Bodhu Bala Sena, a Sinhala extremist group that has been leveraging social media to spread hate speech since 2011. However, other panelists contended that the growth of these groups is fueled by the media and the attention they receive regularly. According to Perera, hate speech is not necessarily an emerging issue, insofar as it exists within small factions.

Perera also said that content differs from newspaper to newspaper, with certain publications somewhat balanced and constructive and others more hard-hitting editorially. “I don’t believe the English newspapers promote hate speech, but [they] definitely continue to divide the country, inciting anger,” he commented. He specified that he does not believe

Lasanthi Daskon noted, “In Sri Lanka, the media at times do not prioritize issues affecting the people—for example, on constitutional reform—and other issues that affect all the citizens.”

that English-language papers target Muslims. Rasmin, however, noted, “Hate speech is very implicit in Tamil and Sinhala media and social media. Both the Sinhala and Tamil media play negative roles. There should be a rights-based approach to regulate hate in media.”

Sekeram explained how media outlets are naturally interested in ratings, and will feature stories on political history and invite guests such as Chathura Senarathna, a politician and commentator known for outlandish statements. According to Sekeram, people watch these programs because they are entertaining, so many outlets are eager to secure more airtime for these types of politicians even if their competence is questionable.

In the regional and linguistic context, Tamil news is divided into three target audience groups: urban, northern, and eastern. The

panelists said that the eastern media are dedicated to being the voice of the Muslim community, where there is a certain amount of fear generated from the notion that they are being targeted in Sri Lanka as well as in the global discourse. Such ideologies result in further marginalization of these Muslims, who already live in isolation. In addition, the panelists asserted that media outlets take advantage of stereotypes to promote the news. Often they reference the ethnicity of the individual if it involves a crime, which panelists contended is irrelevant and unethical. For example, media associate the word “diaspora” with LTTE, rather than a neutral term for Sri Lankans living abroad. This practice promotes one narrative and falsified information, which builds viewership but further divides the public.

The final indicator also received a low score, as the panelists held the view that Sri Lankan media are not exposing citizens to multiple viewpoints. For example, stories about the disabled are ignored, except for a few news broadcasts in which sign language is used. Media do not attempt to present various perspectives, and particularly not of rural populations. Events related to religion and culture also receive little importance. Panelists stressed the need for the media to share stories that capture the life of religious and ethnic communities, or stories that show interfaith marriages and cultural celebrations, which could foster greater national dialogue. Instead, current coverage only fuels division and intolerance, they said.

List of Panel Participants

Yaseer Arafath, doctor, National Hospital, Nuwareliya, Jaffna

Lasanthi Daskon, lawyer, independent consultant, Colombo

Ramzi Deen, activist, Open House International, Negambo

Jehan Perera, executive director, National Peace Council, Colombo

Thirukumar Prema Kumar, president, International Youth Alliance for Peace, Jaffna

Fathima Sanaz, activist, filmmaker, University of Colombo, Colombo

Sharanya Sekeram, activist for youth and women; researcher, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute, Colombo

Moderator and Author

M.C. Rasmin, director, Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum, Colombo

The Sri Lanka chapter was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum. The panel discussion was convened on March 14, 2017

Reconciliation and the Media in Sri Lanka

According to the panelists, neither the media nor civil society are doing enough to foster public discourse during the reconciliation process. Rather, the media celebrate “heroes” of the war. As a result, the media have failed to build public trust or promote the rich diversity in Sri Lanka.

Historically, the media have been unsuccessful in fostering peace in Sri Lanka: during the war media were tools to mobilize moral support for the war, silence civilians, and engender fear. The media fostered mistrust and deepened emotional sentiments, creating a significant disconnect. Even papers such as *Ravaya*, which attempted to provide objective coverage, found it difficult to occupy the middle ground.

At present, the Srisena government’s goal is to make reconciliation a reality. According to the panelists, the time is ripe for the Sri Lankan media to facilitate reconciliation by generating dialogue, but they have no collective vision on how to accomplish that goal. Deen proposed that the media create greater awareness about the common identity of Sri Lankans, and highlight stories of how different ethnic communities and religious groups are working together to tackle development challenges across the country. However, debates facilitated by several television stations tend to exclude the critical stakeholders that could discuss ways to cultivate peace and explore possible solutions. Panelists underscored that the media need to recognize that reconciliation is of strategic interest and national priority. It will require journalists to report on the confluence of economic, political, and social issues that are critical to rebuilding a future for all Sri Lankans.

David commented, "We don't see different points of view in the media. We only get a limited version of views. There are a number of people in Sri Lanka who would welcome different perspectives; however, our media are politically polarized."



Photo: Raveendra Pushpakumara

SRI LANKA

To complete both studies, IREX used closely related, albeit slightly different methodologies. The Methodology for Objective 1 through 5 are explained in detail, followed by a summary of modifications made for the Objective 6 study.

Methodology for Objectives 1 through 5

IREX prepared the MSI in cooperation with USAID as a tool to assess the development of media systems over time and across countries. IREX staff, USAID, and other media-development professionals contributed to the development of this assessment tool.

The MSI assesses five “objectives” in shaping a successful media system:

1. Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.
2. Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
3. Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable, objective news.
4. Media are well-managed enterprises, allowing editorial independence.
5. Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

These objectives were judged to be the most important aspects of a sustainable and professional independent media system, and serve as the criteria against which countries are rated. A score is attained for each objective by rating between seven and nine indicators, which determine how well a country meets that objective. The objectives, indicators, and scoring system are presented below.

Scoring: A Local Perspective

The primary source of information is a panel of local experts that IREX assembles in each country to serve as panelists. These experts are drawn from the country’s media outlets, NGOs, professional associations, and academic institutions. Panelists may be editors, reporters, media managers or owners, advertising and marketing specialists, lawyers, professors or teachers, or human rights observers. Additionally, panels comprise the various types of media represented in a country. The panels also include representatives from the capital city and other geographic regions, and they reflect gender, ethnic, and religious diversity as appropriate. For consistency from year to year, at least half of the previous year’s participants are included on the following year’s panel. IREX identifies and works with a local or regional organization or individual to oversee the process.

The scoring is completed in two parts. First, panel participants are provided with a questionnaire and explanations of the indicators and scoring system. Descriptions of each indicator clarify their meanings and help organize the panelist’s thoughts. For example, the questionnaire asks the panelist to consider not only the letter of the legal framework, but its practical implementation, too. A country without a formal freedom-of-information law that enjoys customary government openness may well outperform a country that has a strong law on the books that is frequently ignored. Furthermore, the questionnaire does not single out any one type of media as more important than another; rather it directs the panelist to consider the salient types of media and to determine if an underrepresentation, if applicable, of one media type impacts the sustainability of the media sector as a whole. In this way, we capture the influence of public, private, national, local, community, and new media. Each panelist reviews the questionnaire individually and scores each indicator.

The panelists then assemble to analyze and discuss the objectives and indicators. While panelists may choose to change their scores based upon discussions, IREX does not promote consensus on scores among panelists. The panel moderator (in most cases a representative of the host-country institutional partner or a local individual) prepares a written analysis of the discussion, which IREX staff members edit subsequently. Names of the individual panelists and the partner organization or individual appear at the end of each country chapter.

IREX editorial staff members review the panelists' scores, and then provide a set of scores for the country, independently of the panel. This score carries the same weight as an individual panelist. The average of all individual indicator scores within the objective determines the objective score. The overall country score is an average of all five objectives.

In some cases where conditions on the ground are such that panelists might suffer legal retribution or physical threats as a result of their participation, IREX will opt to allow some or all of the panelists and the moderator/author to remain anonymous. In severe situations, IREX does not engage panelists as such; rather the study is conducted through research and interviews with those knowledgeable of the media situation in that country. Such cases are appropriately noted in relevant chapters.

I. Objectives and Indicators

Objective 1

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.

Objective 2

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

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

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.

Objective 5

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.

II. Scoring System

A. Indicator Scoring

Panelists are directed to score each indicator from 0 to 4, using whole or half points. Guidance on how to score each indicator is as follows:

0 = Country does not meet the indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation.

1 = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change.

2 = Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces.

3 = Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.

4 = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions.

B. Objective and Overall Scoring

The average scores of all the indicators are averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

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.

Methodology for Objective 6

The purpose of this separate but related study is to rate the extent to which the traditional media (such as newspapers and broadcasters) and new media (blogs and other online or mobile formats) capture citizen concerns in a non-partisan manner. The study also assesses the media's ability to serve as a facilitator of public debate and as an outlet for citizen voices. It measures the capacity of media to hold politicians, business, and other actors accountable.

To accomplish this, IREX developed a methodology similar to its original MSI, described above, so that the results can seamlessly accompany the MSI's five objectives, which measure the performance of a country's media sector. This study uses the same process of scoring, enlisting local participants to answer an IREX questionnaire, and holding a panel discussion moderated by a local partner. Hence, we refer to this study as the Media Sustainability Index's "Objective 6."

Like the original five objectives of the MSI, this study relies on a stated objective and several supporting indicators. Objective 6 and its indicators are stated in such a way that panelists can use them as a model against which to evaluate their current news and information environment. This allows for meaningful comparisons, as well as setting forth expectations for future development. The objective and indicators are listed in the table below.

Objective 6

THE MEDIA SERVE CITIZENS BY PROVIDING USEFUL AND RELEVANT NEWS AND INFORMATION AND FACILITATING PUBLIC DEBATE.

- > The media promote and facilitate inclusive discussions about local, national, and international issues (social, political, economic, etc.) that are important to citizens.
- > Reporting and discussion in the media support democratic policymaking, government transparency, equitable regulatory enforcement, and consumer protection.
- > News and information provided by the media is relevant to, and informs, the choices and decisions (social, political, economic, etc.) made by citizens.
- > Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflects reality.
- > It is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such.
- > Editorial and partisan media content is a constructive part of national dialogue; media refrain from including "hate speech" content.
- > The media expose citizens to multiple viewpoints and experiences of citizens from various social, political, regional, gender, ethnic, religious, confessional, etc., groups.

The process of undertaking the study is the same as above, with the following modifications:

- **A distinct set of panelists.** For Objective 6, panelists might be academics, student leaders, bloggers, media analysts, human rights and other NGO leaders, business association leaders/members, or trade union leaders/members. Consistent with the original MSI methodology, panelists represent the diversity within a society, and are selected in terms of gender balance, residence in the capital city and more rural areas, and membership in various political or other factions.
- **Modified score definitions and interpretation of final score.** Guidance on how to score each indicator and definitions of the meaning of scores are unique to this objective. These are detailed below.

As above, panelists are directed to score each indicator from 0 to 4, using whole or half points. They are provided with the following guidance:

- 0** = No, the media in my country do not meet the provisions of this indicator; it is impossible or exceedingly rare to find content in any media outlet that meets the provisions of this indicator.
- 1** = The media in my country minimally meet the aspects of this indicator. Occasionally, a media outlet produces content that meets the aspects of this indicator. Or, citizens in my country may sometimes obtain news and information that meet the aspects of this indicator, but only by referring to several sources and comparing reports on their own.
- 2** = The media in my country have begun to meet many aspects of this indicator. There are at least a few media outlets that frequently produce content that meets the aspects of this indicator. However, progress may still be dependent on current political forces or media ownership/editors.
- 3** = The media in my country meet most aspects of this indicator. Many media outlets strive to, and regularly produce, content that meet the aspects of this indicator. Adherence to this indicator has occurred over several years and/or changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.
- 4** = Yes, the media in my country meets the aspects of this indicator. Media outlets and the public expect content to meet the aspects of this indicator. Exceptions to this are recognized as either substandard journalism or non-journalistic content (e.g., labeled and recognized as opinion or advertorial). Adherence to this indicator has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or differing social conventions.

The overall score for the objective is interpreted to mean the following:

Unsustainable (0-1): Country's media sector does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Media content is contrary to citizens' information needs, media seek primarily to serve political or other forces, and professionalism is low.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country's media sector minimally meets objectives, with significant segments of the media sector beholden to political or other forces. Evident progress developing media that serve citizens information needs and increased professionalism may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country's media sector has progressed in meeting multiple indicators, and many media outlets consistently strive to and succeed in serving citizens' information needs with objective, timely, and useful content. Achievements have survived changes in government; however, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism is sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country's media sector is considered generally professional; serving citizen information needs with objective, timely, and useful content; and facilitating public debate. A primary goal of most media outlets and media professionals is to serve such ends, and similarly, the public expects this from the media sector. Achievements have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

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