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GHANA

Until 1992, media development in Ghana was undermined by a checkered political history of successive military dictatorships and legislative strictures. The return to multi-party democratic governance in 1993 provided constitutional guarantees for an open society and a free and plural media regime. This engendered a vibrant private interest in the sector as a business prospect. The media landscape under the current (1992) Constitution has, therefore, been quite libertarian and pluralistic. The horizons of free expression and media freedom have also, accordingly, expanded significantly.

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Within six months of coming into office in January 2001, the New Patriotic Party government, in fulfillment of an election campaign promise, repealed the criminal libel provisions of the 1960 Criminal Code. And yet, the government has been rather reticent about giving legislative assent to a civil society initiated draft freedom of information bill.

The MSI assessment gave a positive, progressive, rating to the media in Ghana. The most optimistic assessment, 2.97 was attributed to Objective 5, supporting institutions. On the other hand, the standard of professional journalistic practice was considered to be the least propitious, and received a score of 2.09. Considering that the MSI panel gave a rating of more than 2.00 to every one of the five objective criteria for sustainability, Ghana shows it is making significant progress towards an effective and independent media system.

# GHANA AT A GLANCE

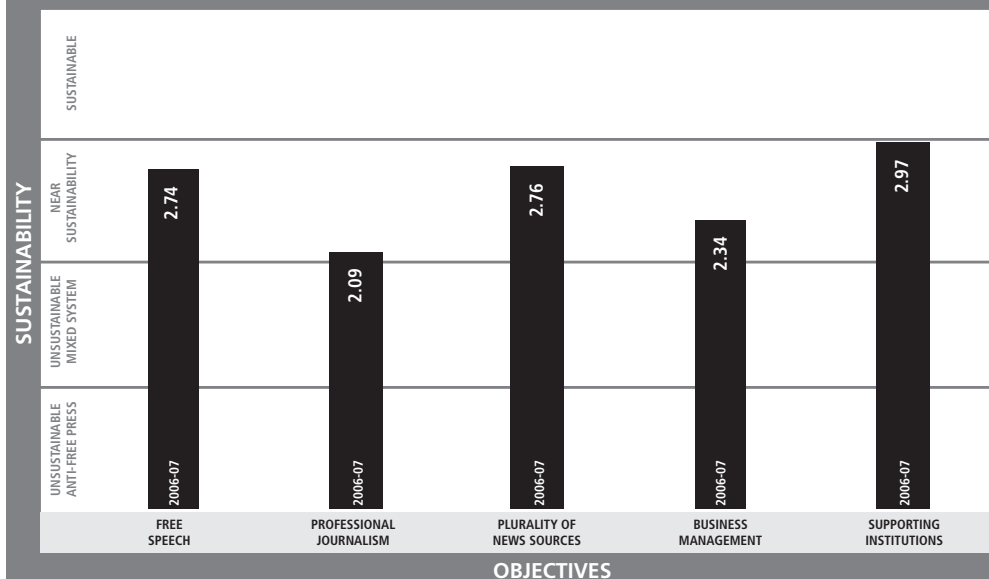
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 23,382,848 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Accra
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Akan 45.3%, Mole-Dagbon 15.2%, Ewe 11.7%, Ga-Dangme 7.3%, Guan 4%, Gurma 3.6%, Grusi 2.6%, Mande-Busanga 1%, other tribes 1.4%, other 7.8% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 68.8% (Pentecostal/Charismatic 24.1%, Protestant 18.6%, Catholic 15.1%, other 11%), Muslim 15.9%, traditional 8.5%, other 0.7%, none 6.1% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), Fon and Yoruba (most common vernaculars in south), tribal languages (at least six major ones in north) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$11.78 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,240 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 57.9% (male 66.4%, female 49.8%) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President John Agyekum Kufuor (since January 7, 2001)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 466 total publications; Radio: 166 licensed, 122 on air; Television stations: 25 licensed, 10 on air (Sources: National Media Commission, December, 2006, National Communications Authority, January, 2007)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Approximately 1 million total circulation daily (<http://www.populstat.info/Africa/ghanag.htm>)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Ghana News Agency (state-owned since 1957)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 609,800 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

### MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: GHANA



#### Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

#### Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

#### Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

#### Sustainable (3-4):

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

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

### Ghana Objective Score: 2.74

While most of the indicators scored close to the overall average, two pairs of indicators that were significantly different from the average counterbalanced each other. On the high side, panelists rated Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news sources and free entry into the journalism profession, equally well and nearly a point higher than the average. However, Indicators 2 and 7, media licensing and access to information, scored noticeably lower than the average, with Indicator 2 faring the worst.

The rights to free speech and expression, of plurality of views, and of the media are firmly secured under Article 21 (1) (a), (b), (d), and (f) and under Chapter 12 of the constitution. In particular, Article 21 (1) (a) provides for all persons the right to “freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media.” According to the MSI panelists, these legal and constitutional protections have enabled a general air of freedom among Ghanaians to hold and express diverse, and even dissenting, views. As panelist Egbert Faibille, editor-in-chief and proprietor of *The Ghanaian Observer*, remarked, “Fundamentally, if you look at the legal and social protections I think that there’s free speech in Ghana.” Godfred Yeboah Dame, a private legal practitioner and media rights advocate, agreed: “The constitutional provisions satisfy international requirements for the free flow, expression, and dissemination of news and opinions.” Those constitutional provisions are elaborated in additional sections of the constitution. Article 162 (3) stipulates that, “There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media ....” Article 162 (4) seeks to insulate “publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media” against editorial influence or control. Finally, Article 163 imposes a particular obligation on the state media to “afford fair opportunities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions.”

A number of important factors still undermine the exercise of free speech, however. The panel was especially concerned that the lack of a right to information law mitigated the liberties granted to journalists and the media under the constitution. The grant of access to public documents and information is essentially subject to the goodwill and discretion of government and public authorities, the panel observed. In the words of Rejoice Esi Asante, editor of the women’s page in the state-owned *Ghanaian Times* newspaper, “Some journalists have more access because of the media outlet they belong to and the circle of friends—contacts—they have.” Panel members contended that although criminal libel had been repealed, the civil libel process, which in

Ghana tends to put the burden of proof on the defendant (rather than the offended party), made the promulgation of a right to information law imperative and urgent. In the words of George Sarpong, executive secretary of the National Media Commission (the media oversight body), “without a right to information law, accessing information that is enough to satisfy the legal burden on the defendant is an uphill task.”

This is particularly important in the wake of what the panel also observed as a worrying trend of politicians and other individuals seeking, and being granted, punitive sums for libel damages. Notably, in 2005 a minister of state was awarded GHC 1.5 billion (\$160,000) in damages for defamation, and a further GHC 20 million (\$2,200) in costs against a pro-opposition newspaper. The latest is a GHC 2 billion (\$225,000) suit initiated by a government minister against some private newspapers with perceived opposition leanings.

Besides, as Bernardind Koku Avle, broadcast journalist and host of an award-winning morning radio program on Citi FM noted, “Media practitioners have, in the course of their duty, been attacked by political party supporters and by police and suspects without any serious sanctions or actions being taken.” He cited the example of a reporter with the station he works for who was the victim of assault by the bodyguard of a suspected drug baron standing trial for narcotic offences.

Faibille also remarked, “When I am driving in my car one of the things I do is to use my air conditioner because when you are stopped at the traffic light and your windows are down and you had had a story published which rubbed somebody

#### 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.

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up the wrong side, you can bet that someone will come and slap you and walk away. If I went on air to report the incident someone will call in and say, Egbert aren’t you the one who did that story? It serves you right!”

In the opinion of Augustina Oti-Twumasi, who works with STB McCann, there are no strong social sanctions against violations of freedom of expression. Rather, certain socio-cultural norms inhibit the expression of critical views, particularly of the elderly and persons in positions of authority. As she put it, “It is a part of our background—where we come from—we always see talking against authority to be disrespectful so for those who are very conservative they think you are being rude to their icon.”

Nevertheless, Bright Kwame Blewu, general secretary of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), observed that, “The fact that many Ghanaians call in to radio stations to report crime incidents rather than go to the police is a demonstration of their faith in free expression.” Blewu recounted how some two years ago the head of the National Commission for Civic Education, proposed the banning of “radio phone-ins.” “There was substantial condemnation of his call,” he said. So, it would seem that public outcry or lack of sympathy for a journalist who has been the victim of assault on account of their work sometimes depends on whose political or other sectarian horse is gored.

The panel did not think the processes for obtaining licensing for broadcast media was sufficiently transparent or apolitical. Indeed, that indicator registered the lowest score of all the indicators of Objective 1. The perception was that the granting of broadcast licenses is biased. The following personal testimony of Charlie Sam, a reputed former broadcaster and now broadcast trainer at the Africa Institute

of Journalism & Communications, was instructive: “I tend to read political influence into it because I am associated with an organization whose application has been pending since the year 2000; seven years now. And since then several stations have come on air. I ask myself, did these stations apply before the year 2000? I don’t think so. So I believe that sometimes it depends on the kind of political clout you wield.” Avle added that “It is unclear, the criteria used for licensing broadcast houses.” This was further corroborated by Isaac Sam-Mensah, program producer of Radio Peace, a community radio station, who declared: “The activities of the NCA [the National Communications Authority, the agency responsible for granting broadcast licenses] are not completely transparent.”

Relative to other equipment, the tax regime for importing broadcast equipment is both cumbersome and prohibitive, the panel observed. “I would particularly wish that tax rebates be given on import duties of paper and other printing materials,” suggested Oti-Twumasi.

There is, however, free and open access to international news and information. The only potential limitations are those imposed by availability and affordability. Similarly, entry into the profession is free, even lax, to the extent that some panel members thought there ought to be more clearly defined entry points into the profession and minimum obligations for recognition as a journalist. As Hamida Maalim Harrison, a women’s NGO advocate, noted, “Even radio DJs are calling themselves journalists.” The panel was concerned that there are reported incidences of impersonators and charlatans purporting journalistic credentials and gaining access to media events or accessing services.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Ghana Objective Score: 2.09

All the indicator scores hovered near the overall average, with two exceptions. Indicator 4, journalists cover key events, scored somewhat higher, while Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, scored somewhat behind the average.

Of all the objective criteria for sustainability, the panel was least impressed with the state of professional journalism in the country. They attributed this to at least two related factors experienced in Ghana’s history of media and politics. First, there was an over exuberant sense of triumph, leading frequently to excesses among media practitioners who had lived under a long spell of a culture of silence during the early years of military dictatorship under former President J. J. Rawlings. Secondly, the country’s media, particularly the private press, are quite blatantly partisan. They tend

to assume and advocate partisan positions on nearly every issue, including even soccer, one panel member quipped. Consequently, journalists often disregard the basic tenet of objectivity and, generally, to dishonor the most elementary provisions of professional ethics codes.

Besides, the panel observed, there were no significant qualitative improvements in format and content of programs and publications to match the numerical increases in print titles and broadcast outlets in the country. Again, the panel attributed this, in part, to the lack of any objective standard of qualification for a claim to professional membership. As Oti-Twumasi put it, journalism seems to be an “open, free-for-all career. Even with limited education, all one needs is the interest and facility. And the professional association [GJA] lacks the bite to streamline things.”

In terms of whether reporting by the media was fair, balanced, and well sourced, the following response by Asante echoed the general sentiment of the panel: “There is so much speculation, mostly in the private print media and some radio stations.” The panel also attributed the lack of objective treatment of stories and issues to the observation that many newspapers have “their own [political] agenda in coming up with stories,” as Avle noted. In the words of Oti-Twumasi, one reason is “because politics sells.” According to Faibille, “some journalists take what is called “soli” from [event] organizers.” “Soli,” from “solidarity,” is a payment made to reporters for covering an event in the hopes of positive coverage. It is common to find stories in the press in which no sources are given and no by-lines or attributions are provided.

Although the GJA has a code of ethics for practitioners, membership in the association itself is very much optional.

## 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).

*Isaac Sam-Mensah was even more critical: “They [journalists] publish false news for money or hold back some important news items which affect some public officials,” he claimed.*

Accordingly, there generally seems to be no sense of obligation to comply with the ethical injunctions. Even for members of the association, the panel noted that violation of the tenets of the code attracted no more than the moral sanction or a public condemnation, the occurrence of which in the view of the panel is rare in the first place and not of sufficient deterrent value in any case. Consequently, “the desire to obtain a scoop or the need to meet deadlines or plain political mischief makes some journalists throw professional standards and ethics overboard,” Charlie Sam noted. He added, “Sometimes screaming headlines and/or accompanying photographs bear no relation to the story content.”

The high level of media pluralism means that there is always an avenue for issues to receive media visibility and gain public attention. Therefore, panelists did not consider that editors were necessarily directly coerced to exercise self-censorship. Besides, the constitution expressly provides under Article 162 (2) that “... there shall be no censorship in Ghana.” And yet, as Asante pointed out, “Journalists and editors practice self-censorship because of fear of losing their job or protecting the interests of a party.” The panel noted a high incidence of coverage inspired by political propaganda, especially among sections of the private print media. This can be traced in part to the history of press ownership in Ghana, where, as Sarpong explained, “people with passion for expression set up media to pursue their own philosophical and ideological inclinations.”

On the whole, journalists tend to emphasize trivialities rather than serious, well-sourced, and contextualized events and issues, the panel noted. Poor packaging, sensational headlines, bad grammar, and factual inaccuracies, in particular, characterize much of the private press. What is considered key or important enough for editorial attention is essentially driven by bottom line considerations since, as the panel intimated, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

The low levels of pay received by journalists and other media practitioners resulted in Indicator 5 receiving the lowest score in Objective 2. The panel thus attributed the high incidences of professional compromises by journalists to their low remunerations. This, again, brought into focus, “the

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issue of ‘soli’ where reporters are ‘paid’ for covering a story” said Avle. Isaac Sam-Mensah was even more critical: “They [journalists] publish false news for money or hold back some important news items which affect some public officials,” he claimed. The greasing of journalists’ palms in order to get a particular version of facts reported has created credibility challenges for the media. As panelist Charlie Sam noted, “this [soli] has tended to belittle them [journalists] in the eyes of the rich and powerful,” adding “Some politicians treat local journalists with disdain, preferring to deal with foreign or international media.”

Bottom line considerations, rather than unwillingness or inability to discuss issues, mean that media content is dominated by programming that appeals to the lowest common denominator. Accordingly, there is more entertainment programming in the electronic media than news and information. In the words of Charlie Sam, “Television stations, in their bid to capture audiences, devote disproportionately more time to reality shows, sports, and soap operas than to news and information.” Isaac Sam-Mensah, on his part, raised quite a storm of controversy when he claimed that, “It is only community radio stations ... followed by the public radio, that provide some edifying entertainment. All commercial radio stations are in for money and so they are only interested in advertisements.” And even though credit is due to some newspapers and stations for their significant emphasis or focus on news and current affairs, much of the emphasis tends to be on politics rather than social or human interest issues.

Niche reporting is relatively low for three reasons. There is low professional capacity among practitioners. There is also low institutional capacity on the part of newspapers in supporting specialized desks or beats. Finally, politics tends to be every journalist’s staple topic.

The press houses in particular are poorly capitalized, one-man-owned endeavors that operate with the very barest of equipment and resources, such as a couple of computers and recorders and nothing more. Such equipment is certainly neither modern nor efficient. Hence, according to Faibille, “poor page planning and technique make most of the papers, especially the privately-owned ones, an eyesore.” On his part, Avle cited the “lack of radio documentaries” as a product of the lack of “money to buy good equipment.”

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

#### Ghana Objective Score: 2.76

The MSI panel rated this objective quite highly, second only to Objective 5, supporting institutions. All indicators scored near the average, although Indicator 2, citizen access to media is not restricted, was by far the strongest with a score nearly three-quarters of a point higher.

The group was of the opinion that collectively, the media are able to present a plurality of perspectives from a diversity of news sources. This they attributed largely to the fact that the media sector in Ghana has been well served by the return to constitutional democratic governance. Prior to 1992, there were only about a dozen, eight-paged, tabloid sized, newspapers making sporadic appearances on the newsstands. But by December 2006, some 466 newspapers, magazines and journals had been registered with the media oversight body, the National Media Commission (NMC). Similarly, there are, currently, more than 160 registered FM radio stations and about 25 television stations (although only about half of them are on-air). Similar growth was observed within the Internet, mobile telephony, and other non mass media service providing sectors of the industry. Thus, according to the panel, the prevailing liberal media regime is ensuring that people with contending or varied views on issues are able to gain access and visibility on the multiplicity of media outlets in the country.

This optimism must be qualified, however, since, as panel members observed, commercial imperatives have dictated

#### 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.

that private newspapers and broadcast stations are mostly located within, and promote the interests of, urban city dwellers to the relative exclusion of the majority rural population. Isaac Sam-Mensah noted that, “there are only few community radio stations in the country because most private individuals are interested in money.” He pointed out, furthermore, that, “Internet facilities are not available across the country. In places where they are available access is very slow.” The following anecdote recounted by Charlie Sam provides poignant illustration of the lack of access in rural areas: “While visiting in my village recently, I had to travel a distance of 32 kilometers to the nearest big town in order to send an urgent e-mail to someone in Accra.”

The panel also lamented the continued hyper-partisan polarization of most media in Ghana. As Oti-Twumasi pointed out, “our journalists take things at face value and merely echo the view of an individual source. I expect journalists to delve deeper, seek alternative views, provide historical background and contemporary context.”

The panel acknowledged the significant presence of international broadcast media organizations (including BBC, CNN, RFI, VOA, DW, and Al Jazeera) available either as subscription channels or through partnerships with local media outfits. A number of international mainstream newsmagazines, including *The Economist*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *FT*, and *Mirror*, are also easily available in supermarkets and at designated fuel stations.

On the question of accessibility, however, there was some very contentious debate. The majority of panelists thought that the absence of any legislative bar to accessing local and international news and information sources is sufficiently good. But in relation to such services as subscription television and the Internet, Avle, on his part, insisted that access must include affordability. “Because of my income I cannot afford cable and I think that should be accounted as lack of access,” he argued. Harrison replied that, “even in Britain not everybody has access to subscription channels in their homes.” But Avle stood his ground, contending, “If there is a three-storied building, nobody may be restricted in theory. But if I’m a cripple, then to all intents and purposes, I don’t have access.”

Broadcast media generally produce their own news programs. In the words of Avle, “Most of what is aired and printed is locally generated,” although a few rebroadcast international news from organizations such as the BBC and VOA. There are, however, more than 20 independent production companies that principally produce sponsored television infomercials, documentaries, and live shows. Notable among them are Charterhouse Productions, Channel 2 Productions, Sparrow Productions, Eagle Productions, Village Communication,

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Premier Productions, Point Blank Media Concept, Deltrack, and Bullseye.

Although the constitution seeks to insulate the media from political or other control (Article 162) and obliges the state media, in particular, to allow a diversity of views (Article 163), panel members did not think that these provisions were necessarily being adhered to in practice. “We sit here and say that the state media are insulated from political influence because the media commission appoint their boards. Yet, we all know that a minister of state can pick up a phone and call the editor of any big media and say chalk this story or use this story. So yes, the law is there but I don’t think it provides guarantees and that impacted my score,” Faibille explained. Asante concurred: “it is not always that state media reflect the views of the political spectrum,” she said.

There is only one official indigenous wire service, the Ghana News Agency, which was established in 1957 and has struggled to survive because of financial difficulties. A number of international newsgathering services such as Reuters and AP are available by subscription to broadcast and print outlets.

The ownership of media outlets is a matter of public record, accessible both at the Registrar General’s Department, where all business registrations are filed, and at the two regulatory institutions in the country, the NMC and the NCA. Indeed, media owners have little reason to disguise their stakeholder interests in the media since the constitution provides that “there shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media” (Article 162 (3)). The panel observed a growing trend of multiple ownerships and affiliations in the FM radio sector, but did not think that there is, as yet, sufficient grounds for concern about the negative consequences of conglomerations. They generally saw this development as an outcome of the need for market presence.

Although there are no local language newspapers as such, the panel noted that the broadcast media provide substantial avenues for local language programming.



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However, this pertains only to the dominant local languages such as Akan and, to a lesser extent, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani, Nzema, and Krobo. Minority languages are short-changed in this regard, a situation that Dame blamed on "a lack of guidelines on the use of minority languages in the media." He emphasized that, "This is necessary to preserve the cultural and linguistic diversity of minority tribes and people in the country." Harrison further pointed out that "programming does not often promote the welfare of certain groups, such as women."

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

#### **Ghana Objective Score: 2.34**

In this objective, all indicators scored at least 2; Indicator 5, government subsidies for private media, scored the best, almost a point higher than the average.

The overall opinion of panel members on the level of business management efficiency in the media industry was that the privately owned electronic media and the state-owned newspapers are better managed, both as professional media outlets and profit-generating businesses, than the state broadcaster and the private newspapers. Specifically, the group verdict on the prospects of media entities as business prospects could be summed up in two words: "It depends."

Whether or not the financial fortunes of a media organization are propitious depends on whether it is a broadcast or print outlet; on whether it is a big, urban based, or small, rural bound entity, and; on whether it is deemed to be "politically correct" in editorial orientation. Thus, there is a striking difference in the way media are run and operate as businesses. Generally, broadcast stations attract more advertising and sponsorship revenue than the

print media. Generally, the bigger, urban-based stations are more professionally managed, and attract more advertising and sponsorship revenue than the smaller, remotely located stations. Generally, private newspapers with known or perceived political inclinations towards the government attract more state advertising and sponsorship revenue and other forms of financial backstopping than critical and pro-opposition private newspapers.

Obviously, the critical, pro-opposition media are also sustained by their political benefactors and sympathizers. They cannot be described as businesses.

Most of the private print media operate on a shoestring budget. Apart from the state-owned newspapers and a handful of the private press, which carry significant amounts of advertisements, the remaining newspapers survive almost entirely on subscription and newsstand sales, and their average circulation figures range between 1000 and 5000 copies. The panel actually estimated that for some newspapers, unsold copies probably constituted 30 to 40 percent of total print runs. An electric power crisis that has assailed the country since August 2006 has further exacerbated high production costs.

In effect, the lack of autonomous revenue generation capacity as business entities makes the private press in general vulnerable to manipulation by political financiers. According to Faibille, "editorial independence is compromised in some ... media houses for partisan political and other considerations."

The liberalization of the market and media has also led to a plurality of large and small as well as multinational and local advertising outlets catering to many different types of client

#### **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.

needs and sizes. Consequently, the panel observed an increase in the amount and variety of advertising and concluded that, relative to the past, this bodes well for the media industry as a whole. Even so, Isaac Sam-Mensah lamented, "Community radio stations operate under very difficult conditions. They hardly get any advertising from the big agencies. They are not able to break even. They are unable to pay their utility bills." Even the media that are better disposed to receiving advertising revenue encounter difficulties. According to Avle, this was "either because of the bureaucracy of payment procedure or in some cases pure insensitivity and manipulation." He cited the example of one advertising agency that owed the radio station he works for arrears on payments in excess of GHC 1 billion (\$113,000).

The independent media in Ghana do not benefit from any state appropriation or fund set up for the purpose of subsidizing the industry. With respect to government advertising, however, the panel concluded that political patronage, more than considerations of management efficiency or professional quality, determined the ability to obtain this source of revenue. Dame was particularly earnest about the potential of the selective allocation of state advertising funds to induce what he termed "soft censorship." "This is because the government can, without any restrictions, channel state funds to certain favored media outlets, thereby encouraging their growth and stifling the development of others which are, by virtue of their critical posture, excluded from similar opportunities," he emphasized.

Furthermore, some non-government advertisers are wary of advertising in some newspapers for fear of being perceived as sympathizing with or supporting their pet causes and political activities. But Oti-Twumasi disagreed. According to her, the major advertising agencies choose a combination of media outlets because they collectively address the advertisers' mix of primary audience targets. She granted, however, that "outside of Accra there are not many advertising firms for the simple reason that most of the advertising is based in Accra."

Independent market research organizations as well as the better-endowed media outlets and advertising agencies conduct market research as a basis for soliciting or placing advertisements. But these are rather few and far between because they are financially prohibitive. Other media outlets occasionally make unverifiable ratings claims, and the credibility of their figures is compromised by their vested interests in such studies. The results of the independent and more credible research agencies are very jealously guarded and sold only on strict conditions of confidentiality to the few media outlets that can afford them.

*Dame was particularly earnest about the potential of the selective allocation of state advertising funds to induce what he termed "soft censorship." "This is because the government can, without any restrictions, channel state funds to certain favored media outlets, thereby encouraging their growth and stifling the development of others which are, by virtue of their critical posture, excluded from similar opportunities," he emphasized.*

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Ghana Objective Score: 2.97

This objective received the highest score among panel members, and all indicators were clustered close to the average.

The burgeoning of media institutions and facilities, coupled with the enabling democratic conditions for freedom of association, have led to journalists and media operators organizing themselves around associations of common interests to represent and promote the goals and aspirations of their members. Thus, besides the GJA, there are other associations and affiliations of media and communication practitioners such as the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, the Ghana Community Radio Network, the Institute of Public Relations, the Advertisers Association of Ghana, the Film Makers Guild, the Association of Women in the Media, Women in Broadcasting, the Internet Society of Ghana, West Africa Journalists Association, Sports Writers Association of Ghana, Sports Broadcasters Association, Environmental Club of Journalists, Economic and Financial News Reporters Association, the Association of Past Broadcasters, Communication Workers Union, and the Ghana Association of Writers. All these unions and associations work to preserve their professional integrity and to advocate the interests and welfare of their members.

As Charlie Sam noted, these associations of media and communication practitioners "do well in representing and supporting the interests" of those who form them. These include welfare needs, such as financial support for distressed members, job security and conditions of service issues

*As Charlie Sam noted, these associations of media and communication practitioners “do well in representing and supporting the interests” of those who form them. These include welfare needs, such as financial support for distressed members, job security and conditions of service issues such wages and benefits, and professional development opportunities such as training workshops and courses.*

such wages and benefits, and professional development opportunities such as training workshops and courses. Avle observed, however, that the GJA, for instance, is sometimes perceived as being in bed with the government. Oti-Twumasi added that the GJA “needs to be empowered to discipline journalists who blatantly disregard professional standards.”

There are a number of NGOs that work in cooperation with the media to support press freedom, freedom of expression, and professional development. Notable among them are the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. The GJA and the other associations of media practitioners undertake these types of activities as well. Charlie Sam cited, for example, the financial and technical assistance of MFWA and FES to associations of journalists and rural or deprived media. This assistance has come in the form of a number of workshops and orientation programs as well

#### **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.

as publications on media rights violations and standards of professional and ethical practice.

NGOs and civil society were also instrumental in the successful abolition of the criminal libel and sedition law in Ghana. They have also initiated the drafting of a right to information bill and have, since 2001, been engaged in advocacy to secure its passage into law.

There exist at least a dozen accredited media, communication, and journalism training institutions in the country. These include the Graduate School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana, the Ghana Institute of Journalism, African Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication, National Film and Television Institute, Manifold Academy, Jayee Professional Institute, Ghana Telecom University College, and GBC Training School. The numbers of such programs continues to increase. Access to these training institutions is open, the only conditions being the general requirements for admission into other secondary or tertiary institutions in the country.

In terms of quality training, however, the panel was less enthusiastic in their assessment. They attributed part of the observed mediocrity in professional practice by some journalists to what they considered to be the low standards of training by these institutions. According to Dame, “The professional standards of journalists produced by training institutions in the country does not seem to be satisfactory.” The assessment of panelists was that there must be more frequent opportunities for in-service training and workshops to provide continuous professional development and skills training to practitioners.

The availability and provision of newsprint and printing and distribution facilities is very much driven by economic imperatives and is absolutely free from political interference or restrictions. Harrison noted that this is partially why, whereas the urban commercial centers are inundated with media production and distribution facilities, few entities are located in, or address the media needs of, rural areas. Thus, newspapers often take more than 24 hours to reach some parts of the country. Limited television coverage excludes a large segment of the citizenry from being well informed and participating fully in decisions affecting national governance. Sarpong called for state support by way of subsidies, tax rebates, or logistic support to private investors who might be interested in attending to deprived, rural community needs. This, he insisted, would be a way for the government to put into practical effect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of all citizens to freedom of expression and the media.

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## List of Panel Participants

**Bernardind Avle**, morning show host, Citi FM, Accra

**Isaac Sam-Mensah**, program producer, Radio Peace, Winneba

**Rejoice Asante**, women's page editor, *Ghanaian Times* Newspaper, Accra

**Egbert Faibille**, editor-in-chief, *The Ghanaian Observer* Newspaper, Accra

**Hamida Harrison**, program officer, ABANTU for Development, Accra

**Godfred Yeboah Dame**, legal practitioner and media rights advocate, Akuffo Addo Prempeh and Company, Accra

**Charlie Sam**, lecturer, Africa Institute of Journalism & Communications, Accra

**Augustina Oti-Twumasi**, deputy client service manager, STB McCann Advertising Company, Accra

**George Sarpong**, executive secretary, National Media Commission, Accra

**Bright Blewu**, general secretary, Ghana Journalists Association, Accra

## Moderator

**Gilbert Tietaah**, lecturer, Graduate School of Communications Studies, University of Ghana, Legon

## Observers

**Beatrice Amoah**, program officer, Research & Publications, MFWA

**Samara Montgomery**, University of Oregon, USA

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