
The executive branch of the government still tries to exercise control over the media, and critical outlets sometimes find themselves temporarily shuttered on technicalities or on the receiving end of obtuse threats from officials. The police and other security forces sometimes manhandle journalists while they are covering controversial events such as demonstrations.



UGANDA

Ugandan media have enjoyed relative freedom for the past 20 years, since the current National Resistance Movement government came to power in 1986. Under the leadership of President Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power since that time, the media, including the public media, have generally operated without any direct intervention by the government.

In this atmosphere the media have flourished. Ugandan media provide coverage of whomever they want, regardless of political affiliation and following their in-house policies. Uganda has registered over 120 radio stations, including many private, commercial FM stations as well as community radio. Ugandans enjoy a selection of more than 30 local television stations on top of several foreign ones. Many newspapers and magazines, both private and public, publish on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

However, challenges remain. The executive branch of the government still tries to exercise control over the media, and critical outlets sometimes find themselves temporarily shuttered on technicalities or on the receiving end of obtuse threats from officials. The police and other security forces sometimes manhandle journalists while they are covering controversial events such as demonstrations. Media professionals feel that certain laws contravene freedom-of-the-press provisions found in the constitution and provide loopholes for the government to intrude on the media. Beyond government interference, important businesses also exercise influence over editorial content, and some media are reluctant to cover stories that might jeopardize advertising contracts.

Uganda's average of 2.41 reflects similar performance of all objectives. Objective 4, business management, had the lowest score, coming in at 2.12. Objective 5, supporting institutions, received a relatively strong 2.77.

UGANDA AT A GLANCE

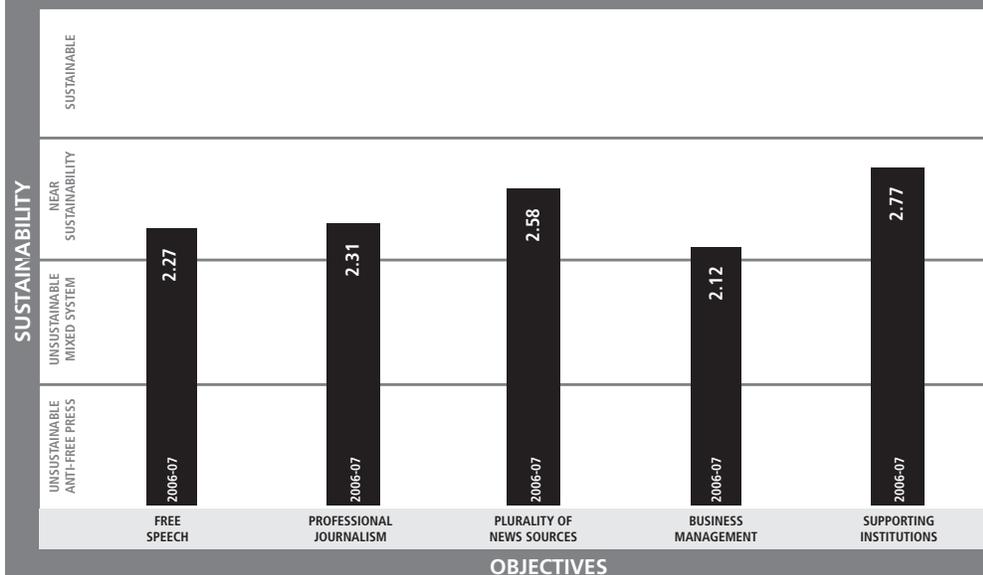
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 30,262,610 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Kampala
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Baganda 16.9%, Banyakole 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%, Langi 6.1%, Acholi 4.7%, Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Bunyoro 2.7%, other 29.6% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Roman Catholic 41.9%, Protestant 42% (Anglican 35.9%, Pentecostal 4.6%, Seventh Day Adventist 1.5%), Muslim 12.1%, other 3.1%, none 0.9% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** English (official), Ganda or Luganda, other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Swahili, Arabic (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$8.917 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,490 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 66.8% (male 76.8%, female 57.7%) (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Lt. Gen. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (since January 26, 1986)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 30 total, three of which are daily newspapers; Radio: 124 registered; Television stations: 20 local, 10 channels that relay external programs
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *The New Vision* (state-owned, 45,000 circulation), *The Monitor News* (privately-owned, 32,000 circulation), *Bukedde* (state-owned, 25,000 circulation)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: CBS fm (private), Simba fm (private), UBC Radio
- > **News agencies:** Uganda News Agency (state-owned), Uganda Radio Network (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 750,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UGANDA



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Uganda Objective Score: 2.27

The final average, 2.27, shows Uganda is in the early stages of approaching sustainability in terms of press freedom. Most of the indicators fell close to this average. Panelists rated Indicator 8, media access to international news sources, very highly, nearly a point higher than the average. However, panelists still see access to public information as a weakness, and Indicator 7 came in more than half a point lower than the average.

Article 29 (1) (a) of Uganda's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Uganda is also a signatory to several international human-rights treaties. However, panelists felt that the spirit of the constitution and treaties is sometimes not respected. There are laws in place, including the Press and Media Law of 1995 and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002, that contradict the constitution. "Even if we have a good constitution, the implementation has been wanting. We have seen political activists and opposition politicians arrested on several occasions for organizing public rallies termed as illegal by government," said panelist Mike Arerenge from WBS-TV. He added that some journalists have even been taken from their stations or summoned to police offices and grilled by police because they host talk shows seen to be critical of the government. Others, who have not been lucky, have ended up appearing before courts of law on similar charges and sent to prison.

Indeed, over the past few years, government security operatives, police, and others have targeted private media outlets, closing them down for weeks and confiscating some of their computers and notebooks. Journalists have been battered intentionally by security personnel during political and civil riots. The president criticizes reporters for running stories he sees as "negative" with respect to his government. At times he has threatened to sack certain editors. In 2006, an editor for the only government-run English daily, *The New Vision*, was forced to resign after the president termed "persistent, negative reporting" about his government by its own newspaper.

However, to the credit of Uganda's political system, the judiciary acts independently and has effectively limited the power of the executive to strangle the media. The executive branch has pursued defamation charges in some cases, yet has never won any of these cases. This independence includes general freedom-of-expression issues as well. Stephen Ouma, general secretary of the Uganda Journalists Union, discussed proceedings brought against Kizza Besigye of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change, and other petitions by the state challenging actions of the opposition, that have been thrown out by the courts.

At one time the current government promised to abolish legacy colonial laws it regarded as contrary to media freedom, but this later turned out to be an empty promise. Worse, the government passed legislation targeting the media, such as those described above. However, after protests by the media profession, the government is in the process of amending some of these laws. The minister of information has asked for input to better inform this process, but no one, not even journalists' associations, has responded with anything concrete.

The panel agreed that licensing of broadcast media is fair and not political. This is handled by two bodies: the Uganda Broadcasting Council and the Communications Commission. Because two bodies are charged with this responsibility, it becomes difficult to know which of them has more power than the other. One of them may decide to withdraw a license of a media outlet without consulting the other. A case in point was the decision by the Communications Commission to temporarily suspend the operations of NTV. "We need to harmonize the licensing process by having one body to be charged with this duty. The Broadcasting Council should be the overall body, like we see in South Africa, where SABC controls all the radio stations and airwaves," said Arerenge.

Uganda has liberal laws on starting businesses that provide an opportunity for people wanting to start any business, media inclusive, to do so without undue impediments. However, because most private broadcast stations are city-based, the government now enforces a policy that all new entrants in broadcast media must be in rural areas. Taxes for the media

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.

industry are similar to those for other sectors; however, investors in other businesses are given tax holidays at times, something not extended to the media.

The panel noted that crimes against journalists and media are very common, and suspects in most cases are not punished. Recent riots in Kampala saw police and other security operatives openly beating and harassing journalists. Although journalists, through their different associations, have protested against such actions, the government has kept silent. One panelist noted, "We were forced to suspend coverage of all police activities, and this moved the inspector general of police, Major General Kale Kaihura, to meet the president of the Uganda Journalists Association and his team, and [he] apologized for the actions of his men." Violations of journalists' rights are well publicized in the media, and the public and human-rights groups condemn such acts.

The panel agreed that as much as the state media are supposed to be independent, this is not the case with both radio and television. In most cases, state broadcasting runs stories that favor the government, which appoints all its editors. However, the panel noted that this is different with the public print media, whose editorial staff has, for a long time, shown a sense of independence despite the fact that government appoints all the top editors and managers. One state paper, *The New Vision*, has published stories critical of the government, attracting the president's attention, who at times has threatened to sack the paper's editors.

The panel noted that the laws that govern the media treat state and private outlets the same, but in practice the state media are favored. One example is easier access to public information by state media. Powerful businesses do interfere with both state and private media's editorial content, as they provide advertisements that are a major source of revenue.

Libel is handled by both criminal and civil laws. Should a journalist lose a criminal case, s/he serves a prison sentence after which the complainant is free to file a civil case for damages. The panel stated that it is up to the complainant to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Very few libel cases have resulted in guilty verdicts against journalists. Panelists were concerned, however, that some journalists abuse freedom of speech to injure others through their media.

Article 41 of the constitution guarantees citizens the right to access most information in possession of the state and authorizes parliament to promulgate laws to allow for such access. These laws have helped media outlets obtain needed information. However, the panel noted that these laws do not cover files in the cabinet and that the procedure for getting information is too cumbersome and should be revised.

Access to international news and news sources is free, and several media outlets use stories from foreign news agencies like AP, Reuters, and AFP. The panel noted that Internet access is not restricted and is available in most cities, towns, and urban areas.

In the past, anyone who wished to join the journalism profession was free to do so, but the passage of the Press and Media Law put in place regulations that spell out who a journalist is and required educational standards in the form of a diploma. Under the same law, journalists are supposed to be licensed and renew the license every year. This change attracted a lot of protest from the media through their associations and has not been put into practice.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Uganda Objective Score: 2.31

Most indicators in this objective fell close to the overall average. Only Indicator 4, journalists cover key events and issues, was noticeably higher, while only Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, came in more than half a point lower.

The panel agreed that most journalists do their work professionally and provide balanced and fair stories to their readers and listeners. However, panelists said there are some lazy journalists who do not bother to crosscheck their facts and end up producing biased stories; they indicated that this is not common.

There is a code of ethics that aligns with international standards and was developed and agreed upon by all journalists' associations. However, panel members said that some journalists

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

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

have violated the code of ethics by taking gifts for coverage and accepting bribes to kill stories; panelists said this is more common in broadcast media. Those who have been caught have been punished by associations through suspension of membership, and others have been sacked by their employer.

Self-censorship exists but is not very common. Panel members agreed that it is mainly due to political pressure, business interests, fear of persecution or arrest, or losing a job when a story would go against the media outlet's editorial policy or bias.

Most key events are covered by journalists without any restrictions, apart from presidential functions, which need clearance from security. The panel states that even security issues are covered and that it is only in times of war and other military actions that the army restricts the media from accessing some geographic areas and information.

The panel agreed that most freelance journalists are poorly paid for their work, especially by radio stations. However, they added that the pay levels depend on the media outlet: some pay better than others, and it is not easy to get a job with those that pay well. But the panel noted that media managers and senior editors are paid very well and that the difference between their packages and those of their reporters is very big. At broadcast media, some announcers, news readers, and DJs get more money than professional journalists, which the panel said is unfair. The low pay levels contribute to the ethical abuses described above, according to the panel. "We have registered a Journalists Union to work and advocate for the welfare of all journalists in Uganda, and we hope it will help solve this problem in future," said Ouma, the Union's general secretary.

The panel says that more time (close to 60 percent) is allocated to entertainment and commercials in broadcast media, with 40 percent or less time allocated to news and educational programs. But in the print media, more space (60 percent) is allocated to the news and about 40 percent to advertisements. "Some media houses have come up with special pullouts to give extra coverage to specific issues like those of women, children, and others," said Sarah Muwanga, a panel member.

The facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news have improved gradually; however, the media, especially freelancers, in Uganda still need assistance in this area. Lack of proper equipment has led to production of incomplete stories without elements such as sound bites or action pictures. Ugandan journalists still need digital video and still cameras, recorders, and computers with Internet connections. Panelists added that assistance efforts that provide equipment should be channeled through professional associations like the Uganda Journalists Union and the Uganda Journalists Association, which give them out as

awards in organized competitions geared toward improving the skills of their members. The same associations may also set up Internet cafés, allowing members, especially freelancers, to send their stories to different media houses for a small fee.

Specialized reporting is present more in print media but is not well pronounced. The panel agreed that some media houses have tried to train and prepare their reporters to specialize in particular fields, but a lot of work is left to be done.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Uganda Objective Score: 2.58

Panelists rated the indicators in this objective nearly equally well; all were close to the final objective score.

Both private and public media exist as affordable sources of news for society. To date there are more than 120 operational radio stations registered and over 30 television stations. Internet facilities are available in urban areas and small towns at fair rates. Although a number of people use the Internet, they do so mainly for e-mail and not news or information. Overall, the panel said, access in cities and towns is much better than in rural areas.

The panel agreed that community media exist in some areas (e.g., Maama FM, Radio Kagadi, etc.) and are doing well. Community print media outlets, however, were forced to close down because of economic reasons. Business people and politicians have also started regional and district radios, which they use for both their political mobilization and developmental issues.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

The panel noted that there are no restrictions preventing citizens from accessing both domestic and international media. Access to the Internet is free to whoever can afford to pay; rates are not overly high (less than \$1 for one hour). People are also free to subscribe to cable or satellite television in areas that are covered.

State media provide coverage to alternative views from opposition politicians, but this is limited. Such media spend most of their time covering the government. Editors and reporters from public media must follow established editorial policies, which favor the government. The panel agreed, however, that state media fill in gaps left by commercial broadcasters by covering developmental, educational, and other programs that commercial media neglect.

The panel decried the decline of most African news agencies, unlike in the Middle East, for example, which enjoys the services of a big media agency like MENA. However, panelists were hopeful that a new agency called Uganda Radio Network, established with foreign funding, would succeed. While it provides news at affordable rates, most existing media outlets already have reporters and correspondents in most parts of the country. Panelists added that some media outlets also use stories and information from international agencies like AFP, AP, and Reuters.

Most private broadcasters produce their own programs, and the content differs greatly compared with that of state media. Private broadcast media's news programs tend to be produced more for the benefit of the public, unlike those of state media, which are biased in favor of the government.

Media ownership is generally known to those who may wish to know; however, there are some media outlets whose ownership is convoluted and therefore hidden. The panel felt that it is easy to establish who owns a media outlet, at least officially, by obtaining registration documents. Some media owners hide information related to their income and political affiliation for fear of being persecuted.

Social issues are well covered in the media, and the government does not restrict any aspects. Panelists felt that minority issues are not taken seriously in the media, and as such minority-language speakers are at a disadvantage and have to read or listen to other media.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Uganda Objective Score: 2.12

This objective received the weakest score from the panelists. All indicators were relatively close to the final objective, with the exception of Indicator 5, state subsidies for private

media, which received a score about a half point lower due to government advertising's being used to exert political pressure.

Both public and private media operate as profit-generating businesses and are generally run in an efficient manner. Apart from state broadcast media, all other media, including public print media, are not directly supported by the government. All sales outlets and distribution is in private hands, managed as professional businesses. The panel agreed that the same applies to printing houses, which are very well managed and numerous enough to support the needs of print media. At times there are delays in distribution of newspapers to remote areas due to transport problems, but this is not common.

Individual media outlets have different sources of revenue, including from sale of copies, advertising, commercial printing, and sponsored programs. State broadcast media depend on both the government and revenue generated from advertisements, and as such influence from the state impacts content. The public print media depend entirely on own-source revenue, and therefore government influence is much less effective. Big advertisers tend to influence news content to the point that one would never see a story critical of a big advertiser, said panel members.

The largest percentage of revenue for most media outlets comes from advertisements, although some print media depend on sold copies and secure advertisements only to supplement their revenue. Most media outlets, state and private, engage advertising agencies to facilitate advertising sales. Advertising is well developed and is handled by both local and international agencies that match favorably in competition. Advertising firms work with all media formats but mainly in cities and towns.

Independent media do not receive any subsidies from the government, but they do receive government advertising that is stopped at times when they run stories that are critical of the state.

Some media outlets like *New Vision*, *Monitor*, and some radio stations carry out research on their own related to their sales, but at times they commission companies to do it for them, said Muwanga Kakooza, a freelance journalist. Some of them use call-in shows, focus groups, or questionnaires given out to readers and listeners.

Two companies produce circulation figures and broadcast ratings: the Audit Bureau of Circulation and Steadman. Their findings can easily be accessed by anybody, including all media outlets. The panel agreed that figures produced by these companies have never been disputed by any media outlets, though that does not prevent some radio stations from claiming to have the widest listenership.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Uganda Objective Score: 2.77

Panelists noted that Uganda has a history of vocal support by media-related associations, a relatively large number of universities offering journalism studies, and that distribution and printing services benefit the media. These factors resulted in a fairly high score for this objective, and all indicators scored close to the final average.

There are several media associations. Organizations such as the Uganda Newspaper Editors and Proprietors Association and the Uganda Publishers Association work for the interests of owners and editors. Working journalists are represented by associations including the Uganda Journalists Union, a trade union, and the Uganda Journalists Association, which specializes in professional issues. The Journalists Safety Committee handles press freedom and media-rights issues. The panel noted that many of these organizations have actively defended journalists' rights whenever they are threatened. Membership is determined by application and payment of membership dues.

Recent government activity aimed at silencing the media has been met with strong reactions from journalists' organizations and human- and civil-rights groups, especially those who work hand in hand with the media. As a case in point, the Uganda Journalists Union and the Uganda Journalists Association recently petitioned the police chief to protest harassment of the media by his department, and a probe has been initiated to determine those responsible. The Uganda Journalists' Human Rights Network also petitioned the Uganda Human Rights Commission over the same issue, and they await the outcome of the investigation.

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.

Certain NGOs also defend journalists' rights. The panel agreed that the Uganda Law Society has been very helpful to the media in areas of legal reform and has also provided legal assistance for journalists arrested and taken to court.

Makerere University, a public institution, was the first to offer a degree program in journalism and mass communication in 1988. Even before that, other institutions offered diploma courses in journalism. More than 15 universities, both private and public, now offer degree courses in journalism. The quality of graduates from these programs is good, but the media industry cannot absorb them all. Some journalists have received scholarships to study abroad and are now at work in Uganda.

Some media outlets have designed and implemented short-term in-house training programs for their employees, and panelists said these efforts have resulted in professional improvement.

Printing facilities are in private hands and are run as profit-making businesses without any government interference. The panel agreed that even where a printing facility is in the hands of the government, it provides services to private media without any restrictions. Media distribution channels are also in private hands and are efficiently managed.

List of Panel Participants

Muwanga Kakooza, journalist, *The New Vision*, Masaka Municipality

Sarah Muwanga, journalist, *Bukedde*, Kampala

Ahmed Kateregga Musaaazi, president, Uganda Journalists Association, Kampala

Wokulira Ssebaggala Jr., program coordinator, Human Rights Network for Journalists, Mukono District

Attactor Kamahoro, freelance journalist, Mityana

David Muwanga, freelance journalist, Jinja

Malinga Doya David, business writer, *East African*, Kampala

Robert Mugagga, journalist, *Weekly Observer*, Kampala

Arengge Micheal, editor, *WBS TV/VOA*, Kampala

John Sserwanga, journalist, Community Based Radio, Entebbe

Moderator

Stephen Ouma, general secretary, Uganda Journalists Union, Kampala

The Uganda study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Eastern African Journalists Association, Kampala.