
For its part, the government claims slow but steady improvement in its relations with the media. But press freedom advocates say that a new press law passed in late 2008 aims to systematically encourage self-censorship and diminish the media's ability to engage the government on important issues.



ETHIOPIA

Relations between Ethiopia's government and media have been contentious throughout the 18 years since the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front took power by toppling the military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Most recently, after violence erupted over the contested elections of 2005, the government arrested many journalists and opposition leaders, charging them with treason in what Reporters Without Borders called a "spiral of repression."

For its part, the government claims slow but steady improvement in its relations with the media. But press freedom advocates say that a new press law passed in late 2008 aims to systematically encourage self-censorship and diminish the media's ability to engage the government on important issues. The new Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation, while banning censorship and pre-trial detention of journalists, also maintained repressive criminal libel statutes and vague national-security restrictions, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The measure, which became law in December, increased fines for defamation and granted prosecutors discretion to impound any publication deemed a threat to public order or national security. Political opposition groups, the international community and journalists in the private media have expressed concern that passage of the law demonstrates that the government has not changed its confrontational approach toward the private press.

However, in what is seen as a big step forward in relations between the government and private media, no journalists have been convicted this year and no journalist is currently jailed. At the same time, high-profile government officials and agencies are slowly opening their doors to private newspapers and have shown signs of engaging the country's two private FM radio stations.

Due to the oppressive political environment, panelists for Ethiopia agreed to participate only on condition of anonymity.

ETHIOPIA AT A GLANCE

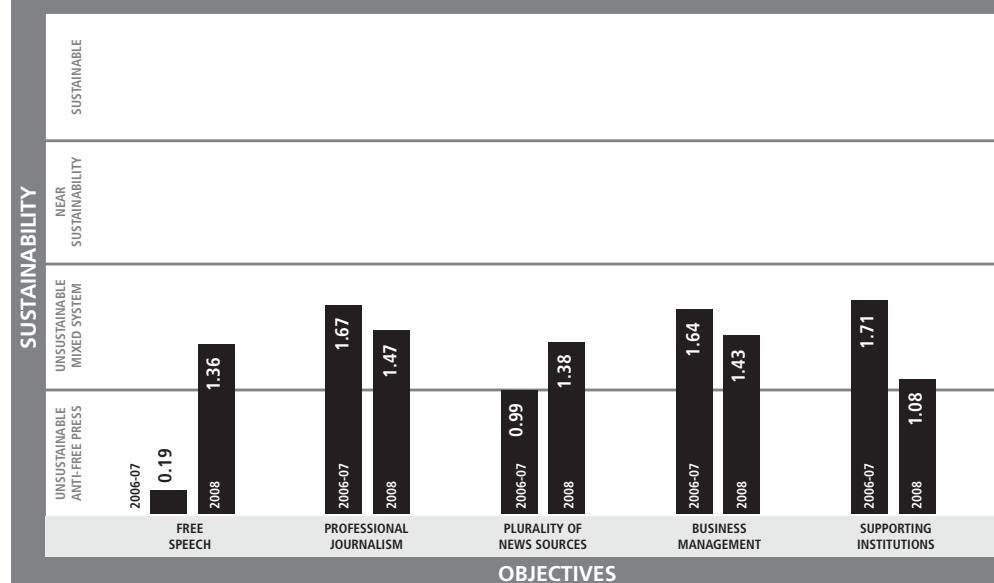
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 85,237,338 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Addis Ababa
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Oromo 32.1%, Amara 30.1%, Tigraway 6.2%, Somalie 5.9%, Guragie 4.3%, Sidama 3.5%, Welaita 2.4%, other 15.4% (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 60.8%, Muslim 32.8%, traditional 4.6%, other 1.8% (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Amarigna 32.7%, Oromigna 31.6%, Tigrigna 6.1%, Somaligna 6%, Guaragigna 3.5%, Sidamigna 3.5%, Hadiyigna 1.7%, other 14.8%, English (major foreign language taught in schools) (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$17.57 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$780 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 42.7% (male 50.3%, female 35.1%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Girma Woldegiorgis (since October 8, 2001)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 3 daily newspapers, 4 other main papers; Radio: 4 main stations; Television: 1 main station
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *Addis Zemen* (state-owned), *Ethiopian Herald* (state-owned), *The Daily Monitor* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: Radio Ethiopia (state-owned), FM Addis 97.1 (state-owned), Voice of Tigray Revolution (state-owned)
- > **News agencies:** Walta Information Centre (private, pro-government), Ethiopian News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 291,000 (2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ETHIOPIA



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

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.36

Panelists agreed that legal protection of free speech exists but implementation is very poor. One participant suggested that free speech actually has three components: freedom before you speak, freedom when you speak, and freedom after you speak. He said that although freedom to speak is largely allowed in Ethiopia, freedom after you speak presents some reservations. He referred to a personal experience when he was “harassed by state security forces after I repeatedly published stories of famine and the war in Sumale *killil* [the ethnic Somali province].”

The participants also agreed that there is no social protection of free speech, as Ethiopian society has little or no respect for journalists. Legal infringements of the right to free expression, which is protected by the constitution, reflect the low stature of the media in society.

Licensing of broadcast media is not transparent, panelists agreed. In fact, broadcast licensing only started one year ago, and it only extends to private FM stations in the capital, Addis Ababa. To the dismay of the majority of the panelists, private television stations are not allowed to operate. One participant said that he considers these restrictions to be the most irresponsible thing that the government has done since coming to power in 1991.

Some participants said that they object to the government's claims that private radio and television stations could be used to incite violence and erode peaceful coexistence of the diverse ethnic groups, as occurred in Rwanda and other countries. On the contrary, they said, private broadcast media could promote cultural dialogue, information exchange and foster common values and tolerance. Some participants said that the government could have consistent consultations with radio and television owners to determine the boundaries of the content of programs and could monitor their broadcasts.

One panelist said that the Broadcast Agency does not know the limits of its mandate, explaining that officials of the agency have conducted surprise checks of the two radio stations to see what was going on there.

In addition, media companies are required to deposit 30 percent of their capital in a blocked account while waiting for a broadcast license, which all the participants said could paralyze the cash flow of the companies.

Generally, more than half of the panelists felt that the government has usurped the role of the free market with

regard to broadcast media and that it maintains a growing political interest in the licensing issues.

Regarding taxation of the media, two senior journalists, one of whom owns the newspaper where he works, ridiculed the fact that the import tax on newsprint stands at 35 percent.

Complaints of harassment have been filed but no physical attacks on journalists had been reported over the past year up until the time of the MSI panel discussion. Shortly afterwards, however, Reporters Without Borders reported a brutal attack on Amare Aregawi, editor of *The Reporter*. Police arrested two suspects shortly after the attack, and local gossip suggests that his attackers were working at the behest of a private party and not the government.

The government generally favors the public media, though a few government offices are willing to entertain requests for information from the private media. There are no legal regulations that preclude certain media from access to information.

Editorial policies at all private and government media, including the state-run Ethiopian TV, typically stipulate editorial independence. In practice, however, government media experience frequent interference from editors who dictate what news and feature stories should be produced, and how. Powerful businesses also are increasingly interfering with content and editorial independence, and some newspapers have fallen under the influence of the businesses with which they have signed advertisement agreements.

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.

Some participants said that they object to the government's claims that private radio and television stations could be used to incite violence and erode peaceful coexistence of the diverse ethnic groups, as occurred in Rwanda and other countries. On the contrary, they said, private broadcast media could promote cultural dialogue, information exchange and foster common values and tolerance.

Going to police stations to respond to defamation and other charges is common practice for private journalists. Journalists are subject to prison sentences for libel and related crimes, and, although they rarely serve them if found guilty, these potential sentences still serve as a real threat. Charges of press offenses can be filed by government prosecutors, private businesses, individuals, and NGOs, but the police are apparently the main players in the arrest and prosecution of journalists. Journalists have accused the government of taking them into custody at peak production hours of the week, keeping them in a police station for three days, and releasing them on bail. Some panelists claimed that the government purposely takes journalists in custody on Fridays so that they stay in jail through the weekend and brought to court on Monday. Journalists are mostly released on bail, and many find that no charges are filed against them after they are released.

A sign of positive change on the government's part in the last two years is the fact that there are currently no journalists in prison. The judiciary system in Ethiopia, however, is not well informed of the importance of protecting free speech. Government prosecutors and judges do not, in general terms, understand the legal philosophy behind the protection of free speech, and judges naturally ally with prosecutors, not journalists, in court. There have been some unproven allegations of corruption involving judges and prosecutors in libel cases.

The government denies restricting some web sites, yet other web sites are not accessible. There is widespread suspicion that the country's sole Internet provider, state-owned ETC, filters sites that belong to militant opposition groups based in Europe and the United States. Although Internet speed has improved over the years, the cost is still high, prohibiting salaried workers and students from searching the Internet for information.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.47

There is a serious lack of professional and ethical standards among journalists in government and private media. Most news stories and special programs are not well sourced. Both government and private journalists employ a great deal of partisanship in their reporting. Fact checking is not usually conducted in reporting news stories. Instead, methods of collecting information are a reminder that the media are still prisoners of Ethiopia's old culture of rumors. The panelists agreed that part of the blame goes to editors. As one put it, "There is a significant amount of trust that editors put in their reporters, which results in no fact-checking at all in the news stories brought by the reporters."

When journalists do attempt to properly report a story, a lack of training and skills has led many to rely on ill-informed sources and minimal, flawed or partisan background material, the panelists said.

Although there are quite a number of journalists' associations in Ethiopia, none has developed any ethical standards for practicing journalists. Most journalists follow guidelines of their own and those established by their editors, which often differ from international standards. For example, news editors at some newspapers do not require repeated background checks before publication, and they sometimes do not edit news stories thoroughly.

There are numerous instances of journalists giving preferential treatment for gifts or cash. The practice is more profoundly noticed in one private paper, but it

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).

generally takes place at many private newspapers and in the government's broadcast media.

Journalists, both in government or private media, say that they practice self-censorship because they fear reprisal in various forms. Government journalists are mostly concerned about job security, as stories seen as unfavorable by editors could cost them their jobs. Even if they try to cover such stories, their requests are turned down by senior editors. Private journalists are afraid of government reprisal either directly, such as through judicial harassment, or indirectly, through denial of access to information from government institutions.

Along those lines, panelists said recent trends show that upsetting opposition political parties and big businesses has become more dangerous than criticizing the government. Opposition parties have threatened, libeled, or openly denounced papers that have criticized them. Recent signs also show that big businesses threaten, bribe or, in rare circumstances alleged by the journalist community, attack journalists following reports into their activities.

Journalists cover almost all major events in the country. Security is not a concern when covering news in regional states far from the capital, except in Sumale *killil*, where there are sporadic clashes between government forces and local insurgents. Editors are mostly willing to send their reporters to cover any political, cultural, or economic events in any part of the country if they can afford to do so.

Panelists agreed that the low salary of reporters is eroding their professional integrity, thereby encouraging what they called petty corruption. Some panelists expressed grave concern over recent alleged instances of the "sale" of favorable articles and news stories to politicians and business leaders for gifts and cash. In such cases, the articles are not produced after negotiating a price, but rather are produced first, after which the subject either chooses to reimburse the journalist voluntarily or is asked for a reward.

Salary levels at different media outlets show significant disparities. At a few private newspapers, the starting salary for reporters is 30 to 50 percent higher than at government newspapers and other private broadcast and print media. The editor-in-chief or deputy editor-in-chief posts at some private papers pay twice or three times the salary and benefits of government journalists. Correspondents and stringers for foreign media outlets are in a better financial condition and are generally regarded as more professional.

The salary and benefits of journalists are much lower than in other fields in the private sector, though not worse than those received by civil servants. Journalism is called a "benefit-free" profession in Ethiopia, because no allowances are given for housing or transportation, and there are no

Panelists agreed that the low salary of reporters is eroding their professional integrity, thereby encouraging what they called petty corruption. Some panelists expressed grave concern over recent alleged instances of the "sale" of favorable articles and news stories to politicians and business leaders for gifts and cash.

provisions for health insurance or pensions, except in the public media.

These conditions have prompted a massive outflow of journalists to jobs in communications, public relations, and other consultancy posts with multinational organizations and NGOs operating in Addis Ababa. In addition, journalism has become less appealing to university students.

With regard to programming balance, most of the panelists agreed it has indisputably tilted to entertainment, particularly sports talk shows, call-in shows, and listeners' song requests. Except for a very few newspapers that focus on economic and political issues, most magazines are geared toward fashion, lifestyle, sports and other "soft and non-controversial" content. Feature programs and analytical news stories are largely unavailable. Government media, including the papers and FM radio stations, are politically charged, and audiences are more interested in sports, cultural shows, and documentaries than news analysis from these outlets.

Most of the panelists, especially from the private papers, said their equipment is outdated. Among private newspapers, there is a serious lack of recording equipment and computer databases to store stories and recordings. These shortages sometimes force reporters to go off the record during interviews, leaving them defenseless in libel cases and making retrieval of background information very difficult. Broadcast production equipment, including cameras and video mixers, at state-owned ETV are outdated, some dating back 20 years. At Walta News Agency and Radio Fana, both affiliated with the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, equipment availability and quality is commendable.

The level of niche reporting and programming is very unsatisfactory. Some media, notably private papers, do a relatively better job of investigative reporting. The only television station in the country, the state-run ETV, is politically charged but does a good job of reporting on minority issues. While not as strong as it was, ETV still airs some investigative programs. The two private FM stations also run investigative programs.

The political opposition is generally not covered by the government media. On rare occasions when they are, the tone and content is mostly negative. The state media does not conduct in-depth reporting, but cultural programs are well prepared and produced and are popular among the television audience.

Major constraints to investigative and niche reporting include politics, lack of professionalism, and ethics. Among the private media, journalists who attempt to investigate specialized subjects are hindered by their editors' biases and lack of buy-in. They also encounter the ethical problems arising from their own personal and vested political interests.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.38

People in the cities have far greater access to news than those in rural areas, and one panelist described the difference as "incomparable." Private media have national coverage but mainly concentrate on issues involving the capital. AM radio is available throughout the regional states, ETV covers much of the country, and a few community radio stations exist for the rural population in southern Ethiopia.

Access to foreign media is not restricted in any way. Foreign broadcast outlets are widely listened to, and foreign magazines are available for purchase at affordable prices, though newspapers are very expensive for Ethiopian readers and not widely available.

Internet is slow and not widely available in the country. It is available only in the big cities, and the cost of access forces low- and middle-class families to rely on their workplace computers. Most government offices and businesses have Internet access for their employees. The culture of browsing the Internet for news is growing in Addis Ababa, and affordability is improving. There are very few blogs on Ethiopian affairs that are frequently visited. Some private newspapers rely on the Internet for information. SMS news alerts are completely unknown.

Most of the panelists agreed that the government restricts access to some anti-government websites. The government allegedly blocks opposition websites and blogs based in the United States and Europe.

Satellite television is unrestricted and is available in urban, rural, and even nomadic communities across the country. Satellite channels such as Arabsat and Nilesat, as well as cable television, have penetrated deep in the rural areas where even telephone access is very limited. The cost of subscription to satellite television has come down to a level where it is affordable for low-income families.

The government media are not truly public-service media. Most of the panelists agreed that the state media are as biased toward the government as the private media are toward the opposition. They reflect the stance of the ruling party and are not open to alternative political thought. The state broadcast media devote much of their airtime to government activities and inflated success stories. The majority of panelists felt that most journalists in the state media do not see themselves as serving the public interest, rather as civil servants serving the government.

The political opposition is generally not covered by the government media. On rare occasions when they are, the tone and content is mostly negative. The state media does not conduct in-depth reporting, but cultural programs are well prepared and produced and are popular among the television audience.

There are only two news agencies in Ethiopia, which gather news and distribute it mostly to government media. The biggest and oldest news agency, state-owned Ethiopian News Agency, exhibits a partisan approach and does not have editorial independence. The other agency, Walta

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.

Information Center, is affiliated with the ruling party and provides much of its news to state media. Walta offers documentary video productions, a press digest, and summaries of international and local news about Ethiopia. The agency also posts its news on its websites, which any other media outlet, including private papers and web sites, can quote. Since both agencies are seen as being associated with government and ruling-party structures, private papers and the public have serious reservations about relying on them, even though the price of news at these agencies is very low and is affordable for many of the public and private papers. On the other hand, many on-line news sources are hopelessly biased against the government, insensitive, and often divorced from reality. International agencies, notably Associated Press, Reuters, and the BBC, are often quoted for news and information on international political and business affairs.

Many of Ethiopia's broadcast media produce their own programming. Both state and private outlets focus on social issues and do not show major differences in content. However, the private stations have a more sophisticated approach in presentation of their programs. Yet news programs mostly rely on press releases that are sent to all stations from government and private institutions.

There are serious questions raised by the public concerning the ownership of media companies. Many private newspapers are allegedly supported, if not created, by opposition political parties operating locally and abroad. Most readers do know for certain who owns the papers they read. In the case of the FANA radio station and the Walta Information Center, both are affiliated with the ruling party.

There is no foreign investment in the media in Ethiopia, as the law only allows Ethiopian citizens to invest in media. The ban of foreign investment deprives the Ethiopian media of finance, modern management, and experience that they badly need, but many of the panelists contended that allowing considerable foreign ownership could mean putting vital national security interests in foreign hands.

There is minimal resistance to the inclusion of a wide variety of social issues in the media. Journalists covering minority issues are not harassed. However, minority-language programs are not as numerous or strong as they should be, considering that Ethiopia is a country of numerous ethnic groups and languages. Minority-language media exist among the state broadcast services but not in the private papers, except for a few that cater to specific minority groups and publish only sporadically.

Marketing and administration posts are usually filled by relatives of the editor-in-chief or other senior editors of the papers. A few of the private papers and the two private FM radio stations have personnel policies to place the right people in the right places, but implementation of those policies is very poor.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.43

Most private and state media do not function as professional businesses. Many of the private papers are badly managed, and financial, administrative, and other documents are not kept properly.

Editorial, marketing, and design teams are not properly organized. Most of the papers do not have efficient marketing strategies. Instead, they are forced to compromise their editorial integrity to secure and maintain business contacts and lure advertisements. Likewise, many of the papers lack strong business plans and strategies, and do not have a vision of where they want to be in five or 10 years.

Accounting and financial practices are below even local standards. Some panelists said that small roadside stores are better managed in terms of accounting and marketing

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.

practices. With the exception of two newspapers, almost all private papers do not hire professional personnel to manage their businesses. Editors-in-chief of many of the papers are directly engaged in day-to-day financial decisions and managing human resources, including hiring and firing of employees.

Marketing and administration posts are usually filled by relatives of the editor-in-chief or other senior editors of the papers. A few of the private papers and the two private FM radio stations have personnel policies to place the right people in the right places, but implementation of those policies is very poor.

Community radio is relatively new to Ethiopia, and such stations tend to be inefficient because the staff is learning on the job.

Government media are widely accused of exploiting taxpayers' money to partisan political ends, and there are allegations of misuse of public funds by these state institutions. The private media are mostly self-financed, drawing revenue from subscriptions and advertisements. Some private papers enjoy page sponsorships from NGOs. It has been widely suggested that private media may be financially supported by opposition political supporters in the Ethiopian diaspora.

Print advertising is growing, as businesses become more aware of the benefits of advertisements in newspapers. As the number of advertisement requests submitted to businesses skyrockets, there have been cases of corrupt deals between marketing departments of businesses and papers. Numerous allegations of corruption have been reported at state-owned ETV and many private papers.

Market connection of private media remains very loose and shows the papers have to battle with each other to secure advertisement deals with businesses. Campaigns, bribes, and the political interests of partners often guide these deals, one panelist said. She claimed that she was asked by foreign interest groups to campaign against some legislative reforms that recently took effect, for which she would have been handsomely rewarded. Bribes and political interests have also become increasingly important means for private newspapers to survive in the market.

There are a quite a few advertising agencies in Addis Ababa that regularly work with radio stations, newspapers, and television stations. These agencies have secured contracts to produce advertising for international brands such as Coca Cola and for cell phone companies.

Advertising takes about one-third of broadcast air time, while the rest is dedicated to content.

Advertising revenue at broadcast and print media is often sufficient to cover costs and generate some profit. Some of the prominent private papers have been able to afford better offices and IT services as a result of long-term advertisement deals with bigger businesses.

Subscriptions are not a major source of revenue among print media. Instead, they rely on street sales. The government-run papers, by contrast, are almost completely dependent on subscriptions. They do not compete in the market with the private papers, but they are needed for government bid invitations, trade license registration, and other legislative issues. Therefore all governmental institutions, businesses, and NGOs subscribe to the three big daily government papers.

Another source of revenue for media outlets is sponsorship of special programs. Most businesses are willing to sign lucrative deals with FM radio stations to sponsor sports talk shows. Issues involving children, women and HIV/AIDS frequently attract NGO sponsorship on radio stations, television, and newspapers.

The panelists unanimously agreed that sour relations between the government and the private media make any subsidy impossible. Some editors said their requests for sponsorship from government agencies have been turned down for reasons of "unfavorable coverage." Some government agencies, however, do occasionally advertise in selected papers, although broadcast media are better placed to benefit from government ads. Government-sponsored companies such as Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Shipping Lines, Ethiopian Insurance Corporation, and others work with private publications and broadcast outlets for their advertisement needs.

Print and broadcast media outlets do not conduct research to tailor production to audience needs. Most papers do not have strategic plans; the few papers that have prepared plans typically do not incorporate market research into the process. Call-ins are the common research tools employed by FM stations.

The Ministry of Information is the sole body that collects circulation figures, although some NGOs and researchers who work on governance and media issues also carry out assessment of circulation and content. Some of the NGOs are respected for their accuracy and professional capacity, and individual researchers, media observers, and the private media rely upon their reports.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.08

There are no media trade associations in Ethiopia. There are six legally registered professional associations, but these do not represent either the majority of journalists or their interests. Rather, they are organized along political lines. They are not willing to work together, and they often accuse each other of not being independent. Three of the six organizations claim to broadly represent journalists' interests, and the other three cater to specialists or particular beats: a photojournalists association, a women journalists association, and journalists working on HIV/AIDS and the environment. All are registered with the Ministry of Justice.

The newest association, the Ethiopian National Journalists Union (ENJU), claims more than 300 members, and is the only functioning association with members from both private and public media in the capital and regional states. The ENJU charter states that only journalists can be members; it classifies publishers as business entities and disqualifies them. By doing so, the ENJU hopes to fend off any conflict between business and professional interests within the association.

Though not adequate, the ENJU tries to provide training opportunities for its members. ENJU has been delayed in obtaining international recognition due to campaigns against the association by older associations and rumors that have circulated that the association is a government front.

Despite calls by local journalists and international media organizations for these associations to come under an umbrella union, the groups continue to work separately, each seeking the demise of the others. Relations between the leaders of the larger associations have grown particularly hostile over the years. Consequently, many prominent journalists in the private media have refused to join any association.

Some panelists said the recently passed media law was one example of how the associations remain silent while the government is drafting contentious legislation. One participant blasted the ENJU for siding with the government while the law was debated on national television. "While all of us expect a journalists' association to campaign and pressure the government for more rights of journalists, the ENJU has in effect argued—taking the same line as the government—that the law is workable and that journalists cannot ask for more in this regard," the panelist said.

"Whether the law provides more rights and protects the citizen's right to information is not the main issue here," said one participant, "but the fact that the one functioning association in the country has objected to calls of greater

freedom of the press is appalling and raises questions of the association's allegiances and values."

The Ethiopian Free Journalists Association and the Ethiopian Journalists Association have lost members to the ENJU. Both are essentially defunct and are believed to maintain ties with the political opposition.

None of the associations is engaged in or capable of providing legal and professional support for journalists, though the Environment Journalists Association does a better job of facilitating career development opportunities for its members.

Quite a few NGOs work closely with media outlets to support media independence and freedom of speech. But working with government and private institutions is uncharted territory for NGOs—and a potential minefield—so many NGOs and multilateral organizations, including the European Union, are distancing themselves from engagement in media affairs to avoid clashing with the government.

NGOs generally refrain from reacting to violations of media freedom; neither do they serve as watchdogs. Their involvement is limited to facilitating forums to bring government and the press together to discuss proposed legislative reforms. The recently passed press law is an example of the highly limited role taken by the NGOs, which only acted as facilitators.

A number of civil society organizations and multilateral organizations are still reeling from the dreadful experiences of the 2005 national election, which was marred by post-election violence and arrests of opposition figures and journalists. With a new and more restrictive civil society law coming into effect, NGOs are more cautious in their support and advocacy roles. Yet NGOs still work closely with the media on social issues, particularly HIV/AIDS, early marriage, reproductive health, and orphans and street children.

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.

“Whether the law provides more rights and protects the citizen’s right to information is not the main issue here,” said one participant, “but the fact that the one functioning association in the country has objected to calls of greater freedom of the press is appalling and raises questions of the association’s allegiances and values.”

The Population Media Center, Panos Ethiopia, and PACT International are the most active NGOs working with media in Ethiopia. Their partnership in these areas includes sponsorship, content production, and advocacy.

Some local NGOs that work closely with the media maintain working relationships with international media watchdogs and press institutions.

There was consensus among the panelists that degree programs in journalism are of a “very questionable standard.” Availability of the programs has significantly increased over the years, with the opening of communications and journalism departments in more than 10 state universities. Private institutions, particularly Unity University College, also have made strides in providing quality journalism education for the last six years. However, almost all institutions in the country focus on theory and classroom-based lessons and paper assignments rather than on practical experience. “The fresh graduates, including those with up to one year’s experience, have absolutely no knowledge of the basic skills of journalism,” one panelist said. “Sometimes I really wonder what they have been taught in college. I am devoting so much of my time re-training them, while at the same time I have to pay them salaries.”

There are a few opportunities for students to go abroad for journalism studies, and a good number of them return home to the profession.

As the number of graduates increases, the existing media outlets are proving too small to accommodate even a small percentage of them. Journalists with graduate degrees do not normally go back into the media but rather find jobs with NGOs and research organizations.

There are short-term training opportunities provided by NGOs on specialized topics, and practicing journalists have some access to such training, but it does not cater to their broader needs. What is needed is a series of training programs to help working journalists upgrade their news gathering and

writing skills. Private media have a good record of supporting the efforts of their staff members to take advantage of professional development opportunities. Normally, fees are not paid for courses and training, as they are mostly covered by international NGOs.

Many of the panelists agreed that printing facilities are not apolitical or unrestricted. The largest printing enterprise in the country, Birhanina Selam Printing Enterprise, is state-owned and prints all the major newspapers and magazines. It has been criticized by some private papers for imposing informal restrictions after reviewing the content of the papers. This has been especially true in the wake of the bloody 2005 election and the subsequent crackdown on the media.

Private printing companies escaped condemnation until last year when a magazine was taken over by police and its editors taken into custody. The magazine printed sensitive information from the trial of singer Tewodros Kassahun, better known as Teddy Afro. The company that printed the magazine was accused of being an accomplice in the seizure of the magazine and of succumbing to government pressure.

Private printing companies do not discriminate among the various media outlets. They often accuse Birhanina Selam Printing Enterprise of trying to systematically cripple them through increased printing costs. This state-owned enterprise cites soaring international paper prices as the cause for higher printing costs throughout the industry, but some publishers have provided figures that show prices have not climbed as fast as claimed by the printer. Nevertheless, steady price hikes effectively put some papers out of circulation in the first quarter of 2008, while the remaining ones cited printing costs as a major cause of smaller circulation.

In the same vein, private paper distributors have used their business clout to persuade papers to meet “some guidelines and rules” for political reasons. Some panelists claimed that distributors have asked them to replace front-page pictures and change headlines.

Radio transmitters are in the hands of the government, except those serving the two private FM stations. Print media distribution is very disorganized and poorly managed. Newspaper distribution is dominated by a few individuals who have established a vast network in Addis Ababa and the regional towns and cities. The Internet is usually provided by small Internet cafés with even smaller profits that prohibit further investment.

List of Panel Participants

Due to the oppressive political environment, panelists for Ethiopia agreed to participate only on condition of anonymity.

