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GHANA

The return to multiparty democracy in 1993 has been auspicious for the media, both as a harbinger of their role in the free marketplace of ideas and of their own business prospects. Before then, the state-owned Graphic Communications Group (the *Daily Graphic* and weekly *Mirror*) and the New Times Corporation (the daily *Ghanaian Times* and *Weekly Spectator*) owned the only newspapers guaranteed to appear on newsstands. The remaining dozen or so private newspapers made only sporadic appearances, depending on the goodwill of the government in power. There also were the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's (GBC) three national shortwave networks (Radio 1 and Radio 2 and the External Radio Service), three FM stations (Radio GAR in Accra, URA Radio in Bolgatanga, and the Apam Community FM station), and one television station, Ghana Television (GTV).

Since 1993, however, there has been a burgeoning of print and broadcast media outlets. According to a combined listing by the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), the National Media Commission (NMC), and the National Communications Authority (NCA), by 2007 there were some 60 newspapers, 120 radio stations, and six free-to-air television stations in the country. There were also about 151 Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

The year under review was particularly eventful for media activity. Spurred by the December 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections, there was a blitz of media fare. Perennial newspapers that had long gone into hibernation came into bloom and joined the partisan cacophony. Broadcast stations abandoned all normal programming for political talk and "serial caller" phone-ins. Politics, particularly of the tart-tongued stripe, made for a good sales pitch. But while the media may have profited from the seasonal windfall, professional standards and ethical norms were severely tested and often compromised by blatant propaganda and scurrilous attack ads.

In spite of this, the MSI panel assessment on Ghana testified to a consolidation of democracy and its underpinnings of free speech and supporting institutions. This is largely due to the far-reaching constitutional and legislative provisions that acknowledge the pivotal role of a free and pluralistic media in securing Ghana's democracy. Specifically, Article 162 (3) of the 1992 constitution and the National Communications Authority legislation (Act 524:45 (1)) swept away restrictions on media ownership and control (PNDCL 211), repealed the restrictive 1971 decree on telecommunications regulation and control, and encouraged private interest and investment in the media.

Ghana's overall score of 2.45 is down slightly from last year's 2.58. As with last year, Objectives 2 (professional journalism) and 4 (business management) received the lowest scores—although still within the lower bounds of "near sustainability"—while the other three objective fared better, even if none achieved a score to place them within the "sustainable" range. None of the objective scores changed radically, although the scores for Objectives 3 (plurality of news), 4, and 5 (supporting institutions) did receive modestly lower scores.

GHANA AT A GLANCE

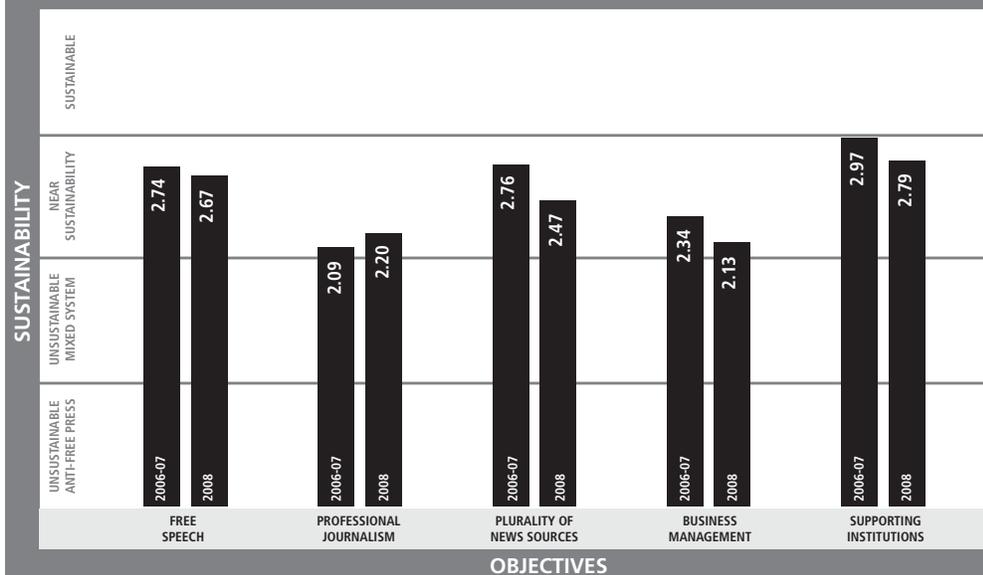
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 23,832,495 (July 2009 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%, Muslim 15.9%, traditional 8.5%, other 0.7%, none 6.1% (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Asante 14.8%, Ewe 12.7%, Fante 9.9%, Boron 4.6%, Dagomba 4.3%, Dangme 4.3%, Dagarte 3.7%, Akyem 3.4%, Ga 3.4%, Akuapem 2.9%, other 36.1% (includes English (official)) (2000 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$13.82 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$1,320 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **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, including 11 national daily newspapers (National Media Commission, December, 2006; BBC World Service Trust-AMDI 2006); Radio 166 licensed, 122 on air (National Communications Authority, January, 2007); Television stations: 25 (10 on air, National Communications Authority, January, 2007)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three daily newspapers: *Daily Graphic* (state-owned), *Daily Guide* (private), *The Chronicle* (private) (BBC World Service Trust-AMDI 2006)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Ghana News Agency (state-owned since 1957)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 650,000 (2007 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: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Ghana Objective Score: 2.67

Panelists again awarded a relatively impressive score for free speech, and this objective showed little change compared with last year. Only Indicators 8 and 9 (media access to foreign news sources and entry into the journalism profession) received noticeably lower scores than last year. All indicators scored within a half-point of the overall objective score except Indicator 7, access to information, which fell behind the others. This is hardly surprising, considering that a civil-society-initiated right-to-information law still had not received executive-branch support.

The fundamental rights to free speech and expression, and of plurality of views and media, are guaranteed under 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.” Article 162 (3) stipulates, “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, while Article 163 imposes an obligation on the state media to “afford fair opportunities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions.”

According to the MSI panel, these constitutional protections, together with the indulgence of a media-friendly government, have provided impetus for the free, even sometimes strident, expression of divergent viewpoints and ideas. As panelist Hamida Maalim Harrison, a women’s NGO advocate, noted, “The pluralization of the media, especially the airwaves, has strengthened people’s freedom to use channels like live phone-ins to speak freely and openly, even sometimes offensively.” The veteran broadcaster and radio/television trainer, Charlie Sam, concurred: “Listening to any of the several radio stations in Accra in the morning, or reading the private press, I become amazed at the scope of issues discussed, and the near irreverence and gusto with which it is done.”

These observations must be qualified, however. The panel was, for instance, unanimous on the view that although the combined effect of the various laws makes the legal environment for media in Ghana one of the loftiest and most forward-looking, some socio-cultural constraints continued to inhibit the expression of critical views, particularly of the elderly and persons in authority. As Sam himself noted, “The situation is a little different in rural settings, where we notice social restrictions on free speech.” Rejoice Esi Asante, regional news editor of the state-owned *Ghanaian Times* newspaper, echoed the concerns about social sanctions for speaking

bluntly: “Social norms, socialization processes, and culture hold many people back. They cannot talk back or challenge issues or comments made by people in authority because they hold the view and perception that it shows lack of respect.” George Sarpong, executive secretary of the National Media Commission (the media oversight body in Ghana) summed it up as follows: “I believe the constitutional provisions of freedom and independence of the media represent formal declarations of national aspirations rather than a codification of existing social realities.”

The panel also lamented that although civil-society and media-rights advocacy organizations had, since 1991, spearheaded a campaign for a right-to-information law, the initiative had not yet received legislative approval. This, the panel argued, undermines the constitutional obligation on the media to promote “the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana” (Article 162(5)) and places access to public information and documents pretty much at the discretion of the government. As Sam remarked, “In the absence of the freedom of information act, the ease or difficulty with which public information is obtained depends on the reputation of the journalist, their personal contacts, or the media organization to which they belong.”

Panelists were also concerned that the apparent ambivalence in ratifying the right-to-information bill was an insidious betrayal of the government’s self-professed credentials as an open, media-friendly regime. Sarpong was particularly adamant that the current assortment of legal provisions

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.

on civil libel, which imposed the burden of proof on the journalist, "makes the defense of justification a tough grind and the promulgation of a right to information law a non-negotiable imperative."

There was also a prevailing concern about the insidious role of political or financial influence in determining the content and nature of media output. Eric E. Aday, a partner at Evolve Limited, a brand development and communications consultancy, observed: "Theoretically, editors have a high degree of independence. However, greed and the need to sustain media outlets as going concerns have threatened to erode editorial independence. Most media vehicles now find themselves pandering to the whims of business interests, governments, or advertisers. This finds expression in the type of programming and reportage" they produce.

In spite of the institutional mandate of the NCA to oversee the equitable allocation of the country's broadcast frequencies, the panel was concerned that the processes for obtaining a broadcast license were heavily prejudiced by political patronage. Godfred Dame, private legal practitioner and media-rights advocate, explained, "To the extent that the allocation of frequencies for the operation of a radio station is left in the bosom of a government-controlled NCA, there is really a concern for freedom of expression since the NCA board can exercise its discretion arbitrarily." Accordingly, they assigned a relatively low rating to that indicator. Godfred suggested that greater transparency might be assured if the NCA were required to allocate frequencies in consultation with the NMC.

Serious injury or death for journalists in Ghana is extremely rare. However, low-level harassment and limited physical violence is unfortunately a somewhat common occurrence. The Media Foundation for West Africa reported a laundry list of threats, beatings, and other interference in the work of journalists over the past year. These incidents were perpetrated by private individuals, the police, and various officials. Public outrage over such incidents is limited, and, as reported last year, to some degree public sympathy may favor the party supposedly damaged by reporting who then resorts to violence.

Access to international news and information is unencumbered, the only potential limitations being those imposed by availability and affordability. Similarly, entry into the profession is free, except that the GJA, the professional association of journalists, has defined prerequisites for recognition. Specifically, the GJA constitution defines a journalist as "someone who by training or qualification in journalism and job specification collects and disseminates news and information for public consumption." However, the panel expressed dismay that some charlatans and impersonators were not infrequently found parading journalistic credentials and gaining access to media events or accessing services.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Ghana Objective Score: 2.20

The panel's outlook on this objective was optimistic, though not exuberant; the objective scored marginally higher than last year. All of the indicators remained more or less the same as last year, and all scored within a half-point of the overall objective score except Indicator 5 (pay levels for journalists), which was slightly more than a half-point lower. The assessment by Sam encapsulates the panel's verdict: "Though we are now training more journalists every year than we did in the past, professional standards still leave much to be desired."

The panel blamed the lack of niche reporting partially on the lack of professional training for specialized beats. As media-rights lawyer Dame pointed out, "Most [journalists] do not have specialized training in particular areas; they are generalists with no particular orientation in any field." But the lack of niche reporting is also partially because politics has become the staple beat of all media output, according to Aday. "There is skewed coverage in favor of political issues, to the sad neglect of other social developmental dimensions, including culture, arts, entrepreneurship, etc.," he said. Samuel A. Bartels, host of the morning program on Citi FM radio, corroborated Aday's view thus: "Even ordinarily apolitical subjects, such as religion and soccer, are examined from the rose-colored glasses" of partisan politics. Dame added: "Reporting generally is colored by the political orientation of a particular media entity. It affects the perspective from which news is presented."

In the opinion of panel members, the blatant political partisanship of Ghanaian media is also partially responsible for the institutional and professional mediocrity that have continued to plague the country's media nearly 20 years into the new age of media plurality. As Aday noted bluntly, "It is easy to tell that a particular journalist is in the pocket of a politician. A political opponent becomes his abiding target, and he [the journalist] makes it his unrepentant duty to routinely publish scurrilous and very one-sided stories about the person." Sarpong added that "often, they hide behind the tenuous disclaimer that 'all attempts to reach XYZ for his side of the story proved futile.'"

The low score for pay levels for journalists, the lowest of all the indicators for professional journalistic standards, lends ample support to Asante's view that "remuneration for journalists in Ghana is nothing to write home about." According to Quarshie Kakraba, program producer for Radio Peace in Winneba, the situation has made journalists unwitting pawns in the hands of politicians: "Certain vital news may be held back, especially where it affects the

integrity of a public official. The journalist concerned is invited behind closed doors and convinced or influenced with monetary considerations to abandon the matter.”

Egbert Faibille, editor-in-chief and publisher of *The Ghanaian Observer*, affirmed this view: “Because of low wages and general economic challenges, journalists are generally not paid well, thereby depriving journalism of qualified brains. This has resulted in a situation where half-baked journalists, especially in the private media, dominate the media landscape with implications for quality.”

It is also common to find stories in the press in which no identifiable source is named and no byline or attribution is provided. “At best, it is given the nebulous epithet ‘By a Special Correspondent’ or ‘a news desk report,’” Sarpong noted. Women’s NGO advocate Harrison blamed this in part on the failure to pass the right-to-information bill, which, she said, “allows for the speculation of news items, usage of anonymous sources, and subjective presentation” of news. In effect, some journalists routinely dishonor the most elementary professional ethics for cash inducements—what Faibille called “soli,” industry jargon for “solidarity”—a payment made to reporters in consideration for favorable coverage. Asante agreed, adding, “It is now termed ‘transportation’ or ‘lunch package.’”

This greasing of the journalist’s or editor’s palms in order to get a particular version of facts reported poses credibility challenges for media practitioners. As panelist Adae noted, “Owing to the loss of professional independence, many media practitioners have lost their integrity.” Broadcaster Bartels added that, “No wonder journalists are now leaving their calling and taking up jobs in marketing and advertising, and as communication directors of firms.”

The outlook on economic viability is mixed. Broadcast stations (with the notable exception of rural-based FM radio) require a relatively higher capital outlay to establish, but they are also the industry cash cows. Newspapers, with the possible exception of the state-owned *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*, operate on a shoestring. They are generally poorly capitalized, single-person proprietorships that operate with the very barest of newsgathering and production resources. Broadcaster Quarshie and news editor Asante agreed on the obsolescent state of their working tools. “Some newspaper houses still write reports on sheets of paper before typing due to lack of computers, recorders, and even cameras for photography,” Asante said.

Quarshie noted that rural media were most lacking in resources. “The absence of modern facilities like Internet dearly affects the performance of journalists,” he said, adding that is accountable for much of the mediocre broadcast

production and inelegant page layouts. Accordingly, the panel lamented that the numerical increases in print publications and broadcast outlets were still not being matched by improvements in format and content in both media.

Although, as stated earlier, the GJA has a code of ethics, the panel noted the limitation that membership is optional. Accordingly, there seems to be no sense of obligation on the part of some practitioners to comply with ethical injunctions. Adae, the consultant, encapsulated this sentiment: “Although there is a widely promoted code of ethics for the GJA, its precepts are not widely adhered to. This is partly because many practitioners are not members of the GJA.” The panel noted that even for members of the association, ethics violations attracted no more than the moral sanction of a public condemnation, a rare occurrence in the first place, and not of sufficient deterrent value in any case. “Unethical behavior, unprofessional output, and corrupt conduct abound,” Adae said.

The wide range of print and broadcast outlets means that there is always an avenue for issues to receive media attention and gain public visibility. Therefore, panelists did not hold that editors were necessarily coerced into self-censorship. Moreover, the constitution provides under Article 162 (4) that “editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications.” And yet, as Sam pointed out, journalists with “the state broadcaster [GTV and GBC radio] seem to practice self-censorship. They hardly ever go beyond merely reporting events. They traditionally stay clear of controversial issues lest they rock the boat and offend the powers that be.”

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).

According to the panel, journalists have also tended to emphasize sleaze and trivia over serious, well-sourced, and contextually backgrounded events and issues. "Sensationalism, emphasis on trivialities for the sake of boosting sales...are some of the drawbacks," said women's NGO advocate Harrison. Adae added that "the TV networks clog their airwaves with telenovellas [soap operas]" and that "too many programs on radio and TV are promotional rather than editorially relevant." This pandering of the commercial media to bottom-line considerations rather than to airing important issues is probably understandable since, as panel members conceded, he who pays the piper calls the tune. In fact, Radio Peace's Quarshie argued a spirited exception for his station, pointing out that "the greater proportion of airtime for community radios is geared toward education and information, with only a small percentage allotted to entertainment."

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Ghana Objective Score: 2.47

The score for this objective received a modestly lower score from the panelists this year. All indicators dropped very slightly, but Indicator 2 (citizen access to media) showed a much larger decrease in score. Most of the indicators scored close to the overall average, although Indicator 4 (news agencies) scored slightly more than a half-point lower.

The panelists observed that the sheer number of outlets suggests a plurality—"or the facade" of one, Sarpong interjected—of news sources. This is largely attributable to the fact that, since the return to constitutional democratic governance in 1992, the media sector in Ghana has been quite laissez-faire. Thus, as the panel noted, while in some countries there are quotas on foreign direct broadcast feeds, no such limitations seem to stand in the way of foreign broadcast entry in Ghana. Accordingly, there is a significant presence of international broadcast media organizations, including the BBC, CNN, RFI, VOA, C-Span, DW, Al-Jazeera, and CFI.

There is also a significant representation of international mainstream news magazines, including *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, *Mirror*, and even French-language publications such as *Le Monde*. The panel attributed the popularity of the foreign media to their superior quality of production and output, in contrast to the local newspapers, which, they lamented, are essentially political-party tract sheets. "Regrettably, Ghanaian journalists have not considered these flagship examples of media as a teaching aid," Bright Blewu, general secretary of the GJA, said with tongue in cheek.

Availability does not amount to affordability, however. As Adae pointed out, "Access to foreign media is unfettered. However, access to cable satellite media is unaffordable." Sam added unapologetically: "I gave up *Time* and *Newsweek* long ago because of the cost."

Besides, from an egalitarian perspective, the numbers of news outlets would seem to belie the lack of real diversity. Sarpong insisted that "while there are many media outlets, there is no real variety." For one thing, commercial newspapers and broadcast stations have tended to cluster within the capital cities of Accra and Kumasi, to the relative exclusion of the majority rural population. And as Asante acknowledged: "Urban dwellers have more access to the various media than rural dwellers. The Internet and other new media facilities abound and are widely used in the urban areas, but this is affected by income levels, illiteracy, and unreliability of the telecommunication networks." Added Adae: "Even in the urban areas, the Internet is used mainly for entertainment and social networking, and not for news sources." Indeed, blogging is still a highly under-utilized genre in Ghana.

The following anecdote recounted by broadcaster Sam provides a poignant illustration of the lack of sufficient breadth in the population served by the media: "I recently spent five weeks at Tumu, a town 18 kilometers from the southern border of Burkina Faso. Though this town is the second largest in the Upper West Region of Ghana, I was astonished at the almost complete lack of newspapers. If you were lucky, you had the national dailies a day or two after publication." He went on that this exclusion was not limited to newspapers. "Apart from GTV, none of the Accra-based TV

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.

stations could be received without the aid of a satellite dish. And how many people can have that?"

In terms of news agencies, there is only one official indigenous wire service, the Ghana News Agency (GNA), which was established in 1957 and which has struggled to survive because of financial pressures. A few international newsgathering services, such as Reuters and AP, are, however, available on subscription by broadcast and print outlets in the country.

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. As newspaper editor Faibille explained, "Any citizen who is desirous of knowing who owns what media can easily find out." Indeed, media owners have little reason to disguise their stakeholder interests since Article 162 (3) of the constitution provides that "there shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media."

The panel noted that the media have tended to reflect the views and promote the interests of the minority elite. Consequently, while in theory there may be no conglomerates, the owners, as Sarpong argued, "tend to reflect the same social and political views." Furthermore, the panel noted that the owners of most of the private tabloids are friends; they share the same broad perspective; and they sometimes even share office premises and equipment. Not surprisingly, there is, not infrequently, a curious coincidence in their news scoops and even headlines.

Most media, both public and private, generally produce their own news programs. 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, Premier Productions, Point Blank Media Concept, Deltrack, and Bullseye. Further, the panel noted the growing trend of multiple ownerships and affiliations in FM radio, in which urban fringe and rural FM stations often form "network partnerships" to expand their audience and market presence. A number of FM radio stations, and literally all television stations, also rebroadcast international news from networks such as the BBC and VOA.

There is only one local-language newspaper, the *Graphic Nsempra*. However, the majority of FM radio stations provide substantial avenues for broadcasting in Akan, the dominant local language in Ghana. This situation is, in the opinion of media lawyer Dame, inauspicious for the preservation and development of the cultural and linguistic identity of minority ethnic groups. He recommended the formulation of state

guidelines on the use of minority languages. "Such a policy will provide guidelines on how minority languages should be used in promoting cultural diversity, religious tolerance, and democratic participation," he said. Harrison, of the ABANTU NGO, further pointed out that "programming does not often promote the welfare of certain groups, such as women."

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Ghana Objective Score: 2.13

Of the five broad measures of the sustainability of the media in Ghana, the business outlook evoked the least enthusiasm of panel members, who awarded it a score somewhat lower than last year. Most of the indicators remained more or less unchanged or dropped slightly; however, Indicator 5 (government subsidies for commercial media) did receive a noticeably lower evaluation. All indicators scored within a half-point of the overall objective score.

"The media industry in Ghana is an anemic infant," Sarpong summed up. And, in the face of the bleak reality of dwindling newsstand sales and increasing production costs, the panel again flagged the threat of political patronage. Blewu, of the journalists' association, explained that "many are one-man businesses—struggling to pay their workers" and therefore are "easy prey to being commandeered for political propaganda ends." In effect, the lack of autonomous revenue capacity makes the private press vulnerable to manipulation by political financiers.

The liberalization of the market and media has also led to the growth of large and small advertising outlets that

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.

serve multilateral and local advertising needs and cater to different types of client needs and sizes. Consequently, the panel observed an increase in the amount and variety of advertising and concluded that relative to what prevailed in the past, this should bode well for the media industry as a whole. Unfortunately, the overbearing influence of advertising power has also tended to compromise the editorial independence of the commercial media. As Faibille recounted, "Multinationals and other big companies withdraw ads when they are criticized."

Dame was concerned about the prospect of government advertising's being so selectively deployed as to produce "soft censorship." "The government could reward a particular media for staying on the straight and narrow way by nourishing it with sumptuous servings of government advertising budgets, and on the other hand, [deprive] another media house of any advertising as punishment for stepping out of line," he said. Furthermore, as broadcaster Bartels added, some nongovernment advertisers might be wary of advertising in some newspapers for fear of being earmarked as pro-government or pro-opposition.

The independent media in Ghana do not benefit from any state or parliamentary subsidy. Sam suggested there be one. "In view of their acknowledged role in sustaining democracy and good governance, it would help considerably if some kind of newspaper fund were established by the government, from which newspapers could access loans to enlarge their operations."

There are no independent nationwide distribution services, and with the possible exception of the state-owned press, newspapers hardly reach beyond the regional administrative capitals.

Few big media houses can afford the prohibitive costs of independently generated market research to guide their output and scheduling. Other media outlets occasionally make unverifiable ratings claims, and the credibility of their figures is compromised by their vested interests.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Ghana Objective Score: 2.79

The relatively high score for supporting institutions provides ample evidence of how zealously Ghanaians cherish and guard the liberties guaranteed to the media under the 1992 constitution. However, the panelists did score this objective slightly lower than last year. Most indicators showed little fluctuation, although Indicator 1 (trade associations) did

suffer a noticeable decline. All indicators did score rather close to the overall objective score, however.

"Ghanaians recognize the pivotal role the independent media play in ensuring the entrenchment of democratic principles and good governance in the country," Sam observed. 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 promote their goals and aspirations. Thus, in addition to the GJA, other associations and affiliations include 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, and Women in Broadcasting.

Add to these 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 for their members.

As Sam noted, however, "What clout these bodies wield over their members and how they are able to ensure ethical and professional practice is another matter." Faibille was more blunt: "Most of these professional associations do not support journalism practice. They are mostly empty shells." In Harrison's view, however, the GJA must be singled out for playing a vanguard role in safeguarding the rights of journalists. "At the same time, it has spoken publicly against members who overstep the boundaries of professionalism," she said.

A number of media and advocacy NGOs work 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, the Frederick Ebert Foundation (FES), the GJA, and the other associations of media practitioners. Sam cited, for example, the financial and technical assistance of the MFWA and FES to associations of journalists and rural/deprived media, which have resulted in a number of workshops and orientation programs as well 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 since 2001 have been lobbying for its passage. And as Sarpong pointed out, the constitution has established the

NMC to promote freedom and independence of the media. "The commission's work is, however, hampered by lack of resources," he noted.

There are also at least a dozen accredited media/communications 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. And the numbers continue to increase. Access to these training institutions is open. The only conditions for entry are similar to 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. They blamed some journalistic mediocrity on what they considered to be the low standards of training institutions in the country. "The professional standards of journalists produced by training institutions in the country do not seem to be satisfactory," Dame, the media-rights lawyer, said. The panel's assessment was that there must be more in-service training and workshops to provide continuous professional development and skills training to practitioners.

The availability of newsprint and printing and distribution facilities is very much driven by economic imperatives and is free from political interferences or restrictions. Harrison noted that this is partially why urban commercial centers are inundated with media production and distribution facilities, while few entities locate within, or address the media needs of rural populations. Thus, newspapers often take more than 24 hours to reach some parts of the country. What's more,

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.

limited television coverage excludes a large number of citizens from being well informed and participating fully in decisions affecting national governance. Sam called for state subsidies, tax rebates, or logistic support to private investors who might be interested in serving deprived rural communities. This, he insisted, would be the government's way of putting into practice the constitutionally guaranteed rights of all citizens to freedom of expression and access to the media.

List of Panel Participants

Samuel A Bartels, morning show host, Citi FM, Accra

Kakraba Quarshie, program producer, Radio Peace, Winneba

Rejoice Esi Asante, regional news editor, *Ghanaian Times* newspaper, Accra

Egbert Faibille, lawyer, publisher and editor-in-chief, *The Ghanaian Observer* newspaper, Accra

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

Godfred Yeboah Dame, legal practitioner media rights advocate, Akuffo Addo Prempeh & Co, Accra

Charlie Sam, lecturer, radio trainer, Accra

Eric K Adae, partner, Evolve Limited, 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, Media Foundation for West Africa, Accra

Richard Koduah, administrative assistance, Media Foundation for West Africa, Accra

The Ghana study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Media Foundation for West Africa, Accra