
Although many panels pointed out the effects of government or economic pressures on the editorial integrity of media outlets, some panels recognized that this was a two-way street. While the media are pressured to serve a political or business master, they also accept this fate, and often too easily.



I am pleased to introduce the 2008 Africa Media Sustainability Index (MSI), the second such study of the region. The MSI provides an analysis of the media environment in 40 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa during 2008. The MSI was first conceived in 2000 and launched in Europe and Eurasia in 2001, in cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since that time, it has become a universally recognized reference for benchmarking and assessing changes in media systems across Africa, Europe and Eurasia, and the Middle East.

The MSI allows policymakers and implementers to analyze media systems and determine the areas in which media development assistance can improve citizens' access to news and information. Armed with knowledge, citizens can help improve the quality of governance through participatory and democratic mechanisms, and help government and civil society actors devise solutions to pervasive issues such as poverty, healthcare, conflict, and education.

The MSI also provides important information for the media and media advocates in each country and region. The MSI reflects the expert opinions of media professionals in each country and its results inform the media community, civil society, and governments of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector. IREX continues to encourage professionals in their vital efforts at developing independent and sustainable media in their own countries or, in many cases, preserving alternative voices in the face of repressive governments.

IREX would like to thank all those who contributed to the publication of the Media Sustainability Index 2008. Participants, moderators, authors, and observers for each country, listed after each chapter, provided the primary analysis for this project. At IREX, Leon Morse managed the MSI with editorial and administrative assistance from Blake Saville and Lillie Paquette. USAID has been a consistent supporter of the MSI, helping to develop the project and ensure its ongoing implementation.

We hope you will find this report useful, and we welcome any feedback.

Sincerely,



W. Robert Pearson

President, IREX

Partisan speech is an acceptable component of a free press and, more broadly, freedom of speech. Nonetheless, a plurality of media outlets with independent and balanced voices goes a long way toward insulating the media as a whole from direct political pressure.



The 2008 edition of the Africa Media Sustainability Index (MSI) includes 40 individual studies, up from 37 nations in the 2006/2007 edition. The latest report adds studies from Gabon and Liberia, plus a separate study for Somaliland. Being the second MSI study of the region, it is too soon to draw development trajectories for the media in these countries, individually or as a whole.

This edition of the Africa MSI does show some noteworthy developments, however. For example, several of the countries in southern Africa, the overall leaders last year, experienced reductions in their scores. Objective 5, Supporting Institutions, last year's strongest objective overall, suffered a similar decline. Objective 2, Professional Journalism, and Objective 4, Business Management, the two weakest objectives last year, improved in many countries but their continent-wide averages remained the same.

A number of common themes also emerged from our diverse panels. In particular, panelists discussed the relationship between the media, government, and the public. Although many panels pointed out the effects of government or economic pressures on the editorial integrity of media outlets, some panels recognized that this was a two-way street. While the media are pressured to serve a political or business master, they also accept this fate, and often too easily. The result is that their standing with the public comes into question. In at least one panel discussion, panelists recommended that the media act more like businesses in their external relations and less like public relations firms.

Our analysis below is both quantitative and qualitative, but it is not intended to be exhaustive, and neither are any of the recommendations made here. The MSI is designed to serve as a summary of overall developments, and a starting point for further research by local media practitioners, international media development workers, academics, and others. IREX intends for the MSI results to serve as one tool in the diverse conversation about media development, and to support advocacy efforts aimed at improving the media's ability to inform the public in the countries under study. To that end, IREX provides all previous editions of the MSI and spreadsheets with combined scoring data on its website, www.irex.org/msi.

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Developments in the Objectives

As an overall average, scores for Africa did not change remarkably between the 2006/2007 and 2008 editions. The continental average fell by a slight 0.03 points, with 18 countries slipping in their scores, 11 gaining, and eight remaining unchanged. The performance on most of the objectives mirrored the overall performance.

Objective 1, Freedom of Speech, gained slightly, up 0.04, with an equal number of countries (11) gaining and losing strength, and the balance remaining unchanged. Panelists complained of many of the same problems as last year, particularly the uneven application of laws. While praising, in most cases, the laws as written, panelists frequently detailed the capricious application of justice by government officials, who ignored laws and implement statutes that contravene constitutional guarantees. Harassment of and attacks on journalists continued to be a problem, although several panels suggested such instances are becoming less frequent. Unfortunately, others reported an increase in such cases, chiefly in countries that had suffered some kind of political instability over the past year. Most panels pointed to freedom of information as not improving.

Freedom of the media to access and use foreign news reports in their domestic reporting remained a strong indicator, as did access to the journalism profession. However, in the case of the latter, a few panels reported attempts by the authorities to regulate who may practice journalism. Broadcast licensing appears to be improving in its professionalism to a limited degree. Libel, although still subject to criminal fines and even jail in many countries, seemed to be relied upon less in some countries as a means to pressure the media (or more cases are settled without the intervention of courts), although in others it is still used as a way to cow the media.

Staying relatively strong, **Objective 3, Plurality of News**, generally received higher scores from panelists and its continent-wide average was 2.00. Panelists pointed to familiar strengths, such as multiple sources of news—even if they were sometimes disappointed in the variety of viewpoints and depth of news—and citizens' ability to freely

access media. Many independent broadcasters do produce their own news and that differentiates them from sources generated by the state.

However, the duality between plurality of media in cities and paucity in rural areas is not being addressed sufficiently. Panelists almost universally point out the difficulties citizens in small towns and the rural areas have in accessing any type of media, new or old. Further, news agencies at the national level seem to be suffering, and more and more may become extinct in the future. State broadcasting was a mixed bag, as some panels reported improvement in balance, while others seemed to think that content was edging more toward propaganda.

Last year's two lowest-scoring objectives, **Objective 2, Professional Journalism**, and **Objective 4, Business Management**, stayed in the lowest spots again this year. Although the continental average for each barely changed, the scores of more countries improved or stayed the same rather than fell. Nonetheless, panelists pointed to the same mutually reinforcing negative attributes that keep the media from moving forward. Specifically, weak economies and a small pool of advertisers create reliance on business or political patrons who expect positive coverage in return. In such a situation, truly independent reporting is difficult to sustain, even if a cadre of well-trained journalists exists. And biased reporting pulls the media into the political fray, typically with negative consequences. This issue is described below in more detail.

One positive development is that more panels described the use of market research by their media, even if it is still rudimentary. Although media are not yet fully using this data to inform strategic planning, there is at least, it would appear, a growing awareness and desire to tailor content to citizens' interests.

Objective 5, Supporting Institutions, suffered the worst loss in overall score. In 19 countries the score fell, for a total average loss of 0.14. To put this in context, the next largest change in the continental average was -0.04 for Objective 3 and 0.04 for Objective 1. Panelists generally criticized the ability of professional associations to create real change, and pointed to, in many cases, the absence of active trade associations. A number of factors contribute to the inability of strong associations to develop, such as political divisions, competition, adversarial relations between owners and journalists, and a lack of resources. Likewise, supporting NGOs, although these do exist in most countries and often make valiant efforts, have a hard time achieving lasting success in their attempts to further civic freedoms, including freedom of the press. Finally, civil society organizations will struggle if their governments' support is only lukewarm—or simply antithetical—to including citizen points of view in their decision-making.

Notable Country Developments

Perhaps the most surprising change in country scores came from several of the countries in southern Africa, namely Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zambia. As a group, last year they had the some of the highest scores, not only in Africa but also in the three regions studied by the MSI. Most of them are still in the category of top-scoring African countries, but it is somewhat alarming that they all received such downgrades.

These lower scores were backed up by observations of the panelists, including returning panelists who mostly downgraded their scores in line with the panels as a whole. Generally speaking, panelists pointed to increasing political pressure as the main reason for these declines, and the pressure had repercussions not only on freedom of speech, but on most other aspects of the media.

To explain its lower scores, Botswana's panel cited new legislation designed to protect national security that allows the government to erode freedoms of the press and chip away at issues of media ownership. Panelists in Namibia indicated that the emergence of an opposition political party generated more government focus on the media; they also complained about coverage of the opposition party in the publicly supported media and fairness in the distribution of broadcast licenses. In South Africa the run-up to the presidential election took its toll on the media, as well. In particular, panelists noted concerns about on-going scandals with the public broadcaster, including the blacklisting of journalists critical of the ruling party. Zambia still suffers from the stalled conversion of its state broadcaster into a public one, and media reporting critical stories are suffering harassment and threats of government closure.

Political turmoil lowered scores in Kenya and Madagascar. Of particular concern for the panelists in Kenya is the fear that both opposition and ruling party politicians are beginning to work together to silence independent voices in the media. The proof of this for the panelists was the passage of harsh legislation intended to heavily regulate the media. In Madagascar, a sharp political rivalry between the president and mayor of Antananarivo was already impacting the media when the panel discussion was held; in the first quarter of 2009 it resulted in the ouster of the president by the army.

On a positive note, Niger passed legislation allowing the expansion of private broadcast media and lifting restrictions that prevented community radio stations from broadcasting news programs. Also, Malawi and Tanzania both showed solid growth. Panelists in Malawi were optimistic after the media exposed instances of corruption and the government took corrective action as a result. In Tanzania panelists pointed to

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improvements in broadcast licensing and balance in the bulk of reporting.

Journalism Quality and the Media's Relationships

Reading the studies herein, some common themes begin to emerge that expose pressure points on the media and its ability to serve as the "fourth estate." Identifying these pressure points can be one way to begin to unravel the problems facing the media sector. However, the pressure points can sometimes be self-inflicted, even if brought on out of necessity.

Real or alleged ethical or other abuses by some media outlets are not a valid excuse for a government to limit media freedom. In fact, actions taken by governments to limit press freedom typically slow the media's progress toward better practices and can reinforce bad habits.

However, media professionals at all levels can still choose the tone, content, and adherence to good journalism practices and ethics in their reports. In deciding to be partisan, a media outlet enters the political fray, which in some countries is a dangerous business. Partisan speech is an acceptable component of a free press and, more broadly, freedom of speech. Nonetheless, a plurality of media outlets with independent and balanced voices goes a long way toward insulating the media as a whole from direct political pressure. In many countries the media have decided not to, or have been unable to choose to, transcend overt partisanship.

Further, partisan reporting often leads to gross violations of ethics. This makes media outlets and journalists an easy target for lawsuits, which are typically presided over by a non-independent judiciary. Many examples exist of good reporting resulting in a journalist on the losing side of a lawsuit, facing fines or jail time. However, it is much more difficult to generate the sympathy of one's professional colleagues, not to mention the public at-large, if one is being persecuted while also flagrantly violating standards of journalism.

For example, a panelist from Guinea offered this insight: “When you contact an office,...you will be sent from one official to the other, and eventually you will not get reliable information. So then, we must use euphemisms and rely on rumors, because we still need to write something.”

A panelist in Madagascar gave an example of how such reporting further creates ill will between the media and government. Journalists reporting on the resignation of a senior government official characterized it as “desertion.” The panelist noted how this increased the government’s mistrust of journalists. A panelist from the Central African Republic said that the private press there covers “all the major issues, but it also excels at wheeling and dealing, and presents black as white, especially on political issues, in order to sell more copies.”

One of the key obstacles to better reporting—freedom of information—is clearly in the hands of the government. Officials who suborn corruption and misuse public funds are unlikely to release reliable public information to the media. Until they do, this will continue to be a serious impediment to the work of journalists. For example, a panelist from Guinea offered this insight: “When you contact an office,... you will be sent from one official to the other, and eventually you will not get reliable information. So then, we must use euphemisms and rely on rumors, because we still need to write something.” Regimes bent on silencing critical voices rely on this shortcoming as a way to prove media outlets are unreliable because they print inaccurate information about an official or government agency.

Lackluster or unethical reporting also diminishes the public’s trust in the media and the value it places on media products. A panelist in the Central African Republic noted that journalists “do not treat key events and issues as they should. Often they do not check their information, and they are not fair. The result is that their intentions seem malicious, harmful, and dishonest.”

Further, media outlets need to make an effort to cover a range of issues beyond politics and government programs to win public support. The Zambia study concluded, “Journalists do not know what is key. They fail to identify issues worth reporting, and simply report on who has said what. For example, issues dealing with environmental degradation

and rising food prices rarely find space in the media, unless another news source reports on them.” This latter point is important, as it implies that one good media outlet can create a more vibrant media sector by serving as a news leader. Others will likely follow to remain competitive.

Even if good reporting happens, it often never sees the light of day. A panelist from the Central African Republic explained, “Journalists showing professionalism may be fired because they bother the shady sponsors of the respective media.” Developing a more solid business footing is one way media can empower themselves and become less dependent on a few powerful advertisers or sponsors.

One step the media can take is to change their perceptions of their place in the local business environment. Rather than serving as a public-relations vehicle for politicians or key businesses, as many do, they should think more as a business. By adopting a business approach to running its operation, many outlets could help bring the media closer to normalized business operations.

The panelists in Niger demonstrated one of the things that frequently hold the media back, the inability to look past competitive rivalry and secure better conditions for the industry as a whole. “While it is the [Higher Communications Council’s] responsibility to regulate the advertising market, media managers can also take collective initiatives. On this point, Ameth, the manager of Multi-Com advertising agency, tried to show the panelists that the situation could change very easily if media managers should agree to negotiate with communication agencies and advertising departments. But his proposition was not considered appropriate by some of the panelists, who did not hide their distrust of go-betweens.”

In addition, media in most countries in Africa—for that matter most countries the MSI studies—have not adopted practices that facilitate solid business-to-business relationships. The Niger discussion continued: “That crisis of trust would also be overcome if reliable statistical data concerning the media—such as audience ratings, print runs, and sales figures—were regularly processed and made available to the public. But such data is unavailable, making it difficult even for advertisers to decide wisely which media outlets they should choose as carriers for their messages.”

Enhancing the performance and sustainability of a media sector is complicated, with many actors influencing the outcome, some intractable in their opposition to reform. However, serious media outlets, on their own, can make choices that improve their chances of openly and professionally informing the public.

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Eritrea (0.26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Eq. Guinea (0.79) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Burundi (1.95) ▼ Cameroon (1.55) ▼ Chad (1.76) ▲ D. R. Congo (1.73) ▲ Rep. Congo (1.63) Gabon (1.81) □ The Gambia (1.68) ▼ Mali (1.97) ▲ Cent. Afr. Rep. (1.47) □ Djibouti (1.38) ▲ Ethiopia (1.35) ▲ Sudan (1.47) ▼ Zimbabwe (1.15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Mauritania (1.93) ▼ Somalia (1.52) Somaliland (1.83) ▼ Togo (1.56) ▼ Zambia (1.89) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Benin (2.23) ▼ Botswana (2.34) ▲ Burkina Faso (2.14) ▼ Côte d'Ivoire (2.01) ▼ Ghana (2.45) □ Guinea (2.21) ▼ Kenya (2.13) Liberia (2.04) ▼ Madagascar (2.01) ▲ Malawi (2.47) □ Mozambique (2.19) ▼ Namibia (2.50) □ Niger (2.03) ▼ Nigeria (2.04) ▲ Rwanda (2.40) ▼ Senegal (2.07) ▲ Sierra Leone (2.16) ▲ Tanzania (2.43) □ Uganda (2.43) ▼ South Africa (2.77) 			
0 – 0.50	0.51 – 1.00	1.01 – 1.50	1.51 – 2.00	2.01 – 2.50	2.51 – 3.00	3.01 – 3.50	3.51 – 4.00
UNSUSTAINABLE ANTI-FREE PRESS		UNSUSTAINABLE MIXED SYSTEM		NEAR SUSTAINABILITY		SUSTAINABLE	

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Eritrea (0.14) ▼ Zimbabwe (0.49) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Cameroon (1.31) ▲ The Gambia (1.38) ▼ Eq. Guinea (1.11) ▲ Ethiopia (1.36) □ Somalia (1.32) ▲ Sudan (1.47) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Chad (1.91) ▲ D.R. Congo (1.76) ▲ Rep. Congo (1.72) □ Djibouti (1.54) Gabon (1.99) □ Madagascar (1.98) ▲ Mauritania (1.97) ▼ Nigeria (1.58) □ Zambia (1.98) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Benin (2.28) □ Burkina Faso (2.23) □ Burundi (2.13) ▲ Cent. Afr. Rep. (2.03) ▼ Côte d'Ivoire (2.10) □ Guinea (2.15) □ Kenya (2.08) Liberia (2.24) ▲ Malawi (2.46) ▼ Mali (2.37) □ Mozambique (2.27) ▼ Niger (2.10) ▼ Senegal (2.02) □ Sierra Leone (2.36) Somaliland (2.11) ▲ Togo (2.43) □ Uganda (2.36) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Botswana (2.60) □ Ghana (2.67) ▼ Namibia (2.58) ▲ Rwanda (2.69) ▲ Tanzania (2.65) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ South Africa (3.17) 		
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UNSUSTAINABLE ANTI-FREE PRESS		UNSUSTAINABLE MIXED SYSTEM		NEAR SUSTAINABILITY		SUSTAINABLE	

CHANGE SINCE 2006/2007

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

IREX included Gabon, Liberia, and Somaliland for the first time in the current edition.

Scores for 2006/2007 are available online at http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_Africa/20067/index.asp

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Benin (2.04) ▼ Botswana (2.33) ▼ Burundi (2.06) ▲ Chad (2.03) ▲ Ghana (2.20) ▲ Guinea (2.20) ▼ Kenya (2.08) □ Madagascar (2.01) ▲ Malawi (2.31) □ Mozambique (2.06) ▼ Namibia (2.16) ▲ Niger (2.02) ▲ Rwanda (2.30) □ Senegal (2.09) ▲ Sierra Leone (2.04) ▲ Tanzania (2.08) □ Uganda (2.28) ▼ South Africa (2.61) 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Burkina Faso (1.86) ▼ Cameroon (1.51) ▲ Cent. Afr. Rep. (1.63) Gabon (1.60) □ The Gambia (1.96) Liberia (1.95) □ Mali (1.85) ▲ Mauritania (1.98) □ Nigeria (1.89) ▼ Somalia (1.52) Somaliland (1.64) ▼ Zambia (1.84) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ D.R. Congo (1.40) ▲ Rep. Congo (1.48) ▼ Côte d'Ivoire (1.48) □ Djibouti (1.43) ▼ Ethiopia (1.47) ▼ Sudan (1.42) ▼ Togo (1.30) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Eq. Guinea (0.84) ▲ Eritrea (0.51) □ Zimbabwe (0.95) 				
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MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Eq. Guinea (0.80) ▲ Zimbabwe (0.84) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Djibouti (1.35) ▲ Ethiopia (1.38) ▼ Togo (1.46) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Cameroon (1.91) □ Cent. Afr. Rep. (1.52) ▼ Chad (1.54) ▼ Rep. Congo (1.94) □ The Gambia (1.82) ▼ Somalia (1.65) Somaliland (1.87) ▲ Sudan (1.61) 				
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UNSUSTAINABLE ANTI-FREE PRESS		UNSUSTAINABLE MIXED SYSTEM		NEAR SUSTAINABILITY		SUSTAINABLE	

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MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Benin (1.35) □ Burundi (1.27) □ Cameroon (1.33) ▲ Chad (1.37) ▲ D.R. Congo (1.32) ▲ Rep. Congo (1.37) ▼ Djibouti (1.18) ▼ Ethiopia (1.43) Gabon (1.07) □ Niger (1.46) ▲ Sierra Leone (1.48) ▲ Somalia (1.45) ▲ Togo (1.04) ▼ Zambia (1.40) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Burkina Faso (1.81) ▼ Côte d'Ivoire (1.70) ▼ The Gambia (1.52) ▼ Guinea (1.95) Liberia (1.55) ▼ Madagascar (1.88) ▲ Mali (1.62) ▲ Mauritania (1.76) □ Mozambique (1.91) ▼ Senegal (1.57) Somaliland (1.54) ▲ Sudan (1.58) ▼ Zimbabwe (1.58) 				
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UNSUSTAINABLE ANTI-FREE PRESS		UNSUSTAINABLE MIXED SYSTEM		NEAR SUSTAINABILITY		SUSTAINABLE	

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2008: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

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