

When former president Bakili Muluzi, who ruled for two terms between 1994 and 2004, entered the campaign, the nominally independent Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) revoked a license it had issued Joy TV, owned by Atupele Properties, of which Muluzi is a shareholder.



MALAWI

F

Fourteen years after the fall of dictator Hastings Kamuzu Banda brought multi-party government and independent media to Malawi, the country was still fighting to realize the ideals of democracy. The media play a key role in the fight, striving to hold those in authority accountable. Yet a stalemate in Parliament and repeated interference by government agencies have prevented the media from becoming fully free.

Introduction of the Access to Information Bill has been blocked since a constitutional dispute over party representation brought Parliament almost to a standstill two years ago. In addition, parliamentary action on budget matters—the only business lawmakers have conducted during the standstill—has resulted in two successive defeats of the financing for the state broadcasters: Malawi Broadcasting Corporation Radio 1 and Radio 2, and Television Malawi.

The run-up to Malawi's May 2009 presidential election also sparked a battle over press freedom. When former president Bakili Muluzi, who ruled for two terms between 1994 and 2004, entered the campaign, the nominally independent Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) revoked a license it had issued Joy TV, owned by Atupele Properties, of which Muluzi is a shareholder. MACRA also closed down Joy Radio, another Atupele outlet, several times. While the ruling party aired propaganda against Muluzi on state broadcasting stations, MACRA justified its action against Atupele Properties on the grounds that its stations were in the hands of politicians, which is contrary to the Communications Act.

MACRA also changed the procedure for applying for broadcasting licenses. The agency said it would announce when there was room for a new radio station rather than allow applications at any time, as the previous system had allowed.

Despite these challenges, Malawi's media—especially private outlets—registered a number of successes, notably providing coverage that affected governance, corruption, and other issues. Nation Publications Limited published articles about the clerk of Parliament's company being awarded a contract to provide printing services for Parliament. Parliament launched an investigation that established that the articles were true and that procurement procedures had been compromised. As a result, the contract was canceled. Blantyre Newspapers Limited, meanwhile, reported that copies of questions contained on the test for the Malawi School Certificate of Education had been leaked. Authorities initially dismissed the reports, but after more articles provided evidence, the government canceled examinations in the subjects that were leaked and students had to rewrite papers. On the legal front, the Media Council of Malawi spent much of the year revising the journalists' code of conduct, while the National Media Institute of Southern Africa and other stakeholders lobbied members of Parliament to pass the Access to Information Bill, if it is ever introduced.

MALAWI AT A GLANCE

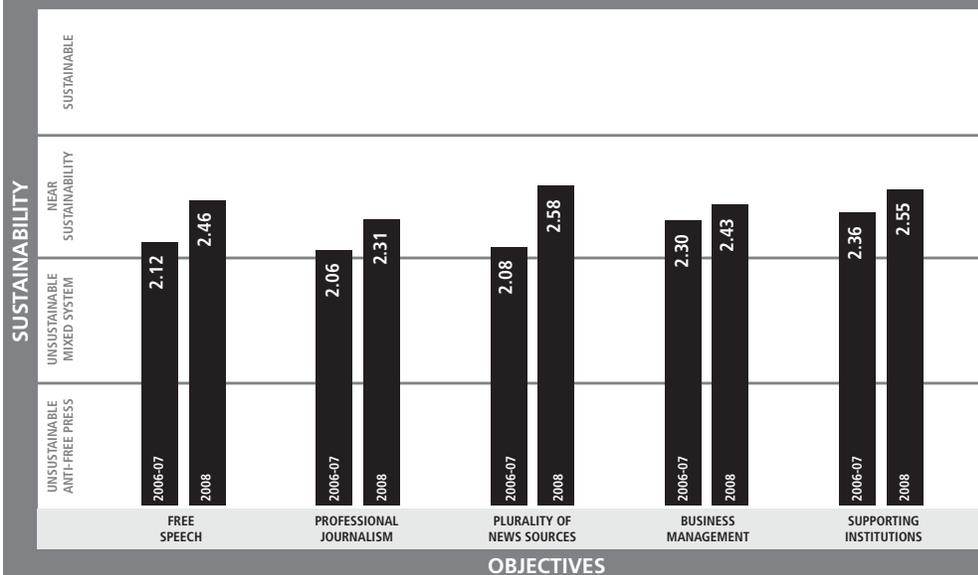
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 14,268,711 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital City:** Lilongwe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Chewa, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tonga, Ngoni, Ngonde, Asian, European (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 79.9%, Muslim 12.8%, other 3%, none 4.3% (1998 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Chichewa 57.2% (official), Chinyanja 12.8%, Chiyao 10.1%, Chitumbuka 9.5%, Chisena 2.7%, Chilomwe 2.4%, Chitonga 1.7%, other 3.6% (1998 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$3.524 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$760 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 62.7% (male 76.1%, female 49.8%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Bingu wa Mutharika (since May 24, 2004)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 13 newspapers, including 2 dailies and 1 state-owned weekly; Radio: 18 stations including 4 community owned, 12 privately owned, and 2 public broadcast services; Television stations: 2, including 1 privately owned, and 1 public broadcaster.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *The Daily Times* (privately-owned), *The Nation* (privately owned).
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Malawi News Agency (MANA) (State-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 139,500 (2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MALAWI



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

Malawi Objective Score: 2.46

Section 35 of Malawi's 1994 constitution guarantees freedom of expression to every person, and Section 36 provides "freedom of the press to report and publish freely, within Malawi and abroad, and to be accorded the fullest possible facilities for access to public information." The right to free expression is not absolute, however, but limited by the constitution's Sections 44 (2) (3), 45 (3) a, and 45 (2), all of which can be applied as the judiciary deems appropriate. The constitutional provisions are also limited by laws such as the Protected Names and Emblems Act, as well as by the absence of an access-to-information policy.

Malawi has several statutes—some of them passed before independence from Britain in 1964—that pose a threat to freedom of expression and editorial independence. According to the SADC Media Law Handbook, 2003, they include the Communications Act (1998) which provides for the regulation of telecommunications, posts, and broadcasting in Malawi; the Printed Publications Act (1947), which governs the print media and provides for the registration of newspapers with the Government Archives; the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act (1968), which regulates the pre-approval of content that is distributed to the public and provides for the regulation of entertainment productions; the Official Secrets Act (1913), which protects state secrets against disclosure; and, the Commercial Advertising (Traditional Music) Control Act (1978), which regulates the use of traditional music in advertisements.

In theory, freedom of expression encourages journalists to report without fear as long as what they are reporting is factual. In practice, some journalists, especially in the state media, cannot report anything bad about the ruling party. The constitutional guarantees are also sometimes ignored, and the media are stopped from expressing their views. For instance, in 2007 Capital Radio was stopped from airing a conversation believed to involve the president and the director of the Anti-Corruption Bureau. The president purportedly was instructing the director to plan to arrest opposition leaders.

Panelists said the archaic laws that affect the media need to be updated, but that there unfortunately seems to be no impetus by the powers-that-be to change or repeal them. The lack of a policy on access to information leaves journalists legally disadvantaged and unprotected. One panelist said bureaucrats in various government departments limit access to information. Another panelist, Grace Kadzakanja, lecturer at the University of Malawi, said that "access to

information is not restricted, but its publication is highly monitored by the Ministry of Information." Even in the absence of a freedom of information law, the constitution provides for access to information, she said, and "Malawi is a sovereign state and is a signatory to a number of international instruments that do promote freedom of speech."

"Although there are small hitches, overall the government allows freedom of speech. It is not common here to have somebody answering charges for having dissenting views, even when some people have gone to the extremes in the quest of exercising their right to free speech," said Archibald Kasalura, a student at the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ). "In a nutshell, Malawi is making great strides in as far as freedom of speech is concerned."

Panelists said licensing of broadcasting companies is not fair because the regulatory body, MACRA, is under direct government control (1.2). The Communications Act of 1998, which established MACRA and gave it the power to regulate the postal, broadcasting, and telecommunication sector and to grant licenses, said the agency should be open, independent of government interference, and should operate transparently. Panelists agreed, however, that MACRA is largely controlled by the government through appointment of its board members. MACRA also answers to the minister of information and civic education, further compromising its independence. In 2007, a lawyer, Ralph Kasambara, challenged the government over the way the directors of MACRA were appointed. This led to the dissolution of the board in 2007; at the time this report was written, the president had not appointed another board.

Panelists were of the view that market entry and the tax structure for media firms are comparable to other industries. For instance, radio stations pay license fees and other usual taxes such as Pay As You Earn (PAYE) for their employees. "The requirements for entering the market by those intending to open a media-related type of business are not different from the rest of business entities," said Eric Mcheka, program officer for the Media Council of Malawi (MCM). "There are no tax breaks for media either. With regard to print media, the market is open to new entrants in spite of stiff competition, as long as one fulfills all the obligations demanded by the registrar of companies when establishing a business in Malawi. However, there is a need for a big capital injection for that media house to survive (whether print or electronic) because of competition on the market," he said.

Crimes against journalists were not common in the year under review. There were times when reporters were detained for a few hours, but not much was done thereafter. For instance, a journalist was arrested for taking pictures of the presidential convoy and his camera was destroyed.

Panelists agreed that political influence threatens editorial independence in state broadcasting and that legal guarantees are weak. There was consensus during the panel discussion that the state media are not independent from government influence and that their stories are not balanced and lack fairness. Panelists attributed the lack of independence to the fact that the heads of Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and Television Malawi (TVM) are appointed by and answer to the government. Mcheka said that “the heads of MBC and TVM are appointed by the government, and the public media is not independent. There are reports of the public media being biased towards the government of the day. The outcry tends to rise especially when getting close to the elections.” One panelist said the state media fail to balance their coverage because they have limited resources and opposition leaders shun them.

In Malawi, libel can be either a criminal or civil issue. Panelists said criminal libel is punishable by two years’ imprisonment. Some panelists said the judiciary offers journalists hope by treating cases against them as misdemeanors. According to the panelists, most libel cases are treated as civil cases and settled out of court. Journalists are rarely sued for publishing defamatory stories; when they are sued, the case is usually settled out of court. Panelists explained that some politicians use the threat of a defamation suit as a lever against critical reportage. In libel cases, journalists—not plaintiffs—have to prove that there is no falsity or malice intended. Panelists appreciated the support journalists enjoy from the public. “Thanks to the general public, each and every time a

journalist seems to be in conflict with the law there is always a public outcry, a sign that the general public is well aware of its right to freedom of speech,” one panelist said.

Access to information is still a challenge for the media, according to panelists. Section 37 of the constitution states that “subject to any Act of Parliament, every person shall have the right to access to all information held by the State. Or any of its organs at any level of Government in so far as such information is required for the exercise of his rights.” Yet, there has not been any legislation to enforce this right. Hopes for a more open environment were shattered with Parliament’s failure to successfully introduce the Access to Information Bill. According to the panelists, the bill was presented to Parliament in June 2007, during the parliamentary budget session, but it was shot down. The National Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA), in partnership with human rights movements in Malawi, continued to lobby and advocate for passage of the bill. It was expected that the bill would be introduced again. According to Mcheka, most public officials “fear to release information for fear of reprisals from their superiors. Other public officers say that they cannot release the information because it is ‘classified information.’” Until the Access to Information Bill is passed, journalists in Malawi will continue to meet challenges in getting information from public officials.

All the panelists said the media have unrestricted access to international news and news sources. They said the lack of resources in some media organizations and what one called “exorbitant Internet fees” are the only limiting factors. Most international news stories are acquired through the Internet.

There also was consensus that entry into the journalism profession is unrestricted; the government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists. The country has a number of training institutions, such as the University of Malawi, Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ), and ShareWorld Open University, that anyone can attend as long as they meet entrance requirements. Panelists stated that if licensing were adopted, it would distinguish between different levels of professionalism based on experience and qualification. This sentiment comes amid complaints of some journalists’ conduct, especially during public functions. There have been cases where when journalists falsely identify themselves or their organizations to sources or event organizers, usually in an effort to gain money or transportation.

Accreditation of journalists happens when one is covering high profile government events, although this is not as prevalent anymore. According to panelists, the government has been issuing press cards to journalists for security purposes as a standard procedure when one is covering high

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.

profile government events. Journalists working together with the MCM stopped government from issuing these “press cards.” Nonetheless, media houses continue to print their own press cards for their journalists.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Malawi Objective Score: 2.31

Some panelists said journalists in the country are trying their best to meet professional standards by reporting in a fair and balanced way but that reporters often make sure they are covering events in a way that is going to please their managers and owners. For instance, journalists in state media cannot say bad things about the ruling party, nor can those who work for some private firms. Other panelists said most journalists do not report their stories fairly. “We see a lot of mistakes in the newspapers, and in some cases sources are not well identified, which diminishes credibility,” said Rhoda Masasula, a journalism student at MIJ. Others argued that evidence of poor quality can be found in the mistakes and corrections seen in both print and electronic media. This problem, they said, arises from lack of proper training. “There are a few accredited colleges, which are expensive. Of course, the University of Malawi program is affordable, but their intake is limited,” Masasula said. Some panelists said, however, that corrections show that a media company is being accountable.

Most panelists shared the view that some stories are not fully researched. “Balancing of facts is sometimes a problem due to lack of resources to travel and meet different sources, and to time constraints,” said Deus Sandram, an assistant broadcaster at MIJ Radio. Balancing of information is also a problem because sources sometimes are reluctant to talk to certain journalists or media outlets. While some sources are simply difficult, many have been misquoted in the past or are only contacted to comment on something negative. For instance, most politicians from opposition parties refuse to grant interviews to MBC and TVM because they claim that these stations are biased against them.

There is little diversity among sources, as “most journalists rely on regular or preferred sources depending on their leanings, political or otherwise,” Kadzakumanja said. Some panelists shared the sentiment that journalists over-report political issues and are therefore prone to corruption, especially with the approach of the 2009 general elections. “Lack of balance is apparent in most media houses. Those claiming to be independent still have leanings towards either government or otherwise,” Kadzakumanja said. It was also said that most reporters do not include background information in their stories.

With regard to ethics, the panelists’ discussion identified two key issues: they noted huge disparities in pay levels, and they differed over whether there is a direct relationship between pay and corruption.

The general understanding was that journalists with some private companies, especially newspapers, are paid higher than those in government institutions; journalists in most private radio companies are paid the least; and there are huge disparities between the salaries of managers and those of reporters and other staff. Monthly salaries, according to the panelists, range from MWK 14,000 (\$100) to more than MWK 500,000 (\$3,600). Some panelists said journalists are not well paid compared to people in other professions. “The pay is also not enough to compensate the hard work that journalists do,” argued one of the panelists, Talumba Mhango, a student at MIJ.

There was debate over whether pay levels are linked to corruption. Panelists, notably those working as reporters, were of the view that journalists take bribes to increase their income because their salaries are low. Other panelists disagreed. Edward Chitsulo, editor at Nations Publications Limited, said, “I don’t think people are corrupt because they are underpaid, but I think they are just corrupt by nature. It is genetic.” Some panelists noted that some journalists earn good money but still take bribes.

It should be noted that, in Malawi, bribes generally take two forms. One is when a journalist and a source agree on a bribe to deliberately influence coverage; the second, and most common, is when organizers of an event offer journalists money, gifts, and transport for attending. In the latter case, often referred to as the passing of the “brown envelope,”

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).

independence is compromised but not as much as in the first case. However, panelists said, not all journalists in Malawi accept brown envelopes; there are others who hold the integrity of the profession in high esteem.

The panel discussion showed that reporting has improved, reflecting the democratic dispensation; journalists have been uncovering high-level corruption through investigative journalism.

The discussion made clear that many journalists in Malawi are not aware of existing codes of conduct. The Malawi Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, adopted in 1994, is a self-regulatory regime for all media; broadcasters must also adhere to the codes of conduct stipulated in the Communications Act and their respective licenses. It was not until Chitsulo mentioned that there was a code launched in 1994 that most of the participants knew of its existence. Chitsulo, one of the drafters of the code, said he did not think it had been promoted adequately. MCM has revised the code and will distribute it soon. Panelists also mentioned that some individual media outlets have their own codes of conduct, though most of their employees are not aware of them. Even if they are, they sometimes do not follow them.

Regarding self-censorship, one of the panelists said that “Malawi is a small country, and self-censorship is evident in many forms. Journalists want to protect themselves against making enemies in the community, and they act in the interest of the owners and employers.” Most of the panelists agreed and said political stories are the ones that suffer most from self-censorship. In the state-owned media, journalists have learned to censor their stories because of political and other interference. They seem to write more positively about government and the ruling party and negatively about opposition parties and politicians. Reporters and editors sometimes practice self-censorship because of fear of intimidation from government departments like MACRA, according to one of the panelists. Some panelists thought of censorship in a positive way, as in cases where editors decide not to use gruesome pictures.

The panelists felt that Malawian journalists cover key events and issues that involve both government and the private sector, and this indicator got the highest score of any under Objective 2. However, Chitsulo noted that this is largely because budget cuts at MBC and TVM pose “constraints on journalists’ ability to go out and cover stories, and they will definitely go for those who will provide transport to ferry them to the venue of the function, which is mostly the government.”

There was a general view that state media balance their information and entertainment programs. Some private radio stations have more entertainment than information, while

the print media have more information than entertainment coverage. “Educational and cultural reporting is mainly done by the state broadcasters, while entertainment (music), news briefs, phone-in programs characterize private radio,” said Talumba Mhango, a student at MIJ.

The panelists said media personnel lack adequate and modern equipment to gather and produce news. “For example, very few journalists own recorders, and most recorders are outdated manual recorders. Because of lack of prioritizing, most media bosses do not see any reason to purchase the latest equipment,” Sandram said. Panelists noted that this issue needs to be addressed at a policy level. While big newspapers have equipment for their journalists, there is a need for better gear at smaller outlets, particularly among private media but also at TVM. One panelist commended MBC for having good equipment and for having shifted to digital technology. Some panelists even suggested that the government should provide equipment even to private media. “This lack of equipment and the use of outdated equipment contribute to poor quality of programs,” Sandram said.

Quality niche reporting exists in Malawi but is constrained by limited resources, according to the panelists. The panelists said media outlets cannot afford to allow their staff to specialize; they would rather have a general assignment reporter covering several beats. Some panelists said journalists need specialized training to be effective at niche reporting. Some were of the view that journalists tend to concentrate on political stories, ignoring issues of the environment and only occasionally featuring gender, education, and agriculture.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Malawi Objective Score: 2.58

Malawi has more private media outlets than state-run ones. At the time this report was written, the country had one state television station, two state radio stations, 12 private radio stations, four community radio stations, and 13 newspapers. All the private media outlets are based in urban areas, and there are a few community radio stations in the rural areas. Even though most of the private radio stations have licenses to broadcast nationwide, some cannot reach all parts of the country. The newspapers are published in English and circulate mainly in urban areas. Most of the radio stations broadcast in English and the Chichewa language. MBC Radio 1 broadcasts in almost all of Malawi’s major languages. People also get news from international radio stations such as BBC and VOA on specific local channels or through relays on the radio stations.

Though Internet penetration in Malawi is extremely low, people in urban areas also get news from Internet cafés. The Internet is popular among youths, the working class, and academics, and it serves as a good news source for Malawians in the diaspora and other stakeholders. Journalists also use the Internet to source international news. It was noted that some traditional media outlets extended their operations to the Internet during the past year. For instance, MBC started its own web site, joining Capital FM and some print outlets that were already on the web.

Foreign publications are available in Malawi but are not affordable to the majority of citizens. Cable television is also accessed by few since subscriptions are relatively expensive. A few people in Malawi get international news through their mobile phones.

Although there are no legal or government restrictions on access to news from domestic or international sources, panelists noted that people in rural areas have fewer sources of news than those in urban areas because of access, language, and income barriers.

Panelists said that, in some cases, ownership can determine content of media outlets. "There is a high level of bias in reporting especially at the public broadcasters and some private radio stations. For example, MBC is pro-government and Joy Radio is pro-opposition," Kadzakumanja said. Other media outlets use a variety of news sources in their news items, providing citizens with reliable, objective, and diverse news coverage. Some panelists were of the view that most people find the media to be credible, as evidenced by the fact that they rarely question information that the media provide.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

The panelists agreed that the state media are biased in their coverage, serving the interests of the government of the day and rarely covering the opposition positively. This has been the trend since the first multi-party elections in 1994. "The bias tends to become more pronounced each and every time Malawi goes to the polls," said Mcheka. "Like currently, as we are drawing closer to elections, political parties in the opposition are already complaining of bias by the state media. Opposition parties have accused the MBC and TVM of having a bias, favoring coverage of the ruling party." Some panelists said the state media are biased because they get funding from government, though it could be argued that MBC and TVM should have been more independent since they have not gotten their budgetary allocation for two consecutive years.

It was clear that politicians are reluctant to open up the state media and turn them into true public service broadcasters. For the past four years, Malawi has had strong opposition parties with more legislators in Parliament than the ruling party. If the opposition parties wanted to liberate MBC they could have voted on policies to remove direct government control on the public broadcasters.

However, panelists praised the state broadcasters for meeting professional standards when reporting on issues such as the environment and HIV/AIDS.

Media outlets get international news from agencies such as Reuters and the Associated Press. The only domestic news agency, state-run Malawi News Agency (MANA), has a sizeable infrastructure, with offices in almost every district in Malawi, but no longer provides a wide variety of news because it is under-funded, according to some panelists. However, one panelist said that if a particular outlet feeds stories to MANA, it gets regular and good stories in return.

Panelists said private broadcast media produce their own programming and that most private radio stations also have relays from international media such as BBC, VOA, and Channel Africa. Panelists noted that if one station has a program that is doing well, chances are others will copy the format. "What is happening with most of the broadcasting houses is that they are copying from each other, especially the content of the program; the only thing that changes is the name of the program and producers," Mcheka said.

Panelists said that even though there are no laws requiring disclosure of ownership, many people in the country know who owns the different private media outlets. Media ownership in Malawi is widely spread, but most of the newspapers have links with politicians. For instance, Nation Publication Ltd. belongs to Aleke Banda, a politician. Blantyre Newspapers Ltd. is a subsidiary of a group of

companies owned by Chayamba Trust, which oversees all the businesses that were owned by the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's longtime dictator. There is also Guardian Publication Ltd., publishers of the *Guardian* newspaper, which has links with President Bingu wa Mutharika. In most of the newspaper companies, content is not directly influenced by the interests of the owners. The panel was not aware of any foreign investment in the media in Malawi.

The panelists said social interests are reflected and presented in the media, especially electronic media. The state broadcasters and other stations have programs produced from rural areas, and some are in local languages. "In terms of packaging programs, media in Malawi produce programs that cover many issues that cut across all the spectrum of issues affecting the society. We have programs that focus on AIDS, agriculture, environment, human rights, economic development," Mcheka said. Panelists noted that daily newspapers do not accommodate local languages, but that weekend papers have supplements in Chichewa.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Malawi Objective Score: 2.43

Panelists said most independent media outlets are well managed as businesses. They generate income from such sources as advertising and sponsorships and do not rely on the government for funding. Their major challenge is that editors serve the interests of advertisers, compromising editorial independence. "For instance, some editors cannot say anything bad about an organization sponsoring their programs for fear of hurting the advertiser and in turn losing business," Masasula said.

The print media are better managed as sustainable businesses than electronic media, according to panelists. Other panelists argued that there are very few media outlets of any kind that are operating as efficient and successful businesses. "Most of them are finding it difficult to survive, as they lack good marketing teams. Community media are either poorly funded or not funded at all," according to Rogers Siula, senior broadcaster at MIJ Radio. It was also noted that human resource management needs improvement, as evidenced by high staff turnover, especially in newsrooms. Other media managers were of the view that some media outlets deliberately poach staff from competitors.

The state media were commended for having strong marketing departments with aggressive professionals. "Strong marketing teams are also found at the Nation Publications Ltd. [NPL]

and Blantyre Newspapers Ltd. [BNL]. Both NPL and BNL are run just like any other business entity. In most of the private radio stations like Capital FM, FM101, and Zodiac Broadcasting Corporation, one is bound to find marketing departments with staff and accounts officers as well," Mcheka stated.

Some panelists said that while most of the radio stations are profit-driven, community and religious radio stations' main motive is to serve their communities. Because they rely on volunteers, they often lack funds and management skills. Hence their marketing and financial departments are not well developed. The panelists also noted that more radio stations have begun seeking business in rural areas, where people advertise by announcing their business on the air. Such programs include "Vendors' Bargain," aired every day on MBC, and MIJ Radio's "Pamsika" ("At the Market"), which is also aired every day.

One panelist said some print media houses generate revenue from advertising, newspaper sales, consultancies, producing publications for other organizations, and other streams. The Malawian government is the biggest advertiser, and some panelists said it tends to pull strings from behind the scenes. Media houses supporting the government of the day tend to enjoy a lot of advertising from the government, unlike those who are deemed to be supporting opposition parties. One panelist was of the view that some businesses shun some media houses because they fear that if they advertise on certain stations they will be perceived by the government as supporting the opposition and will lose out on government businesses.

Some panelists said that despite most media companies being well managed, editorial independence has not reached impressive levels.

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.

Panelists noted that there has been a proliferation of advertising agencies that provide support to the advertising market, though few have been as vibrant as expected. Panelists agreed that advertising is growing, adding that it is well developed—mainly in the urban areas—with major companies such as Zain Company, Unilever, and TNM increasing advertisement buys. Radio and print are the most frequently utilized media.

Panelists said that most media outlets are driven to run more advertisements in their programs, as advertising is the only substantial source of revenue. “There is a deliberate need for more programs to be sponsored, including news bulletins, for example, on MBC. Ads take up a lot of time, and managers encourage more ads in almost all programs to maximize revenue,” Kadzakumanja noted.

Panelists said the fact that independent media do not get government subsidies means that they are able to carry out their activities without pressure from government. They said that accepting advertising from the government cannot be equated to a subsidy. However, the fact that the government is such an important advertiser likely means that media with a large share of government advertising do consider their editorial policies carefully in this context.

Panelists observed that there is very little market research, if any, conducted in the country “because most media houses do not realize the importance of research,” as Sandram put it. Some panelists blamed the absence of research on lack of resources. MBC has a research department but does not publish many of its findings, according to one panelist. In the absence of traditional research, some media companies use other analysis methods. Chitsulo said that “what is happening now in the private media is that we are going into strategic planning, to look at the markets: we do SWOT analyses, assess the markets, and come up with our plans; that’s how we have survived. We also have editorial retreats and other activities to make sure that our product is okay and we deliver in good time.” Panelists, however, expressed concern over the ad hoc manner in which research is done, including relying on experience and common practice to draw conclusions and form strategic plans. Unable to do audience research because they lack funds, some broadcasters rely on phone-in programs to gather feedback from their listeners about programming and other issues.

Panelists agreed that at present there are no independent institutions producing circulation figures, broadcast ratings and Internet statistics. Media organizations use their marketing and sales sections to produce their own circulation figures based on estimates from printed copies and sales figures, or broadcast ratings based on popularity of programs. “There are very few ratings available, and circulation figures

are not reliable as they just culminate from guesswork,” Chitsulo said. It was noted that the Media Council of Malawi is exploring ways of tapping into research expertise to produce independent circulation figures.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Malawi Objective Score: 2.55

Panelists singled out NAMISA as the most active organization striving to protect journalists’ rights. However, one panelist stated that NAMISA “only speaks whenever something has gone wrong. They are more reactive than proactive—they only react when a person has been arrested. I have never heard of them going to different media houses to find out how journalists are surviving, how they are treated by their employers.” Panelists also noted that NAMISA is not a union, and they said that what journalists need is an active union to look into such issues as staff welfare.

It was also noted that many journalists do not know how to get help from NAMISA. One panelist said: “I heard from someone that you have to be a member, and I don’t know how you become a member.” Other organizations include the Journalists Union of Malawi (JUMA), Editors Forum, and the resuscitated MCM. The MCM is mandated to promote professionalism in the media through training. The organization is also responsible for mediating cases between the media and the general public and accrediting all journalists in Malawi. Panelists said that NAMISA has been trying to resuscitate the Journalists Association of Malawi (JAMA).

It was also mentioned that there used to be a Publishers Association and National Broadcasters Association but, according to one panelist, the broadcasters association “didn’t stay on the scene for a long time... because broadcasters are very busy people and there was a lot of competition amongst the broadcasters.”

The Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre and other NGOs support media freedom in the country, and during the year under review they were actively involved in championing the drafting and adoption of the Access to Information Bill. They also serve as watchdogs and react to violations of media freedoms. Coverage of issues with which NGOs are involved has improved, though some NGOs criticize the media for not reporting cases of domestic violence and other issues.

Journalism degree, diploma, and certificate programs are offered at the University of Malawi and other private institutions, such as MIJ, ShareWorld Open University, and African Bible College. But because the course fees in the private institutions are very high, some people resort to

studying at unaccredited institutions, which are cheaper. Kadzakumanja said that “the programs appear to be quality... The makeup of the courses shows that there is really some movement in that direction.” However, she noted that the University of Malawi “is really incapacitated... because of lack of resources, lack of equipment... This year is even worse and [it] is resulting in many of our graduates being unable to perform. They are unable to really work on the ground, they are unable to work unsupervised because they just know most of the theory but they really cannot practice.” In addition, there are private colleges outside Malawi that offer diplomas and certificates in journalism, such as ABMA and ICM in the United Kingdom.

Some panelists said that graduates need more interaction with working media during their training and that their frustrations with the profession lead them to careers in public relations. However, some of the colleges offer internships as part of the curriculum so that students can have practical experience. One panelist suggested that journalism students should be given longer attachments than the situation currently allows. For instance, students in the four-year degree program at the University of Malawi go for a mandatory internship of only three months.

Short-term training opportunities exist both locally and internationally and are available to everyone in the profession, allowing journalists to upgrade their skills or acquire new ones. Most media outlets provide short-term training as well as in-house training to members of their staff. But while media outlets routinely send staff to take part in professional development whenever such opportunities arise, they rarely do so for long-term training. Some panelists were of the view that short-term training sessions are not held frequently enough.

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.

Panelists said most of the media workers are in need of training, including technicians, cameramen, producers, sports reporters, and other categories. “Currently Media Council of Malawi has taken the responsibility of conducting such short courses for journalists. MCM writes proposals to different donors for support towards such training. Embassies are also approached for scholarships and short trainings that take place from time to time abroad,” Mcheka said. The major challenge, one panelist said, is that well-trained graduates tend to leave the media for greener pastures.

Panelists complained that there are no media management training programs in Malawi. Journalists in Malawi have to rely on training conducted by organizations elsewhere in Southern Africa such as the NSJ and the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership.

Most sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands and are not restricted in any way by the government. However, newsprint must be imported, and its supply and price are affected by economic trends at the national and international levels. In the past year, Malawi performed well economically, so there was not much negative impact. Most of the printing facilities are run as business entities. Blantry Printing and Publishing is one of the main printing presses in Malawi. The other printing presses are under Nation Publications Ltd. and Montfort Press, a Catholic institution. The government also has printing presses.

As indicated above, panelists felt that channels of distribution for print media and Internet are not restricted, as government has no direct control. Internet cafés, or kiosks, as they are popularly called in Malawi, are in private hands and are run like other private businesses. Once an individual gets a license from MACRA, they can set their business wherever they want as stipulated in the license. But since customers determine where one can set a business, most Internet cafés are in cities like Lilongwe, Blantyre, Zomba, and Mzuzu, according to panelists. In rural areas, one is bound to find an Internet café at most district headquarters, but the fee is relatively high.

It was noted, however, that most radio stations do not have their own transmitters and instead use those of state media. Some panelists said it would be better if all broadcast stations owned their transmitters. However, there are issues of cost, feasibility, and effectiveness that must be considered.

List of Panel Participants

Grace Kadzakumanja, senior lecturer, University of Malawi, Polytechnic, Blantyre

Eric Mcheka, program officer, Media Council of Malawi, Lilongwe

Evanse Masamba, editor, Malawi Institute of Journalism Radio, Blantyre

Edward Chitsulo, chief editor, Nation Publication Limited, Blantyre

Rodgers Siula, senior broadcaster, Malawi Institute of Journalism Radio, Blantyre

Josephine Semu, producer, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Blantyre

Beauty Mbewe, course manager, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

Charles Nkalo, assistant controller of news, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Blantyre

Deuseditt Sandram, assistant broadcaster, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

Talumba Mhango, journalism diploma student, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

Rhoda Masasula, journalism diploma student, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

Kondwani Gondwe, journalism diploma student, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

Archibald Kasakula, journalism certificate student, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

Moderator

Peter Jones Mitunda, executive director, Malawi Institute of Journalism, Blantyre

The Malawi study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa