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BOTSWANA

The 2008 Botswana MSI suggested a growing sense in the media community that past gains are slowly eroding. The government of Botswana validated those concerns by signing the Media Practitioners Act (MPA) into law on the last day of December, 2008 despite vehement opposition by journalists, independent media outlets, and civil society bodies both in Botswana and internationally. The act requires journalists to have government accreditation and stipulates that media organizations must be licensed by a statutory media council. Critics argue that the creation of this government statutory body goes directly against the self-regulatory system promoted by the Press Council of Botswana and argue that it poses a threat to Botswana's independent media and freedom of the press generally.

The government shows no signs of loosening its grip, as the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) under President Seretse Khama Ian Khama won the majority of seats, as expected, in the October 2009 parliamentary elections. The BDP is beset by deep factional rivalries and poor relations with the private media. Despite the tensions between the government and the media, Botswana's economy remains among the strongest in Africa, and the country enjoys one of the world's highest growth rates—largely attributed to diamond resources and a thriving tourism industry, coupled with sound macroeconomic policies. However, given the global financial setbacks, the economy has experienced several negative shocks, including a temporary decline in global diamond demand.

The government continues to discourage a diverse, sustainable, and independent media environment by offering no incentives to private media enterprises. Instead, the government taxes private media enterprises heavily. In addition, the state media continue to compete directly with private print and broadcasting media for advertising, offering rates that undercut those offered by private media. Notwithstanding, a concentration of ownership is emerging within the private media sector. Currently, Botswana has no legislation regulating competition in the economy as a whole or for the media sector specifically, except for a slight reference in the MPA. In 2007, the Ministry of Trade and Industry shelved anti-competition legislation for private companies.

These developments hurt Botswana's MSI score. Objective 1 (freedom of speech) slipped nearly a third of a point from last year's study. All of the other objectives dipped at least a little in 2009, although not nearly as drastically as Objective 1, indicative of the panelists' concerns with the government stance toward the media and the signs of private media monopolization in Botswana. Bright spots remain, including in Objective 5 (supporting institutions). There is recognition of the NGOs working actively with Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Botswana and challenging anti-media laws and practices. The passing of the MPA in particular spurred civil society activists into forming an umbrella organization—aptly named the Coalition for the Freedom of Expression—in 2009.

# BOTSWANA AT A GLANCE

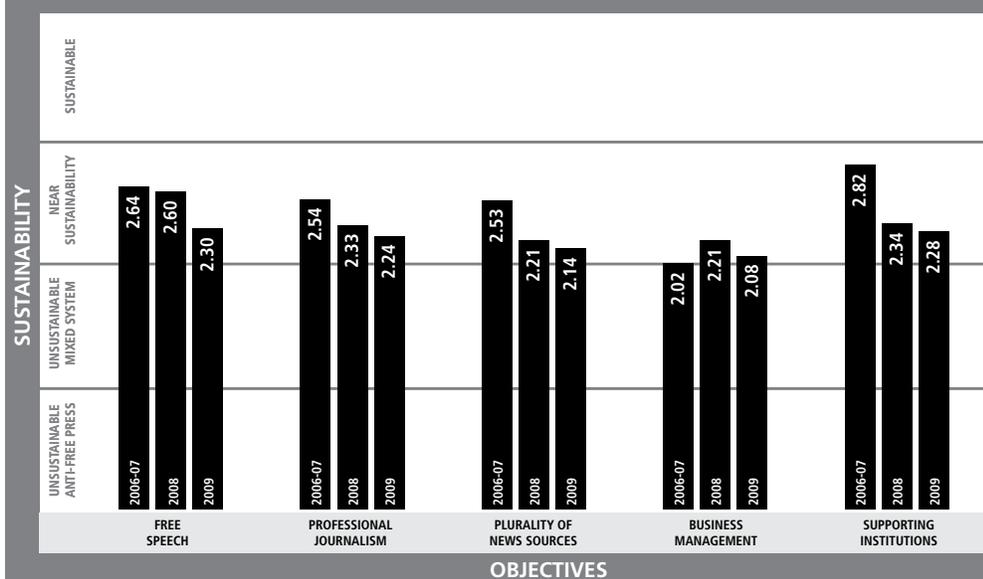
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 1,990,876 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*).
- > **Capital city:** Gaborone
- > **Ethnic groups (percent of population):** Tswana (or Setswana) 79%, Kalanga 11%, Basarwa 3%, other, including Kgalagadi and white 7% (*CIA World Factbook*).
- > **Religions (percent of population):** Christian 71.6%, Badimo 6%, other 1.4%, unspecified 0.4%, none 20.6% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (percent of population):** Setswana 78.2%, Kalanga 7.9%, Sekgalagadi 2.8%, English 2.1% (official), other 8.6%, unspecified 0.4% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$12.17 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$12,860 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 81.2 % (male 80.4 %, female 81.8 %) (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Seretse Khama Ian Khama (since April 1, 2008)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**  
Print: 1 state-owned newspaper and 13 privately owned commercial newspapers; Radio stations: 2 national state-owned, 3 national privately owned, and 8 foreign stations. Television Stations: 1 state-owned, 3 privately owned. Newspaper ownership is mostly concentrated in Gaborone.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *Daily News* (circulation 65,000, state-owned), *The Voice* (circulation 35,000, private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** 85% of population has access to national (state-owned) radio. Broadcast dominated by state-owned BTV.
- > **News agencies:** Botswana Press Agency (State-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Total advertising expenses estimated at BWP 300 million (2008 MSI panelist commentary). There are 16 registered advertising agencies. Major players include Alliance Media, Mudhut Sound Studios, Horizon Ogilvy and Mather, Optimum McCann Erickson, Primedia Outdoor, RMC Marketing, Central Advertisers, and CBS Advertising.
- > **Internet usage:** 120,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BOTSWANA



### 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

### Botswana Objective Score: 2.30

The Objective 1 score suffered a moderate decline compared to last year due mostly to much lower scores in indicators 1 (legal and social protections of free speech) and 9 (licensing of journalists); indicator 3 (free market entry) also received a somewhat lower score. These drops were mitigated somewhat by a higher score in indicator 4 (attacks on journalists). Despite the fluctuation of indicator scores, most remained within a half point of the overall objective average. Indicators 5 (legal preferences for state media) and 9 scored just slightly more than half a point behind, while indicator 4 scored slightly more than half a point ahead. Indicator 8 (media access to and use of foreign news sources) was the leading indicator at about three-quarters of a point higher than the objective score.

Most of the panelists expressed their sense that journalists' rights and editorial independence have become increasingly restricted over the last two years, in all sectors of the media. They view the MPA as a significant threat to media freedom by undermining the media code of self-regulation. Opposing this view, Jeff Ramsay, coordinator of the Botswana Government Communication and Information System, said, "...freedom of speech is provided for in the constitution. The laws of the republic are both consistent with the constitution and subject to judicial oversight as to their constitutionality."

#### 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.

Botswana's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but according to media lawyer and University of Botswana lecturer Tachilisa Balule, the cause of concern is that "such guarantees fall short of international standards on freedom of expression." He observed that a number of restrictive laws are in force. They include the National Security Act (1986); provisions of the penal code on insult and sedition; the National Security Act, which regulates against anything that might threaten the security of the country; the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Crime Act, which prevents journalists from reporting on subjects under investigation until a case reaches the courts or investigations are concluded, and; the Police Act, which allows officers to monitor communication on land lines and cellular telephones in instances involving defense and public safety. Panelists were also troubled by a recent mandate by the Telecommunications Authority of Botswana that required all cell phone users to register their SIM cards with the authority by the end of 2009. Panelists said that the authority might use this requirement to interfere with civil liberties.

While last year's MSI reported the promising news that the National Broadcasting Board allocated licenses to three private radio stations, the 2009 panelists agreed that the government controls the board. Panelists expressed particular concern about the board's failure to date to issue any community radio licenses. MISA broadcasting specialist Gladys Ramadi said, "The board has grown accustomed to delaying the licensing of community broadcasters, as it does not suit the government's agenda right now of monopolizing information for the masses. I feel the non-licensing of community media is politically motivated."

Sharing his views on the fairness of market entry and media tax structure, media management consultant Gerald Mulowa said, "The tax structure does not put the media industry at too great a disadvantage; it is within the norm. Still, the government could promote the industry by either reducing or revoking completely the value-added tax applicable to materials such as newsprint." The panelists expressed a reluctance to describe market entry as unrestricted any longer, citing the MPA's potential to limit entry.

As for crimes against journalists, panelists described the attack on a reporter while covering a story at the Lobatse High Court in May 2009, and several instances of threats to photographers. Panelists said that the police intervene only when attacks on journalists threaten to disturb the peace more widely. Panelists did not cite other examples of direct attacks on the media, but they expressed concern about rumors surrounding the newly established Directorate of Intelligence and Security Services' (DISS) involvement in abductions, unlawful arrests, harassment, and assault. They

*According to the panelists, the introduction of the MPA could also mean that, for the first time in the country's history as an independent nation, the government could restrict entry into the journalism profession.*

described the society's pervasive culture of impunity, and said that journalists are afraid to execute their duties.

Panelists offered mostly negative opinions on the preferences received by, and the legal independence of, state media outlets, which include Radio Botswana One and Two, Botswana Television (BTV), and the *Daily News* newspaper. MISA Botswana Director Thapelo Ndlovu said, "The preferential treatment for state media continues. The fact is that state media can write or air whatever stories they want without consequence [i.e., harassment or legal trouble]." Most panelists said that journalists working for the state media remain strictly under government supervision. "There is no editorial independence in law or practice...the minister and the ruling party exert editorial control," Ramadi said. Tautona Chaba, of the local NGO Botswana Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS, agreed. "The government of Botswana has exhibited paranoia for a long time, by controlling both Radio Botswana 1 and Botswana Television—which enjoy high coverage within the country. Thus, people learn only what the government wants them to know," he said.

As for libel, panelists said the Botswana penal code contains provisions for criminal libel, sedition, and the publishing of "false news" or news that might "alarm the public." However, Balule said that most lawsuits are either withdrawn or settled outside of the courts. As reported in the 2008 MSI, MISA and the Botswana Press Council work hard to deter lawsuits against the media. The panelists brought up the May 2009 case in which President Khama sued the private *Sunday Standard* for alleging that he may have been involved in the Kalafatis murder. Subsequently, reports in the media (*Mmegi*, May 27, 2009) stated that the government was planning an advertising ban on the *Sunday Standard* and *Mmegi* for breaching the code of ethics and defaming the president. At the time that the 2009 MSI panel convened, investigations were continuing, and whether Khama would withdraw or continue with the case after the investigations concluded was not clear. The president can sue only if it is proven that the story was written with knowledge of its falsity and with malicious intent.

Panelists said that journalists cannot draw on access to information legislation to get what they need, and independent journalists are frequently blocked from attending government events. In one instance, the government barred private media from attending a press conference addressing allegations about the involvement of security forces in extra-judicial killings, related to the death of an alleged thief, John Kalafatis, on May 13, 2009 in Gaborone.<sup>1</sup> Between April 2008 and May 2009, security agents were allegedly responsible for 12 extra-judicial shootings and nine deaths, arousing suspicion that the president condoned or even ordered this approach.<sup>2</sup> Fear of the DISS has effectively stymied attempts to access public information. "This fear restricts reporting, as journalists are afraid to pursue investigative stories and are censoring themselves," Ndlovu said. "Furthermore, there is no protection of whistle-blowers." MISA Botswana continues to push for an access to information law, although the Minister of Communications, Science, and Technology told parliament that such legislation is not a priority.

Regarding the media's access to international news sources, traditionally a high-scoring indicator for Botswana, the panelists noted their appreciation that the government does not restrict Internet access. However, they expressed concern that the MPA might affect access in the future—and in particular wondered what it would mean for citizens who publish online, given that the MPA requires all websites and blogs to register with the media council. The panel also raised concerns over the registration of cell phone SIM cards.

According to the panelists, the introduction of the MPA could also mean that, for the first time in the country's history as an independent nation, the government could restrict entry into the journalism profession. This development explains that indicator's dramatic fall in score of more than a full point from last year's score, which had approached the border of sustainability. The act stipulates that all journalists living in Botswana must be accredited by the government through a statutory media council, which is also responsible for issuing operating licenses to media companies. Chaba criticized the law, saying, "Nowhere has it been found that self-regulation of media has failed, yet the government introduced this act."

Media houses are lobbying to have the law withdrawn, arguing that it is unconstitutional and contrary to the country's international obligations. They strongly object to the broad definition of a "media practitioner," the

<sup>1</sup> Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Botswana alert: "Private media barred from government press conference on controversial death of Botswana man," May 22, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Kgosi Kgafela mobilizes civil society against extra-judicial killings" *Sunday Standard*, July 6, 2009. <http://www.sundaystandard.info/article.php?NewsID=5132&GroupID=1> Accessed May 27, 2010.

requirement of journalists and publications to register with and receive accreditation from the government, and the compulsory membership in the statutory media council. Chaba said that he believes that this law directly impinges upon the public's right to disseminate and receive information.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Botswana Objective Score: 2.24

Most of this objective's indicators scored within the boundaries of near-sustainability, with two exceptions: indicator 3 (self-censorship) and indicator 5 (pay levels for journalists discourage corruption); indicator 5 was also the only indicator to deviate from the overall objective score by more than half a point, although it lagged by only a little more than half a point. Most indicators showed little change from last year. Small losses in indicator 3 and indicator 8 (niche and investigative reporting) and a small increase in indicator 6 (balance of entertainment and news) were the only exceptions. Overall, however, the objective score changed only marginally from last year's 2.33.

In the panel's view, journalists in Botswana do meet professional standards of quality, although the majority of the panelists see paths to improvement. Although in theory the Press Council of Botswana compels journalists to meet internationally accepted norms and standards, panelists raised concerns over the quality of reporting and the lack of balance in particular. Panelists offered multi-faceted reasons for the shortcomings: a lack of training in specialized reporting, the prevailing political environment, restrictive media laws, self-censorship, and inadequate resources to cover events.

#### 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).

*"The prevailing political and legislative environment makes it a challenge for journalists to be fair and effective," Chaba said.*

"The prevailing political and legislative environment makes it a challenge for journalists to be fair and effective," Chaba said. "The private media, while displaying a high degree of professionalism, are obscured by the lack of access to information, which leads to unbalanced stories." Ramsay took an even more negative view, saying, "In general, the standards of journalism in the country are poor."

Ndlovu said that the media operates within a code of ethics, but the sector's operations are compromised by a lack of capacity. Balule commented, "Over the years, [the media] has established its own voluntary self-regulatory press council, which adopted a code of conduct that compares to international professional standards." He suggested that adherence to this code could be considered strong based upon "the number of complaints regarding violations of the code registered with [the] press council."<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the prevalence of self-censorship, Ramadi summarized most panelists' perceptions: "Self-censorship exists to a large extent in public media, because the journalists are not regarded as journalists, but civil servants." While she concluded that "self-censorship in private media is largely due to commercial interests," Balule said, "The issue of self-censorship is difficult to ascertain, but one cannot ignore economic and ownership interests that may induce some measure of self-censorship." Sello Motseta, owner and editor of *Tswana Times*, argued that the lack of resources prevents private media journalists from covering stories adequately, and journalists self-censor out of fear of antagonizing the government and losing advertising. He gave an example: "...during campaigns toward the October general elections, many journalists concentrated on the ruling party as newsmakers, and gave no right [of] reply to opposition parties on particular stories." Most panelists agreed that political reporting needs improvement.

Balule pointed to the private media's fair coverage of all key events, and said the media attempt to cover key events and issues such as HIV/AIDS and poverty.

On the issue of low pay, Balule pointed to the trend of experienced journalists leaving the profession in search of

<sup>3</sup> At time of this research, the numbers of complaints could not be obtained, as the press council secretariat was operating at below capacity due to insufficient funds.

greener pastures in the corporate sector, where their skills are in high demand. This leaves newsrooms to carry on with younger, less experienced staff. This echoes last year's report, which warned that poor pay levels are linked directly to declining professional standards.

The score for the indicator assessing the entertainment-to-news ratio was the only one to increase appreciably in the period studied. This area has typically been considered a strength of Botswana's radio stations in particular, as they offer news every hour in both Setswana and English, as well as current affairs, entertainment, local music, call-in interactive programs, and sports.

This year's panelists consider technical media facilities and equipment adequately modern and efficient, and previous panels agreed that growth in the country's communication and technology sector have positively impacted the media's technical capacity.

As reported in last year's MSI, a number of factors hamper the development of niche reporting, and scores in this indicator declined further this year. Previously, panelists called for organizations such as MISA Botswana and the Southern Africa Institute for Media Entrepreneurship Development to provide training to help journalists develop specialized knowledge in business, health, and other news beats, and it appears that this need persists. Botswana has a number of local magazines that center on specific topics, such as *Hotel and Tourism*; the environmentally focused *Wena*; the youth publication *Lapologa*; a farmers' magazine; and the contemporary magazine, *Kutlwano*, which is published by the Ministry of Communications, Science, and Technology. These are published infrequently, for the most part.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Botswana Objective Score: 2.14

Overall the score for this objective did not show much change compared to 2008 and none of the indicators showed significant change. Further, all the indicators fell within half a point of the overall objective score, with the exception of indicator 2, citizen access to media, which scored a full point higher.

In a country where a newspaper costs BWP 4 (\$0.45), a diverse array of news and information sources are available for the people, provided they can afford to pay for satellite broadcast services and the Internet, Balule said. In Botswana, an estimated less than 10 percent of the population can access the Internet; they mainly log on at work or in Internet

### 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.

cafés.<sup>4</sup> They use the Internet primarily for communication, not as a news source.

Print media are all in English; no local languages are used. A Setswana-language newspaper, *Mokgosi*, folded in 2005 after three years. Botswana has nearly a dozen weekly papers, mostly national; others, such as Francistown's *Blue Jacket News*, are limited to specific locations, with circulations ranging between 8,000 (*Sunday Tribune*) and 30,000 (*The Voice*).<sup>5</sup> An additional concern is that one associated group, Dikgang Publishers, owns most private papers.

Broadcast media, especially radio, are the most accessible. Frequencies are national, but located in Gaborone. Six radio stations broadcast in Botswana: the government-owned Radio Botswana 1 and 2 (the latter with more of a commercial focus), and the private and commercial stations Duma FM, Gabz FM, Ya Rona FM, and Voice of America. Duma FM began broadcasting within the last two years. Two local television stations are located in Gaborone: the state-owned Botswana Television (BTV) and the private Gaborone Broadcasting Company (GBC), transmitted within a 25-km radius of Gaborone. Viewers can also subscribe to the South African satellite subscription service, DSTV, through Multi-Choice Botswana, if they can afford the expense.

Ramsay pointed out that while the country has multiple news sources, they are not especially strong, and that community

<sup>4</sup> So This is Democracy: State of media freedom in southern Africa 2008 and Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Botswana, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Circulation figures obtained from: So this is Democracy: State of Media Freedom in Southern Africa 2008, Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Windhoek, 2009 along with input from panelists.

media is a particularly weak area. In fact, panelists said that Botswana still has no print or broadcast community media. Other panelists noted the government's role in preventing community media from gaining strength. Balule said that the state refuses to issue licenses to community media broadcasters and insists on using the state broadcaster to promote its objectives.

The panel assigned the highest score for this objective to the issue of access to domestic or international media, which fell soundly within the range of sustainability. However, rural audiences do not enjoy the same access as urban areas. Aside from the state-owned *Daily News*, print distribution to rural areas is very limited. Similarly, according to Ramadi, private radio stations mainly service urban areas, while the state media has a national footprint. Mulowa agreed: "Largely, the country's population has access to both local and international news sources—however, most rural areas are excluded," he said.

As for the success of the state-run media reflecting the views of the political spectrum, panelists assigned the lowest score of the objective. As reported in last year's MSI, the state media do favor the ruling government, but also try to cover a wide range of issues and events. State radio stations cover a more diverse range of issues than television.

The panelists agreed that independent news agencies do not exist. Noting that the Botswana Press Agency (BOPA) is state-owned, panelists do not view it as independent. The previous MSI panel reported that the government has always made content for BOPA available to the private media as well as public media, but most private media outlets do not use the resource. Ndlovu mentioned the Sila Press Agency as one example of a private news agency, although whether it is well used or even particularly active is not clear. Most panelists agreed that the local media depend mainly on international news agencies, but find them expensive to access regularly. International news agencies mentioned include Reuters, AP, and AFP. BBC and CNN also provide a stream of international news. Participants agreed that while independent media produce their own news and current affairs programs, these do not differ significantly from those provided by public broadcasters.

Discussions on indicator 6, transparency of media ownership, revealed that political affiliations and business interests of media owners have led to the concentration of media into few hands. They agreed that the Dikgang Publishing Company's acquisition of sole ownership of the *Botswana Guardian* and the *Midweek Sun* could have been more transparent. The company already owns *Mmegi* and the *Monitor*, and has minority shares in the private radio station Gabz FM. The Botswana government is the other significant media player and has the widest reach. The free paper, *Daily*

*News*, is widely distributed to most areas of the country and has the largest circulation of any print publications in Botswana. In rural areas, this is often the only print media available to most people, although it arrives up to a week or so late sometimes.

Currently, Botswana has no legislation regulating competition in the economy as a whole, or for the media sector specifically, although the new MPA recognizes the issue. In 2007, the Ministry of Trade and Industry shelved anti-competition legislation for private companies.

Botswana's media still has work to do to reflect a broad spectrum of social and minority issues. As stated in the 2009 African Media Barometer, a biannual report developed by MISA Africa and its partners, Botswana has few female journalists, which may help explain the lack of attention to women's issues in its press.<sup>6</sup> Setswana and English (the two official languages) are the only languages used, and the private media outlets all tend to discuss the same issues and draw on the same sources as the public media. There is no content in Kalanga and Sekgalagadi or other minority languages. Motseta observed that the lack of community broadcasters and newspapers has stymied efforts to try to boost linguistic diversity in the media.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Botswana Objective Score: 2.08

Most of the business management indicators did not change significantly from last year. However, indicator 7 (reliability of broadcast ratings and circulation figures), dropped dramatically—more than a half of a point. All indicators scored within a half point of the overall objective score.

Generally, the panelists agreed that Botswana's independent media outlets run efficiently as business enterprises, relying on sales and advertising revenue for sustenance. Standards vary across different media outlets, and smaller companies tend to face more challenges in business management. As reported in last year's study, smaller outlets often face the necessity of merging editorial and business staff and functions, which places great pressure on its employees.

In response to the world's economic meltdown, private media managers have worked extremely hard to maintain their operations, despite high printing costs and reduced revenue. As a result, most privately owned publications have reduced their print runs. Only the *Botswana Gazette* can claim to have increased its print run from 16,000 to 20,000 in the past

<sup>6</sup> African Media Barometer – 2009 – Botswana: 34.

## 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.

couple of years. (For comparison, the dominant state-owned *Daily News* has a circulation of 65,000.) *The Voice*, on the other hand, reduced its print run from 38,000 copies per week in 2008 to 30,000 copies in 2009.

Botswana has a solid but small advertising market, according to Ramsay and other panelists. The 2009 African Media Barometer noted that the advertising market appears large enough to support the urban, English-based press, but noted, "...the collapse of the Setswana newspaper, *Mokgosi*, in 2005 is a clear indication that the advertising market in Botswana is not large enough to maintain a real diversity of media outlets."<sup>7</sup> As for advertising space percentages, Mulowo commented, "International standards of 60:40 ratio of advertising to editorial are compromised by the poor demand for advertising space, and dependency on particular sources of advertising revenue."

The government does not provide subsidies in terms of tax breaks. However, the government does offer loans to the private press through citizen empowerment programs of organizations like the Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Agency. In addition, the government remains the main source of advertising revenue in Botswana, and by far most of its advertising goes to its own *Daily News*—which makes the position of private media especially vulnerable to subtle editorial and financial pressure. Last year's MSI noted that *Mokgosi* failed likely because of competition from the government's *Daily News*. The African Media Barometer for Botswana reported that the government usually favors a subtle approach, relying on self-censorship to keep private media dependent upon state advertising and non-critical of the government.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> African Media Barometer—2009—Botswana: 39.

<sup>8</sup> Africa Media Barometer—Botswana—2009: 38.

During their market research discussion, the panelists agreed that no independent surveys have been produced in the last two years. John Chulu, editor of *Business Directory*, said, "If anyone claims to have conducted research and market surveys, they are largely unscientific, and are not independently produced." Although panelists in previous years have claimed that the media has used such research to improve and tailor its programs, no new research has appeared to back up or invalidate such claims.

In terms of circulation figures, the Audit Bureau of Circulation of South Africa confirmed that it has provided ABC certificates for a number of publications in Botswana, including the *Mmegi Monitor*, the *Mmegi Reporter*, the *Botswana Gazette*, the *Botswana Guardian*, and the *Midweek Sun*.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Botswana Objective Score: 2.28

Overall, Objective 5 scored nearly the same as last year, with all indicators scoring in the near-sustainability range and very close to the overall objective score. However, panelists lamented the inadequate capacity of professional associations to protect journalists and ensure quality journalism training.

Discussing trade associations and the protection of journalists' rights, the panelists noted that MISA Botswana, the Botswana Editors' Forum, and the Press Council of Botswana staunchly support the professional development and legal rights of the media industry. However, the panelists said that they want to see these organizations strengthened and empowered to contest the MPA. According to Motseta, these associations

## 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.

lack funding and need to spend more time consulting with government officials to promote members' interests. Kabo Mokgoabone, a *Sunday Standard* senior reporter, pointed to other media houses with membership in the Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry, and Manpower, which looks into the interests of all local businesses; and the Botswana Media Women's Association. Mokgoabone described the limitations of this organization and lamented, "The in-fighting in most media workers' unions is not helping the profession."

Panelists said that civil society groups, under the umbrella organization the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations, have been more supportive recently than in previous years. "There are many reasons for this," according to Thapelo, director of MISA Botswana. "But it is partly because of the formation in Botswana in early 2009 of the Coalition for Freedom of Expression, which draws the attention of civil society to the importance of protecting freedom of expression—especially with the threats to civil liberties posed by the MPA." During the 2009 World Press Freedom Day commemoration, organized by MISA in May, civil society organizations issued statements of solidarity against the introduction of the MPA.

Discussing the state of journalism degree programs, short-term training programs, and in-service training programs, the panelists agreed that local journalism training is fairly solid, but it fails to develop practical skills adequately. In-service training institutions, such as the locally based Southern Africa Institute for Media Entrepreneurship Development, are poorly funded, resulting in narrow frameworks of program offerings.

The panelists had little to say about the strength and independence of Botswana's sources of newsprint, printing facilities, and distribution networks. Given the sparsely distributed population in Botswana, media distribution remains a challenge. As a result, most private publications and transmitters remain centered in urban areas with high population concentration. In the last five years, developments in information communications technology have made the media more accessible to more people, especially in urban areas.

Distribution by the private media has varied, with some outlets handling it themselves and others outsourcing distribution services to public transportation and any other means to increase their circulation reach. The government-owned *Daily News* has engaged a private courier for its distribution countrywide. Five years ago, only two media houses had bureaus outside Gaborone: the Botswana Press Agency (*Daily News*) and *The Voice* newspaper, both in Francistown. By 2008, the Dikgang Publishing Company (*Botswana Guardian*, *Midweek Sun*, *Mmegi*, etc.) had also opened a distribution outlet. Panelists

see clear indications that the local private media need to work more cooperatively, as a network, to stabilize the distribution of media in Botswana. The government has little incentive to offer support for distribution or transmission to independent media, as this would be tantamount to enabling the competition, panelists said. Panelists also said that South African print media receive preferential treatment in distribution of their products at South African-owned retail outlets in Botswana.

## List of Panel Participants

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**Gerald Mulowa**, media consultant, Meritus, Gaborone

**John Churu**, editor, *Business Directory*, Maun and Francistown

**Gwere Hamufari**, editor, *Mining Mirror*, Jowaneng

**Sello Motseta**, editor, *The Tswana Times*, Gaborone

**Kabo Mokgoabone**, journalist, *Sunday Standard*, Gaborone

**Bonolo Ramadi Dinokopila**, legal officer, Botswana Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS, Gaborone

**Tautona Chaba**, legal officer, Botswana Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS, Gaborone

**Gladys Ramadi**, broadcast media specialist, Media Institute of Southern Africa Windhoek regional Secretariat, Windhoek and Gaborone

**The following participant submitted a questionnaire but did not attend the panel discussion:**

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## Moderator

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