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ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's current government, led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, continues on a course of oppressing the media, all while claiming that press freedom is growing stronger. Officials display little respect for press freedom and freedom of speech, crushing demonstrators agitating for their rights, forcing many journalists into exile, and holding others in detention for years. The media labor in an atmosphere clouded by intimidation, fear, and self-censorship. The few surviving independent voices feel forced to tread cautiously, often avoiding penning any articles that criticize the government.

The government continues to enact ever more draconian and highly subjective media laws, such as the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. The law drew international condemnation for granting the government broad power to criminalize reporting that it claims supports or glorifies terrorist groups. The government used the law to force the closure of the independent *Addis Neger* in late 2009, dealing a serious blow to key independent voices in the country. *Addis Neger's* staff fled the country after a government paper publicly accused them of violating the new law.¹

Much of Ethiopia's rural population lives in what some panelists designated a "media dark zone." Electronic media, especially radio, remain the most influential (and in some cases the only) information reaching the rural areas where most Ethiopians live. However, the government controls most of Ethiopia's radio stations, as well as the sole national television station; they are expected to serve as its mouthpiece. Currently, only three independent broadcast outlets operate in the country of about 80 million people.

Although people in major cities increasingly access online news sources, predictably, Internet reliability and speed weaken outside urban areas. Watching foreign media online is not a problem, provided that Internet access with the required bandwidth is available—and that the state has not blocked sources with one of its periodic cyber-blockades. Blogging is still uncommon in Ethiopia, and SMS news alerts are nonexistent.

Despite the many obstacles, some private media outlets have managed to grow, with new newspapers and news websites emerging that dare to criticize the government in their publications. In another sign of progress, some regional officials are softening their stance on providing official information to journalists.

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

¹ Heinlein, Peter. "Ethiopia Newspaper Shuts Down, Editors Flee." Voice of America News.com, December 6, 2009.

ETHIOPIA AT A GLANCE

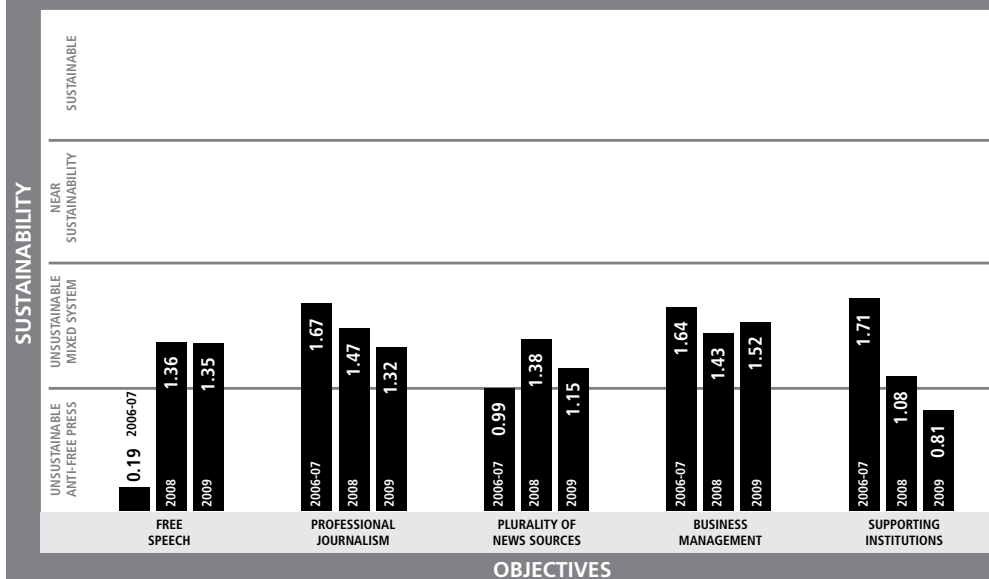
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 88,013,4192 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Addis Ababa
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Oromo 34.5%, Amara 26.9%, Somalie 6.2%, Tigraway 6.1%, Sidama 4%, Guragie 2.5%, Welaita 2.3%, Hadiya 1.7%, Affar 1.7%, Gamo 1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, other 11.3% (2007 Census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Orthodox 43.5%, Muslim 33.9%, Protestant 18.6%, traditional 2.6%, Catholic 0.7%, other 0.7% (2007 Census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Amarigna 32.7%, Oromigna 31.6%, Tigrigna (official) 6.1%, Somaligna 6%, Guaragigna 3.5%, Sidamigna 3.5%, Hadiyigna 1.7%, other 14.8%, English (official) (major foreign language taught in schools), Arabic (official) (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$27.03 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$930 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 42.7% (male 50.3%, female 35.1%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Girma Woldegiorgis (since October 8, 2001)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 3 daily newspapers, 4 other main papers; Radio Stations: 12; Television Stations: 1 main station
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *Addis Zemen* (state-owned), *Ethiopian Herald* (state-owned), *The Daily Monitor* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: Sheger Addis, Fana FM, Zamj; Ethiopian Television (state owned) is the sole domestic television channel
- > **News agencies:** Walta Information Centre (private, pro-government), Ethiopian News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 447,300 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ETHIOPIA



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.35

Article 29 of the 1991 constitution guarantees the legal tools that govern the protection of free speech and media. Most panelists argued that in practice, an assortment of policies, regulations, and politics have poisoned the media atmosphere since the constitution was enacted, rendering its protections increasingly powerless. The regulatory and social frameworks governing the day-to-day details of journalism, along with longstanding legal hostility towards the press, have proven to be increasingly disabling for journalists.

Noting the advent of a series of laws and regulations on the press, civil societies, and terrorism, the panelists said that the state is constantly eroding protection for the freedom of expression. Social norms also seem to work against the media. Sixteen years after the birth of free press in Ethiopia, tolerance to different views is still in its early stages, and lags far behind other countries. The government, for example, labels the private press as puppets of diaspora opposition camps.

Panelists underlined with concern the recently enacted anti-terrorism law, which they said could be used to silence the media and justify a systematic crackdown on media practitioners. One panelist recalled repeated instances in which comedians who poked fun at leading government officials suffered serious harassment and intimidation.

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.

A third private FM radio station, the all-English Afro-FM, received its license in 2009. It airs mostly English music. Several panelists consider this evidence that radio station requests are not only frequently delayed, but they are more likely to be rejected if they deviate from entertainment into more serious, controversial topics, including politics.

Near unanimously, the panelists deemed the broadcast media licensing process deeply opaque, political, and selective. Previous FM radio permit allocations demonstrated that no clear regulations guide the bidding process for the licensing of airwaves. Media professionals see the severe restrictions on radio station licensing as the government's unwillingness to entertain views different from its own. The broadcast agency's obscure process led the panelists to conclude that the agency functions with its own set of vague criteria to arrive at decisions with an air of political bias.

A third private FM radio station, the all-English Afro-FM, received its license in 2009. It airs mostly English music. Several panelists consider this evidence that radio station requests are not only frequently delayed, but they are more likely to be rejected if they deviate from entertainment into more serious, controversial topics, including politics. Furthermore, the process of appointing heads of the regulatory agency is highly political, which panelists take as additional evidence of the government's intention to steer the whole licensing process toward its own political advantage.

The panelists do not deem market entry more restrictive for the media than other businesses. However, under the new law, individuals that own more than a 31 percent share in one newspaper are not allowed to apply for broadcast permits. The new law also puts a minimum capital of \$20,000 to establish a Media PLC—a ridiculous and virtually unworkable amount for those planning to launch their own outlets. Media houses enjoy the privilege of importing large printing machineries tax-free, but the tax levied on paper imports is crippling.

A spate of physical attacks on media professionals by unknown assailants intensified in the last year, with yet another famous reporter, from *Addis Neger*, beaten on his way to his office. The event was a stark reminder of the near-fatal attack on renowned journalist Amare Aregawi that

“Regional government officials are becoming more receptive to our queries on news articles—a huge improvement over the past,” noted one panelist.

took place in broad daylight. Most panelists agreed that the trend is not likely to abate, as the new press law empowers the government to ask editors and deputy editors to print their residence addresses on forms—removing a key hurdle for potential attackers.

Despite the unprecedented increase in violence against journalists in the past year, no investigations of attacks against journalists resulted in indictments or prison terms—a further indication of the government’s disinclination to protect the media or to take such attacks seriously. However, this year’s panelists noted a significant decline in the number of journalists appearing in court and being imprisoned.

According to the panelists, state media receive preferential treatment at all levels of government—federal and regional. On paper, media laws do not favor state media over private media outlets, but in practice, party-affiliated media and state broadcast agencies often enjoy premier access to public information. For example, in one regional state, reporters from Zami FM, one of the three private FM radio stations, were denied access to government offices and the opening ceremonies of a power station. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs often denies members of the private media access to cover ministry news conferences and events at the national palace, where diplomatic delegations are welcomed.

The new press law makes it harder for journalists to extract themselves in sound financial health from libel accusations. Journalists found guilty of defamatory stories could face fines of ETB 100,000 (\$8,000). The panelists said that the fines are designed to strike a financial blow to already struggling private media, and ultimately deter journalists from writing public interest stories regarding powerful institutions (mostly non-state actors, including large private businesses, religious institutions, and other establishments connected to the incumbent party).

State media have unrestricted access to information, and the government has no overt bans on private media access to public information. Although the government has communicated its understanding that its public relations officers are duty-bound to share official information with journalists, the reality on the ground, however, is often quite different. Private journalists have consistently protested obstacles on this front, with little success.

Another concern raised in this category is the amalgamation of the new press law and freedom of information act. The panelists said that many of their colleagues believe that the merger is carried out deliberately to delay or deny access to information to journalists.

Nonetheless, access to public information has also shown some signs of improvement in the past year, as the prime minister’s office eased its stance and began inviting journalists from private media outlets to its press conferences. In another encouraging sign, other federal ministries and offices have slowly started following suit. The panelists commended regional authorities for their efforts to cooperate with private papers concerning matters under their jurisdiction. “Regional government officials are becoming more receptive to our queries on news articles—a huge improvement over the past,” noted one panelist.

Rebroadcasting of content from international media is prohibited by law in Ethiopia. Sheger FM, the much-acclaimed private station in the capital, signed an agreement with VOA, while FM 97.1 has similar deals with the BBC. One panelist stated that the Sheger VOA deal could soon come to an end, following the Ethiopian government’s alleged displeasure over the issue. In addition, the government blocks websites from foreign countries periodically, in violation of journalists’ constitutional guarantee of access.

Regarding licensing and accreditation, no group of reporters receives special privileges or restrictions. The only exceptions that the panelists noted are the cases of journalists Eskinder Nega and Sisay Agena; the government has ignored their license applications. The two were among those jailed alongside opposition politicians following the 2005 election riot, and pardoned after two years. At times, reporting on certain events requires special permission. For example, any media activity in the restive Ogaden region requires permits from federal authorities.

The government does not control access to journalism schools in many of the public universities. However, the Addis Ababa University (AAU) graduate school of communication and journalism has a practice of “unwritten quotas” for state media journalists. As the program’s entry qualifications are tight, with just two dozen available places, the reservation made for state journalists could be termed politically charged.

State media journalists are governed by strict regulations on reporting, editing, and broadcasting their content. The hiring of entry-level journalists is partly political, as recruits are trained on the incumbent’s political ideals and strategies. Critics term this process as governmental “indoctrination of the media” and denounce it as unprofessional and detrimental to Ethiopian media in general.

Journalists are relatively free to form associations to protect their rights and to join any of the four currently legal associations (which, the panelists noted, dislike and distrust each other intensely). However, the panelists said that they have not yet seen any that fight resolutely to improve rights for journalists.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.32

In terms of professional standards of journalism, fact checking has improved somewhat over the last two years, according to many of the panelists, but not to an extent that could fairly allow them to hail the progress as significant. “Journalists themselves know that their work falls short of internationally accepted standards, but they see little incentive to improve the quality of their work,” one panelist said.

Financial rewards are too small for striving practicing journalists in Ethiopia, impeding much-needed ethical and professional progress in the media. Some panelists argued that editors deserve as much, if not more, blame for the decline in professional standards. Noted one panelist: “Traditionally, editors are more interested in quantity than the quality, accuracy, or creativity in news reporting and feature productions.” The panelists found problems to be worse in regional public radio stations, but the federal stations have not escaped crumbling standards, either. In particular, panelists said, investigative pieces fall far short of standards, with meager attempts to verify accuracy and check adequately for errors.

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).

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As an example, panelists noted that journalists still make potentially dangerous factual errors in business reporting—and such mistakes are not only common, but go unpunished by editors at media houses. “For example, we have seen embarrassingly disparate estimates of the production capacity of cement factories in different newspapers,” a panelist said. “None of these papers cared to look into the disparity and investigate either their reporting or the information about the cement investments.”

Some panelists pinned much of the responsibility on public media for what they described as a dreadfully laughable lack of professionalism in recent years. Previously, faltering standards and fact-checking lapses were associated more with the private media. “It is a clear twist of trends, and the public media registered the biggest backslide after the 2005 election,” explained one panelist. “Prior to the election, independent print media dominated the ‘standard-free’ field of media activity.”

On the other hand, panelists have noticed some improvements relative to conditions five years ago. A few practicing journalists have succeeded in raising professional standards; for example, it is becoming more common to see technical experts consulted for stories. However, the panelists noted a parallel rise in anonymous quotes. A couple of panelists said that wary readers might question the trustworthiness of anonymously sourced articles, and said they fear that such reporting could be hijacked and used dishonestly by journalists who wish to use the media to advance private agendas.

Ethiopian journalists do not have a generally accepted code of ethics or conduct to guide their work. Panelists from one of Ethiopia’s major newspapers complained about colleagues that regularly fail to meet their deadlines. The panelists consider the widespread addiction to chewing “chat,” the commonly used wild stimulant, and alcohol abuse during working hours to be ethical problems that poison the work environment and need to be addressed.

In the words of panelists, self-censorship is now the unwritten, unspoken, but universally accepted approach for all news outlets, regardless of ownership. One panelist cautioned that self-censorship should not be taken solely as

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a state-induced problem, but “rather a combined production of state, business, religious, and other actors who want to silence or threaten the media, or dictate coverage on their activities.” Members of the panel came to a consensus that presently, businesses operate under the widespread belief that the media can be bought, and it is a matter of finding the right price. The panelists said that currently, big business poses the most dangerous threat to the media.

Regarding the degree to which journalists cover key events and issues, the panelists agreed that journalists know that they face unintended consequences if they cover certain topics. There are numerous cases in which editors actually prevent reporters from covering certain areas of interest in the political, business, or social spheres, for fear of imagined or real retributions. For example, journalists rarely report on military activities and security affairs, despite the strength of information made available to them on these topics.

Pay rates for reporters and editors have shown steady growth over the last two years, especially at private print media houses. High employee turnover to other media outlets—and worse, the increasing number of journalists abandoning the profession for communication jobs at international organizations—has worked to the advantage of practicing journalists. Editors’ salaries have seen constant incremental growth in the last two years as well, although the raises are still too weak to discourage corruption, panelists said.

Frequently, journalists covering events ask organizers for transportation allowances and per diems—one panelist observed that this is becoming the norm, rather than the exception. Many institutions have become so uncomfortable with the requests that they note in their invitations that they offer no per diems for coverage or participation. The lack of financial rewards, weighed against the time, intellect, and energy that journalists must put into their work, has effectively resulted in favorable stories exchanged for cash or gifts in kind. Allegations of journalists’ widespread involvement in cash-for-coverage deals in the past two years have hurt the credibility and status of the private press at a

time when it desperately needs both to survive and grow as a respected institution.

Panelists debated the entertainment-to-news balance, considering the definition of FM and the objectives of FM stations before deliberating on the content of broadcast and print media. On the one hand, FM programs are, by nature, meant to entertain pluralistic political views from across spectrums, argued one panelist, which raises questions about the approach and content of Ethiopia’s FM radio formats. Entertainment programs are laden with music and lack creativity. Nevertheless, said the panelists, public and private radio broadcasts both have made significant strides in customizing entertainment programs for the young, and attracting a growing audience for their programs on social issues such as marriage, children, personal development, and health. Panelists noted also that when the broadcast agency grants airtime permission, it explicitly states how much time must be allocated for entertainment and other programs in daily schedules; those decisions are not at the discretion of the station. The content of regional FM stations tends to fare worse, with entertainment programs eclipsing news and information programs. Sports and social issues take up the bulk of the daily air time, leaving virtually no space for listeners to hear and engage in harder issues.

News-gathering and production facilities are improving slowly, with Internet access slightly improved over the past year. However, the panelists said that newsrooms cannot be described as modern and efficient. More often than not, journalists seeking important background information to fill out their stories are left to the mercy of very unreliable Internet connections. Internet connections are knocked out routinely in Ethiopia, sometimes for three to four days at a time. Digital cameras and other recording equipment are available now more than ever, according to panelists. Media houses, however, still suffer shortages of the most efficient equipment. In most cases, journalists purchase digital cameras and recorders from their own funds and use them for both work and personal causes.

Niche reporting is emerging slowly, particularly thanks to the private newspaper *Addis Neger* and the two private radio stations Sheger FM and Zami FM. According to the panelists, *Addis Neger’s* deep, detail-rich coverage of economic and political issues signal the coming of the first paper customized for the educated elite.

Sheger FM also airs programs with a distinctively attractive format. Global business news stories are simplified, shortened, customized, and aired throughout the day, giving the station an uncontested lead in business coverage along with its popular weekly guest programs. The panelists praised

Sheger FM's news presentation for originality and catering to listeners across all age groups and strands of life.

Zami FM specializes in a grassroots approach to news, sending its reporters to the lowest levels of public administrations and reporting on events of public interest. The one-of-a-kind approach has been hailed for its originality, follow-up, and depth. The trend is encouraging, although the public media has not shown interest in emulating the approach.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.15

Enormous financial restraints plague the media as well as the consumers and businesses that sustain the media. The low income levels of Ethiopia's mainly rural and semi-urban citizens limit access to newspapers, despite wide availability. As a result, the plurality of public and private media sources is not very developed—even in urban settings, where access is greater and financial capacity is relatively stronger.

Rural audiences rely mostly on state radio (AM), followed by state television programs; print products are largely out of reach. Community media, owned by regional governments, broadcast in some parts of the country, but their news slots are taken over by extended music and sports call-ins. Currently, two AM radio stations have national reach, but their service to peripheral regions is compromised often by technical difficulties (signals weaken and are lost, and sound quality deteriorates).

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.

One panelist recounted a troubling incident in which stacks of his weekly paper were briefly taken into police custody in the eastern part of the country en route to distribution in Somaliland. Local security agents accused the paper's distributors of trying to smuggle "national secrets" into neighboring countries.

Private papers deal overwhelmingly with national issues (economic and political)—a trend driven by market strategies that aim to capitalize on the demand for national political issues. Ethiopia has multiple international news sources, including free satellite channels accessible by most urban dwellers. Persistent price drops, and the expansion of retail businesses, are allowing more Ethiopians to own satellite dishes, with few problems related to income disparities. Free satellite channels are now a common phenomenon in urban settings all around the country, and some international broadcast agencies have gained a significant viewer base in recent years. Subscriptions to satellite television programs are available for those who can afford to pay annual fees. ArabSat channels and many others are transmitted free of charge, and viewers all over the country access them without any restrictions.

Some panelists described a "media dark zone," where most rural Ethiopians live without access to news. Radio remains the sole means of news and information, but the availability of radio sets is questionable—a further obstacle to the dissemination of information among most rural communities.

Citizens who can afford satellite dishes mount them on rooftops, to date without state interference. Foreign news articles, including those that publish critical articles routinely, are easy to find in shops around the capital city. University libraries around the country also offer outdated copies. Generally, middle-income earners in Ethiopia can afford foreign print materials. Panelists stated that in a country of 80 million people, where the largest private paper has a maximum of 40,000 copies in weekly circulation, access to information is unacceptably low.

Furthermore, the government sometimes intervenes to block foreign reporting that it deems threatening. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that in August 2009, the Ethiopian government tried unsuccessfully to apply diplomatic pressure to a private Kenyan broadcaster, Nation Television,

A couple of panelists stressed that while the public media throw all their power and energy into praising the government's endeavors in every sphere, the private press, particularly the print media, have taken to "fault exploration" across policy levels. The private print media dwell too much on witch-hunting on government shortcomings, noted one panelist.

to drop a report on Ethiopia's separatist rebels in the south (the Oromo Liberation Front). Ethiopia's ambassador to Kenya protested the airing of the report, claiming it tantamount to giving a platform to a terrorist organization. The government tried a similar approach against Qatar-based Al-Jazeera in 2008, after the station aired a report on another separatist group, the Ogaden National Liberation Front.

One panelist recounted a troubling incident in which stacks of his weekly paper were briefly taken into police custody in the eastern part of the country en route to distribution in Somaliland. Local security agents accused the paper's distributors of trying to smuggle "national secrets" into neighboring countries. Although the incident has a comical tone, it also serves as an example of the challenges that the independent media face.

With regard to the Internet, income levels dictate ability to access online news sources. People in major cities access the Internet for news and information on many issues. Those in the capital especially enjoy better connections, speed, and reliability than rural areas; service weakens as one goes further from the capital city in all directions. The state also launches periodic cyber-blockades, hampering access to a multitude of sources on the Internet. Blogging is still uncommon in Ethiopia, and SMS news alerts are nonexistent.

Watching foreign media online is not a problem, provided that Internet access with the required bandwidth is available. However, watching foreign-based news reports on local issues is a different story. The government routinely blocks many foreign websites classified as "unfriendly" and "hostile."

State print and broadcast media are almost synonymous with the ruling party; for the most part, state media do not entertain views from a broader political spectrum. The government, according to some panelists, has abused the public media into a party propaganda machine that seeks to politically capitalize on selected economic achievements. A

couple of panelists stressed that while the public media throw all their power and energy into praising the government's endeavors in every sphere, the private press, particularly the print media, have taken to "fault exploration" across policy levels. The private print media dwell too much on witch-hunting on government shortcomings, noted one panelist. However, another panelist noted, "The state media focus on highlighting government successes, rarely producing coverage that can be classified as critical. The rare exceptions usually rest on individuals, not establishments." Panelists gave wider recognition to state media, though, for their growing efforts to introduce the different cultures and traditions of Ethiopia's ethnic groups.

Ethiopian Television (ETV) is the sole television broadcaster in the country. Daily transmission has expanded to 24 hours of coverage, with a significant block of time dedicated to regional issues. Using their newly constructed studios, regional states now produce programs in Oromifa and Tigrigna (the two most widely spoken languages in the country, after the official Amharic) and send the programs to ETV to be aired. The content of the regional programs is quite similar to federal programming, in that most of the programs are reports on government development success stories.

Currently, Ethiopia has only two news agencies, with scores of reporters and affiliates to cover the entire country. One is the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), which belongs to the state; the second is Walta Information Center, a ruling-party affiliate. Panelists blasted both of them for being completely partisan, lacking editorial independence, and proving unwilling to entertain diverse views and opinions. Neither one is trusted largely nor relied upon by local private journalists, according to the panelists. International news agencies including AP, Reuters, and AFP are used (online) by private media as their principal sources of international news, but the panelists said that they only know of one private news outlet that subscribes to an international news agency for its international news needs. State broadcasters also receive international news items from global news brands, including AP and BBC. Other international news sources that serve journalists and the wider public include BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, and France 24.

Public and private outlets both rely on their own reporting. Many members of the panel held up Sheger FM's creative productions and format as unique and worthy of setting a precedent for all others. In the print media, many news articles come from their own research and informants, while ENA and Walta supply many public broadcast station news items.

Media ownership is kept highly secret in the Ethiopian media atmosphere, except in rare circumstances. The new media law stresses disclosure of ownership, but the opposite is true in practice. Many private media outlets are alleged to be owned by individuals whose names are never made public; the antagonistic nature of government, one panelist said, has possibly played a big role in the choice of many people behind some private papers to conceal their identities or use “front men” for legal purposes. “Newspaper ownership is mostly shrouded in secrecy, and it has proven difficult time and again for media professionals to know whose and which interests lie behind certain publications. The condition has resulted in yet more rounds of speculation—often misguided—based on the content and tone of the papers,” commented one panelist. Noted another, “I think the owners of many of the private media outlets are known, though undeclared. But the ownership of Walta Information Agency and Radio Fana has been kept ambiguous for many years. They are allegedly affiliated with the ruling party, but the government has not come clean on the issue.”

According to the panelists, the media entertains a variety of social issues with content and format that is improving every day. FM stations deserve credit for inclusion of so many social issues in their programs and encouraging listeners to participate in programs. In general, though, the shortage of funding and a lack of interest result in insufficient coverage of minority issues. The state broadcasters have made commendable efforts to include minority language programs, but overall the country has a serious lack of programs in minority languages. South FM, state-owned and located in the heart of the multiethnic southern region, has some programs in minority languages—but in light of the array of minority languages spoken in the region, the efforts could be summed up as only a beginning.

Community media outlets are only beginning to learn of the dynamics of community media, objectives, and target audience. Efforts so far have not gone beyond promoting the government’s political interests. But signs have emerged that they are reflecting on local needs and a broader spectrum of views. It should be noted that longstanding cultures have proven quite a challenge to cover for young journalists with the skills and the will to make their reports truly representative of the different views in their areas. Community media efforts remain minimal, but panelists lauded the efforts as hopeful stirrings.

“The only thing these journalists had when they started the papers was desire,” observed one panelist, “and what keeps them going is passion, not the profit margins.”

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.52

Ethiopia’s state media outlets were never established to generate profit; they are intended to serve as government organs that function in tandem with official policies and as public relations machines, and operate on budgets allocated annually. However, the panelists noted, the government is in the process of transforming state television into a corporation, paving the way to shore up its income, expand its reach, and improve program quality.

Most of Ethiopia’s media outlets operate in a mainly traditional sense, the panelists said. Media houses are not managed as businesses—many private print media outlets are established by journalists that are eager but lack even basic business management skills. “The only thing these journalists had when they started the papers was desire,” observed one panelist, “and what keeps them going is passion, not the profit margins.” Some parties invest in the media, but recently, more investors are opting to leave the media.

Many private media outlets lack essential human resources, such as accountants and marketing professionals, and have

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.

One panelist noted, “I haven’t seen editors who, after conducting market research, have changed columns or improved style and design and advertisements. The editors are responsible for improving their own papers, and I can say many of the media have not given market studies serious consideration.”

never developed business plans or marketing strategies to improve their businesses. Despite numerous difficulties, however, the print outlets *Addis Admas*, *Addis Neger*, *Reporter*, and *Fortune* have made significant progress in staffing their marketing and finance departments and have strengthened their institutions steadily in the past few years.

According to the panelists, the future of community radio is openly contingent on the ability of the stations to market their product and attract advertisements from businesses. “The continuous funding for community radios in Ethiopia from donor or state organs is likely to become increasingly tenuous in the years to come,” said one panelist. “The community radios in the country are pilot initiatives, and at their current performance, it is clear that their sustainability is in doubt.”

As underdeveloped and improperly governed as the sector looks, advertising still constitutes the lion’s share of revenue for private media houses. However, what advertisement exists is concentrated heavily in the capital city, as advertisements follow capable consumers and established markets.

Print media outlets (both private and state) earn the bulk of their revenue from advertisements and by attracting sponsors of various pages from the donor community. Mounting printing costs (which have increased three times in one year alone) force media managers to focus more on obtaining advertisements and forging new business partners than on the style and substance of their products. One panelist said that although the sponsorships are helping the papers weather bitter financial difficulties, there are growing fears that the impact has already started to creep into the editorial room. “We have started to note a trend recently that advertisers (at times) tend to impose, rather than partner, when it comes to news contents that involve them,” observed one panelist.

The lack of sufficient revenue has pushed media managers to include more and more advertisements in their programs to fill revenue gaps. Many programs are so haplessly dependent on sponsorship (or continued advertisement funds) that a number of them have appeared and then disappeared, depending on whether or not they were able to secure sponsorship funding.

Panelists see a tendency now to strive to appeal to potential advertisers—completely contrary to the obligation requiring the media to allocate not more than 40 percent of programming for advertisements. One panelist expressed his fear that the momentum of such practice could lead to exclusion of issues of public interest, replaced instead by entrenched businesses, government events, and popular news.

Among private broadcasters, sponsorship revenue is the most serious issue. One panelist noted that currently, donor agencies and businesses have earmarked a considerable portion of their budgets for sponsorship of media programs. But the sponsorship mostly materializes based on informal connections or vested interests.

Affiliations with private businesses, embassies, and international development organizations is becoming more common among some print media outlets. Similarly, a few panelists raised the issue of restrictions imposed by the new media law that bars any sort of media funding from foreign sources. During numerous debates in parliament, government representatives argued that foreign funding (just as domestic sources, as some critics argue) could jeopardize editorial independence and leave a media outlet vulnerable to foreign interest groups with hidden agendas.

Very few advertisement agencies work with the media. Advertisement agencies work with television, print, and radio, but the lack of Internet commerce (and Internet news media) has kept them from engaging with Internet media. Internet speed and availability issues have also discouraged Internet advertisement in Ethiopia.

Subscriptions are not a significant source of revenue; the panelists indicated that only one English and one Amharic paper currently enjoy a wide base among the media-savvy urban population.

Independent media do not receive subsidies in any form from the government, although suspicions of alleged financial aid granted to some members of the private media community have surfaced in the past. Other claims maintain that some of those papers compromised their editorial independence in exchange for state support. The allegations withered away

slowly, and no further evidence emerged of state attempts to entice members of the private media to promote their causes.

Market research, for the sole purpose of improving form and content of programs or the overall media management, is not a usual practice in Ethiopian media. Although Zami FM produced a revised comprehensive market strategy—its second in four years—others claimed repeatedly that market strategies are largely absent from media houses. Panelists pointed out that the lack of such detailed study and vision explains why so many media are mismanaged. One panelist noted, “I haven’t seen editors who, after conducting market research, have changed columns or improved style and design and advertisements. The editors are responsible for improving their own papers, and I can say many of the media have not given market studies serious consideration.”

Many private media outlets assume that by including programs catering to all sections of society, they can expand their advertisement partners—an approach that the panelists believe may have done more harm than good. Panelists argued that outlets need clearer definitions of target audiences in order to evaluate the impact of programs and to court business accordingly.

Some panelists argued in defense of journalists that have failed to conduct proper marketing research. Two panelists explained that most of the private media houses are not established by individuals with prior business management experience. One panelist, well acquainted with state radio and television in Ethiopia, said that the Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency recently declared that it is too short of manpower, expertise, and finances to conduct full-scale audience surveys in the country.

The case with party-affiliated Radio Fana is different nevertheless. The station has conducted surveys in the past, and claims that it carries out annual audience surveys on its programs.

Ethiopia has no independent organizations that work on broadcast ratings, figures, and other related statistics. But weekly circulation figures are available from the broadcast agency’s office and they can be accessed by anyone, including journalists. Panelists also noted the initiative taken by some newspapers to print their weekly circulation figures, in a bid to reveal their competitive edge to potential businesses. Some papers also started presenting figures that show the number of Internet users visiting news features on their websites.

“Some of the pseudo-professional associations have in fact played roles that damaged the status of journalism in the country,” one panelist said.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Ethiopia Objective Score: 0.81

Ethiopia does not have industry-level trade associations that represent the interests of practicing journalists and the media, and publishers and media owners are not represented as “entities” in trade associations.

Currently, several associations claim to represent media interests, both as umbrella organs and for specific interests of professionals. They include the Ethiopian Journalists Association, the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association, the Ethiopian Women Journalists Association, the National Photo Journalist Association, and the Ethiopian National Journalists Union (ENJU). Currently, ENJU claims more than 300 members (which private media and other media professionals highly doubt) and does not accept publishers or other individuals involved in activities related to publishing businesses, for fear of conflicts of interest between businesses and journalists.

The debate over who truly represents the media has sparked fierce friction and finger-pointing among the (often warring) associations, and has degenerated into disastrous political labeling over the past few years. The conflict has shown signs of simmering down in the past

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.

“NGOs are not allowed to take up advocacy programs if more than 10 percent of their income is secured from foreign sources,” he said, “and that move is designed to limit the NGOs to humanitarian and relief work, and sever their relationship with the media.”

year, however. The firestorm between members of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association five years back, and the ensuing court battle, still remains a stark reminder of the lack of trust and civility among association leaders and their members. Many journalists still recall scenes in which disgruntled members exchanged barbs and incendiary comments and finger-wagging over corruption scandals and political affiliation.

Some panelists expressed annoyance that little more than verbal assistance has materialized from any of the associations. None of those currently operational have lobbied the government to protect the interests of the media, and they failed to voice any trace of concern when the media law was drafted and introduced. “Some of the pseudo-professional associations have in fact played roles that damaged the status of journalism in the country,” one panelist said.

Another panelist summarized, “If professionalism was the norm in the culture of associations, then all journalists would have come under one umbrella to develop and implement code of conduct, ethics, and other programs geared towards the professional growth of their members and dialogue with the government over issues confronting the media and its practitioners.”

Panelists were unanimous that Ethiopia has no trade association of media owners or journalists at the moment that have the will or capacity to look after journalists’ interests. Although the government’s broad categorization of the private press as aligned with “anti-development forces” is by any standard unfair, inappropriate, and dangerous, it has been noticed in the past that association leaders were deeply and scandalously embroiled in opposition politics and were repeatedly accused of extortion and soliciting funds in the name of jailed journalists, only to divert the funds for their private use.

Some NGOs are engaged seriously in the promotion of freedom of speech and offer institutional support for media rights issues. Other civil society organizations have sponsored platforms, but the issue of engagement with the media, the panelist opined, has never made it to the top of their “focus list.” One panelist did note some NGO involvement in the media over the past few years, and provided some details. He explained that a media forum composed of journalists and other media practitioners played a role in the drafting process of the new media law, while the activities of that forum were made possible through NGO funding.

The panelists identified some international NGOs that have played a relatively significant role in supporting the media. The US-assisted PACT, Panos Ethiopia, Population Media Center (PMC), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and the Heinrich Boll Foundation are the only civil society organizations working closely with the media in different capacities, including training and financial support. PACT supported the media sector during its discussions with the government over the draft media law. Panos and PMC trained media practitioners, and Friedrich Ebert and Heinrich Boll provided financial support to journalists’ works.

One panelist stated that he has serious doubts whether the government would tolerate the existence of, let alone partner with, NGOs that aspire to work with private media organizations. He cited the rationale of the new media law to detail what he called the government’s intent to strangle the media by choking off all forms of local and foreign support. “NGOs are not allowed to take up advocacy programs if more than 10 percent of their income is secured from foreign sources,” he said, “and that move is designed to limit the NGOs to humanitarian and relief work, and sever their relationship with the media.” For fear of stepping in dangerous territory with potentially disastrous consequences, he argued, the NGOs have been staying out of meaningful contact with the media. Another panelist said that the limited and sporadic engagement of some NGOs will end completely in the coming years, when the government enacts the press law.

Higher education in journalism and communication is a relatively new phenomenon in Ethiopia, considering that the first mass media training institute founded its diploma program only 12 years ago. The institute began by training journalists from state-owned broadcast and print outlets and public relations officers working in regional information bureaus. Eighty percent of students enroll through governmental recommendations, with private

applicants allowed to fill in remaining spaces. Unity University College was the first private educational institute to offer a journalism degree program, while AAU opened its graduate school of journalism in 2004. Government-sponsored students still represent the majority enrolled in AAU's journalism masters program. Beginning in 2007, the former Ethiopian Mass Media Institute was integrated into AAU to form the School of Journalism and Communication.

Panelists complained that all journalism training schools, including the famed school of journalism at AAU, are known mostly for their poor job in producing competent and aspiring journalists ready to join the media. "As far as my experience [goes], none of the graduates I have seen can write a decent news story," one panelist commented. "Feature stories are unthinkable, because I wonder if they really know the distinction between the two."

Another panelist complained that low-quality graduates add to the burden of veteran journalists, who then assume the extra responsibility of teaching new arrivals the basics of writing. The absorption of graduates is thus undesirable, despite empirical evidence that the media are suffering from a shortage of qualified personnel.

The school of journalism at AAU was also slammed for lacking professional lecturers with experience as journalists and thus the ability to combine theory and practical experience in class. In recent years, the school has also made headlines for disputes that flared among its administrative personnel over alleged corruption and unethical behavior. Such coverage has seriously undermined the reputation of the school, its ability to cope with the dynamics of the industry, and its capacity to produce journalists with the skills and motivation to promote positive change.

Judged against opportunities to join schools of journalism, the better option is to take advantage of NGO-sponsored short-term training programs, working not directly on media skills but indirectly on niche subjects such as health and environment, the panelists said. In the past, media professionals benefited from training opportunities organized by international and local NGOs. The most common training programs focused on the environment, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, and newsroom management. Although the programs were drops in a sea of skill-related problems, it is fair to assume that they helped bridge some capacity gaps among journalists in those respective fields. One panelist opined that NGO training classes are usually preferred by journalists over the painstaking degree programs. Generally, locally organized training programs do not charge fees.

Another panelist offered some details of NGO attempts to provide some support in what he called a highly controlled and unfriendly atmosphere. "NGO programs involve some conditions—prescribed by the NGOs rather than professionals," which some journalists find hard to swallow, he said. Generally, NGOs' roles as supportive organizations are minimal, the panelists suggested. "It should also be noted that many of the NGOs would like to benefit from media coverage, instead of working to strengthen it and cooperate to improve its professional and ethical standards," one panelist said.

The training programs are limited in scope to those journalists who cover certain areas of interest, and do not address the professional needs of other departments in the media.

Mid-level editorial positions are sometimes included in training programs. But more commonly, mid- and high-level positions at media houses benefit more from international travel experiences than training at the local level. Management positions such as editor-in-chief and managing editors travel to many international events, with event organizers covering their expenses.

Printing facilities are almost entirely in the hands of government. Coupled with what some panelists described as the state's unfriendly attitude towards the private media, the result is an uncomfortable relationship between publishers and printers. The biggest printing enterprise, Birhanina Selam, is state-owned and responsible for the printing of all major public and private papers. The hostile relationship is reflected in the unjustified printing price hikes and other impediments that private publishers face.

Distribution networks are not strong; they are concentrated in a few hands. Panelists that come from the large private papers described the distribution mechanism as very chaotic. Some of them also pointed out that the distributors might well have taken a political role, particularly in the pre-2005 period. One panelist shared, "A few individuals without legal jurisdiction or contracts ran the whole business, and all private news and magazines heavily depend on these 'barons' for their survival." Although meddling in the survival and (content) of some private papers by these distributors has withered in the last two years, the attempts to rein in these distributors have not been entirely successful.

List of Panel Participants

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