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MALAWI

For the first time since the advent of modern democracy in Malawi, one political party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), dominates the parliament. In the presidential and parliamentary elections on May 19, 2009, DPP won 114 of the 193 contested seats. Its leader, President Bingu Wa Mutharicka, was also re-elected, with the highest number of votes that a Malawian president has ever won.

The media played a significant role in the run-up to the election, but at the same time, politicians grossly undermined the public broadcasters. Despite the Malawi Communications Act (1998) requirement that the airwaves be open to all political players during the campaign period, the media gave the ruling party the most positive coverage by far. This was evident in weekly reports published in the local press and provided by the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) and Malawi Electoral Commission. Any coverage of opposition parties tended to be negative.

The private media also had their shortcomings, but mostly were more responsive to the MACRA and MEC reports, adapting their coverage when they were shown to be favoring one party over another. Radio station MIJ FM is a good example: initial reports found that the ruling party dominated its coverage, but with time, its coverage became more balanced. On the other side was Joy FM, a private station owned by the opposition United Democratic Front leader, which demonstrated a consistent bias in favor of the opposition coalition.

The ruling party members' dominance in parliament proved to be good news for public broadcasters, who managed to get their first national budgetary allocation in five years. The previous opposition-dominated parliament refused continuously to pass the public broadcasting budget, accusing public media of bias towards its political rivals.

The elections provided a welcome boost to media companies, as political parties sought advertising space and other stakeholders placed advertisements for civic education purposes. At the same time, ordinary people consumed more media products to keep up with events. Public broadcasters also benefited by acquiring modern equipment, enabled by the government's interest in beefing up production. While the global financial crisis impacted Malawi, MSI panelists said that the media were not badly affected—despite the demise of a weekly newspaper, *The News*, which closed down during the first half of 2009. Malawi's two newspaper companies, Nation Publications Limited and Blantyre Newspapers Limited, continue to dominate the print market, while no new entries appeared on the broadcast spectrum.

MALAWI AT A GLANCE

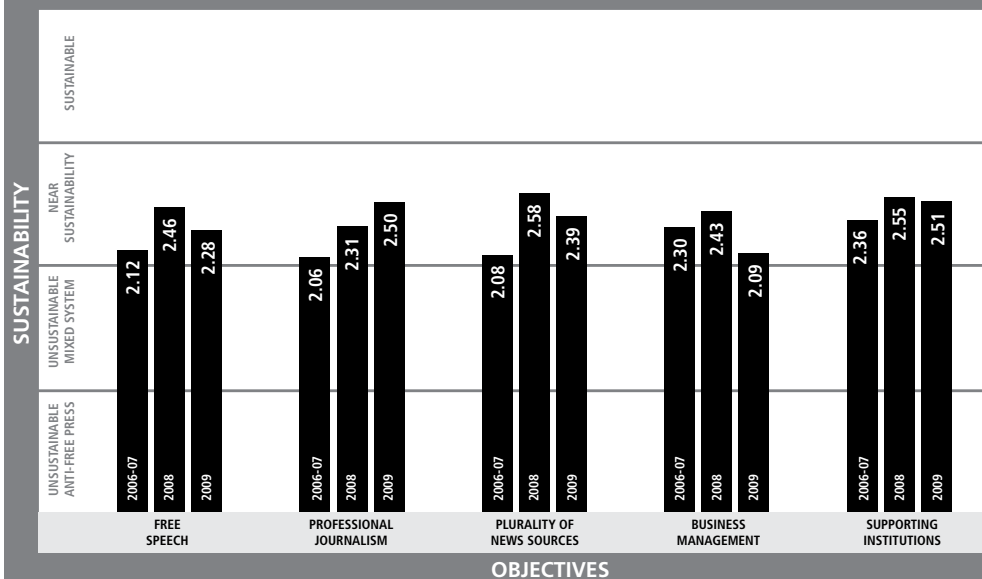
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 15,028,757 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital City:** Lilongwe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Chewa, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tonga, Ngoni, Ngonde, Asian, European (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 79.9%, Muslim 12.8%, other 3%, none 4.3% (1998 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Chichewa 57.2% (official), Chinyanja 12.8%, Chiyao 10.1%, Chitumbuka 9.5%, Chisena 2.7%, Chilomwe 2.4%, Chitonga 1.7%, other 3.6% (1998 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$4.017 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$830 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 62.7% (male 76.1%, female 49.8%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Bingu wa Mutharika (since May 24, 2004)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 9 newspapers, including 2 dailies, 2 private weeklies, and 1 state-owned weekly; Radio: 19 stations including 2 public broadcast services and 13 privately owned, and 4 community-owned stations; Television stations: 2, including 1 privately owned, and 1 public broadcaster.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *The Daily Times* (privately-owned), *The Nation* (privately owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Malawi News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 316,100 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MALAWI



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Malawi Objective Score: 2.28

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi protects free speech. Providing an example of how the right is generally respected, panelists pointed to the media's freedom to cover all political parties during the April/May elections campaign period. However, panelists also noted that some archaic laws remain on the books that have the potential to limit press freedom, and the panel expressed deep concern about the parliament's failure to enact the Access to Information Bill. Differences such as these account for the wide range of scores within the indicators, and several scored more than half a point ahead of or behind the objective score. Indicators 8 (media access to and use of international news) and 9 (free entry into the journalism profession) both scored about a point higher. Indicators 5 (preferential treatment for state or public media), 6 (libel laws), and 7 (access to information) all received scores more than half a point behind. The public media's failure to meet the stipulation in the Communications Act prohibiting the state media from biased coverage, particularly with regard to political parties, accounts for indicator 5 receiving the lowest score in the objective.

Legal and social protections of free speech are entrenched constitutionally, with Section 35 guaranteeing freedom of expression, Section 36 on freedom of the press, and Section 37 on access to information. However, as Media Council of Malawi (MCM) representative Alfred Banda pointed out,

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.

"Recently, a few radio stations and television stations were denied licenses for poorly explained reasons—it seems as though the reasons have been political," said Herbert Chandilanga, Chichewa editor for Nation Publications Limited.

Section 37's reach can be limited by acts of parliament that prohibit access to information. Panelists also bemoaned the existence of outdated laws, especially in the penal code, that can be used against the media at any time. They fear these laws could be used to repress media houses that refuse to tow a particular line. Capital Radio Malawi managing director, Alaudin Osman, cited the protected names, emblems, and places law as an example of legislation that should be revoked. While some panelists seemed unconcerned about the archaic laws, which had not been used in the period under study, others felt that as long these laws remain, freedom depends on the goodwill of the current political leadership. In general, though, panelists pointed to significant improvement regarding free speech, compared to the climate in previous elections.

Panelists once again questioned the fairness of the broadcast licensing process. The country's licensing authority, MACRA, is a parastatal body receiving funding from government, and the presidentially appointed executive director can exercise indirect control. Although the Communications Act of 1998 that established MACRA states that the agency should operate openly, transparently, and free from government influence, panelists said that they believe that political leaders do influence licensing decisions. "Recently, a few radio stations and television stations were denied licenses for poorly explained reasons—it seems as though the reasons have been political," said Herbert Chandilanga, Chichewa editor for Nation Publications Limited.

Media companies operate under the same tax structures as other companies, and panelists reported no restrictions obstructing market entry. However, panelists expressed concerns about the high capital costs of starting a media business. Osman felt this is particularly true regarding print products, while Maria Chidzanja-Nkhoma, Zodiak Broadcasting Station women and children's coordinator, pointed to prohibitive costs for broadcasters.

Again this year, the panel reported very few crimes against journalists and media outlets. Most notably, authorities arrested two journalists (Mary Chande Mhone and Aubry Nazombe), a technician (Abdul Razaq), and a driver (Yusufu Suleman) from Joy Radio and closed the station just before the

Government personnel frequently resist releasing information by claiming information is not meant for public consumption.

election. Allegedly, the station broke the ban on endorsing or ridiculing candidates after the closure of the official election campaign on May 19. The journalists were held for two days, while the technician and driver were released on the same day. The radio station re-opened on July 9. Panelists noted the government's tendency to arrest journalists for flimsy reasons, interrogate them, and then release them without pursuing a formal case. Journalists, associations, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders regularly condemn these tactics.

Weighing whether state or public media receive preferential legal treatment, the panelists could not point to any specific instances. However, they said that editorial independence is severely compromised, and this year's score for that indicator dropped dramatically. Panelists pointed out that there is no statute guaranteeing editorial independence, and noted that different regimes have deliberately neglected to come up with such a law.

Panelists' views regarding the treatment of libel varied widely, reflected in a wide range of scores. Those who gave high scores to this indicator claimed that libel is still treated as a civil case, with the burden of proving falsity and malice carried by the complainant. They also said that they do not believe that corruption plays a role in decisions by judges. However, one panelist assigned a very low score based on the fact that media houses rarely seek accountability from state officials. In practice, the panelists said, the media often opt for self-censorship when threatened with legal action.

Some panelists noted that journalists cannot easily access public information, which at times prevents them from holding public officials accountable. Government personnel frequently resist releasing information by claiming information is not meant for public consumption. This obstacle persists despite Section 37 of the constitution, which states, "...subject to any Act of Parliament, every person shall have the right to access to all information held by the State or any of its organs at any level of government in so far as such information is required for the exercise of his rights." Absent an enforcement mechanism, this law has not helped journalists, and the media and other stakeholders have proven unsuccessful in their attempts to lobby parliament to enact the Access to Information Bill. These shortcomings

led some panelists to assign this indicator the lowest possible score.

The panel agreed that all media outlets are free to access international news and news sources. Some media houses tap the Reuters news feed, while others rely on online news sites for international news. The media can freely rebroadcast or reprint material sourced elsewhere. However, Zeria Banda, a World Bank communications officer, pointed out that print media outlets often repeat information that people have already encountered online or on television. Panelists cited the costs of accessing the news online and relatively slow download speeds as the only limiting factors.

The panelists debated the ease of entry into the profession, with some panelists questioning whether access to the profession is too free. "Becoming a journalist is the easiest thing in Malawi," Banda said. "You can just wake up in the morning and call yourself a journalist." Some panelists said that they see a need to control entry into the profession, while others disagreed. Early in 2009, MCM introduced an accreditation program and asked all practicing journalists to register. However, Alfred Banda described a mixed response to the call, with journalists from big media houses refusing to apply. Panelists favoring accreditation cited the need for controls to stop people claiming to be journalists from harassing news sources. They described accreditation as a form of self-regulation preferable to government-imposed restrictions. Those against accreditation said that the move runs counter to the principles of a liberalized industry. In their view, it would be better to license companies rather than individual journalists. They also said that, at times, "credible" journalists behave unethically as well.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Malawi Objective Score: 2.50

All of this objective's indicators scored in the near-sustainable range, and all scored close to the objective score.

Most panelists agreed that private media news coverage is generally fair, objective, and well-sourced, albeit with room for improvement, while the public media is biased politically. However, panelists said that journalists make too many mistakes, with some problems even visible on the front pages of newspapers. Panel members pointed to excessive corrections and retractions as proof. In addition, some panelists bemoaned that journalists depend heavily on a handful of sources. Illustrating this point, Zeria Banda said, "The two daily papers feed upon the same news sources for political and economic comment. After hearing from the same people on a daily basis, I personally have reached a

point where if I just scan through the story for the source, I do not bother reading it... Surprisingly, journalists do not seem to see this, and continue making their papers a boring read with the same dull sources.”

The MCM developed a code of ethical conduct for journalists in 1994, and awareness appears to be increasing—an improvement over last year’s MSI study. While journalists generally follow the code of conduct, panelists expressed grave concerns about the continuing tendency of journalists to accept gifts—often in the form of cash—when covering news events. Panelists said that politicians are willing to line reporters’ pockets in exchange for positive coverage in the run-up to the elections. This practice has been reported in previous MSI studies and is seemingly gaining acceptance. In a notable exception, Nation Publications Limited was commended for publishing an announcement asking news sources to refrain from giving their employees cash for covering functions.

Panelists’ views on the prevalence of self-censorship did not change dramatically from last year. They said that political pressures still drive state media journalists to censor their stories, and that state journalists write more positively about the government. However, this year, panelists noted that outside of the public media, issues with repercussions for major advertisers pose a bigger concern than interference by political elites.

Panelists said that they believe that the media cover key events and issues, although some panelists labeled the coverage of presidential functions excessive. Zeria Banda said that whenever the government holds a presidential event, public broadcasting reporters hardly ever can be persuaded to

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cover other news. The public broadcaster frequently neglects political events organized by opposition parties, citing a lack of resources.

Regarding pay levels for journalists, panelists had divided impressions: some consider pay levels acceptable and others disagreed. “Journalists could be enticed into corruption,” Chandilanga said. Panelists said that journalists in public media earn more than other civil servants with the same level of qualifications. They noted that employees of the major newspaper companies enjoy fairly decent pay, although low pay prevails in most electronic media and some print media houses. Low pay drives media school graduates to work in other fields, such as advertising, public relations, marketing, and management, rather than mainstream journalism. However, panelists did not see an automatic correlation between low pay and the corruption of journalists, and suggested that journalists who earn comparatively high salaries could be more corrupt than those who earn less. Osman proposed that an organization such as the Journalists Union of Malawi determine a pay scale based on qualifications, experience, skills, and other specific factors.

According to the panelists, entertainment does not eclipse news and information programming, either in the print or electronic media. “News [and information] enjoys more time and space, especially in print,” noted Chandilanga. Manda observed, “Even stations that champion themselves as entertainment radios, like Capital FM, have regular times for news bulletins. When it comes to 9 o’clock, everyone knows there will be news on Capital.” Chidzanja-Nkhoma estimated that entertainment programming constitutes 60 percent of airtime, while news represents 40 percent of electronic media content.

The efficiency of technical facilities and media equipment received an average score, with panelists noting that some media outlets use modern equipment and others lag behind. Although cameras, computers, and recorders tend to be relatively modern, other equipment requiring large capital outlays is aging badly. Panelists agreed that daily newspapers

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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are forced to rush their production cycles to give the slow and aging printing presses enough time to print the papers. They also blamed the poor printing quality of some newspapers on old presses.

A notable development since last year's MSI study is the public media's acquisition of modern equipment, such as digital recorders. However, Television Malawi (TVM) still struggles with technical capacity. Zeria Banda commented, "Lack of resources also stands out the most with Television Malawi. News is pre-recorded and not delivered live. Stories on television, except for coverage of the president, are usually stale... TVM badly needs help with equipment."

According to the panelists, niche reporting and programming exist, and various media outlets reflect different subject expertise. Weekly newspapers prove their strength in investigative journalism, while the state media covers a much wider spectrum of news. In the view of the panelists, most journalists are well prepared to cover their respective niches. Although basic journalism education programs do not offer specializations, media professionals receive regular opportunities to attend skill-sharpening workshops relevant to their beats. However, Grace Kadzakumanja, a lecturer at the Polytechnic University of Malawi/Malawi Institute of Journalism, said that reporters and editors need more education and experience to improve. She suggested that many attend workshops and short-term training courses only to tap into the allowances provided by various funders.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Malawi Objective Score: 2.39

Most of the indicators under this objective scored close to the objective score. However, two fell outside this range. Indicator 5 (private media produce their own news) scored about three-quarters of a point higher. Indicator 3 (state media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum) drew the lowest score of any indicator in any objective, with a score about a point-and-a-half behind. However, the panelists indicated that despite its firm grip on the state broadcaster,

the ruling elite continues to allow considerable diversity among the private media.

Panelists agreed that people have access to a variety of news outlets, including radio and newspapers, but noted a lack of plurality of sources informing these outlets. Alaudin Osmond argued that the print media is dominated by two dailies that carry very similar content. Two young publications, one owned by the Malawi Institute of Journalism and another called *The News*, collapsed during the period under review. The MBC has a much wider footprint than any independent radio station, broadcasting in most of the widely spoken languages.

Panelists said that more and more people are beginning to access news on the Internet but penetration remains very low and the cost of going online is prohibitive for many. Malawi has several Internet news sources, but they are accessed by very few people—mostly people with access at their workplace or on their mobile phones. According to the panel, most Internet café customers can rarely afford the luxury of visiting news websites; they go to the cafés primarily for priority services, like checking mail, due to high charges. However, the local sites are a good source of news to many Malawians living outside the country. People in some rural areas can access the Internet at government-established telecenters. Most of the media houses, including radio stations, have established their own websites, which help keep Malawians abroad informed about events at home.

The rural population relies heavily on radios; they have access to MBC Radio 1 and Radio 2, and at least one private radio station. The two public radio stations and almost all

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

the private radio stations serve the urban and semi-urban population. They also have access to all the newspapers, though some people cannot afford to buy them. Only 35 percent of the population receives the TVM transmission, while few people can afford international pay television services. Some people can afford to access international television channels through DSTV services, which are offered by MultiChoice Malawi and free-to-air decoders.

Regarding access to domestic or international media, the panel agreed that this indicator deserves a score approaching sustainability, as the country does not restrict access deliberately. All citizens are free to consume the media they can afford, restricted only by poverty or poor infrastructure. For instance, the country's only television station reaches 35 percent of Malawians, while newspapers cannot be distributed in some areas due to poor roads. Additionally, a large number of the population cannot afford to access international media by satellite or the Internet.

Panelist scores showed decidedly that the state and public media do not serve the public interest, with this indicator dropping sharply to well inside the unsustainable range. Panelists said that while the state broadcaster has long displayed bias, the situation worsened in the period under review. According to the panelists, the ruling party treated the broadcaster as its mouthpiece, providing a litany of positive coverage for the DPP and negative reports about opposition parties, especially the Malawi Congress Party. Panelists backed up their charges by pointing to monitoring reports issued by MACRA and the Malawi Electoral Commission.

Panelists reported that the country's sole news agency—the government-owned Malawi News Agency (MANA)—often provides stale reports biased towards the ruling party. Capturing the panel's view, Osman said, "The news agency covers a wide range of issues, but on the political scene, it betrays a bias towards the ruling party." MANA news is distributed freely and is available to anyone interested, but the demand for the service is limited. Malawian news outlets frequently use international news from agencies such as Reuters, AP, and AFP.

The panelists said that independent media tend to produce their own programs and rarely rely on purchased content. However, with the exception of politics programs, most MBC productions are of a higher quality standard than those produced by the independent media, panelists said. They noted also that independent broadcasters tend to duplicate each other's programs.

Panelists said that Malawi has no laws mandating disclosure of ownership, but it is not difficult to determine the owners

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of major news organizations. Consumers are well equipped to judge the objectivity of the news, they said. Joy FM was cited as a good example; its listeners are well aware that an opposition political figure owns the station. No business conglomerates own media outlets, according to the panel. However, there is some concentration of ownership, as two newspaper companies, Blantyre Newspapers Limited (publishers of *The Daily Times*, *Malawi News*, and *The Sunday Times*), and Nation Publications Limited (publishers of *The Nation*, *Weekend Nation*, and *Nation on Sunday*) still dominate the print industry. Journalism and media studies academic Levi Manda noted that at the time both companies were established, their original owners were high-profile political leaders. Kadzakumanja noted that so far, no foreign investors have expressed interest in the media field.

Panelists criticized the dominance of English across the media spectrum, noting that Malawi has five widely spoken languages, and that the MBC is the only media house to use all five. Manda said that most of these languages are used only in news bulletins, which often have little relevance to speakers of these languages—they are simply translations of the English bulletins. No mention was made of vernacular newspapers, although three weekend publications do carry supplements in Chichewa, the national language.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Malawi Objective Score: 2.09

All of the indicators for this objective fell within half a point of the objective score. Most of the media firms operate as profit-generating businesses, but not all are managed efficiently, according to some panelists. The private media, both print and electronic, generate the bulk of their revenue from advertising, but their dependence on advertising revenue threatens editorial independence.

Most of the media houses operate as efficient and professional businesses, though some panelists pointed out that the editorial departments typically receive more attention than other departments, such as sales and accounts. Zeria Banda emphasized the difficulty in dealing with the

Poor management continues to plague community media, and panelists said that they see a need for interventions in this respect. The community media houses do not seem sustainable without support from donors.

advertising departments, and shared instances in which she needed to push some media houses to provide quotations and to collect their payments. Whether media houses have or use business plans was unclear to panelists. Some media houses do hire professionals in departments such as accounting and finance, but these departments are harder to staff than the editorial positions. Osman commented, "In one day, I may get 90 applications from journalists, but just one from, for example, a sales representative."

Poor management continues to plague community media, and panelists said that they see a need for interventions in this respect. The community media houses do not seem sustainable without support from donors. However, with poor management of grants, that support may be threatened. For example, Zeria Banda gave an example of an undisclosed community radio station that received funding from the World Bank, but could not account for the money when asked to do so.

In 2009, the government provided direct funding for public media for the first time in five years. In the previous four years, parliament had been denying MBC and TVM their budgetary allocations, after accusing them of biased and

unfair reporting and programming. Incidentally, the approval of their budgetary allocation this year can be explained by the ruling party's majority in parliament, not an improvement in the performance of MBC and TVM.

Newspaper editor James Mphande also noted that advertisers exert unnecessary pressures on newspapers, demanding that papers cover all their functions—even those that are not newsworthy—and that they report nothing negative. "This is a threat because media houses earned their reputations the hard way," Mphande said. "Once the credibility is lost, the same advertisers will not want to be associated with such media houses. This is also because most media houses are led by trained 'business' managers. It would be better if media professionals were at the helm of media houses."

Despite a wide range of scores, panelists generally agreed that media organizations derive the bulk of their income from advertisers (although the state broadcaster also receives a government subvention, and print media make some money from copy sales). Television and radio services are free to consumers, with the exception of those who have contracts with international satellite television providers. Some media houses supplement their incomes by producing advertisements, while radio stations also generate revenues by recording music.

Panelists said that media houses work directly with advertisers, rarely employing advertising agencies. Radio broadcasters in particular have diversified their advertising sources by gaining business from small enterprises and even from individuals. MBC and MIJ Radio are at the forefront of this trend. Zeria Banda noted that advertising agencies still have a lot to learn in coming up with creative ideas that are not offensive, especially to women.

The panelists agreed that it is difficult to gauge whether advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted commercial standards, because reliable data is scarce. Panelists based their arguments on observations, for example, of the number of pages of editorial content versus those with advertising content. Advertisements, on average, filled more pages than news stories, and advertisements are present heavily on the airwaves. But as Chidzanja-Nkhoma of ZBS pointed out, not all advertisements are paid. She said that her station is owed more than MWK 17 million (\$110,000) in advertiser debts. Osman also shared that one media manager had to seek legal help just to get payments from some advertisers. However, Manda blamed media managers for tolerating what he called the "Malawian culture" of giving everything on credit.

Scores for the indicator assessing whether the independent media receive government subsidies varied widely. Panelists

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.

agreed that the government does not subsidize independent media directly, but some felt that the government's removal of taxes on newsprint, computers, and other items required by the media industry could be seen as subsidies. The panelists had a variety of views as well regarding the appropriateness of government support for private media. Some panelists said that they believe that independent media play an important social role and should be subsidized, while others said that such subsidies would erode editorial independence. As media activist Peter Kumwenda put it, "If government already pressures the media through ad placements, what more if they begin to provide subsidies?" Panelists agreed that if the government was to form a subsidy program, it would need to develop clear procedures to safeguard independence.

The application of market research drew the lowest scores for this objective. Malawi lacks readily available information about demographics, and neither the media nor professional polling companies conduct market research—despite the acknowledged need. Often, media managers and staff members just develop programming and content that they believe their audience needs; many follow trends in other countries in the region without considering the local market. The panelists cited the cost of conducting research as a major limiting factor.

Panelists agreed that broadcast ratings and circulation figures remain a mystery. The country does not have an independent body to produce ratings and circulation assessments, which leaves media houses making claims that cannot be substantiated. The print media rarely disclose their circulation figures, and if they were to disclose figures, the accuracy would be hard to assess. Aside from media houses hiding the size of their audience, it is evident that some simply do not know the size, according to the panelists. Zeria Banda spoke of a newspaper company (whose name she did not disclose) where the advertising manager cannot produce circulation figures, or even list the distribution points of its product. Zeria Banda also pointed out that even when print outlets provide circulation figures, they are given in wide ranges; for example, between 12,000 and 15,000.

The panel noted that advertisers place advertisements based on popular sentiments and advertising rates. For instance, ZBS was voted Namisa Malawi Chapter Radio of the year, and the station enjoyed good business during the year. The print media are complacent because the sector has little competition, with only two newspaper companies dominating the industry.

Osman also shared that one media manager had to seek legal help just to get payments from some advertisers. However, Manda blamed media managers for tolerating what he called the "Malawian culture" of giving everything on credit.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Malawi Objective Score: 2.51

This was the highest scoring objective, with all but one of the indicators scoring very close to the objective score. Panelists shared their impression that media rights organizations and NGOs support journalists, and that training opportunities are available to enable people to enhance their skills. Indicator 1 (trade associations) scored almost a point lower than the objective score, however, as trade associations are largely inactive.

According to the panel, Malawi has only a few trade associations, the Broadcasters' Association being one, and they are largely inactive. Various associations and organizations are working to protect journalists' rights, however, such as the Malawi chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). Panelists praised MISA's Malawi chapter for its efforts to represent its members. Through World Press Freedom Day celebrations and other opportunities, the association has lobbied for support

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.

For example, the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre lobbied parliament to table the Access to Information Bill, and the center has added its voice to professional associations decrying questionable government moves against the media.

for journalists and the media. Membership, acquired by application and a payment of a MWK 3,000 (\$22) fee, grew in the past year. MISA represents other practicing non-member journalists as well, although they do not enjoy full benefits. From time to time, MISA condemns infringements of journalists' rights, and reliably provides support to arrested journalists in particular.

Malawi has associations that represent the interests of specific topics of reporting, such as HIV/AIDS and business in the media. In the past year, a corporate organization formed an association for business journalists, but panelists condemned the move, saying it would compromise the objectivity of journalists involved.

MCM works with all practicing journalists, and while some panelists praised its work, others criticized it for applying its powers selectively and compromising its ethics. On March 23, 2009, an online news site, Nyasatimes, published a story that claimed that President Bingu wa Mutharika was seriously ill and that he had canceled events to launch the election campaign for his party. MCM condemned the publication and issued a warning to the publishers, based in Britain. Panelists said that MCM's actions were a positive step, but still problematic because the actions followed government pressure. Rumors floated that even their meeting and related costs to discuss the issue were paid for by a politician.

Panelists agreed that the country's civil society sector supports free speech and independent media. For example, the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre lobbied parliament to table the Access to Information Bill, and the center has added its voice to professional associations decrying questionable government moves against the media.

Despite its relatively high score, the indicator measuring the existence of quality journalism degree programs sparked much discussion among panelists, who complained that the quality of graduates is declining. Malawi has a number of media programs, with courses offered by the University of Malawi, ShareWorld Open University, and the African Bible College. "As a consumer, when I read stories, I ask

myself, 'Are these journalists going through the lectures we received?'" queried Zeria Banda. "The quality is not very strong, and that shows in the published work and in the questions they send out to news sources."

The panelists attributed the deterioration to several problems: the lack of practically oriented training; an increase in the number of students; limited resources, and; low interest, poor work ethics, and apparent immaturity among graduates. For example, the University of Malawi has adjusted its intake from 15 in the early 2000s to more than 40 today. Despite increasing their class size, the university still suffers from insufficient resources—for instance, during a training session, it only supplied three recorders for the whole class, noted Manda. Some panelists recalled that in the past, the University of Malawi only offered its program to practicing journalists, which boosted the quality. In addition, according to the panel, the institutions have produced too many graduates to be absorbed by the industry. Thus, a lot of graduates opt to work in related industries beyond mainstream media. Osman agreed that the quality of graduates is low, but he also said the industry is partly to blame for not carrying out proper orientation programs and not allowing journalists to work on particular beats.

Short-term trainings earned the highest score for this objective, with panelists noting that journalists in the country upgrade their skills by attending both local and international short-term training programs. Some have also participated in in-service training programs. A good number of journalists were trained on elections reporting through classes conducted by the Malawi Electoral Commission and other stakeholders.

The panelists said that sources of newsprint are apolitical, and deemed most of the printing houses apolitical and unrestricted as well. Newsprint is imported from countries such as South Africa, without restriction from the Malawian government, although affordability may affect some outlets.

Finally, the indicator weighing the independence of media distribution methods received a relatively high score. One panelist differed in her assessment: Chidzanja-Nkhoma explained that "broadcast transmitters are controlled by government and not managed in a non-partisan manner."

Osman said that limited access to transmitters has a significant impact on broadcast media. "Putting up transmitter towers costs a fortune, and as a result, radio stations are forced to co-site—meaning they put their antennae on a tower usually owned by a mobile network company. They charge high fees for putting their antennae on top of the tower, and they also charge high fees for housing the transmitter and for sending out the signal. It

costs quite a lot of money. Unfortunately, the broadcast sector does not have the powers to negotiate the costs; MACRA needs to come in on this point. It is inhibiting the development of the sector.”

List of Panel Participants

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Maria Chidzanja-Nkhoma, women and children’s coordinator, Zodiak Broadcasting Station, Lilongwe

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