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SOUTH AFRICA

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South Africa has experienced a great deal of uncertainty in the year under review, with the global economic crisis resulting in thousands of job losses across all sectors, including the media. The economic crisis, dubbed the “Triple F” (food, fuel, and finance) crisis, appeared in the first half of 2008 and was followed by the global financial crisis in the latter half of the year. Numerous strikes occurred during this period.

The country also experienced what could arguably be called its most hotly contested election since the dawn of democracy in the country in 1994. The African National Congress (ANC) retained its dominant position following the April 22, 2009, vote, and ANC president Jacob Zuma became the new president of South Africa. However, the party did lose the two-thirds majority in parliament it needs to unilaterally alter the constitution. The ANC now holds 264 of the 400 seats in the National Assembly, but a new party, the Congress of the People (COPE), made inroads into ANC’s support base, despite launching less than five months before the election. COPE draws most of its support from ANC defectors who left the party after it recalled former president Thabo Mbeki from office. COPE came in third in the election, winning 30 seats, behind the Democratic Alliance’s 67 seats.

Despite having had a difficult relationship with the media in recent years, President Zuma began his term by extending an olive branch to his critics. Addressing a South African National Editors Forum awards dinner in June, he said: “Today, we look to these journalists, and to the media in general, as a vital partner in strengthening our democracy and promoting the rights for which our people fought... As a country, we need journalists who are dedicated to their craft and to their audience. We seek reporting that is credible and honest and informative. We seek comment and analysis that challenges us and provides fresh insight into our world and the challenges we face. This is a challenge that is seemingly difficult in an ever-changing world, and in an industry that is undergoing major changes.”

While much media freedom is apparent in South Africa, work remains, especially in closing geographic and economic gaps in access. New media options may help close these divides. Freedom House’s *Freedom on the Net* report hailed the fairly high degree of digital media freedom in South Africa and noted that more South Africans access the Internet with the help of their mobile phones rather than computers. The key obstacles outlined by Freedom House remain cost, and the fact that much of the content is offered in English.¹

In this year’s MSI scores, South Africa gained enough ground to nearly cross over into the sustainable category. Three of the five objectives achieved sustainable scores: Objective 5 (supporting institutions) scored the highest, followed by Objective 1 (freedom of speech) and Objective 4 (business management). Objective 2 (professional journalism) and Objective 3 (plurality of news sources) scored within the near sustainable range.

¹ Freedom House. *Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media-South Africa*. April 1, 2009: p. 91. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=203&parent=19&report=79>

SOUTH AFRICA AT A GLANCE

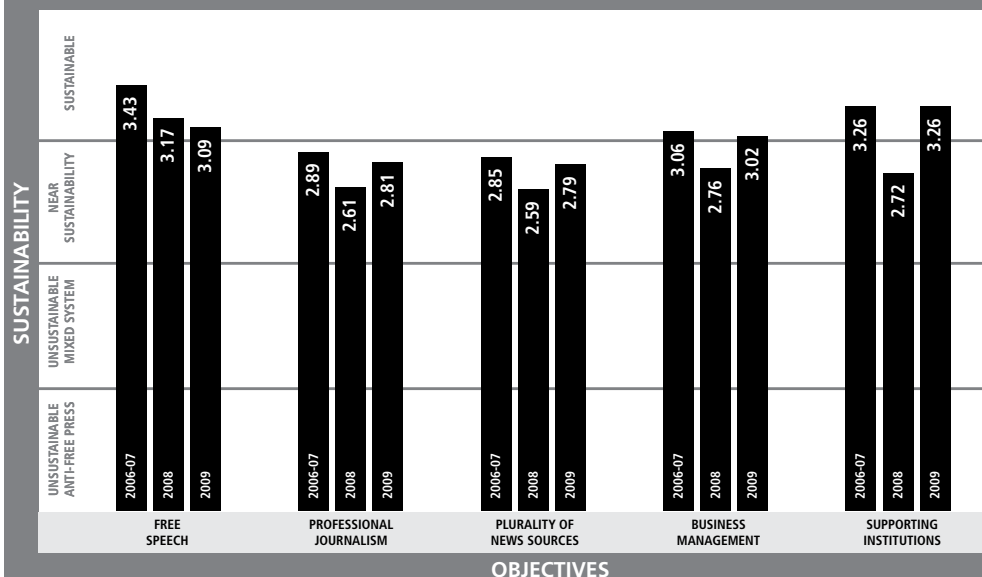
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 49,052,489 (July, 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital cities:** Pretoria (administrative capital), Cape Town (legislative capital), Bloemfontein (judicial capital)
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** black African 79.5%, white 9.2%, colored 8.9%, Indian/Asian 2.5% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Zion Christian 11.1%, Pentecostal/Charismatic 8.2%, Catholic 7.1%, Methodist 6.8%, Dutch Reformed 6.7%, Anglican 3.8%, Muslim 1.5%, other Christian 36%, other 2.3%, unspecified 1.4%, none 15.1% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** IsiZulu 23.8%, IsiXhosa 17.6%, Afrikaans 13.3%, Sepedi 9.4%, English 8.2%, Setswana 8.2%, Sesotho 7.9%, Xitsonga 4.4%, other 7.2% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$284.5 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$10,060 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 86.4% (male: 87%, female: 85.7%) (2003 est., OMD Media Facts 2009)
- > **President or top authority:** President Jacob Zuma (since May 9, 2009)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 1000+; Radio Stations: 100+; Television Stations: 50+
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three dailies by circulation: *Daily Sun* (508,512), *The Star* (177,899), and *The Sowetan* (143,167), all private. Top three weekly/weekend newspapers: *Sunday Times* (499,033), *Rapport* (318,359) and *Sunday Sun* (209,474) (Audit Bureau of Circulation)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio and television channels are all publicly owned. Radio: Ukhozi FM, Umhlobo Wenene FM, and Lesedi FM. Television: SABC 1, SABC 2, SABC 3 (AC Nielsen)
- > **News Agencies:** South African Press Agency (non-governmental), Health-e (private), ASP (private), I-Net (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Total: ZAR 20.1 billion, Radio: 13.5%, Print: 39.8%, Television: 37.7%
- > **Internet usage:** 4.187 million (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SOUTH AFRICA



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

South Africa Objective Score: 3.09

The objective weighing freedom of speech attracted both the highest and lowest indicator scores among all objectives, indicative of the dynamic interplay between the media and the law in South Africa during the period under review.

Overall, however, the objective scored much the same as last year. Indicator 8 (media access to and use of other news sources) scored about a half point higher than the objective score; indicator 9 (entry into the journalism profession) received a near-perfect score. In contrast, indicator 5 (state or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and the law guarantees editorial independence) drew the lowest scores from panelists, and lagged the objective score by nearly three-quarters of a point.

Panelists unanimously praised the constitution for affording much-needed protection to the media sector. Section 16 of the constitution expressly affords the right to freedom of expression to the press, while Section 32 enshrines the right to access information (supported by the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act). However, while panelists celebrated the existence of these provisions, they emphasized the vast divide between theory and practice, stressing that many people cannot afford the legal costs of enforcing their constitutionally enshrined rights. As such, they felt that socioeconomic inequalities across South Africa meant that

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.

Panelists also expressed concern about the Film and Publications Amendment Bill, which media activists warn has the potential to impinge on media freedom by allowing for pre-publication censorship of certain materials.

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There was a flurry of legislative activity in 2009. The *Mail & Guardian* reported that the incoming justice minister, Jeff Radebe, will actively push for the enactment of the Superior Courts Bill—which has been 13 years in the making. Although the minister reassured the media community that members of the judiciary, legal academics, and interested parties will have an opportunity to comment, critics of the draft believe some provisions violate the constitution, threaten judicial independence, and limit access to courts. According to William Bird, director of the Media Monitoring Project, how this transformation will impact other aspects of the judiciary, and ultimately media freedom, remains to be seen.

Panelists also expressed concern about the Film and Publications Amendment Bill, which media activists warn has the potential to impinge on media freedom by allowing for pre-publication censorship of certain materials. The bill requires publishers—who are not recognized by the Press Ombudsman—and film and game distributors to submit publications, films, and games to the Film and Publications Board for approval if they contain sexual content that violates human dignity, incites people to cause harm, or advocates hatred toward a group.² The Act became law in September 2009. The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) reacted sharply, noting: “The Amendment Act constitutes a grave intrusion of the right to freedom of expression [and]... offends against the letter and spirit of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.”³

Tasked with the licensing of network operators, radio broadcasters, television channels, related service providers, and other players within the sector, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) is the regulatory body for the IT and telecommunications industry. ICASA also investigates and adjudicates complaints internally (among licensees) and externally (from members of the public

² IFEX Alert, September 9, 2009 http://www.ifex.org/south_africa/2009/09/09/films_and_publications_amendment_act/

³ “FXI deeply disappointed by the signing into law of the Films & Publications Amendment Act.” Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), September 4, 2009. <http://www.fxiproject.org/content/view/full/212/1/>

On the whole, the panelists agreed that when crimes have been committed against journalists, the perpetrators are more than likely ordinary civilians—thus the ordinary process for prosecution and sanctions applies. The panelists considered the likelihood for successful resolution on par, generally, with the investigation and prosecution of any crime.

against licensees). Panelists agreed that although licensing frameworks are sound, ICASA is failing to meet some of its other obligations. Bird cited an example where ICASA failed to act against the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) when the public broadcaster declined to release a report dealing with the alleged blacklisting of critical political commentators, or to show how it had responded to the report.

Panelists agreed that there are no significant obstacles to licensees in the sector and that the licensing procedures are transparent and rational. They did, however, feel that the regulator is failing to police its own license conditions. Lumko Mtimde, CEO of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), said, “Although licensing frameworks are sound, the investigation and monitoring of licensees by the regulator is failing.”

According to the panelists, entry into the media sector and the tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries. Referring to smaller media operations, Bird felt that the “lack of guidance and collective lobbying means smaller media operations struggle and do not receive tax breaks in comparison to other sectors.” Panelists said that the requirements for starting a small, medium, or microenterprise, such as a small-town newspaper, are simple and straightforward—companies only need to complete a registration process in accordance with the Companies Act.

On the whole, the panelists agreed that when crimes have been committed against journalists, the perpetrators are more than likely ordinary civilians—thus the ordinary process for prosecution and sanctions applies. The panelists considered the likelihood for successful resolution on par, generally, with the investigation and prosecution of any crime. Panelists were not aware of any criminal acts or violence directed at journalists by the state or state emissaries.

The panelists were not aware of any reported or pending cases that would either support or disprove the statement in

Indicator 5; there was further consensus that the absence of evidence either way was not irrevocable proof of editorial independence. A panelist related an anecdote in which a senior SABC manager criticized an employee for reporting on an event truthfully. The manager then pointed to the Editorial Code of Conduct, posted on the newsroom wall, and declared, “This means nothing; I will do what I must, so as not to lose my job.” Panelists were concerned about the fact that senior positions at the SABC tend to be held by people with political allegiances.

Public officials are not shielded by special laws, the panelists agreed, and journalists are generally free to report and follow up on matters of public interest. A prominent case heard by the Supreme Court of Appeal, *National Media LTD v. Bogoshi*, upheld the notion that greater latitude is usually allowed in respect of political discussion and that, in fact, “Even false defamatory statements of fact must be regarded as lawful if, in all circumstances of the case, it is found to be reasonable to publish the particular facts in the particular way and the particular time they were published... Protection is only afforded to the publication of material in which the public has an interest.”

The court also stressed, however, that notwithstanding the rich legal protection afforded members of the media, “There can be no justification for the publication of untruths; and members of the press should not be left with the impression that they have license to lower the standards of care which must be observed.”

Panelists seemed satisfied that when journalists have a legitimate need to obtain public information, they can approach the courts and other institutions and organizations for assistance. The Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA) provides the framework and procedures to exercise the constitutional right to information. The constitution also protects human rights, and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) plays a key role in the implementation of PAIA. Furthermore, SAHRC functions as a Chapter 9 institution—which, in South Africa, is a statutory body supporting constitutional democracy and facilitating the enforcement of protected rights when they are infringed upon.

According to the panelists, there are no restrictions on international news and news sources, beyond those relating to general copyright and other legal provisions. Amina Frense, of the South African National Editor’s Forum, cited the example of photographers, who are compelled to sign away any rights they may have to images snapped up during the Confederations Cup as a condition of their employment. Panelists did comment that access to international news resources is tempered by access to funds.

Entry into the journalism profession is generally free; hence, this indicator achieved nearly a perfect score. The government imposes no licensing requirements or other restrictions on journalists.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

South Africa Objective Score: 2.81

The overall score for this objective improved compared with last year even if it did not change dramatically. Scores for indicator 1 (reporting is fair, objective, and well-sourced), Indicator 6 (balance of news and entertainment), and Indicator 8 improved significantly. All indicators scored very close to the objective score.

Assessing the strength of professional standards, the panelists concluded that reporting in the South African media ranges from excellent to “gutter journalism.” A number of award-winning documentaries and current-affairs programs focusing on investigative reporting were cited, such as *Carte Blanche* on MNET and *Special Assignment* on SABC 3. However, Bird argued that the use of the term “objective” is misleading, since all reporting is contextual and can never be truly objective. Yet, according to Frense, “Very few sources are used to verify facts for stories, and the lack of editorial control in newsrooms has eroded the general public’s trust in journalists.”

The panelists concurred that there are recognized and accepted ethical standards in the media sector. The Press Code of Professional Practice, which was established by the print media industry, captures the most basic and universal

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).

Freebies (such as cash, cell phones, or free travel) from the motor, sports, and entertainment industries are quite common and readily accepted by many journalists.

principles for journalists—namely, “to report news truthfully, accurately, and fairly; and to present news in context and in a balanced manner, without an intentional or negligent departure from the facts.” Despite these safeguards, Jeanette Minnie, a Pretoria freedom-of-expression expert, lamented the lack of a rational, regular approach to formal enforcement of codes, while other panelists noted that journalists need to be more careful regarding questions of accuracy. They stressed their perception that journalists appear to print corrections too frequently.

Panelists also raised concerns that some journalists use the public exposure they have gained from their work to leverage additional commercial benefits for themselves. While such activities may not violate the code, panelists deemed such behavior distasteful and warned that it could compromise professional standards. According to Frense, this practice is evident among motoring and television sports journalists.

Panelists viewed journalists’ lack of resources in covering stories as the biggest ethical problem facing journalists. Financial pressure has prompted some journalists to accept financial help, accommodations, and help with travel expenses to cover political stories and government activities. This practice is also common among journalists covering travel, sports, motoring, entertainment, arts, and culture. Portia Kobue, SABC executive producer, felt this practice “constitutes a serious threat to journalistic independence, as journalists feel indebted to their sponsors and under pressure not to be too critical. It also results in editorial choices being made not because of news value, but because of the generosity (or otherwise) of the organizers of events.” Freebies (such as cash, cell phones, or free travel) from the motor, sports, and entertainment industries are quite common and readily accepted by many journalists.

The indicator considering self-censorship received the lowest score within Objective 2. As Kobue explained, “There is a lot of self-censorship; often members of government question who gave the go-ahead for certain interviews.” Minnie added, “Censorship has been the most severe from commissioning editors. The SABC is unique in its ability to reach many in Africa; no broadcaster or other form of media comes close. It is just a pity that this kind of power is not used

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beyond petty agenda-setting." The public broadcaster, in particular, came under fire for self-censorship when it came to critiquing politically powerful people. Panelists also described how, during protests over wages, SABC staff members did not cover the marches and demonstrations.

Regarding how well journalists cover key events and issues, the panelists had a lukewarm reaction. There was general agreement that key events are covered; however, Bird brought up revealing statistics on the subjects that receive the most coverage—indicating that race, gender, and environmental issues received scant regard. He cited the example of *50/50*, an environmental-issues program on SABC 2, which has been cut.

Manana Stone, a media advocacy officer for the Media Institute for Southern Africa, stressed the importance of distinguishing between events and issues. He said events such as hospital openings and project launches are covered, but issues requiring ongoing awareness-raising, such as gender violence and poverty, are often addressed marginally or neglected altogether.

The question of whether pay levels for journalists are sufficiently high to discourage corruption drew mixed responses. Some panelists believe that although journalists are poorly paid in both the private and public sector, their salaries are high enough to discourage corruption. An SABC survey showed journalists' salaries to be market-related or better. However, in a bid to save money and increase profits, media companies are increasingly hiring nonpermanent staff as reporters or sub-editors, and the panelists noted that such people might be more vulnerable to temptations.

According to ICASA license conditions for broadcasters, there are quotas for a fair balance of exposure between entertainment and current affairs, education, and social issues. However, panelists noted that the budget allocation or distribution of resources to entertainment programming is much higher than that allocated to news and information programming.

The impending digitalization of television featured prominently in the panelists' consideration of the adequacy of facilities and equipment. Panelists agreed that, in terms of the availability and use of facilities and equipment, the South African media sector is on par with the world's most developed nations. Both private and public media houses invest heavily in equipment to build state-of-the-art facilities, which account for a large portion of their annual budget.

Regarding niche reporting, Frense suggested that niche reporting ranges from good to under-resourced. Generally, it was agreed that between the public broadcaster and private media, quality niche reporting and programming exists; however, Bird again questioned the commitment in practice—referring again to the great loss of programs like *50/50*.

In conclusion, panelists indicated that the playing field is not equal and expressed the hope that influential institutions and organizations will dedicate far more resources to the improvement of the media sector as a whole. The benefits, they said, would translate to elevated professional standards and the recognition of journalism as a credible profession.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

South Africa Objective Score: 2.79

This objective also experienced modest improvement, led by improvements in indicators 1 (plurality of viewpoints and sources) and 6 (transparency of ownership and presence of conglomerates). All indicators scored very close to the objective score.

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.

Panelists agreed that South Africa has a range of public and private news sources, but they tend to be concentrated in larger urban, more affluent areas. Poorer townships and remote rural villages are often underserved. "There is still a problem with respect to the absence of community-based news," Kobue added, describing how riots broke out in the informal settlement of Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg, due to a lack of information. She described the violence that erupted following a rumor that the township was to be placed under the administration of the worst-performing municipality in the Gauteng province. Municipal representatives had to be dispatched to convince the community that these rumors were unfounded; there were no plans to revise the municipal demarcations. Kobue believed these riots could have been avoided if the community had access to reliable sources of information provided by community media. Frense cited the case of a rural teenager who could not access her exam results in her town; she had to travel by bus to a neighboring town just to buy a newspaper.

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net report, "Print outlets, television, and radio continue to be the main sources of news and information for most South Africans, but there are increasing efforts to extend mainstream news to online platforms—for example, by the *Times* and *Mail and Guardian* newspapers, which operate affiliated websites."⁴

Panelists agreed strongly that there are no legal restrictions to domestic or international media, and that access comes down to affordability.

A general distinction was highlighted with respect to media coverage during the pre- and post-election periods. Bird indicated that during the election period, there were up to 15,000 news items across different media, which delivered nonpartisan political coverage; however, since the publication of election results, there has been a steady decline—not only in the range of topics but also the quality of the coverage. The panelists conceded that post-election coverage is lacking and that little or no monitoring is done within media institutions.

South African media have access to a range of independent news agencies, panelists agreed, including the South Africa Press Association, I-net Bridge, Eye News Service, SACSIS, East Cape News Agency, Touchline, Health E-News Agency, Mpumalanga African Eye, Gender Links, and Sangonet. International agencies, such as Reuters and the Associated Press, are also available. However, the panelists said that

⁴ Freedom House. *Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media-South Africa*. April 1, 2009: p. 93. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=203&parent=19&report=79>

"There is still a problem with respect to the absence of community-based news," Kobue added, describing how riots broke out in the informal settlement of Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg, due to a lack of information.

some of these news sources are underutilized, and there is a need for more variety among media houses.

While independent broadcast media produce their own domestic news programs, high production costs limit their ability to produce international news. For the most part, private media houses source their international content from international news agencies.

Panelists said that ownership is fairly transparent; however, a few large conglomerates dominate the media landscape. The media sector is run as a monopoly, and panelists conceded that the absence of competition is the hallmark of South African business. In other sectors, this has cost consumers dearly, owing to collusion and price fixing by businesses operating as cartels. For example, wheat and flour prices have dropped since June 2008, but the price of bread has stayed constant. Research from the FXI also revealed, "While two major groups controlled most newspapers in the past, ownership is now shared by six major groups, with independent newspapers emerging as a major owner."⁵

Panelists split over how well the media reflect a broad spectrum of social interests, including minority-language sources. Bird indicated that while coverage of social-interest issues is better during the pre-election phase than at any other time, the main focus of the coverage was political campaigning and political in-fighting among parties. Furthermore, racism and xenophobia, gender-based violence, education and development issues, and poverty together accounted for less than one percent of total coverage during this time. On the other hand, the Internet may help change these patterns; Freedom House reported, "The South African blogosphere has been highly active in promotion of AIDS awareness and the discussion of environmental issues, in addition to more general political coverage."⁶

⁵ Haffajee, Ferial. "Presentation of Research on the South Africa Press and the MDA." Freedom of Expression Institute; January 3, 2008. <http://www.fxiproject.org.za/content/view/165/>

⁶ Freedom House. *Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media-South Africa*. April 1, 2009: p. 92. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=203&parent=19&report=79> (Accessed October 3, 2010)

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Frense argued that variety is more evident on the radio, as the SABC channels cater to various minority languages. Citing the example of the Nu/Khmu language programs, she said that minority languages are indebted to radio for their new lease on life.

Panelists were ever-mindful of the paradox regarding the term “minority” in the South African context; the term is applied to the demographic majority, which is the indigenous African population. Furthermore, the benefits of reporting in minority languages are undermined by low-quality translations, bad grammar, and a lack of coherent subtitles in television broadcasts, Kobue argued. It was noted that Zulu-language dailies are doing well, especially in Kwazulu-Natal. Isolezwe’s average daily sales topped 100,000 for the first time since its 2002 launch. At 102,454, sales are encouragingly up from 99,095 for the comparative 2008 period.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

South Africa Objective Score: 3.02

Panelists improved their scores in three indicators to push the score for this objective higher this year compared with last year. These indicators are 4 (balance of advertising to other revenue sources), 6 (market research) and 7 (audience and circulation statistics). Indicator 4 (government subsidy of private media) fell, however. All indicators scored within a half-point of the objective score.

Panelists agreed that most media outlets and supporting firms in South Africa operate as professionally run businesses, but they were quick to note that the same could not be said for the SABC. The public broadcaster is deeply in the red and has been the subject of several very critical news reports highlighting different forms of mismanagement. Panelists attributed the success of commercial media houses to the employment of dedicated business-development executives tasked with meeting commercial targets.

However, the panelists raised a concern that newsrooms, especially in private print media houses, have made drastic cuts in the wake of the global financial crisis. They also described the worrying trend of the “juniorization of newsrooms,” with relatively inexperienced journalists taking on important positions. Rookies require lower pay packages, while taking on heavier workloads.

Kobue recalled reading three articles in a well-respected business daily, all compiled by the same journalist. All three articles were replete with spelling and grammatical errors. “Private media houses may meet bottom-line targets by cutting costs in terms of personnel, but it is at the expense of quality,” Kobue said.

Panelists expressed concern that the SABC’s heavy reliance on commercial revenues affected the public broadcaster’s programming. The SABC derives 85 to 87 percent of its revenue from commercial sales, 13 percent from license fees, and the remaining 2 percent from direct government grants. This funding model suggests that the SABC needs to pursue a commercial, rather than developmental, agenda, panelists said.

Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market, and panelists said that South Africa’s advertising sector is very well developed. However, some panelists called on advertisers to show more responsibility. Stone also commented that advertisers show reluctance to advertise in community media, although Minnie countered that “advertising is a business and cannot be expected to support small mediums, like community media, for free.”

Regarding the balance of advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue, ICASA guidelines stipulate 12 minutes per

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.

hour for television advertisements, and past MSI panels have charged that SABC clearly and regularly exceeds this standard. However, advertisers are subject to scrutiny; the marketing communications industry created and funds the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to regulate advertising in the public interest. ASA works closely with the government, statutory bodies, consumer organizations, and the media to ensure that advertising content meets its Code of Advertising Practice requirements.

Independent media do not receive government subsidies, although, as last year's MSI panel reported, community media do receive large government grants—though some panelists reported that little money reached the stations. Furthermore, the government is one of the country's largest advertisers, and sometimes this financial clout can be abused to make editorial demands on the media. Minnie said that the MDDA, a statutory body set up to ensure a plurality of voices in South Africa, funds some private and community media organizations. The MDDA gets funding from both government and industry sources and uses these funds to support independent media initiatives.

According to the panelists, market research accounts for a large portion of media house budgets—both public and private. For large media companies, the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF), a tripartite organization consisting of marketers, advertising agencies, and media owners, conducts research to help inform programming decisions. SAARF conducts the All Media and Products Survey, the Radio Audience Measurement, and the Television Audience Measurement. However, past MSI studies noted a key weakness: market research is costly and focuses primarily on urban areas and larger organizations—neglecting the smaller media houses that need the research the most.

As reported in last year's MSI study, broadcast ratings are produced by SAARF, and the SABC also produces ratings for its television programs, using standard audience research software. The Audit Bureau of Circulations produces newspaper circulation data.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

South Africa Objective Score: 3.26

Objective 5 sustained strong improvement, with panelists awarding higher scores for all indicators. All indicators scored within a half-point of the objective score except for indicator 7 (channels of media distribution are private, apolitical, and unrestricted), which fell just outside that range.

As a young democracy, South Africa has a plethora of NGOs that function to check state power and generally offer debate on topical issues affecting freedom of speech. Panelists gave examples of various NGOs, including FXI, the Media Monitoring Project, and the Media Advocacy Project.

A number of trade associations safeguard the interests of media owners and provide member services in South Africa. The National Community Radio Forum brings together operators of community radio. Print Media South Africa (PMSA) serves as an umbrella body to constituent members: the Newspaper Association of South Africa, the Magazine Publishers Association of South Africa, and the Association of Independent Publishers. Taken together, PMSA represents more than 700 newspaper and magazine titles. New media organizations include the Internet Service Providers Association, Wireless Application Service Providers Association, the Website Association of South Africa, and the Online Publishers Association.

In terms of professional associations, SANEF, a professional organization for editors and senior journalists, is active; most editors are members. In addition, the Media Institute of Southern Africa has an operational South African chapter. Other organizations include the Forum of Black Journalists, which was revived in early 2008.

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.

As reported in last year's MSI, online media continue to be tied down by monopolies like Telkom, as well as ludicrous Internet fees—and the government seemingly lacks political will and strategy to address these obstacles.

Despite these organizations, panelists indicated that journalists are suffering, especially in light of the economic climate, and conceded that the South African media workforce is not adequately protected. Only one union, the Media Workers Association of South Africa, represents media workers' rights; however, there are no associations that specifically protect the rights of journalists.

As a young democracy, South Africa has a plethora of NGOs that function to check state power and generally offer debate on topical issues affecting freedom of speech. Panelists gave examples of various NGOs, including FXI, the Media Monitoring Project, and the Media Advocacy Project. "Free Our SABC" is a coalition of NGOs that acts as a lobbying group in instances when freedom of speech is undermined by the public broadcaster. While acknowledging the work of these NGOs, Bird suggested they are overly concentrated in large urban centers and called for more NGOs to spread out across the country. He also felt that these NGOs could enhance their ability to protect media freedom if they cooperated more and presented a united front. Minnie indicated that a strong alliance among journalists, media owners, and NGOs could be very beneficial for the media community.

Some panelists were aware only of the journalism and media studies program offered by the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, while others acknowledged that the University of the Witwatersrand also offers a journalism program. While it is difficult, in some cases, to specify whether a program should be called a journalism course, it is estimated that there are about 15 journalism-related courses taught at a tertiary level in South Africa. However, panelists agreed that students do not bring enough practical knowledge with them when they enter the newsroom; they end up developing some critical skills on the job.

To address these shortcomings, Frense suggested the establishment of cadet schools, which would offer practical training. She went on to indicate that in her experience, rookies "cannot write one sentence without making a mistake." The panelists attributed this problem to different reasons, including the poor quality of schooling, undiagnosed deficiencies in linguistic skills, and ineffective teaching methods.

Short-term training programs do exist to help journalists upgrade their skills. Panelists highlighted the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism as a good institution offering short courses and tuition for non-degree purposes. However, the panelists generally agreed that unless the government gets involved with media owners and mandates continuing education for the media workforce, standards will continue to drop. Furthermore, as noted in last year's MSI study, the cost of short-term trainings can be prohibitive, and the majority of training institutions are based in the urban centers—factors that have kept a large and growing pool of freelance journalists outside of the circle of formal training, education, and knowledge.

Although printing facilities are in private hands, panelists agreed that ownership could never be truly apolitical. In addition, as newsprint is costly, community and small media outlets find access difficult.

Broadcast transmitters are divided between state and private hands, and Frense indicated that the tight control of broadband and its pricing is restrictive. The public sector is in full control of the various features of the national communications economy. For example, the regulator is ICASA, while broadcasting and transmitters are under Sentech, and the broadband monopoly is dictated to by Telkom—all state-funded or parastatal institutions. As reported in last year's MSI, online media continue to be tied down by monopolies like Telkom, as well as ludicrous Internet fees—and the government seemingly lacks political will and strategy to address these obstacles. As for print distribution, the panelists agreed that private hands control the infrastructure and that there are a number of different distribution companies who deliver papers to large retail outlets.

List of Panel Participants

Jeanette Minnie, freedom-of-expression expert, Pretoria

Lumko Mtinde, CEO, Media Development and Diversity Agency, Johannesburg

William Bird, director, Media Monitoring Project, Johannesburg

Amina Frense, project manager, Southern African Broadcasters Association; South African National Editors Forum council member; Media Institute of Southern Africa-South Africa Governing Council member, Johannesburg

Manana Stone, media advocacy officer, Media Institute of Southern Africa, Johannesburg

Portia Kobue, senior executive producer, South African Broadcasting Corporation, Johannesburg

Moderator and Author

Shehnaaz Bulbulia, executive director, Institute for the Advancement of Journalism, Johannesburg

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