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UGANDA

Although Uganda's constitution is among the strongest on the African continent, with provisions that guarantee press freedom and freedom of speech, undemocratic media laws contradict these freedoms. Laws on sedition, anti-terrorism, criminal libel, and others that hinder freedom of expression remain on the books, despite calls from media organizations, local and international human rights groups, and civil society to scrap or amend them to meet modern standards.

Furthermore, as the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government continues to consolidate its power, press freedom and freedom of speech in Uganda seem likely to remain under threat. The government moved ahead with plans to review the constitutional provisions that guarantee press freedom and freedom of speech, arousing suspicion among the journalism community and the opposition. In 2008, the president formed a cabinet committee to look into the existing media laws, possibly to make them more biting. The Uganda MSI panelists said that they expect the committee to present a report to the national parliament.

Journalists work under the threat of violence, with reports on the rise of journalists being beaten, harassed, interrogated, and tortured. The government continues to harass and intimidate the media through its security organs—including a special police unit set up to deal with negative media reports. Many journalists and some opposition politicians have been summoned to appear at the Criminal Investigation Department headquarters, where they are grilled for their stories that criticize the ruling NRM Party. According to the MSI panelists, some of these journalists are never the same after appearing before the police desk, and they give up writing critical stories. Government officials, including the president, continue attacking the media for their work to expose corruption. At the World Press Freedom Day celebration in Uganda, the president appeared as the keynote speaker and verbally attacked the media, accusing them of behaving irresponsibly.

In addition, big advertisers and businesses interfere with editorial independence, especially with private media, to the extent that some funders have threatened to withdraw business from media houses that criticize their companies. The global downturn has impacted many media houses also, leading to layoffs and pay cuts for staff members and freelancers. The mounting economic pressure threatens some media houses with closure.

Despite all of these problems, the vibrancy of the media comes through, with its coverage provided to all sectors and its wide geographic reach. Since the last MSI, a number of FM stations have come on the air; to date, more than 150 radio companies have been granted licenses, and about 130 are operational. In combination with Uganda's new television stations, this growth in electronic media has particularly benefited the rural poor, increasing their access to news.

# UGANDA AT A GLANCE

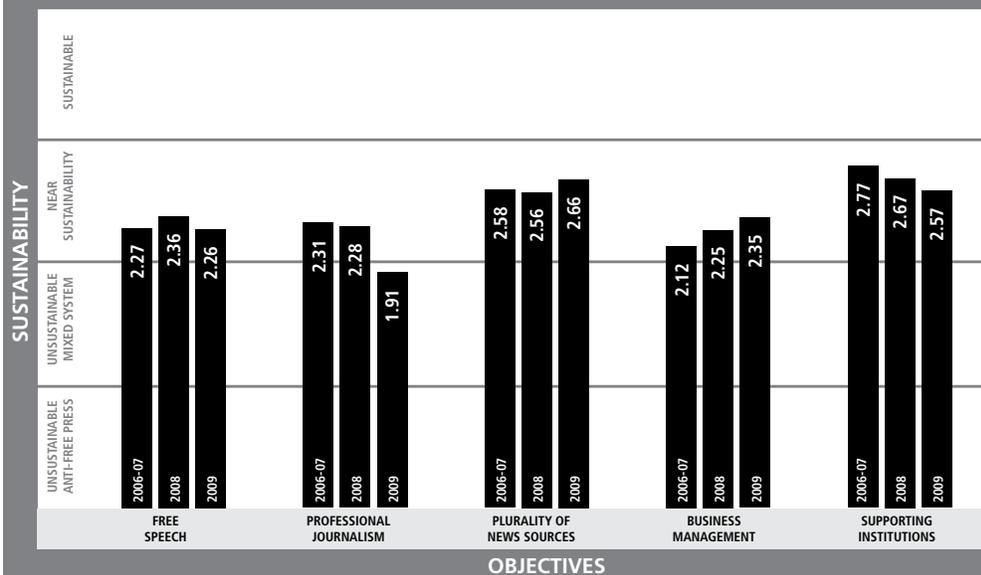
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 32,369,558 (2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Kampala
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Baganda 16.9%, Banyakole 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%, Langi 6.1%, Acholi 4.7%, Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Bunyoro 2.7%, other 29.6% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Roman Catholic 41.9%, Protestant 42%, Muslim 12.1%, other 3.1%, none 0.9% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** English (official national language), Ganda or Luganda (most widely used of the Niger-Congo languages), other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Swahili, Arabic (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$15.04 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$1,190 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 66.8% (male 76.8%, female 57.7%) (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Lt. Gen. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (since January 26, 1986)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 4 daily newspapers, 5 weekly newspapers, several magazines; Radio Stations: 165; Television Stations: 45
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *The New Vision* (60% state-owned, 40% public share holders; 35,000 circulation); *The Monitor* (privately owned, 27,000 circulation); *Bukedde* (60% state-owned, 40% public share holders)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: Central Broadcasting Service FM (private), Simba FM (private) and Bukedde FM (60% state-owned, 40% share holders)
- > **News agencies:** Uganda Radio Network (private), Ultimate Media (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$10 million (2007)
- > **Internet usage:** 2.5 million (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: UGANDA



### 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

### Uganda Objective Score: 2.26

Uganda's 1995 constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression and the media. However, noted Geoffrey Wokulira Ssebagala, program coordinator for the Human Rights Network for Journalists, "there are subordinate laws on the books which contravene the national constitution and regional and international treaties to which Uganda is party. Such laws include the Anti-terrorism Act, which criminalizes news likely to promote terrorism and sets death as a penalty; the Law on Sedition, which limits the media's ability to audit government performance, and; the Press and Journalists' Statute, which requires every journalist to be licensed. The government has drafted another controversial communication bill [the Communications, Internet, and Computer Misuse Bill] to intercept all communications, including Internet, telephone, and mail boxes, among others. If passed in its current form, the sources of information which the media relies on most will be threatened."

In addition, the Police Act prohibits any Ugandan from holding a rally or public meeting without permission from the police inspector general. The police use these laws and regulations to deny Ugandans—especially those linked to the opposition—their right to associate and hold assemblies. On several occasions, plainclothes officers have dispersed nonviolent political assemblies, including those organized by

#### 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.

parliament members, under the guise of maintaining law and order. "Ugandans have been stopped from holding peaceful demonstrations, arrested, beaten, and sometimes released without being charged. Others at times are charged, and with time, cases against them are dropped," said one panelist.

Other panelists disagreed, and credit the current government with promoting freedom of speech and the press, pointing to progress in comparison to previous governments' treatment of the press. "People have been allowed to organize freely under different political parties, professional associations, trade unions of their choice—which was not the case before," said one panelist. This panelist also noted that rallies or public meetings are held in designated areas in cities and towns to avoid disrupting other businesses, but are free to take place anywhere in rural areas.

Journalists continue their struggle to abolish laws that obstruct the freedom of the press, petitioning parliament and presenting their views to the cabinet committee and the new information minister, Winnie Kabakumba Matsiko. However, panelists said that journalists remain skeptical that their views will be accommodated in the amendment process.

Access to information is still obstructed, despite being guaranteed by Article 41 of the constitution and a supporting act for free access to public information. David Malinga Doya, senior writer for *The East African*, said that many departments ignore the law and do not release information, or they make it very difficult for journalists to navigate the dense bureaucracy to obtain information—to the point that journalists miss their deadlines. The panelists said that the government has disregarded the law further by refusing to appoint information officers in most ministries and departments, which have the responsibility of giving information to any requestor, according to the information act.

The media law reform process continues, albeit sluggishly. A good number of journalists, through their leaders in different media associations, have submitted their views on the cause; whether they will be accommodated remains to be seen.

The panelists said that the judiciary acts independently in cases involving the media, but this independence is put to the test in political cases. Media associations have tried to challenge these laws in the courts, helped by civil society groups and human rights organizations, but without much success. Cases stall frequently in court, and whether state influence is involved is unclear. Furthermore, many state cases against the media die in the initial stages. Panelists expressed concern that the government has started appointing its cadres in the judiciary ranks—possibly compromising its independence in the future.

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Internet access is free, and the government does not place official restrictions or require website registration, except for pornographic sites. This may change, however, with the Communications, Internet, and Computer Misuse Bill.

The Uganda Broadcasting Council and the Uganda Communications Commission handle broadcast licensing. The state-appointed minister of information appoints members of these bodies, hence they are not independent from government. The fairness of the broadcasting process generated some debate among panelists. One commented that the large number of FM radio stations in the country reflects the level of fairness. Other panelists countered that the process may appear fair, but some applications are blocked for political reasons. For example, the major opposition political party, Forum for Democratic Change, was denied a radio station license. Applications for those sympathetic to the ruling party are given more attention than others. "Though in the near past many media outlets have entered the market without undue restrictions, recently it has not been all that easy to license newcomers," noted Robert Mugagga, special correspondent for *The Observer*. "The experience of NTV, one of the top television stations in the country, proves the point. It took the intervention of the president, high-level talks, and much pleading from the owners [Nation Media Group] before it was allowed to operate." The panelists suggested that media laws should be amended to streamline the licensing process, and the government should charge one body with issuing radio and television station licenses.

Julian Amutuhaire, acting editor of KFM, Monitor Publications Limited, said that market entry is fairly easy, as evidenced by the large number of emerging radio stations and mushrooming newspapers. Dianah Nalunkuuma, a lecturer at Kampala University, had a different perspective. "Politics in granting media licenses have pushed many out of the media business, in addition to the high taxes," she said. "Some stations operate for a few months and then close because of the burden."

The tax regime is the same across the board in Uganda, but a few big investors in other sectors are given tax holidays—a benefit not commonly extended to media investors. In an effort to attract investors, the government granted a tax exemption on all video and digital still cameras in the new fiscal year, which started on July 1, 2009. However, the panelists said that this may not have much impact on the growth of the media; they said that the government should have abolished or reduced the heavy VAT charged on newsprint and advertisements.

The panelists noted rampant crimes against journalists and widespread impunity for the perpetrators. Ssebagala

said, "Journalism is currently one of the most dangerous professions in Uganda, as the media is attacked by seemingly all sectors of society—including the private sector, religious groups, the military, and political and cultural groups." Recent cases include a Catholic priest of St. Balikuddembe Mitara-Maria assaulting Ben Ssentongo, a correspondent of the leading daily *Bukedde*, who was covering an incident at the school. Police beat the WBS television crew of Timothy Thibas and Francis Tumukwasize and confiscated their cameras while they covered an eviction of police constables from Namboole National Stadium. In addition, forces from the Joint Anti-Terrorism squad arrested Tonny Kizito of *Red Pepper* and Katende Maribu of WBS Television while they pursued a story about victims of torture. The Press Freedom Index for 2009 published by the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ) lists 35 instances of journalists attacked or threatened in the course of their work in Uganda in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

Jane Nakyondwa Matovu, senior journalist at Mama FM, commented, "Crimes against media houses rarely occur, but those committed against journalists have started to increase in number in recent years...and when they occur, authorities do not take them seriously." Muwanga Kakooza, senior reporter for *New Vision*, agreed. "Many times, crimes against journalists are not vigorously prosecuted," he said. "The most common crime against journalists is being beaten or manhandled while taking photographs. Though some journalists have reported these cases to police, little is done to have the culprits prosecuted. For example, *Bukedde* photographer Henry Nsubuga was recently beaten while covering a fire. He reported the incident to the police, but no one has been apprehended yet."

All these abuses are carried out in broad daylight, without discrimination between journalists working for private and state/public media. Media associations have taken legal action against the perpetrators of some of these crimes, but the cases are unresolved, added a panel member. The HRNJ 2009 report also lists 18 Ugandan journalists fired under state duress.

Some panelists said that violence against journalists causes public outrage and draws condemnation from local and international human rights groups, but Amutuhaire disagreed: "There is very limited public outcry when journalists are harassed or treated unfairly," he said. "For instance, when stations like KFM and NTV were closed down by the state, there was limited interest and response by civil society." Sometimes, journalists protest police harassment with media coverage blackouts.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda. Press Freedom Index—2009; p. 6.

The state/public broadcast media outlets have no editorial independence, although their independence is mandated by law. The state minister appoints all top editors and managers. “Public media do receive preferential treatment,” Matovu said. “Although they are supposed to be independent, this is not the case. Even top managers of the state media are appointed by the government.” Amutuhaire added, “There have been reports of people being fired from state-owned media because they accorded the opposition airtime.” However, with print state media, the situation is different; many run stories that criticize the government and the president.

Regarding legal preferences for state media, on paper the media laws are the same across the board. In practice, state-sponsored media enjoy favoritism in several capacities, including access to public information.

Libel is addressed with both criminal and civil penalties. Journalists convicted of libel receive prison sentences, and then the aggrieved party may sue for damages as well—but at least the complainant or the state must provide proof of guilt. Matovu said that although journalists are prosecuted frequently for libel cases, they are imprisoned only rarely. The panelists were not aware of corruption in the judiciary in libel cases, but they said that political influence cannot be ruled out in cases involving the state. Currently, Internet service providers and website hosts are not held legally responsible for content, but that may change when the new communications bill is passed into law.

Article 41 of the constitution guarantees citizens the right to access official information, except where the release of the information is likely to compromise the security or sovereignty of the state or interfere with the right to the privacy of any other person. Parliament’s Access to Information Act also improved access somewhat for the media and citizens. However, the government still has not appointed spokespersons charged with providing this information in some ministries and departments, inhibiting information flow. The panelists said that laws are in place to facilitate access, but hurdles exist and removing them will take a collective effort between the media and government. Furthermore, Matovu noted, women are viewed as second-class citizens in Uganda and often face greater obstacles in access, despite legal and social norms promoting free access to public information.

The government places no restrictions on access to foreign media sources, according to Amutuhaire, and journalists and editors use the Internet freely to access these sources where it is affordable. Ugandan media outlets are free to reprint any foreign news, and some press houses are affiliated with news agencies such as AP, Reuters, and AFP. Doya noted that CNN,

Al Jazeera, and the BBC are available to electronic media outlets, which relay the programs for Ugandans. However, the cost is prohibitively expensive, and not just for citizens; even some small media houses cannot afford access.

Entry into the journalism profession is not restricted politically. However, the existing media law, the Press and Journalists Statute of 1995, sets academic standards for journalists. To qualify, journalists must earn a diploma and be enrolled with the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda (NIJU)—a body put in place by the government to control the media. Journalists must renew their licenses annually, but the panelists said that this rule has not been enforced. Ugandan journalists are free to organize as they wish, which has given rise to the more than 20 professional associations in the country (although only a few are national in scope). During the media law reform process, the media community proposed that the government replace NIJU with the Uganda Journalists Association and empower it to regulate the media.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Uganda Objective Score: 1.91

Most panelists agreed that the quality of stories in print and electronic media has deteriorated. The trend is due to a number of factors, but especially because of financial pressure and stiff competition among media houses that result in compromised press objectivity. However, some panelists offered a more positive perspective. “Days have gone when journalists would publish stories without verifying or cross-checking their facts,” Mugagga said. “Today, most journalists try their level best to get all sides of a story, and

#### 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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almost all editors demand this.” Amutuhaire also said that reporting is generally fair, noting that “some leading outlets, such as the Nation Media Group and the Vision Group, have policies that demand fair coverage and consultation of numerous sources.” He agreed, however, that not all outlets uphold the same standards.

Other members of the media community interviewed in Uganda commended the media’s work, especially in the area of fighting corruption, but singled out a few media houses and journalists as unprofessional and corrupt. For example, some journalists wake up and listen to the radio to lift stories and run them verbatim—without any further cross-checking of facts or additions. This practice is seen mostly in up-country media outlets with limited facilities and reporters. But the panelists said that even some moderately-sized media houses in the cities are guilty of the practice, under the guise of saving money—but at great expense to professional standards. Matovu added, “In the past, journalists in Uganda used to follow accepted professional standards, but recently, journalists seem to prefer money to their careers, and they end up taking bribes to drop a good story—especially those stories that involve public officials embezzling the taxpayers’ money.”

Other media houses, especially electronic outlets, air direct views from call-in listeners, which some panelists deem improper. However, the panelists said that big media houses have clear policies in place on objectivity, and their journalists conduct their work properly.

All the journalists’ associations cooperatively developed and agreed to a code of ethics aligned with international standards, and Nalunkuuma noted that the code is taught in schools. However, some journalists violate the ethics code by taking gifts for coverage and accepting bribes to kill stories. According to the panelists, this is more common in broadcast media and in freelancing. “Among journalists, accepting gifts and payments from their sources in exchange for coverage is a daily occurrence... Some journalists are given money; others a lift and other gifts,” said Stephen Ouma, the general secretary of the Uganda Journalists Union. Kakooza added, “The press and media statue of 1995 criminalized breaches of media ethics, but no journalist has been apprehended yet.”

The newly established independent media council amended the current code of ethics, but because journalists were not consulted widely during the process, few of them accept and respect the changes. The panelists said that although enforcement of the new ethics code at the national level has failed, they have confidence in the new leadership of the Uganda Journalists Association, their professional body, which has agreed to develop collaboratively a new code of ethics. Additionally, some media houses have their own ethical

codes, and journalists caught violating them are either sacked or suspended.

Self-censorship remains a serious problem at all levels, attributable to house style, editorial policy, political pressure, business interests, fear of persecution or arrest, or job insecurity. Powerful businesses interfere with state and private media editorial content, as its advertisements provide the major sustenance for the press. The panelists noted cases in which big advertisers threatened to cancel advertising deals following critical stories about their companies. Kakooza said, “Editors and reporters censor the news for fear of losing their jobs. Some media houses have business and political interests and may not publish some news for fear of annoying their owners or advertisers.” Other panelists said that some stories are dropped by the media on orders from the government or advertisers threatening legal action. Matovu said, “Editors and journalists are sometimes forced to practice self-censorship—especially those working in the state media, like *The New Vision*, where the managing director of the company is appointed by the president. In this case, the editors also restrict the journalists from reporting objectively, and stories about certain companies engaged in dirty deals may be dropped out of fear of losing potential advertising accounts.”

Some panelists said that journalists cover most key events without any restrictions, but for journalists to cover the president’s functions, the first family, and all visiting heads of state, they must acquire security clearance or accreditation. Other panelists disagreed, adding that not all key issues are covered—but they view this as a weakness of the media, not state influence, noting that the military restricts only war zone coverage. On several occasions, the government has threatened to arrest those who cross the red line while reporting on “sensitive” issues, and those who have taken the risk have been summoned before the media offenses desk at police headquarters. Furthermore, Amutuhaire noted, journalists are not allowed in key meetings for the ruling party—especially the parliamentary caucus, which makes key decisions for the country.

Panelists were divided regarding journalist pay. Kakooza said, “there’s a general outcry about the poor pay of journalists. However, journalists in leading media houses are paid better than teachers, policemen, soldiers, and the lower civil service ranks.” Amutuhaire and other panelists disagreed, claiming that Uganda’s journalists are among the most poorly paid professionals in the country, leading to rampant corruption in the media. The situation is worse for freelance journalists, especially those working for FM radio stations. Some receive no pay or professional papers because they are working to build a name, and generally are paid by their sources.

Ssebagala noted, "Last year, the East African Media Institute conducted a survey on remuneration of journalists in the country and found that journalists are paid as little as UGX 500 [\$0.25] per story... this makes journalists more prone to corruption and easier to manipulate." The panelists suggested that a survey on working conditions of journalists in Uganda, especially freelancers, could help the media community find a solution to this persistent problem.

The pay disparity between editors and journalists has increased steadily; editors of big media houses might bring in UGX 10 million and above (\$4,250), while a highly paid reporter in the same media house gets UGX 2 million (\$850) per month. On average, reporters earn between UGX 100,000 and UGX 300,000 (\$40 to \$125) per month, not to mention those who work without any pay to build a portfolio. The panelists concluded that a few well-established media houses do pay reasonable salaries to their staff members and fair rates to freelance journalists. Despite pressure from the trade union movement, the government has failed to come up with a minimum wage act that would encourage fair pay all around. The Uganda Journalists' Union has been unable to conclude any collective bargain agreement for any of its members.

Amutuhaire noted that electronic media outlets devote more time to entertainment (especially music) than news, because the market demands it and such programming is less costly. Nalunkuuma commented, "Indeed, entertainment has surpassed news content in most of the media houses, driven by the urge to generate more advertising revenue." Panelists gave the example of Monitor FM, which had a heavy news focus but nearly closed down until it changed its policy and name to KFM and began to play a lot of music. Now, it is one of the most popular radio stations in terms of listenership. On average, 70 to 80 percent of radio airtime is entertainment programming, and news 20 to 30 percent. For television, the ratio of entertainment to news is about 60:40. However, the panelists said that print media carry more news than entertainment.

The facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are improving and can be attributed to inexpensive imported secondhand equipment, including still and video digital cameras. Some journalists have managed to buy their own secondhand laptop computers at fair prices in this way. Doya noted that *The New Vision* recently bought a new state-of-the-art color printer. More prominent media houses have modern equipment and facilities for their full-time staff journalists, and they often extend loans to their freelance journalists to help them acquire equipment. Still, a majority of journalists continue to work without adequate facilities and even the most basic equipment.

Ssebagala noted, "Most newsrooms have no telephone services to cross-check the accuracy of stories, and journalists are not given field transport." Freelance journalists also suffer disproportionately; some media houses charge freelance journalists a monthly fee to use company computers and cover other supplies.

Panelists said that to reverse this situation, outside assistance is needed, especially in obtaining more computers, still digital cameras, video cameras, and digital recorders. They suggested that any assistance would be channeled best through the Uganda Journalists Association.

Specialized journalism is still in its infancy, according to the panelists. "There is very little niche reporting," Doya said, "and when it occurs, the journalists often lack proper technical backgrounds." Bukedde Political Editor Ahmed Kateregga Musaaazi agreed. "There is a need for specialization, especially in investigative journalism, business analysis, legal and political reporting, environmental reporting, and war reporting," he said.

Some media houses have invested in training some of their reporters. Professional associations, such as the Uganda Journalists Association, the Uganda Journalists Union, and smaller sector-specific associations have also tried to encourage their members to take up specialized training—though the expense is an obstacle. The panelists said that the print media has made more of an effort to build investigative reporting capacity than their counterparts in the electronic media.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Uganda Objective Score: 2.66

Since the last MSI study, a number of FM stations have gone on the air; to date, more than 150 radio owners have been granted licenses, and about 130 are operational. These include mainly private stations, along with some owned by politicians subscribing to the ruling NRM political party and a handful of community radio stations. More television stations, including some pay channels, went on the air in 2009.

At least 20 newspapers and 15 magazines are published in Uganda; of these, only four are daily papers. Some newspapers are state-owned, while others are held privately. The panelists said that Uganda has several objective and reliable news sources, but these sources are costly, especially newspapers. Kakooza noted, "Only a very small segment of the population can afford to buy newspapers. Less than 50,000 people out of a population of over 30 million can afford to buy private newspapers daily." Amutuhaire

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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.

commented that teachers are among those who cannot afford to buy newspapers.

In addition, urban Ugandans have more access than rural Ugandans to alternative news sources, such as the Internet, and those who earn enough use the Internet on their mobile phones. SMS media is used also, and companies including Monitor Publications Limited and True African disseminate news through SMS, but the method has not yet picked up great momentum. Many Ugandans therefore depend mainly on radio—both commercial and community—for information. Matovu commented that buying a small radio and batteries that last a month is more affordable than buying newspapers daily. In other areas, public address systems are being used as local radio stations. Sometimes these systems are used to relay news and programs from major radio stations.

Access to domestic and international media is free; the government imposes no restrictions at all. Foreign publications are sold in Uganda, including the capital city, without any fear. Satellite television is also accessible, though many Ugandans cannot afford the subscription fee, which is about UGX 50,000 (\$23). Internet access is fairly easy, but the cost is still very high compared to other countries in the region. The panelists agreed that the number of Internet users has gone up, as facilities fan out beyond towns. They said also that Ugandans are beginning to appreciate the importance of the Internet as a source of information. Furthermore, the state's ICT ministry has begun a program to supply computers to all schools—even in rural areas—and connect them to Internet facilities. Also, the government has started installing tele-centers to open up Internet access for rural communities. There are also hints that the

cost of Internet service in Uganda could drop drastically in the future, as regional governments plan to install a fiber optic cable.

The panelists said that public media outlets are relatively independent from the state/ruling party—especially the print media, which covers opposition views widely. Matovu noted that the government owns only two newspapers, *New Vision* and *Bukedde*. With electronic media, however, the situation is different. According to the panelists, electronic media still behave as though they are fully government-controlled, allotting excessive time to government propaganda and programs. The panelists commented that the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation television and radio is supposed to run independently of the government, but it fails to uphold that principle.

Uganda has two local news agencies, Uganda Radio Network and Ultimate Media, but they are inefficient—forcing media houses to depend more on networks of correspondents and stringers, foreign news agencies, and other Internet sources. Major media houses can afford the foreign news services, but small media houses mainly depend on news websites for free information. Some journalists credit their sources and others do not.

The panelists noted that private broadcasters have improved the quantity and quality of the programs they produce locally, thereby reducing the number of foreign programs that they must purchase. Matovu said that independent media produce their own news and programs, and in most cases, their products are far superior to the news that the government produces. Private media target a broader audience, while state news covers mostly government officials and programs.

Regarding television programming, stations are now tending to rely more on locally produced programs, because their viewers prefer local shows over foreign options. The most popular foreign television programs include a teleplay called "Another Life" and films from Nigeria commonly known as "Ekinigeria."

With regard to media ownership, Uganda has no law addressing ownership disclosure, but those interested can obtain ownership information easily. According to Amutuhaire, people generally know who owns major media houses. For example, Aga Khan owns the Nation Media Group, state and private shareholders own New Vision Media Group, and the Buganda Kingdom and many others own the Central Broadcasting Service. The panelists estimated that 80 percent of FM radio stations are owned by politicians, mostly NRM supporters and sympathizers. These owners interfere at times with the editorial process and limit time for opposition views. The reverse is true for FM radio stations that opposition politicians own, panelists said: they promote

activities of opposition political figures and devote little time to the activities and initiatives of ruling party officials.

The panelists agreed that the media fail to take minority issues seriously, placing minority-language speakers at a disadvantage. With 56 ethnic groups in Uganda, this is a significant problem, and in response, some regions are developing radio stations and small publications published in minority languages. Musaazi elaborated, “Other than the deaf, as a section of people with disabilities, no other minorities are catered to by Uganda’s media. The Ugandan media are predominantly in English and Luganda, and a few in Kiswahili, Runyakitara, Luo, and Iteso. The media do not cater to the rest of Uganda’s languages. However, with mushrooming FM radio stations in every district, some minority languages are slowly but steadily being included. The state-owned Uganda Broadcasting Corporation has a Gujarati [Indian] and French talk show every weekend, while Voice of Africa has Arabic and Nuabian.” Kakooza added that community radios are located in almost all districts, covering minority communities.

The media tend to cover social issues without government restrictions. However, Doya commented that sexual minorities are not always represented fairly; he noted that a presenter on Capital FM, a private radio station, was suspended following pressure from the government after he spoke in favor of gay rights.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

#### Uganda Objective Score: 2.35

The panelists were divided on the sustainability of Ugandan media business management practices. Some said that public and private media operate as profit-generating businesses, and generally are run in an efficient manner. Those media companies hire competent finance professionals to ensure that businesses remain profitable, panelists said, and even the state broadcast media have improved their management, generating revenue to supplement what they receive from government to stay competitive. Other panelists were less positive. Davis commented, “Media houses, particularly radio, are not managed professionally with accounting and management principles,” often because they were launched by individual businessmen, politicians, or faith-based institutions. Uganda has a few small media houses that are run like family businesses, employing relatives of owners or friends—but many of these outlets wind up collapsing. Many community media outlets struggle as well; they are largely dependent on donor funding, and once the donors pull out, they fail.

Private media have multiple sources of revenue: the sale of copies, advertisements, sponsored programs, donations, and commercial printing services to outsiders (for outlets such as the *New Vision* and *The Monitor*, which have their own printing presses). Most revenue comes from the advertising sector, however.

Amutuhaire said that advertising is fairly developed in the country. Some media houses have sales executives assigned to work with agencies, and top companies in the country rely on agencies, both local and international, for their advertisements. Doya noted, “To a significant extent, advertising agencies support the media, and there are a number of these, such as Saatchi & Saatchi, Lowe Scanad, Moringa Ogilvy, ZK Advertising, etc. Advertising firms work with all media formats, but mainly in urban areas. However, some advertising agencies are very selective about the outlets they will work with, and they sometimes exert editorial pressure on their clients.”

Kakooza said that the advertising agencies are not well developed compared to other countries, and most radio stations produce the advertisements they run. Furthermore, Mugagga commented that advertisers influence greatly the editorial policies of media outlets. “Mobile telephone networks like MTN supply massive amounts of advertising for private media outlets. Consequently, no negative stories about MTN appear in their publications or are aired on such stations,” he said.

Many panelists agreed that media managers feel pressed to run more commercials in their programs, given that advertising is the only substantial source of revenue. Mugagga said, “At the *Daily Monitor*, where I once worked,

#### 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.

news pages could be withdrawn at the eleventh hour and be replaced with ads—however late they came. This would anger reporters, who saw all their day’s effort wasted. But the editors would always remind them that it was the revenue from such ads that paid their salaries.”

The government only rarely extends direct subsidies to the independent media. But as the government supplies the biggest stream of advertising, it does end up fueling some independent media houses as well—therefore, editorial interference cannot be ruled out. The panel noted that at times the government threatens to withdraw its business from media houses that run stories criticizing the ruling party.

A few media outlets carry out market research to evaluate their performance in terms of sales, listenership, program quality, area of coverage, and audience needs. Preferred methods include call-ins, questionnaires, and hiring outside firms. Survey results are used in the design of business plans—but only in the larger companies that can afford to hire expert advice, according to Amutuhaire.

Two companies produce circulation figures and broadcast ratings. The South Africa office of the Audit Bureau of Circulations conducts circulation surveys for *New Vision* and its sister papers, such as *Bukedde*; and Steadman conducts research for some FM radio stations. Anybody may easily access their findings for a fee. The panel agreed that media outlets generally accept these figures, but that does not prevent some radio stations from claiming falsely to have the widest listenership. Many FM radio stations rely on the number of callers into their station to get an estimate of their reach.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Uganda Objective Score: 2.57

Uganda has four national-level media owner associations: the National Association of Broadcasters, the Uganda Newspaper Editors and Proprietors Association, the Uganda Publishers Association, and the Editors Forum. They lobby the government on behalf of their members on tax and policy issues, and on many occasions they have succeeded. However, according to the panelists, they are driven more by business interests than professional standards. Furthermore, not all media houses belong to these bodies; the panelists attributed declining association membership to a duplication of roles and duties.

Many associations represent working journalists as well. They include the Uganda Journalists Association, which specializes in professional issues; the Uganda Journalists Union, and; small associations focused on specific sectors (such as the

environment, education, health, and parliamentary issues). The Journalists Safety Committee handles press freedom and media rights issues. Some panelists said that professional associations and human rights groups step up to defend the media and condemn acts of violence against journalists, other panelists qualified their success. Amutuhaire commented that although these associations do try to advocate for journalism rights, “their activities are... on a limited scale, and have not created a force that is respected by employers and state agencies.”

Membership is determined by application and payment of membership dues. The panelists expressed concern over the fact that many members fail to pay their dues, yet still have high expectations in terms of services. Without reliable payment of dues, many associations have been forced to close. To help address these concerns, the Uganda Journalists Association is working to form a national coalition body for all media associations. Talks are underway, with assistance from the Danish International Development Agency.

Several NGOs in Uganda work with the media to defend press freedom. The Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, Human Rights Network Uganda, and Action for Development are among the groups that support advocacy initiatives, fund lawyers to represent journalists, support media interests in legal reforms, write reports underlining violations of journalists’ rights, and sponsor human rights training. International NGOs and organizations that support the media include the Foundation for African Development, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and the Danish International Development Agency. Kakooza commented, “NGOs, like the Human Rights Initiative, do support freedom of speech. At times, these organizations march with journalists during demonstrations, and actively

## 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.

speaking out about press freedom. NGOs come out to fight for journalists who are in trouble, especially with the state." Matovu pointed out that NGOs are based primarily in cities, though, leaving rural journalists without protection. "Journalists in rural areas are frequently abused, and crimes against them go unreported," she noted.

Uganda has many journalism study options available. Media training institutions offer quality degrees and journalism courses, and Uganda has more than 30 private and public universities, with 20 offering a degree in journalism and mass communications. In 1988, Makerere University (a public institution) offered the nation's first degree program in journalism and mass communication. "Makerere University's department of mass communication, in partnership with the International Labour Organization's Small Enterprise Media in Africa, has done a great job in training journalists, especially in audience research and environmental journalism," said Rose Kigongo, a freelance journalist from Masaka.

Panelists did point to some issues regarding journalism education. According to Nalunkuuma, many upcoming media institutes are profit-oriented rather than focused on the quality of the journalists they train. Apart from Makerere, the quality of some university programs is questionable, and schools tend to focus on theoretical instruction because of the lack of practical training equipment, according to the panelists. In addition, the Ugandan media sector does not offer enough opportunities to absorb all graduating journalists.

Journalism students who have the chance to train abroad tend to abandon the profession upon their return to Uganda, disillusioned by the poor pay. Some media houses offer short-term in-house training programs, and many of their journalists have benefited. The training courses most in need are investigative journalism and specialized training in the various media sectors.

Newsprint and printing facilities are held privately and run as profit-making businesses without any government interference. The panelists agreed that even with government-held printing facilities, private media are serviced typically without any restrictions. However, Doya pointed out isolated incidents of printers shunning certain publications. For example, *The Independent's* maiden issue was delayed because the government threatened to withhold official business from the newspaper's printer. Otherwise, the panelists said, the media's biggest burden is the high taxes on newsprint. The government is the majority shareholder of the New Vision Printing and Publishing company, but this press helps other newspapers from within and beyond Uganda to print at reasonable rates.

Media distribution channels are in private hands and are managed efficiently, but the government controls the transmitters, which can be switched off at any time in case of disagreements between the state and media outlets.

## List of Panel Participants

**Stephen Ouma**, general secretary, Uganda Journalists Union, Kampala

**Jane Nakyondwa**, senior journalist, Mama FM, Kampala

**Ahmed Kateregga Musaaazi**, political editor, *Bukedde*; former president, Uganda Journalists Association, Jinja

**Saulo Wokulira Ssebaggala, Jr.**, program coordinator, Human Rights Network for Journalists, Kampala

**David Muwanga**, business writer, *The New Vision*, Kampala

**David Malinga Doya**, senior writer, *The East African*, Entebbe

**Julian Amutuhairwe**, acting editor, KFM radio station, Mbale

**Rose Kigongo**, freelance journalist, Masaka

**Diana Nalunkuuma**, lecturer, Kampala University, Kansanga

**Robert Mugagga**, journalist, *Weekly Observer*, Kampala

**Isaac Ssenabulya**, parliamentary correspondent for Top TV, Kampala

**Moses Lutaaya**, editor, Bunyoro FM, Hoima

## Moderator and Author

**Muwanga Kakooza**, journalist, *The New Vision*, Kampala

## Coordinator

**Herbert Mukasa Lumansi**, vice president, Uganda Journalists Association, Kampala