
Additionally, the effects of Ethiopia's 2009 Anti-Terror Proclamation are becoming evident. Few independent publications remain in Ethiopia, after threats forced the independent weekly Addis Neger to stop publishing in late 2009 and several of its editors to flee the country.



ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian government's negative attitude towards the media and oppression of journalists changed little in the past year, with continued imprisonment of journalists and stifling of independent voices. In addition to threatening and arresting journalists, the government actively censored politically sensitive blogs and other sources and jammed foreign broadcasts.

Ahead of the May 2010 general elections, the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), won elections by a landslide. But the International Press Institute and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange underlined the absence of independent media voices in the lead-up to the vote and decried the harassment and intimidation of journalists. Additionally, the effects of Ethiopia's 2009 Anti-Terror Proclamation are becoming evident. Few independent publications remain in Ethiopia, after threats forced the independent weekly *Addis Neger* to stop publishing in late 2009 and several of its editors to flee the country.

On the new media front, Internet access remains very low and prohibitively expensive; most urban residents depend on Internet cafés. Rural residents continue to live in the "media dark zone," as described by last year's MSI panelists. Although access is low and the government actively filters and blocks sites that it deems threatening, bloggers and online journalists within and beyond Ethiopia's borders are fueling political debate by providing alternative news sources. A small but growing number of Ethiopians are tapping social media websites to exchange information, as well.

Judging by the MSI panel discussion, clearly much work remains to help Ethiopian journalists gain their freedom. According to the MSI panelists, Ethiopia's constitution guarantees the freedom of speech and the press, but major challenges lie in enforcing the provisions and laws. The average scores for Objective 1 (free speech) placed it in the middle of the unsustainable, mixed-system range of the MSI study. The lowest-scoring objective was Objective 5 (supporting institutions), near the border of the anti-free press range and the unsustainable, mixed-system range. Objective 2 (professional standards of journalism) scored quite low, as well.

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

ETHIOPIA AT A GLANCE

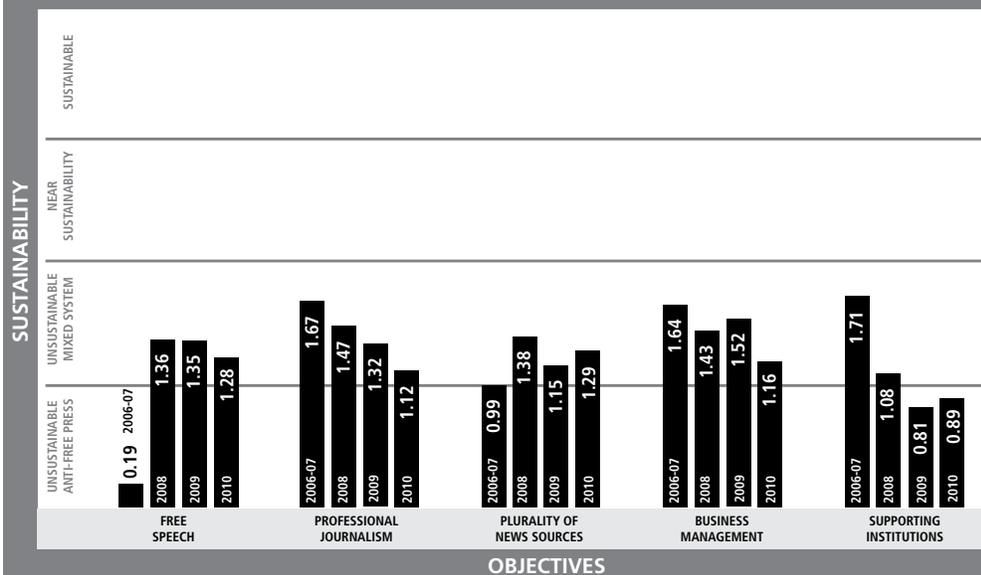
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 93,815,992 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Addis Ababa
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Oromo 34.5%, Amara 26.9%, Somalie 6.2%, Tigraway 6.1%, Sidama 4%, Guragie 2.5%, Welaita 2.3%, Hadiya 1.7%, Affar 1.7%, Gamo 1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, other 11.3% (2007 Census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Orthodox 43.5%, Muslim 33.9%, Protestant 18.6%, traditional 2.6%, Catholic 0.7%, other 0.7% (2007 Census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Amarigna 32.7%, Oromigna 31.6%, Tigrigna (official) 6.1%, Somaligna 6%, Guaragigna 3.5%, Sidamigna 3.5%, Hadiyigna 1.7%, other 14.8%, English (official) (major foreign language taught in schools), Arabic (official) (1994 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$32.41 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$1,010 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 42.7% (male 50.3%, female 35.1%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Girma Woldegiorgis (since October 8, 2001)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

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

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ETHIOPIA



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.28

Everyone familiar with the Ethiopian media emphasizes that constitutional provisions provide strong guarantees for free speech in the country. The panelists hailed the constitutional protections but criticized the law enforcement challenges that continue to plague the sector. They stressed that legal and administrative regulations that directly and indirectly affect media freedom are not sufficiently clear, remain scattered among different laws, and are implemented unsatisfactorily.

One panelist expressed his grave dissatisfaction with the lack of enforcement of free speech provisions, explaining that not only has press freedom eroded since 1995, but the pressure has intensified in the last few years. A series of administrative, legal, and political measures are now aiming to paralyze the private press and indoctrinate the public media.

The panelists expressed concern that the media, rather than the government, tend to shoulder the burden of defending these constitutional rights, with no visible improvement in the last 12 months. One panelist questioned private-media journalists' motivation to vigorously or constructively challenge the government on press freedom issues. "The blame should be shared by all parties involved in the process," he said. "...the broadcast law reinforces the right of access to information, but members of the media have

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.

not adequately worked to defend their rights and challenge restrictive regulations."

The fears expressed by last year's MSI panelists—that the anti-terror legislation could be used against independent journalists—proved well founded. *Addis Neger* journalists were intimidated by threats that they would have to answer to charges under the legislation, and this led them to stop publishing and flee the country.

In its report analyzing the law's likely impact on independent media, human rights group Article 19 noted, "Of particular concern is the broad definition of terrorism, which would appear to apply to many legitimate acts of expression; the undermining of protection of journalists' sources including by surveillance and an excessive duty to cooperate and provide information; and vaguely defined provisions on 'encouraging' terrorism that would criminalize the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and have a real chilling effect on debate on matters of public interest."¹

One panelist brought up an encouraging development: the weekly *Fortune's* libel case, which ended in the paper's favor last year. The civil suit was filed by a real estate company but thrown out of court. The panelist commented that the case is an example of how "the press is afforded protection and privileges guaranteed by the constitution," but added that vigorous enforcement of the protection of the press will only come with the development of the whole judicial system. "It cannot be viewed separately from overarching questions of civil liberties and social development," the panelist concluded.

Broadcast licensing is a critical issue for the media, and the majority of the panelists agreed that licensing has not improved in the last year. Despite a broadcast law that stipulates free and fair access to licenses for media practitioners, significant challenges remain in the administration and implementation of the law. The licensing agency is not an independent body; it is controlled by the ruling party and led by state political appointees.

However, as reported in last year's MSI, panelists could not say that the political appointments have politicized the licensing process. The process set forth by the authorities is clear and transparent, they claimed, but added that a couple of former journalists that applied for press licenses were informally denied, despite meeting all requirements, thus revealing violations. The agency has an appeals process for applicants who are displeased with the process, but no reports of denied applications surfaced in the last 12 months at the agency.

¹ "Article 19 concerned about broad definition of terrorism in new legislation." Article 19: April 5, 2010. Available at: http://www.ifex.org/ethiopia/2010/04/05/anti_terrorism_proclamation/ (Accessed June 19, 2010.)

Media practitioners may enter the market without any business restrictions. Nevertheless, some legal restrictions alarm media owners and journalists. Regulations pertaining to the new media law, for example, restrict owners of one medium (such as print) from owning and operating another type (such as broadcast). Supporters of the regulation claim that its purpose is to prevent media monopolies and promote professional ownership standards. Critics, on the other hand, view the regulation as a part of a grand strategy on the part of the government to ensure that the private media remain financially incapacitated and institutionally weak.

Furthermore, proponents claim that since authorities began enforcing the law, private newspaper owners have removed themselves from editorial positions and transferred all professional responsibilities to hired journalists, effectively barring owners from having a say in their papers. The move was hailed by some members of the media community for promoting editorial independence in private media, and preventing owners' vested interests from creeping into the editorial room, thus strengthening professionalism and ethical journalism.

Financial burden, however, remains a worrying obstacle for the private media. The media do not receive any incentives in fees or taxes; one panelist mentioned that she has been unable to pay the hefty tax on broadcasting equipment since last year. Some representatives of the print media express the belief that the sector is in imminent danger of collapsing due to unbearable price hikes in roll-paper and other operational expenses. Newsprint is still among the highly taxed import items, leading to ever-increasing printing costs. In addition, the value of the Ethiopian birr continues to slide against major currencies. The birr has devalued drastically to 20 percent of the U.S. dollar, hitting newspapers with inflationary costs. In response, street vendors are raising their prices, passing on the increases to readers and advertisers.

Regarding crimes against journalists, the panelists reported that generally, journalists, bloggers, and photographers feel safe. But a feeling of insecurity is taking a firmer hold among some segments of the media community—especially given some bold attempts by non-state actors to dictate media content. One panelist noted, "The silence of the government on the brazen attack on Amare Aregawi [managing editor for the *Reporter*, attacked by unidentified assailants in 2008] will continue to negatively affect the sense of security of journalists in the private press, and erode their trust in the judicial process. Furthermore, the government has not tried to disprove critics who argue that it has not taken steps to assure the press of its rights and stature in society." Another panelist noted that although attacks are rare, threats are not—but most incidents fail to make it to police stations and courts.

A couple of examples illustrate cause for private media journalists to feel insecure. The Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International (WiPC) and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) reported that Ezedin Mohamed, editor of the private *Al-Quds*, was jailed in January for criticizing statements made by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Mohamed was released in September 2010, but in November, police arrested his son, Akram Ezedin, the 17-year-old acting editor of *Al-Quds*—despite the fact that under Ethiopia's Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation, pre-trial detention is illegal.² In another example, Wubeshet Taye, the former editor-in-chief of *Awramba Times*, was summoned to the Broadcast Authority to explain the content of his paper. Officials objected to what they considered an anti-government tone and a leaning toward opposition ideologies.

One radio journalist stated that harassment from the private sector and other non-state actors is on the rise. State media photographers, along with reporters from the private press, have been warned, threatened, and assaulted in separate incidents, one panelist said, while the government fails to uphold its responsibility to protect the constitutional rights of the media. Furthermore, panelists agreed that crimes against journalists are not well publicized in the media, and hence fail to draw public attention and outcry.

Preferential treatment for state media outlets is still rampant, with the panelists finding no improvements in the last year worth mentioning. The government finances its media outlets, boards are stocked with politicians, and the ruling party handpicks managers, robbing the institutions of vital editorial independence. Policies stipulate that state media must be editorially independent; however, in practice, the state-run media are steered by political decisions and they engage in extremely partisan reporting, panelists argued.

One panelist said that often, private journalists that approach government offices for information are turned away. There is an unspoken expectation that only state media journalists have full rights to seek and obtain information. State media journalists are afforded unparalleled access to public officials and information at government offices. One panelist recounted an instance at the Broadcast Authority in which the officials delayed a press conference because the state-run ETV was late and it would not be fair to begin without ETV's presence.

² Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International (WiPC) and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange; November 16, 2010. "Alert: Editor released, his son jailed." Available at: http://www.ifex.org/ethiopia/2010/11/16/ezedin_release_son_imprisoned/ (Accessed on June 19, 2010.)

One panelist described the understanding of public and state media in Ethiopia as confused. In other countries, the government might own the public media, but their boards are made up of representatives from across the public spectrum. Public media rightfully should have a significant element of public governance, panelists said, but in Ethiopia, the public media are fully state-owned and operated and led by political appointees, thus denying their independence.

Another panelist differed, insisting that laws in the country do not explicitly favor state media over private media, but acknowledging that laws are not always upheld in practice. "We cannot deny that there are difficult hurdles in the implementation of the rights of the media and self-expression, but policy and legislative tools do not infringe on media rights," the panelist said.

Libel is addressed by civil code; technically, press offenses are not punishable with prison terms. Recent examples show that the burden of proof falls on the plaintiff to convince courts of a press offense; inability to prove a story true has resulted in plaintiff losses. However, little evidence exists to support claims that public officials are held accountable for wrongdoing.

One panelist said that it is easier than ever to gather information. In the past year in particular, journalists have seen improved access to information, panelists reported. Still, more work is needed to strengthen the Ethiopian bureaucracy's capacity to uphold the information act. Some panelists argued that government offices are forthcoming with public information only when it is deemed not harmful to official interests. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopian Airlines, and others cooperate eagerly when they need the media's help, one panelist noted, but they back away when confronted with stories that are not necessarily "image-friendly."

More than access to information, the lack of organized information is probably the biggest issue with which journalists should be concerned, panelists said. They expressed concern and frustration over what they called gross mismanagement of information in many offices. Many communications and public relations officials are unable to retrieve data from their colleagues, rendering their positions useless and encouraging reporters to bypass the public relations offices in favor of higher officials, using personal contacts.

Regarding the media's access to news sources, some panelists described complaints that the Voice of America Amharic service is jammed in some areas, while other panelists commented that the service continues to reach audiences in certain areas. IPI and IFEX reported that in March, the prime

minister ordered all VOA broadcasts blocked, describing VOA content as "destabilizing propaganda" and comparing it to Radio Mille Collines (the Rwanda radio station notoriously involved in the Rwandan genocide). VOA and international media organizations condemned the comparison vigorously. In late March, VOA launched Amharic-language satellite broadcasting, enabling Ethiopians to listen to the broadcasts on an audio channel—but only about one percent have access to satellite television.³

Panelists confirmed that the practice remains of blocking some opposition blogs and websites. According to OpenNet Initiative (ONI), "The Ethiopian government maintains strict control over access to the Internet and online media, despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and free access to information." In 2008-2009, ONI tested Ethiopia's only ISP (the Ethiopia Telecommunications Corporation, or ETC) and published a report describing the results. The report states, "The ETC's blocking efforts appear to focus on independent media, blogs, and political reform and human rights sites though the filtering is not very thorough. Many prominent sites that are critical of the Ethiopian government remain available within the country."⁴ The ONI report adds that political bloggers are the most affected. Blocked Blogspot sites "include Ethiopian and international commentators on politics and culture, including popular blogs EthioPundit and Enset."⁵

A couple of panelists, however, shared a very different view on the alleged censorship of online sources. They said that some of the blocked blogs are dangerously radical and should not be considered credible international news sources, in their view.

Journalists and editors are able to use the Internet to access news sources, although Internet connectivity in Ethiopia remains among the poorest on the continent. According to the International Telecommunications Union, less than one percent of Ethiopia's population (which now exceeds 90 million, according to the *CIA World Factbook*) has access to the Internet.⁶ As the OpenNet Initiative reported, Ethiopia's

³ "IPI welcomes launch of VOA satellite broadcasts." IPI/IFEX: March 29, 2010. Available at: http://www.ifex.org/ethiopia/2010/03/29/voa_satellite/ (Accessed June 19, 2011.)

⁴ Ethiopia Country Profile, OpenNet Initiative. Available at: <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/ethiopia> (Accessed June 19, 2011).

⁵ OpenNet Initiative, *Ibid*.

⁶ According to the International Telecommunications Union, Ethiopia has 0.75 Internet users per 100 inhabitants. See "Key 2000-2010 country data (Excel format); Internet Users" http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reporting/ShowReportFrame.aspx?ReportName=WTI/InformationTechnologyPublic&RP_intYear=2008&RP_intLanguageID=1 (Accessed June 19, 2011).

rate is the second lowest in sub-Saharan Africa; only Sierra Leone is lower.⁷

The cost of Internet subscriptions is still extremely high for poorly paid journalists. An Ethiopian blog, citing 2009 International Telecommunications Union figures, reported that Ethiopia is the second-most expensive country in the world in terms of broadband access cost as a percentage of average income. As noted on the blog, "According to ITU figures, it [fixed broadband service] would cost nearly 21 times the average monthly salary in Ethiopia."⁸ Cost is a highly prohibitive factor in obtaining most international news, but the Ethiopia has no laws that govern the importation of any foreign language publications.

As for entry into the profession, no groups of reporters receive special privileges or restrictions, but sometimes reporting on certain events requires special permission.

Generally, journalists are free to organize their own associations to protect their rights. In the year under study, the government made no noticeable threats to undermine involvement in media associations.

The state does not officially monitor access to Ethiopian journalism institutions; anyone interested is free to apply to journalism school. However, the panelists reported that some universities give state media journalists enrollment preference in journalism master's programs.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.12

Regarding professional standards, the panelists agreed that reporting is not satisfactorily objective or fair. News sources are not considered factually reliable; corrections on stories published soon after the stories appear are now commonplace. Often reporters do not verify their facts before publishing stories, although panelists said that they have seen some improvements in the last two years.

Additionally, journalists often fail to consult a wide variety of relevant sources or include all sides of a given story. One panelist explained that this practice is due in part to the scarcity of sources willing to go on the record. "It is difficult to find private and independent consultants willing to share their observations on public interest issues," the panelist said.

⁷ Ibid, OpenNet Initiative.

⁸ Nazret.com "Ethiopia world's second most expensive place to get a fixed broadband connection," Available at: http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2010/09/02/ethiopia_world_s_second_most_expensive_p (Accessed June 19, 2010).

As for media ethics, the panelists agreed that none of Ethiopia's journalistic associations have developed ethical standards. Reporters routinely violate commonly accepted ethical standards. For example, reportedly some journalists have accepted gifts in exchange for positive coverage. The practice is not limited to a specific media organization; rather, it is considered culturally ingrained across media houses.

Some panelists attribute the professional and ethical shortcomings to poor education. One panelist explained, "There is a lack of sufficient professional training for journalists; in fact, most journalists practicing today never received proper journalism training. Addis Ababa University and other universities have journalism departments, but its graduates typically do not join the media. Instead, they opt to join fields such as public relations, opening up the journalism field for unqualified journalists who do not report fairly and objectively."

Self-censorship continues to be widespread, in part due to perceived (or real) threats to journalists' safety, or to avoid legal problems. An additional layer of self-censorship comes from the fear of offending incumbent or opposition political parties and powerful business interests. In the last few years, those entities have flexed their financial muscle to silence the media. One panelist commented, "Journalists are sometimes afraid of upsetting a multitude of stakeholders when they want to pursue investigative leads that could potentially implicate the powerful elite in government and business circles." One panelist noted that the inability to rely on the justice system for protection is the main reason he chooses not to cross red lines in his work.

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).

Considering whether or not journalists cover all key issues, panelists said that in normal circumstances, journalists can and do cover all sorts of events and important subjects—provided that the coverage is not likely to bring harm to the writers, one panelist qualified. Panelists recounted the story of a Radio Fana journalist that was in charge of an investigative program and was threatened and nearly kidnapped. The incident served as a symbolic warning for all journalists considering embarking on similar projects and an impetus to think twice before mentioning names and leveling accusations in the press.

Subjects that journalists hesitate to cover include the military, national security, and corruption scandals. The panelists gave the example of a major scam in which thousands of people lost a collective sum of an estimated 46 million birr to a business owner that promised to take them to South Africa for the World Cup. The promotion was a hoax, and although millions were lost, the media coverage of the issue was disproportionately low, according to some panelists. Another issue that the media fails to cover extensively is the abuse and deaths of Ethiopian immigrants in the Middle East, panelists said.

A sense of unease also prevails among journalists interested in reporting in detail on natural disasters, such as floods in regional states. Reporters fear that such stories might irritate state as well as federal authorities, who might accuse them of exaggerating the gravity of the disasters. Another panelist stressed that media houses do not have the financial means to report on events outside the capital city of Addis Ababa or follow up on earlier stories, thus limiting the private media's coverage issues of local and regional importance to people who live outside of the city.

Although pay levels for managers and editors continued to increase in the past year, pay levels are still too low to discourage unethical tendencies and corruption in a meaningful or sustained manner. Ever-increasing living costs, coupled with low salaries, are said to have fostered a culture of petty corruption in the media. For state-run media outlets, one panelist said that salaries at the Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency range from less than ETB 100 (\$6) to a maximum of ETB 4,000 (\$240).

As noted in last year's MSI, poorly paid journalists that cover events will often ask organizers for transportation allowances and per diems, leading to a backlash from many institutions. Allegations of cash-for-coverage deals have hurt the profession's credibility in recent years.

Entertainment programs dominate Ethiopian media and eclipse news and information programs—particularly at regional radio stations, which focus heavily on health and

social issues. Panelists trace the comparative dearth of informative programs not necessarily to a lack of regulations, but more to media managers' need to offset costs through advertiser-friendly entertainment programming. One panelist added that media houses tend to follow the public in selecting discussion topics. Nevertheless, last year's MSI panelists reported that public and private radio broadcasts alike have made significant strides in customizing entertainment programs for the young, and airing programs on social topics such as marriage and health.

From a technical standpoint, media facilities continue to improve slowly. Individual journalists still struggle on this front, but more are gaining access to computers and production equipment. Challenges remain with reliable, affordable Internet access.

As for niche reporting, much work remains, although the panelists did report some encouraging progress. The loss of *Addis Neger* is a blow to the media community in this regard, as it had made a particularly strong push to provide hard-hitting coverage of economic and political issues. Last year's MSI panelists also singled out Sheger FM's original news programming—particularly global business news—for praise. They also lauded Zami FM's grassroots approach to news gathering: sending its reporters to the lowest levels of public administrations for new information sources.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.29

In terms of content, Ethiopian news media cannot be described as pluralistic, even in urban settings. Given the prohibitive costs of newspapers and Internet, radio is the major source of news.

Finding media that reflect the full political spectrum is difficult. The government media are engaged largely in "positive coverage," as part of a broader image-building campaign, and communicating the government's activities and policies to the public. For people who get their news constantly from ETV, the country must sound like a haven of unparalleled progress, one panelist said. On the other end, the panelists alleged, the private media expend too much energy criticizing the performance of the government, and opinions and analysis dominate rather than balanced and objective news. Furthermore, across the sector, most journalists focus on activities in the capital city.

The panelists were unanimous that quite a number of FM radio stations operate in the country but the government has still not allowed private AM radio broadcasters to operate.

Rural audiences rely heavily on state AM radio, with the state-owned Ethiopian Television (ETV), still the country's sole television broadcaster, in second place. Community radio is dominated by music and sports. Print products are largely not accessible.

One panelist said that the FM radio sector has indeed seen improvements in allowing more private operators, citizen access to media outlets remains extremely low across much of the country. Income levels in most regional towns prohibit citizens from accessing online news sources, while foreign publications are not affordable for journalists or citizens. In addition to the reports that authorities jam the Amharic service of VOA intermittently, websites such as nazret.com have also been blocked inside Ethiopia, and the ESAT satellite television is also blocked.

Furthermore, ONI noted that Internet cafés are required to log the names and addresses of their customers, and those who fail to do so face prison sentences; and bloggers say that they believe that authorities monitor their communications.⁹ Social networking sites are not blocked and are accessed by Ethiopians, albeit a small portion of urban residents. VOIP and related Internet services are fully functional in Ethiopia. Satellite television is available, and free satellite channels are available in many urban settings, but only for those who can afford satellite dishes.

The panelists were unanimous that public media do not reflect the views of the political spectrum. One panelist commented, "The government media is not independent from the state and the ruling party, and does not follow the public media model." Journalists in the state-owned

media do not feel bound by a public interest mission. Rather, panelists say, they are under tight state control that aims to boost the security of the ruling party. Panelists agreed that the line between public media and government media remains highly blurred in Ethiopia, with one panelist asserting that the public media are not a forum for alternative views or opinions; rather, they are dominated by the ruling party's philosophy.

Ethiopia has no independent news agencies for gathering or distributing news for print or broadcast media. Currently, two news agencies distribute and sell their services to papers, television stations, and radio stations. One of them, the Ethiopia News Agency (ENA), is state-owned and delivers its news for free; while the other, WALTA, is affiliated with the ruling party and boasts a vast network and ample resources throughout the country. One panelist commented, "The two news agencies are not independent; they tend to sway towards propaganda rather than information." Media houses often turn to international agencies on foreign as well as local issues. Usually journalists mention sources when they take news stories from foreign sources, according to the panelists.

Private news media produce their own features and programs, but they also purchase a small portion of their content from production companies. Outsourcing is becoming common with private FM stations, in particular. Although private media use news content from foreign sources (such as AP and BBC) and state-owned news sources, they rely mostly on their own reporters to collect news stories.

The panelists said that they see worryingly little transparency in media ownership, and much of the knowledge about media owners is based on speculation. One panelist noted that although the law clearly states permit requirements, ownership remains veiled from the public. Private media are concentrated in the hands of a few. Allegedly, several business conglomerates are behind some major private publications, but the lack of proof fuels the culture of gossip and secrecy surrounding media ownership. In most cases, media staff report that owners interfere heavily in the content and tone of reporting.

The panelists confirmed that there is no foreign investment in the media; in actuality, the country's media law disallows outside investors. Although the complete absence of foreign media investment is detrimental in terms of lost potential, some panelists noted that the ban plays a positive role in stopping unwanted interest groups from abroad working actively in the country under the guise of media investment.

The panelists differed regarding the degree to which the media reflect social interests. One panelist argued that

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

the community radio stations scattered across the country provide this type of content. “In the last two years alone, seven zonal radio stations and eight community stations have sprung up across regions, with minority language services,” she said, adding that the community radio stations “...have set up boards and management structures in the Southern Region [and] entertain all aspects of social issues.” These outlets discuss gender and health issues without limits, she continued, and participation remains high and inclusive.

Another panelist acknowledged the existence of numerous radio stations but indicated that a big question mark lurks regarding the spectrum of views represented in those media houses. “We cannot say that, in the current situation, a range of issues are being addressed, especially for issues that are deemed socially and politically sensitive,” the panelist explained. Another panelist shared his view that the Ethiopian media do not reflect social interests; rather, international sports and entertainment news dominate the agenda.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Ethiopia Objective Score: 1.16

The majority of Ethiopian media outlets do not function as efficient, effective, or well-organized businesses. Still, some independent private media houses with business-savvy owners are profitable and well managed. One example is Media and Communication Center, which publishes three weekly papers, “yellow pages,” and other related businesses. The other is the weekly *Fortune*, an English business that has drawn unparalleled interest from foreign and local advertisers

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.

for its calculated penetration into the emerging business sector. Additionally, panelists mentioned that two private FM stations and two private papers have reportedly developed sound business and strategic plans that have helped them spur profits.

Various donors have become involved funding Ethiopia’s private media. Ads and sales are the lifeline of private papers, and generate the bulk of revenue at government-owned media. Some panelists argued that papers and radio stations rely almost entirely on advertising for survival—making the publications, which are already financially weak, vulnerable to interference by business interests. This influence results in favorable coverage and skewed facts to benefit financial backers.

Panelists agreed that private print media have been particularly prone to influence from business owners. The panelists described this problem as easily evident, while the government finances—and influences—its media outlets. As one panelist noted, many private media organizations are not able to sustain themselves in the media market because of financial constraints, yet state media are set up to survive for the long term. “The government is financing its media with the presumption that the firms will gradually become capable of generating their own finance through advertising and sponsorships,” the panelist said.

The advertising market for media houses is growing. Businesses are gaining awareness of the widening audience base in the country, with advertisers showing a preference for television, followed by radio. Media professionals, meanwhile, are improving their skills in using advertising revenue to shore up their finances, enabling them to pay off mounting printing and staff costs. Radio stations, state-owned and private alike, are increasing their already-large share of advertising revenue, capitalizing on their vast audience base in urban and rural settings.

Print media also take a share of the advertising revenue, but the Internet, because of its extremely low penetration and slow connectivity, has seen almost no advertising revenue come its way. Media outlets market themselves directly to advertisers through hired sales officers, while by private communication and advertisement companies produce advertisements.

Media outlets are financed mainly through advertisements and sponsorships. Sales officers at media houses scramble to fill airwaves and pages with advertisements, and a number of international NGOs sponsor social programs that provide key financial support for media houses. The panelists emphasized that copy sales are no longer profitable. In fact, many editors complain that increasing circulation works to their

disadvantage, because it only ends up spiking printing costs. Hence, copies are a source of financial loss for the big papers (those with more than 40 pages, with color insertions). One panelist pointed to a weekly that publishes issues with more than 50 pages—40 of which are filled with ads. Mounting pressure to generate more revenue and offset costs has pushed papers to expand their ad pages indefinitely.

Additionally, the rampant inflation that has eroded the value of Ethiopian currency and constrained cash flow has forced papers to look for more advertising to meet their financial goals. Ads are steadily taking over almost half of the space in private print media, and radio stations are dedicating more and more program time to ads. One panelist confirmed that he became so concerned with the growing dominance of ads in his station's radio programs that he raised the issue with his editors and colleagues. As another panelist put it, the media have failed to fully understand how to merge what he called the "audience market" and the "advertisement market." He explained, "You must first win the audience market to seek and bring in advertising revenue...but now, the practice focuses disproportionately on attracting the advertisement market."

The panelists stressed that the biggest advertisers in the country are the government and large state-owned companies. Unsurprisingly, the state-owned media are the main beneficiaries of the government ad market—despite common understanding that the government should distribute advertising fairly to all media houses.

The state-owned ETV, as the only television station, monopolizes the television advertisement business beyond government ads, as well. Normally, businesses take their ads and sponsorships to ETV, rather than the station pursuing advertisers and competing with rivals. Most advertising is given to media houses based on content popularity, not necessarily the distinct content quality. International sport programs draw some of the most expensive ads on radio, while the two weeklies with the highest circulation (*Reporter* and *Fortune*) take the greatest share of newspaper advertisements.

The independent media do not receive government subsidies. The panelists argued, though, that the more serious problem is the government's belief that the private press is aligned with what it calls "anti-development forces," resulting in systemic efforts to stifle the free press.

Typically, media houses do not conduct market research aimed at increasing revenue or circulation audits. Advertisers base their decision to place ads on the popularity of the newspaper or station. Ethiopia has no specialized ratings agencies, and no other agencies engage in circulation

assessments, surveys, or related research—although the broadcast agency's office tracks weekly circulation and can be accessed by anyone, including journalists. As noted in last year's MSI, some newspapers have begun to present figures on the number of Internet visitors to news features on their websites.

Summing up the business management outlook for Ethiopian media, one panelist said, "The environment, coupled with financial constraints, often inhibits growth and expansion. Less than a handful of media houses are thriving in a population of more than 80 million. Editorial independence, niche reporting, outreach and expansion are at alarmingly low level, compared with other countries in Africa and across the globe with equivalent size of population and social and economic conditions."

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Ethiopia Objective Score: 0.89

Ethiopia still lacks independent trade associations to represent the interests of media owners, managers, and publishers in Ethiopia.

However, journalists have several professional associations, including the Ethiopian Journalists Association, the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association, the Ethiopian Women Journalists Association, the National Photo Journalists Association, and the Ethiopian National Journalists Union (ENJU). As last year's MSI panelists noted, there is much conflict and finger-pointing among these associations over who truly represents the media. Panelists said that many of the journalist associations are considered politically charged,

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.

or are beleaguered by scandal allegations and nepotism. One panelist remarked, "Journalists have a number of professional associations, but many of them are inactive and crippled organizations that are not guided by international ethical standards." Another panelist added, "There are vivid gaps among these professional associations, and they have proven unable to work together so far."

According to the panelists, many in the journalism community understand clearly the activities and vision of these associations, but there is a widespread understanding that the state exercises control and oversight over all the associations. One panelist commented, "I do not remember any of these associations speaking out when the draconian press law was being drafted and passed in parliament. They did not oppose the brutal laws, or offer amendments to them, while the direct and indirect implications of the laws were imminent and dangerous to the media. They exist in name only, and their leaders appear on the media to defend their existence."

In general, the panelists expressed the feeling that many of the associations are too busy opposing each other to work cooperatively for tangible results. Many journalists are not involved in any way with these associations, and the leaders are believed to abuse their positions to advance their own individual interests.

Currently, no local NGOs are supporting media freedom in Ethiopia. Some organizations periodically conduct workshops, but some panelists criticized these efforts as ineffective, ultimately doing little to advance free and independent media. Some NGOs are tackling issues such as development aid, HIV/AIDS, and health issues in Ethiopia, but there are no signs that they have built strong working relationships with the media. One panelist said that the absence of supporting institutions is disturbing, noting that "...whatever support the media houses get stems from their own initiatives or networking capabilities. Ironically, there are more regulatory bodies than supporting institutions."

A look at the condition of the media reveals that neither private nor public colleges are proving capable of providing high-quality journalism training, panelists said. As a result of the sub-par journalism programs of Ethiopia's institutions, media companies are facing major problems hiring and training newly graduated journalists. "The media outlets are having trouble absorbing the huge number of graduates, and compounded with their unsatisfactory training, it has become a headache for the media houses," a panelist said.

Often, Ethiopian students who travel to foreign countries for study do not return, panelists said, further aggravating the shortage of skills and knowledge already plaguing the profession. According to one panelist, "We have not seen

"The media outlets are having trouble absorbing the huge number of graduates, and compounded with their unsatisfactory training, it has become a headache for the media houses," a panelist said.

graduates returning home after finishing up their studies abroad, in part because of the small salaries in Ethiopian media houses. For example, I know a woman who went to the United States for her master's degree, and decided to stay there to work for Reuters when she got the opportunity. However, money is only half the picture to explain why we have dwindling numbers of good journalists in the media houses. So many of the managers are traditional in nature: autocratic and inflexible. Hence, young journalists are not willing to work at media houses run by incompetent and rigid bosses."

Few, if any, short-term training programs address the lack of experience of young graduates. However, panelists described the news portal New Business Ethiopia, which launched an online distance-learning program to track and recruit talented journalists for its own work and to channel other prospects to local media outlets.

The panelists said that they consider sources of printing and distribution mechanisms politicized. They gave the example of Berhanena Selam, the giant state-run printing house, which they said exerts too much power on the private print media. The printer often decides on the number of pages of a paper, color prints, and other technical elements, citing internal reasons (which could include lack of paper, color, etc.). One panelist said, "Some distributors tell you that you can only print a limited number of copies and they sometimes try to interfere with your cover pictures and content. The problem was worse in the previous years, however, but it has scaled down significantly." Distribution mechanisms are also politically charged.

List of Panel Participants

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