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MALAWI

For the first time since independence in 1964, Malawi has a new flag, boasting a full sun to replace the rising sun of the old flag. Proponents of the change argued that 46 years after independence, Malawi should no longer be considered a rising nation. The public protested the change, calling it costly and unnecessary, but the parliament passed a bill to usher in the move, with President Mutharika's assent. Contrary to the spirit of the new flag, the change left many citizens concerned that the ruling party makes laws to support its will, without the input of the opposition and the people. This governmental attitude is reflected in its approach to the media as well.

In 2010, with four years to go until the next presidential and parliamentary elections, drama swirled in the political and media spheres. Mutharika won the 2009 election by a landslide, renewing his five-year term. The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) also won a parliamentary majority. Despite this advantage, there is much political restlessness over the 2014 candidate. Already the ruling party has two camps, with one more pronounced side supporting the president's brother, Peter Mutharika, and the other rallying behind the country's vice president, Joyce Banda. Public and private media alike are consumed in the contest, with endorsements dominating headlines; cluttering front pages, commentaries, and even phone-in programs; and detracting from coverage of other pressing issues.

Meanwhile, the government is sending troubling signs to the media. During 2010, the government indirectly banned its departments from advertising with the private media house Nation Publications Limited (NPL). Even some private companies shunned advertising with NPL, for fear of cross-contamination. Despite this blow, NPL and the other leading print media house, Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL), managed to add new titles to their brands. The new list includes NPL's *Fuko*, published in Chichewa and Tumbuka and distributed in rural areas for free.

The government's attempt to exercise control over private media extended to broadcasters, when the authorities stopped live coverage for VIP events. Parliament's lack of interest in passing the Access to Information Bill disheartened the media community further.

The long-awaited merger of Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and Television Malawi (TVM) proved to be the major public media event in 2010. Opponents expressed concern that many people would lose their jobs, while supporters countered that blending MBC Radio 1, MBC Radio 2, and the television broadcaster under one roof is ideal and in line with the MBC Act and the Malawi Communications Act. Also, for the first time, Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) spearheaded a review process to amend the Malawi Communications Act of 1994. According to the authorities, the objective of the review process is to enhance MACRA's operations and boost the ICT industry. But given the steps taken to quiet the media in the past year, media advocates are understandably skeptical.

MALAWI AT A GLANCE

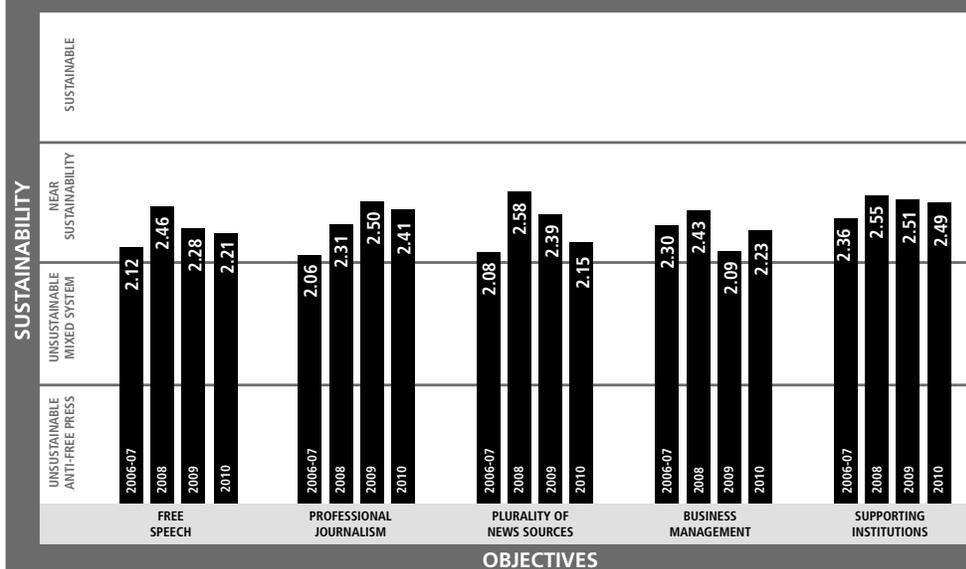
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 15,879,252 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital City:** Lilongwe
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Chewa 32.6%, Nyanja 17.6%, Yao 13.5%, Ngoni 11.5%, Tumbuka 8.8%, Nyanja 5.8%, Sena 3.6%, Tonga 2.1%, Ngonde 1%, other 3.5% (2008 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 82.7%, Muslim 13%, other 1.9%, none 2.5% (2008 census *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Chichewa 57.2% (official), Chinyanja 12.8%, Chi Yao 10.1%, Chitumbuka 9.5%, Chisena 2.7%, Chilomwe 2.4%, Chitonga 1.7%, other 3.6% (1998 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$4,886 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$850 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 62.7% (male 76.1%, female 49.8%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Bingu wa Mutharika (since May 24, 2004)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 9 newspapers, including 2 dailies, 2 private weeklies, and 1 state-owned weekly; Radio: 19 stations including 2 public broadcast services and 13 privately owned, and 4 community-owned stations; Television stations: 3, including 2 privately owned, and 1 public broadcaster.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *The Daily Times* (privately-owned), *The Nation* (privately-owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Malawi News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 716,400 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MALAWI



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Malawi Objective Score: 2.21

Objective 1 received an overall average score of 2.21, and indicator scores varied widely. Indicators 8 (media access to and use of news sources) and 9 (licensing of journalists) both scored more than half a point higher than the objective score. On the other hand, indicators 2 (media licensing), 5 (guarantees of independence for state media), and 7 (access to public information) all scored more than half a point behind; indicator 7 lagged by more than a whole point.

Malawi's 1994 constitution guarantees free speech in sections 35, 36, and 37, but as Institute for Policy Interaction (IPI) Director Rafiq Hajat noted, the government took steps in 2010 that threatens the freedom of expression. Parliament, for example, passed an act restricting demonstrations.

Other laws are in place that contradict the freedoms outlined in the constitution. The prohibitive laws surround issues such as sedition and protected names, emblems, and places. For example, in August 2010, the authorities arrested Reverend Levi Nyondo, secretary general for Livingstonia Synod of the CCAP Church, on charges of sedition. The charges stemmed from Nyondo's eulogy at the funeral of former Minister of Health Moses Chirambo, who died just days after being dismissed from the government. Nyondo had criticized government policies, including the quota system used in university admissions, and said also that it was ironic for

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.

"The constitution is very positive, progressive, and supportive of the collection, processing, and distribution of media products, but there are about four dozen laws that undermine the constitutional provisions," said NPL Managing Editor Edward Chitsulo.

Mutharika's government to praise Chirambo posthumously, when it had removed him from the cabinet. Nyondo's case was suspended after his lawyers challenged "the constitutionality of the sedition offense."

Several panelists pointed out that freedom of speech, as enshrined in the constitution, is for the whole population and not the media only, but it is becoming more common for any dissenting voices to be branded as enemies of the government. "The constitution is very positive, progressive, and supportive of the collection, processing, and distribution of media products, but there are about four dozen laws that undermine the constitutional provisions," said NPL Managing Editor Edward Chitsulo.

The country's judiciary is still considered independent. Along with the Nyondo case, panelists cited another recent case in which the judiciary showed a streak of independence. Two politicians, DPP's expelled official Harry Mkandawire and National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) member Jeremiah Chihana, were accused of sedition and unlawful assembly with their group, the Northern Region Fora. According to media reports, the state contended that the Northern Region Fora aimed to incite disturbances of peace and order in the republic. Delivering his judgment, Justice Lovemore Chikopa trashed the prosecution's evidence, which included a press statement by the group calling for a January 1, 2010 referendum to address the education quota system and to decide on the devolution of power for the northern region to allow it become a sovereign state.

Many panelists expressed concern about the broadcast licensing process, and scores for the related indicator were accordingly low. Panelists said that the licensing agency, MACRA, is not independent, and its process lacks transparency. The composition of the MACRA board and officials is highly partisan, and panelists found worrisome the close social relationship between the licensing body and a senior politician in one rural district. Panelists also noted that MACRA does not supply reasons when it turns down license applications, and the system has no appeals process for those denied. Panelists also faulted MACRA for letting the public

media operate without any licenses, while adopting a strict approach with private broadcasters.

“Much uncertainty clouds the licensing of broadcast media,” said BNL General Manager Tikhala Chibwana. “A whole set of applications was disqualified, with no explanation, leading to speculation of political pressure.” He added, however, that signs are pointing to the process opening up.

Market entry is said to be free, and the law allows any individual or entity to enter the media industry. Generally, the tax structure for the media is not singled out or treated differently than for other industries. But panelists from the print media side bemoaned the recent introduction of a duty tax on newsprint and printing chemicals. The development led to an increase in production costs, and consequently, prices for newspapers. Both BNL and NPL raised cover prices to meet the increased costs. Some panelists expressed the opinion that introducing the tax is unfair, as the country has no paper mill. However, other panelists had no problems with the tax introduction, arguing that the break had been around long enough to provide some advantage.

Most panelists agreed that the huge start-up capital requirement is the most restrictive factor in entering the media market. But the shortage of independent printers is another barrier, according to panelists. Capital FM Director Osman Alaudin said that BNL and NPL deliberately block new entrants. “The two main publishing houses...operate as a cartel and do not allow printing of other newspapers on their web presses,” he said.

Other panelists noted that from a legal standpoint, entering the print media world is easier than breaking into broadcast media. As Chibwana explained, “Market entry is linked inextricably to the issue of licenses. For example, for private radio and television stations, you must first collect a hundred signatures, as if it is a political party. You must demonstrate that there are people looking for the services. But this is a commercial exercise, and if there is no demand for your services, you will go bust.”

The relatively high ratings for indicator 4 reflected the fact that no crimes against journalists were recorded in the previous year—but some panelists cautioned that the progress is too recent to judge. Furthermore, prosecution of those who treat journalists poorly remains an ongoing challenge, as often the culprits are authorities such as the police.

Attempts to intimidate journalists persist also. Journalists from the private media are the most insecure, as their job entails treading where NGOs fear to tread. For example, presidential press briefings are held in the presence of party functionaries, who browbeat journalists that ask questions that they find threatening. Also, a BNL journalist, McDonald

Chapalapata, had his car gas-bombed at his house. The incident was preceded by threats, linking the attack to his work. Although Chapalapata reported the incident to the police, no tangible action followed. In other cases, NPL journalists have been whisked out of government meetings. Panelists said that these kinds of threats, which typically lack evidence, are more difficult to deal with. Chitsulo added that “the cost of litigation is also prohibitive, and the onus of proof rests with the journalist.”

Editorial independence in the public media remains weak. By law, the public media are supposed to be editorially independent, but practice has proven otherwise. A bias has existed for many years, and no political regime seems to want to change the laws. One year after the presidential and parliamentary elections, the public media continue to show bias, often favoring the ruling party. The public media air heavily partisan analytical programs and commentary, seemingly championing the process of selling Mutharika as the DPP presidential candidate in the 2014 elections. In Chibwana’s words: “...each successive ruling party has taken advantage of public media to its own ends.”

Multiple other government policies further erode public media editorial independence. Public media journalists enjoy preferred access to official information; the government appoints public media board members and management staff; and the state provides public media funding.

Although libel cases are civil law issues, lawsuits are still used as a way to scare the media. The panelists that rated the indicator highly emphasized that libel is a civil issue. Those who rated it lower argued that litigation is expensive, and media outlets enter into defense rarely, often opting for out-of-court settlements. The fear of attracting lawsuits affects journalists’ work negatively as well.

Without a pro-media legal instrument in place, access to public information remains a challenge, especially for private media. The government is not mandated to share information with the public, so it is common to see stories in which government sources refuse to comment on pertinent issues, and where documents were not available for the journalist to verify information.

In the beginning of 2010, without any legal grounds, the government started restricting NPL journalists from attending certain public functions, thereby denying them access to information. The government also issued an order to bar private media from covering live VIP functions, forcing them to rely on feeds from the Ministry of Information instead.

In consultation with MISA Malawi and with the support of civil society stakeholders, media members have drafted the Access to Information Bill and have been lobbying parliament

to table the measure. But some panelists said that they have almost given up on it being deliberated in parliament, given lawmakers' reluctance to discuss the proposed bill or pass it into law. According to Hajat, "Parliament has adamantly refused to amend, even when the opposition was in majority and there was a golden opportunity to do that. I asked a member of parliament, and [he] said that if I were in [his] shoes, I would want that control, too."

The panelists concluded that public officials have yet to appreciate that they are accountable to Malawi citizens. At times, the authorities have not only withheld information, but lied to journalists. For example, Chibwana said, when BNL ran a story on the acquisition of an extravagant presidential jet, others rushed to claim that it belongs instead to the military. Chibwana suggested that the claim was intended to mislead the public. However, panelists did underline a positive trend: some government institutions, such as the police department, are designating a communications point person to work with the media.

Panelists agreed that access to international news sources has remained unrestricted, for several years and through changes of government, indicating likely sustainability. Still, some media houses cannot afford to subscribe to international news agencies, and slow Internet speed presents another challenge.

Indicator 9 scored fairly high as well, as largely the panelists agreed that Malawi's government does not control entry into the journalism profession. The Journalist Union of Malawi (JUMA) defines journalists in its constitution, but the reality is that anyone capable can practice. According to MISA Malawi General Secretary Deborah Nyangulu-Chipofya, "Malawi is one of the easiest countries to practice journalism. You can wake one day, get a pen and notepad, and say you are a journalist."

Press cards are in place, but they are not a must, except for VIP functions. An accreditation process launched last year by the Media Council of Malawi (MCM) did not move forward this year.

Essentially, journalists are free to protect their rights as they see fit.

Entry into the journalism program at the public university is restricted to a selected number of students, due to limited space, but the government does not influence the selections.

Despite the rosy picture painted by many of the scores, panelists expressed concern that during the past year, the government imposed some serious restrictions on private media—most significantly on NPL. The government imposed an advertising ban of NPL and also barred the outlet's

journalists from attending certain government functions. In addition, the government stopped private radio stations from covering some VIP functions.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Malawi Objective Score: 2.41

Panelists gave Objective 2 an overall average score of 2.41. All indicators scored within half a point of the objective score, except indicator 5 (pay levels are sufficient to deter corruption), which came in the lowest and trailed by about two-thirds of a point.

Panelists said that generally, private media reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced. However, they saw room for improvement in terms of variety of sources and balance. Poor verification of facts weakens the quality of reporting, and journalists lack the technical training and expertise to sort through certain issues—as reflected in the level of reporting.

Hajat shared a personal experience that he said illustrates the lack of balance. "I was appointed to the presidential advisory council, and then I was dropped without a meeting. A government official appeared on TVM and said it was because I was 'misguidedly arrogant'—apparently because he said I had not replied to the president when he appointed me. I proved that I replied, but I had replied and requested for terms of reference. My request was ignored, and I was dropped. The title of the story was 'Hajat dropped from presidential council.' Even NPL's *The Nation* wrote that. Only one side of the story was reported; nobody printed my side of the story. There is your objectivity."

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).

Nyangulu-Chipofa noted that the sector has many untrained journalists, and reporting lacks thoroughness. The frequent retractions and apologies published make it clear that often reporters fail to verify their facts. Part of the problem is that editors give young journalists little assistance in enhancing stories with depth and dimension.

This year's debate over media ethics echoed the concerns of the 2009 MSI participants. Panelists had a general consensus that journalists observe ethics, save for one significant exception: the common "brown envelope" practice, in which journalists accept payment to cover events. Panelists said that almost all reporters, whether from public or private media houses, or from print or electronic media, accept allowances from event organizers. However, this practice is thought to be more prominent among younger journalists.

Panelists noted other forms of corruption in the media. University trainer Grey Mang'anda commented, "In some cases, reporters have been caught up in unethical behavior, especially requests to pay to publish or omit a story. Stories of musicians who are asked to pay for publicity of their material are rife. Malawian journalists have coined a term, *chipondamthengo*, which glorifies corruption. It is a worrying trend."

This type of corruption is proving difficult to curb, as very few people come forward to report to management. "It is quite tricky...because some of these things are practices that are accepted out in the field," Chibwana said. "The managers are not involved, and they are seemingly unaware of what is happening out there."

During the year, MCM distributed copies of the code of ethics, complaints, and disciplinary procedures to all its members, yet broader adherence continues to elude the journalism field. Peter Kumwenda Jegwa, a media activist and member of the Lilongwe Press Club, commented, "MCM, which is supposed to champion self-regulation by the media and adherence to ethical standards, is still trying to find its feet. All players, particularly the main media houses, have not completely accepted its guidance. This means the onus of observing of media ethics is on the media houses and journalists themselves."

The panelists said that self-censorship continues to weigh on journalists. The government's withdrawal of advertising in NPL products increased self-censorship implicitly in that media house as well as other outlets. Big businesses, which are major advertisers, drive self-censorship further among journalists and editors. Additionally, as Alaudin noted, "Recent research by JUMA indicates that poor salary scales are also sources of self-censorship, as poorly paid journalists are more likely to accept 'brown envelopes' or forms of bribes not to report certain issues."

With little discussion, the panelists agreed that reporters and editors are willing to cover critical events and issues, but in some cases, the government stands in their way. "Key events are not covered adequately. This is due to a recent directive by the government that media houses will no longer cover VIP events, except through the Ministry of Information and Civil Education," said Alaudin. NPL journalists confirmed that from time to time, the government bars reporters from covering important government events.

Regarding pay for journalists, panelists delivered a wide range of scores—reflecting the impression that pay levels vary from one media house to another. Journalists working in public media earn better pay compared to other civil servants with the same level of education and experience. The two major print media houses are also said to pay decent salaries. In contrast, there are only a few well-paying outlets in the private electronic media, with the rest giving miserable wages. Some panelists said that pay levels seem fair in comparison to certain other professions, but given the risks and temptations that journalists face, pay scales are on the lower side.

However, the panelists were divided on the question of poor pay leading to corruption. Some underlined a connection between the two, and others disputed the link. "As long as employers continue to abuse journalists, as long as journalism continues to be a financially unrewarding career, media ethics will always be thrown to the dogs," Nyangulu-Chipofya said.

As if in response to last year's proposal from panelists, in 2010 JUMA published its recommendations for "appropriate pay scales based on qualifications, experience, skills, etc." Titled *Faithful, Patriotic, Overworked, but Exploited*, the document was released in June and contains survey results and evaluations. JUMA found that most journalists in private radio stations earn less than MWK 10,000 (about \$60) per month. JUMA proposed setting the minimum monthly salary for journalists at MWK 50,000 (about \$300).

With little debate, the panelists agreed that entertainment does not eclipse news and information programming. "Currently, news content competes mostly with advertising [as opposed to entertainment], especially in newspapers," said Jegwa. However, NPL Chichewa Editor Herbert Chandilanga had a different opinion. "News generally comes before entertainment, but news and entertainment programming is not balanced. Mostly, entertainment comes in as fillers," he said.

Although the balance in the media is fair, many people seem to like entertainment more. Chibwana pointed to *The Weekend Times* as an example. While not a purely entertainment publication, entertainment constitutes the

bulk of the content, and its popularity is a clear indicator that entertainment is what consumers want.

Some panelists said that media facilities and equipment are sufficiently modern, though panelists disagreed. Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS) reporter Norman Fulatiro said, "Some media institutions have made it a point to equip their reporters with digital recorders, vehicles (on loan), cameras, etc. ZBS and NPL are clear examples in this area." On the other hand, Hajat emphasized the need for improvements: "Equipment is often worn out and obsolete. Indeed, some radio stations are using pirated software, and the system is heavily infected with viruses."

Panelists agreed that niche reporting exists; however, some panelists noted the need for better quality. "Low staffing levels lead to shortcuts on getting the story done," said Nyangulu-Chipofya. "We have to fill the paper at no cost, so stories cannot be completed comprehensively. Not all sources are contacted." Jegwa commented, "State media, which is generally better resourced than private media, best covers rural areas, but it is private media that can be relied upon for good investigative journalism."

Reporting on issues such as HIV/AIDS and maternal health surpasses political coverage. However, in those interest areas, reporters are usually carrying the agenda of NGOs. Electronic media cover minority issues much more than the print media. The same applies in use of minority languages. NPL's new *Fuko* has improved coverage of minority language, panelists noted.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Malawi Objective Score: 2.15

With an overall average score of 2.15, Objective 3 scored the lowest of all objectives in the MSI. Panelists observed that despite the existence of several media houses, the Malawian media sector has no plurality, high costs impede free access to international news sources, and the public media continue to show extreme bias. As Chitsulo explained, "There is a clear pattern that overall, citizens get reliable, objective news from multiple sources—agencies, regional and global radios, and televisions—including public media. The only catch is that the truly independent media comes at a cost. Hence, the majority of rural poor depend on cheap or free media sources."

Indicator 2 (citizens' access to international and domestic news) and indicator 5 (private media produce their own news) received the highest scores for the objective, both exceeding the objective score by half a point. Indicator 3 (state or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are

non-partisan, and serve the public interest) scored the lowest for this objective; trailing the objective score by more than a whole point, it landed in the unsustainable, anti-free press range on the MSI scale.

In the past 12 months, the leading print media houses added new titles to their brands. BNL, the 2009 Media House of the Year, introduced a tabloid, *The Weekend Times*, and a family magazine, *Times Lifestyle*, to its brand, which already includes *The Daily Times*, *Malawi News*, and *The Sunday Times*. And despite the blow to its advertising income, NPL, publishers of *The Nation* and its weekend editions, managed to introduce *Fuko*. Private media are more independent than the public broadcasters, as reflected in their news programming. Yet most media, print and electronic alike, focus primarily on national issues. At the community level, media is not very developed.

Panelists commended the unrestricted citizen access to domestic and international media, noting that such conditions have prevailed for a reasonably long time. Panelists could not think of any instances of government interference in access to domestic or international news sources during the period of study for this MSI.

However, other challenges hamper access. Cost is the major limiting factor—especially for newspapers, television, and the Internet—in a country where income levels are low. Illiteracy is another obstacle. Panelists also pointed out that the shortage of decent roads in most rural areas limits the distribution of print media. Jegwa explained: "Newspapers are hardly accessible in the remote parts of the country. Rural audiences still rely on the national radio station and at least

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

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

one private radio station for news. As private newspapers arguably present the best journalism, the quality of news accessed in rural areas is not as high as that accessed in towns and cities.”

To increase access, the government, through MACRA, has established a number of telecenters in rural areas. Although satellite television is available, most people watch the public television station, which is free. The onset of free-to-air decoders has eased the gap to some extent. Access to other news sources, such as the Internet, is improving slowly, with developments in the mobile network companies and ICT.

Again this year, panelists handed the lowest scores to indicator 3, exposing the public media’s ongoing failure to serve the public interest. Panelists cited the bias, partisanship, and lack of balance in the public media. They also expressed concern that the propaganda programming, which increased during last year’s presidential and parliamentary elections, did not fade after the election season. The public media also interfered in the internal politics of the ruling party, DPP, over succession plans. With Mutharika serving his second term, succession tensions are already underway, and even with the next elections several years away, the public media has shown its bias. Under the banner “Road to 2014,” coverage heavily favors Mutharika, while Banda receives little or negative coverage.

Malawi does not have an independent news agency that distributes news to local media. The country still has just one news agency, the government-owned Malawi News Agency (MANA). MANA distributes print and electronic content to public and private media without any bias. Additionally, MANA maintains offices across the country, and provides good coverage of social issues. However, because it is a government institution, independence is a challenge, and limited resources and personnel impact its efficiency.

International news agency services are available, but have limitations as well. “The foreign news agencies are not only expensive, but the content is mostly packaged for the western audience and irrelevant for us,” Chitsulo said.

The panelists agreed that independent broadcast media produce their own programming. But as noted in last year’s MSI, aside from political programs, most MBC productions adhere to production standards higher than those of the independent media. Independent broadcasters also tend to duplicate each other’s programs.

Individual ratings for indicator 6 varied widely. Essentially, the media sector has enough ownership transparency to allow consumers to judge the objectivity of news. Also, the country’s regulations do not allow an entity to monopolize the industry. During the year, NPL founding owner and

former politician Aleke Banda died, and all the company’s newspapers covered the funeral with passion—and readers understood why. Another hot news topic was a man who came to the country claiming to be the son of the country’s first president, Kamuzu Banda. Banda’s family holds shares in BNL, allowing readers to judge the objectivity of the coverage in the company’s publications.

The panelists said that in general, the media reflect a relatively broad spectrum of social interests. According to the panelists, the public radio stations still offer the most content in different languages, although NPL’s new *Fuko* is published in Chichewa and Chitumbuka. Overall, though, minority-language information sources have little impact, as Mang’anda attested: “Once in a while, a newspaper like *Fuko* comes along, but although they are aimed at the rural areas, we do not have any feedback that they are making an impact. What efforts have such media made—to reach as many people as possible, especially in print?”

Similarly, the need to invest in community media is clear. Malawi still does not have community newspapers. Some community radio stations have gone national, arguably for commercial reasons, while existing community radio stations have had management problems. Most are staffed with volunteers, resulting in high turnover. Achieving sustainability and operating without donors has proven a major challenge.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Malawi Objective Score: 2.23

Objective 4 received an overall average of 2.23. Only indicator 7 (broadcast ratings and circulation figures) did not score within a half point of the objective score; it trailed by about two-thirds of a point.

Most public and private media operate as profit-generating bodies, are managed professionally, and allow editorial independence. Key departments are headed and run by professionals with the appropriate skill sets (accounting, human resources, editorial). According to Chibwana, “By and large, independent media are managed as businesses. Since they do not receive subsidies, they must operate as businesses to survive.” Most media outlets create strategic plans to enhance their advertising revenue, but these are rarely backed by market research.

The degree of personnel efficiency varies among media outlets. In some media houses, qualified staff can be found only in newsrooms, while novices staff circulation desks.

Other outlets face problems because they are run as family businesses. Weak management also plagues community radio stations, dimming prospects for their sustainability.

Scores for indicator 2 (sources of revenue for the media) were across the board, but panelists agreed that advertising provides the biggest chunk of funding. Some radio stations boost revenue with advertising productions, along with sponsored programs. One of the private radio stations, ZBS, seized opportunities presented by the 2010 World Cup soccer tournament and managed to turn a profit. ZBS beamed the games onto big screens in high-density locations, with help from corporate sponsors.

For print media, sales of copies bring in a healthy amount, but at high cost. During the year, leading print media houses added new services to bring in more revenue. For example, BNL introduced a courier service, and NPL forged partnerships with other organizations to offset the costs of production and distribution of its free newspaper.

The bulk of advertising flows from just a handful of companies, along with the government.

Media houses must handle their advertising accounts carefully, however, because if a media company falls out of the government's graces, corporate advertisers are likely to shun the outlet as well. This happened when the government suspended its advertising with NPL. Chitsulo, NPL's managing editor, explained his perspective: The government might be a major source of advertisements, but the real issue is that government is a highly influential advertiser. "If you look at the volume, we are still surviving with corporate advertising. But the seal of approval from government clearly influences private advertisers," he said.

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.

Advertising agencies exist in Malawi, although the industry is underdeveloped. Some advertising agencies are proving not only unhelpful, but detrimental to media houses—collecting money from clients directly, then forcing media outlets to fight for the revenue. Furthermore, panelists said, agencies supply ads that are lacking in quality and imagination, and do not add much value to the end products. Chitsulo commented, "Advertising agencies are essentially post offices, where companies go to post an advert to send on to media outlets...we are not seeing much creativity."

Some of the major advertisers send their advertising business out of the country to meet their standards. Other companies forgo television ads, despite having room in their budgets, because they cannot seem to find anyone talented enough to create decent ads. Noted Limbani Matola, the director of sales and marketing at MBC TV, "We have a very big problem. Our audience challenges us on the quality of advertisements, and even programming. I can make lucrative business deals, but who will make punchy adverts? In other countries, the private sector or agencies fuel productions." Given such limitations, media houses often source their own advertising.

Although the panelists said that advertising makes up the largest portion of revenue, they did not have figures to determine the percentage of time or space taken up by news. Nearly all the panelists agreed that the advertising ratio is in line with international standards, but the media appear willing to cut editorial space to accommodate every available ad. For Chibwana, "the industry norm is 60:40, but currently [it has declined] to about 55:45." NGOs and companies with international branches are cutting down on advertising, although panelists said the situation is improving somewhat.

The government does not subsidize independent media, and panelists agreed that this is ideal, considering the political pressure and interference with content that it would bring. "Any attempt to subsidize private media outlets would kill their independence," said Mang'anda. The 2010 panel's position is a significant change from last year, when panelists differed on the question of whether subsidies help or hurt. Perhaps the strong feeling this year that subsidies would compromise independence stemmed from the government's advertising ban on NPL. Some panelists suggested that subsidies could come in the form of tax breaks.

Media houses conduct little market research. Usually, products are tailored to suit the perceived needs and interests of audiences, determined from sporadic feedback and general comments. As an example, panelists pointed to the launch of the BNL tabloid, *The Weekend Times*. Without conducting any market research, BNL identified a gap and offered a tailored product, and it proved worthwhile. Within 12

months, circulation figures have grown from about 3,000 to about 16,000.

Broadcast ratings and circulation figures remain a mystery, thus the related indicator scored the lowest in Objective 4. Malawi does not have an independent body producing or authenticating broadcast ratings or circulation figures. Once in a while, media outlets announce their broadcast ratings and circulation figures, but with no proof provided, their accuracy and authenticity are questionable.

A media monitoring unit put in place during the elections last year has since stopped functioning. According to the panelists, it seems that individuals and organizations have decided that they can do without statistics.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Malawi Objective Score: 2.49

Again this year, Objective 5 brought the highest overall score, at 2.49. All indicators scored above 2.00 and within half a point of the objective score.

Some of the panelists recalled a trade association for broadcasters, and another for publishers, but said they have apparently lapsed into oblivion. “[Organizations] such as the Broadcasters Association of Malawi seemed to have died at birth,” Alaudin remarked.

Agreeing that strong trade associations could help lobby for independence and professionalism, the panelists proposed that it would do no harm if media owners and managers join other associations. For example, media owners could join commercial bodies, such as the Malawi Confederation

of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, where they could negotiate issues. The media could also lobby using the parliamentary Media Committee. Chitsulo gave a specific call to action: “The independent media need to get organized to bargain for favorable trading terms.”

Indicator 2 drew higher scores, as professional associations exist. The most popular and active include MISA Malawi, MCM, JUMA, and press clubs. Journalists pay fees to become MISA Malawi members, although the association caters to the interests of all practicing journalists. Despite growing membership ranks, MISA Malawi’s overall funding declined as a result of the global recession, which forced it to cut some programs. MISA Malawi works independently from the government, and few entities have had the financial resources to support the association.

Members seem to expect more immediate, monetary benefits than participate in efforts to improve media frameworks; a significant number would rather attend workshops and receive allowances. After researching journalists’ compensation, JUMA championed pay increases (although most of the panelists had not seen the report at the time the MSI panel convened). But JUMA has not proven efficient enough to influence media owners and managers.

Furthermore, the professional associations tend to respond too slowly on urgent issues. “Our supporting institutions are relatively young, or wrought with inefficiency, to the point that they cannot effectively support the industry,” Chitsulo said. “The institutions also dwell more on formative and administrative problems instead of programming, hence they lose relevance and ownership.”

Malawi has NGOs that support the freedom of speech and the independent media, helping media outlets in particular by zeroing in on issues specific to them. For example, NGOs helped lobby the parliament to debate the Access to Public Information Bill, which, if passed, would enhance journalism. However, one panelist said the media do not support all NGOs equally. As the executive director of an NGO, Hajat commented that he has to pay journalists just to get coverage. He also lamented that Malawians lack the solidarity of the country’s NGOs. “We do work collaboratively, but civil society is fragmented. There is no unity, there is no one single voice,” Hajat explained.

Quality degree programs exist, but panelists pointed out areas that could be improved. A proliferation of training institutions offer journalism or media-related programs. The schools include the University of Malawi Polytechnic and Chancellor College, ShareWorld Open University, African Bible College, Mzuzu University, and Blantyre International University. However, the panel discussion focused heavily on

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.

the quality of the University of Malawi journalism degree program, which the panelists find lacking in several capacities. The program admits more and more students, but fails to provide hands-on opportunities with media professionals to build practical skills. In the beginning, classes were capped at a maximum of 15 students, but 40 students or more crowd the classrooms now, with resources failing to grow to match enrollment. While most panelists placed the blame on the university, one participant pointed out that the media industry offers little support. Furthermore, the panelists had a sense that some graduates do not feel passionate about their chosen profession.

While in-service training opportunities are uncommon, there are short-term training seminars and workshops offered locally and internationally. Malawi NGOs that focus on specific areas, such as HIV/AIDS, provide the most journalism training opportunities, often designed to enhance coverage of a specific issue. However, the NGOs are disappointed in media managers' commitment to the trainings, according to the panelists. Jegwa commented that the media community does not take seriously NGO training initiatives, because the editors often choose to enroll their most junior reporters—those least needed in the newsroom. "In the end, the same person trained in reporting on gender issues today is sent to an environmental reporting training tomorrow. Now you wonder if this sort of short-term training is adding value. In my view, not quite," Jegwa said.

However, some panelists said they expect the Malawi Institute of Journalism to eventually offer short courses, especially refresher programs, as envisioned during the formation of the institution.

Sources of newsprint are private, apolitical, and unrestricted. Private institutions own most of the printing presses, and the two major newspaper companies own their own printing presses. Panelists pointed out, however, that printing facilities in private hands are not necessarily available to all.

Costs for printing are the major impediment. Newsprint must be imported, at a significant outlay. Panelists suggested that entrepreneurs could invest in the paper-making business, and simply import pulp and finish production in-country, but Malawi's electrical infrastructure is too weak to support such an investment.

Media distribution networks are apolitical and owned privately. The only restriction highlighted by the panelists is the cost of hosting a transmitter. Hajat commented that distribution channels are "freely accessible, though not affordable."

Public broadcasters are available on satellite—an option not extended to private operators. Private media outlets also have difficulty co-hosting programs with the public broadcaster.

List of Panel Participants

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The Malawi study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

The 2009 Malawi study did not credit the correct author or moderator. Costly Mtogolo, head of journalism and media studies at the Polytechnic University of Malawi served as the moderator and Sintha Mkuziwaduka, deputy editor, Blantyre Newspapers Limited authored the 2009 chapter. IREX deeply regrets this error.