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BOTSWANA

B

Botswana has received accolades throughout the country's history for its democratic credentials and has been dubbed the shining example of democracy in Africa. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has had an overwhelming majority since the country's independence from the United Kingdom in 1966. However, as more African countries attained independence, Botswana's democracy proved to be less progressive. Academics have described Botswana as a "minimalist democracy" and not a participatory democracy because, apart from holding elections every five years, the country has failed to enact laws that empower the citizenry to have a more active and meaningful role in the running of their country.

An example of this deficiency is the absence of freedom-of-information legislation in the country. Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration Mokgweetsi Masisi, who is responsible for media in Botswana's government, stated at a July 2012 sitting of parliament, "A freedom-of-information law should be more about what should be kept secret than revealed." This position, indicative of secrecy in government, has led people to lose confidence in the government's decisions. In addition, as reported by *The Botswana Gazette* in April 2011, there appears to have been a rise in corruption of late, with a number of ministers having faced corruption charges in 2011 and 2012.

During the same July parliamentary sitting, the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) Bill, a bill that was widely viewed as regressive, was rushed through parliament and is awaiting the president's signature. It repeals the Broadcasting Act of 1998, with its three-tier system of broadcasting (public-service broadcasting, private-service broadcasting, and community-service broadcasting), while the new piece of legislation talks only about state media and commercial media. As reported by *The Sunday Standard* in August 2012, civil-society groups in Botswana criticized the move to revert to state media as a clear attempt by the state to tighten its grip on this national asset and turn it into a propaganda tool.

The MSI panelists generally felt that the Botswana media space is under threat and that the government seems determined to reverse gains the country has made over the years. Supporting institutions are having mixed success pushing back against these efforts. Despite this rather gloomy picture, freedom of speech is broadly guaranteed in Botswana, particularly thanks to the private media, which ensures the availability of a steady stream of news sources and viewpoints, at least in the major urban centers.

BOTSWANA AT A GLANCE

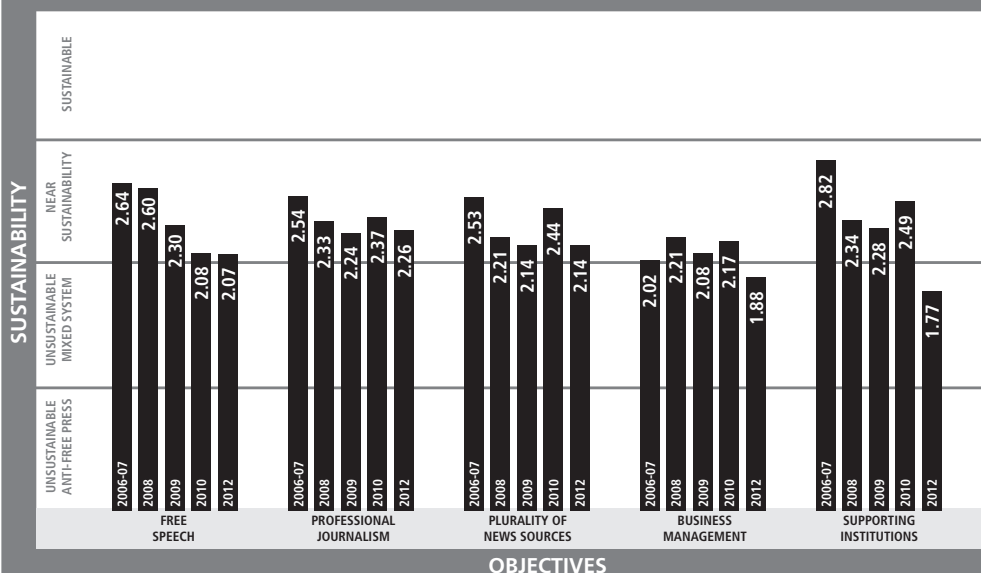
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 2,098,018 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*).
- > **Capital city:** Gaborone
- > **Ethnic groups (percent of population):** Tswana (or Setswana) 79%, Kalanga 11%, Basarwa 3%, other, including Kgalagadi and white 7% (*CIA World Factbook*).
- > **Religions (percent of population):** Christian 71.6%, Badimo 6%, other 1.4%, unspecified 0.4%, none 20.6% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (percent of population):** Setswana 78.2%, Kalanga 7.9%, Sekgalagadi 2.8%, English 2.1% (official), other 8.6%, unspecified 0.4% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2011-Atlas):** \$15.19 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$14,560 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **Literacy rate:** 84.5% of adults (2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Seretse Khama Ian Khama (since April 1, 2008)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 1 state-owned newspaper and 13 privately owned commercial newspapers; Radio stations: 2 national state-owned, 3 national privately owned, and 8 foreign stations. Television Stations: 1 state-owned, 3 privately owned. Newspaper ownership is mostly concentrated in Gaborone.
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top two by circulation: *Daily News* (circulation 65,000, state-owned), *The Voice* (circulation 35,000, private) (2010)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** 85% of the population has access to national (state-owned) radio. Broadcast dominated by state-owned BTV.
- > **News agencies:** Botswana Press Agency (BOPA) (State-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Approximately \$45 million (2010 est., MSI panelists)
- > **Internet usage:** 120,416 (2010 est., World Bank)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BOTSWANA



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

Botswana Objective Score: 2.07

One panelist, *Mmegi* newspaper news editor Douglas Tsiako, expressed concern that the existence of certain laws makes it difficult for citizens to enjoy freedom of expression as enshrined in the constitution. Tsiako highlighted various instances where there was an attempt on the part of government to tamper with the free flow of information and freedom of expression. For example, when covering ruling-party rallies, the officials typically order journalists not to talk to or mention public figures when reporting on the story.

Free speech is also under pressure from huge fines meted out by courts to the media in defamation suits. One of the panelists, a radio news editor who prefers to remain anonymous, cited a case in which *The Sunday Standard* was ordered to pay a lump sum of money to one-time Minister of Minerals, Energy, and Water Resources Charles Tibone¹ for defamation. "I know the amount was much higher when the judgment was first delivered but was later reduced to BWP 400,000 [\$50,000] upon appeal by the newspaper," the panelist said. He added that this huge amount set a precedent for defamation cases.

"This case and a plethora of others² have the potential to lead to self-censorship among media workers and their employers," stated the anonymous radio news editor. "Even though some members of parliament lose their cases, the success of the others and the high amounts given pose a threat to media freedom."

The panelists stated that it is difficult for private broadcasters to obtain licenses because the license conditions set by the national regulatory body, the Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA), favor the state broadcaster, which unfairly competes with ill-resourced private broadcasters for advertisements.

"The state commercial station has the luxury to charge little for [advertising placements], while we in the private broadcasting sphere have to charge up to BWP 15,000 (\$2,000), because we do not have a cushion from government. We are paying tax, and the same tax is used to finance the [state] station, our competitor," the radio news editor lamented.

¹ Civil Case 235 of 2007, Tibone v. Tsodilo Services Pty Ltd t/a *Sunday Standard* and Others

² The panelist cited such cases as MP Makgalemele v. Yarona Fm, MP Fedelis Molao v. *The Voice* Newspaper, and Ms. Muzila v. *The Voice* Newspaper.

An anonymous print editor on the panel observed, "The lack of access to information laws makes journalists susceptible to defamation and libel suits because they end up relying on allegations which they do not have any way of verifying."

The panel felt that the new piece of legislation, BOCRA, is going to make the situation worse by promoting unfair competition in favor of state-owned media, which is financed through taxpayers' money but still competes for advertising with the private media. In addition, state media will no longer require a license to operate under the new BOCRA law.

Media activist Thapelo Ndlovu said the Media Practitioners Act (MPA), an as-yet unenforced 2008 law requiring the registration of all media outlets, including websites and blogs, could be enforced at any time, and the fact that the government has not put it into use as yet should not make journalists lose focus on this threat. "The intention of the law is to silence and punish journalists by denying them accreditation." Further, one of the panelists, a newspaper editor who chose to remain anonymous, questioned the fairness of some government agencies that apply laws and regulations selectively. "One of these agencies is against the

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.

idea of Dikgang Publishers' dominance of the media industry, but this is just one of the government's efforts to marginalize private media," he quipped.

While crimes against journalists are very rare in Botswana, the panel noted a new trend: suspected criminals who attack journalists in court. During the latest incident reported by *Mmegi* newspaper in September 2012, "chaos reigned supreme at Village Magistrates Court when two men accused of armed robbery charged at journalists and broke at least one camera as police officers stood idly by."

"Private media tend to allow for multiple viewpoints in their editorial policies, while the state media are clearly biased toward government ministers, ruling-party cadres, and senior government officials," observed Romang Mogapi, information officer at the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Botswana. She said the fact that the government refuses to allow the media to serve the public interest proves their desire to create a monopoly on public information. Kabo Mokgoabone, senior reporter at *The Sunday Standard* newspaper, added, "Journalists at BTV [Botswana Television], Radio Botswana, and *Daily News* [a state newspaper] are treated as information officers who cannot make independent judgments in terms of political reporting. The state media tend to report positively on the BDP [the ruling party] to the detriment of [opposition parties] BNF [Botswana National Front], BMD [Botswana Movement for Democracy], and the BCP [Botswana Congress Party]."

As noted earlier, Botswana has seen a growing number of defamation cases. An anonymous print editor on the panel observed, "The lack of access to information laws makes journalists susceptible to defamation and libel suits because they end up relying on allegations which they do not have any way of verifying. The judiciary is widely believed to be independent, but public perception is that there are some pro-establishment judges who compromise this independence." The anonymous newspaper editor further stated, "The current president has tended to ignore suggestions of suitable candidates to be judges from the Law Society, as was the norm, and chooses to appoint his preferred candidates." In June 2012, *The Botswana Gazette* reported that the Law Society of Botswana (LSB) shares this concern.

The panel agreed that government officials are not cooperative when asked for information. There are restrictions in place for government employees who are expected to swear to silence, and public-relations officers are not empowered to release information unless permission is

granted from government officials. In addition, *The Botswana Gazette* reported in August 2012 that the Freedom of Information Bill was recently rejected by government in the July 2012 session of parliament.

The poor information flow is also evident from national inquiries that were never made public. "An example is the Scotland Yard report on the suspected ritual murder of Segametsi Mogomotsi, which the government still believes would jeopardize national security if released," lamented Mokgoabone. Mogomotsi was a 14-year-old school girl murdered and mutilated, allegedly for ritual purposes, in November 1994. Her death sparked protests, which led the government of Botswana to call in Scotland Yard from the United Kingdom to conduct an impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding her death. The government of Botswana has not released the Scotland Yard report.

There are no laws in Botswana that restrict access to international news and news sources. However, access to international media is a challenge, as most media outlets cannot afford international publications. The dominant foreign media in Botswana hail from neighboring South Africa, which has affected the growth of the domestic media industry, as consumers tend to prefer the better-resourced South African competition.

Entry into the journalism profession has generally been free, with the government imposing no restrictions on individuals. However, the aforementioned MPA, if fully enforced, would impose registration barriers on bloggers. Should individuals or citizen journalists be required to register with the government as media outlets for the purposes of expressing their political views in the public forum, Botswana's freedom-of-expression score would deteriorate markedly. While legal and professional associations have refused to comply with the MPA, it hangs above the media sector like a potential sword of Damocles.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Botswana Objective Score: 2.26

MSI panelists noted a distinction in professionalism between the private and public media. "Even though there are cases of extremely unethical reporting, by and large the local private media do a good job of reporting fairly and objectively. The same cannot be said about the state media, which are clearly biased in favor of the state," said the panel's anonymous newspaper editor.

Mokgoabone admitted that the credibility of news is sometimes questionable. He asserted that this might be a

result of less experienced and unskilled media professionals in the industry, observing, "Our newsrooms are getting younger and younger as the profession loses highly skilled and experienced people to better-paying jobs, such as in public relations." An anonymous private radio news editor added, "A shortage of staff in most media houses is a challenge and at times compromises the quality of work that journalists produce."

"Private media, to a large extent, follow and adhere to ethical standards, but low salaries for reporters, the brain-drain in the newsrooms, as well as government dominance and abuse of state media compromise their otherwise good performance," summed up Mogapi. Mokgoabone added, "The desire by journalists to compete with faster modes, like social media, to break stories leads to rushed work that is not well researched."

The panel noted that the proliferation of defamation suits and high penalties awarded by the courts may lead to self-censorship in Botswana's media. Media activist Ndlovu explained, "Self-censorship is high; even though the private media try to report fearlessly, it is done by the state media, whose journalists are censored by the political leadership but who, in most cases, censor themselves in fear of losing their jobs."

The anonymous newspaper editor reported that because younger journalists tend to be less experienced, they are not well grounded in historical context; ultimately, the ability of such journalists to cover key issues and events is greatly affected. He added that the shorter deadlines inherent in new media also work against the media.

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).

Media activist Ndlovu explained, "Self-censorship is high; even though the private media try to report fearlessly, it is done by the state media, whose journalists are censored by the political leadership but who, in most cases, censor themselves in fear of losing their jobs."

During the well-covered national public-sector strike in 2011, state media were heavily criticized for taking sides and reporting only on the government's view. The anonymous print editor said state media always report positively about the leading party "to a point where it fails to draw the line between issues of public interest and leading party interest." Mokgoabone added, "There is a study from BTA that recommends that independent broadcasters should be given access to government facilities around the country, but the refusal by government shows an effort to maintain its competitive edge over the private-service providers."

Mokgoabone further stated, "Consultants engaged by the BTA to carry out a study to inform the development of appropriate policy and regulatory framework have recommended that infrastructure sharing be made mandatory, though there are both benefits and disadvantages."

The media industry in Botswana remains among the worst-paying industries in the country. It is characterized by high turnover of personnel as they look for more lucrative careers in other related industries, such as marketing and public relations. None of the panelists were able to establish the severity and extent of corruption. "Even though there has not been any proven case of 'brown-envelope' journalism, there is a growing concern over unbalanced reporting and suspicions of corrupt practices," said Ndlovu. An anonymous print editor attributed most of these deficiencies to poor working conditions for journalists and low salaries, which they believe makes most reporters susceptible to corruption and bribes.

The panel observed that most of the local Botswana radio stations greatly favor entertainment programming, with news taking a backseat. "There is no station registered as a fully-fledged news station locally," the anonymous radio news editor said. Sidney Baitoile, of SidFm, said Radio Botswana and Duma FM are supposed to close the information gap left by other radio stations that play more music but noted, "Duma FM does not cover most parts of the country, though it's the only private talk-radio station." He added, "At times media houses find themselves with no option other

One positive development of late has been the cellular providers' new offering of free access to Facebook for mobile-phone customers, which has increased information flow for citizens.

than to go for entertainment programming over news and information because it's what they can afford at that time."

The panel agreed that technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient. Media houses have digital cameras, computers, voice recorders, and other tools needed for gathering competitive news and present them in formats the audience can access. MISA Botswana director Phenyo Butale argued that media practitioners do not fully use web resources to gather information, or even to take their stories to the masses through new media and social media, which he said are revolutionizing the work of journalists. "New media are shaping the mainstream media in very interesting ways that the media should not overlook," said Butale. He advised that media houses also should consider investing in specialized software and other Internet tools, which they say will aid journalists in doing their work more effectively. "This will make the media more interactive, and hence competitive, in a market which is fast becoming digitized," concluded Butale.

Ntibinyane Ntibinyane, journalist and Francistown bureau chief of *Botswana Guardian* and *The Midweek Sun* newspapers, added, "At times, a lack of necessary skills to enable media houses to fully exploit technology is a major challenge, meaning that state media remain miles ahead of private media due to vast resources at their disposal."

Mokgoabone pointed out that due to meager resources, private media do not have the capacity to support specialized reporting; he noted that this type of reporting "would improve the quality of reporting through mastery of the subject matter." He said the current situation, with reporters covering cross-cutting issues, compromises their ability to have a deeper understanding of the issues involved. However, there are new publications emerging—like *BOIDUS* newspaper (an upcoming architecture publication based in Gaborone)—but often media houses find it challenging and unsustainable to target certain segments in the market because the Botswana domestic market is small.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Botswana Objective Score: 2.14

The panel recognized the existence of a wide range of news sources for citizens, especially in urban areas, but observed that the choice is reduced significantly for those in rural areas who are, in most cases, dependent on the state media. This was a major concern because the vast majority of Botswana live in rural areas, and their dependence on state media, the reporting of which has been found to be biased to the views of the government, might suppress debate. Moreover, private print media tend to be more expensive, which affects the ability of many to buy their publications. Tsiako commented, "The private media, in their struggle for survival, are forced to revise prices upward, making the prices of newspapers a bit on the high side."

The panel observed that there is no provision for community media in the new BOCRA legislation. "[MISA Botswana] has been advocating for the licensing of community media but was shocked [that] provisions for them were excluded in the BOCRA bill," explained Butale.

The panel criticized the fact that there are only two television stations in Botswana: BTV (the state-owned national television station) and e-Botswana (a privately owned station accessible only in and around Gaborone), with the latter broadcasting mainly South African content. However, as reported by BizTechAfrica.com in July 2012, recently e-Botswana has moved toward nationwide broadcasts.

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.

Though there are no restrictions in place to keep citizens from accessing international media, papers from countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, and other neighboring countries are still not readily available in local outlets. Botswana continues to enjoy South African media through a signal overspill. Many citizens have acquired special decoders that enable them to access many South African radio and television channels.

Currently Botswana has no laws that limit access to news or information online. Despite this, Botswana's market for Internet services remains characterized by high prices, which limits access in practical terms. Internet access is high only in urban areas, where computer literacy is also high. Access and use are very limited in rural areas.

One positive development of late has been the cellular providers' new offering of free access to Facebook for mobile-phone customers, which has increased information flow for citizens. Though this is a welcome development, its impact is still limited to color-screen phones and only for those using specific rate plans. Social networks are very popular among students and young professionals, mostly in urban areas. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular, as they are seen by many individuals and companies as a platform on which they can market their products and make meaningful connections.

In Botswana, there are no community media outlets, only state-owned and privately owned media. "Private media are often accused of supporting the opposition while the state media are clearly abused and monopolized by the ruling party," said Mogapi. She argued that all political views are often covered in the private media, but the same cannot be said about the state media. The anonymous print editor noted, "The coverage during the public-service strike [in 2011] showed this bias, as only the government view was aired on state media while the views of unions and striking workers were barred." The anonymous print editor added that the fact that government media operate under the office of the president compromises the editorial independence of state media and noted, "This is a further indication of a desire by government to control the editorial content of government media outlets."

"Most Botswana believe views expressed through the state media are those of the ruling party, as opposed to those of a diverse spectrum of citizens," argued Ndlovu. He also observed that journalists in state media have very limited professional freedom within which to operate, as they are effectively barred from criticizing the government they serve. Mogapi noted, "The professionals working for state media are denied the freedom to work, and they have to deal with political interference most of the time."

"The problem is further compounded by the fact that there is only one privately owned daily newspaper that still has limited circulation, compared with the state-owned *Daily News*, which is circulated for free throughout the country," observed Mogapi. She said the atmosphere has led to the voice of private media being suppressed by state-owned media, which the ruling party uses to manipulate and distort public discourse and shut out alternative views.

There are no privately owned news agencies in the country. The only news agency in Botswana is BOPA (Botswana Press Agency), which gathers news for state media. Private media do not subscribe to this agency, because while it is a news agency, it acts as a de-facto primary source for the state-owned newspaper *Daily News* and state-owned radio station Radio Botswana.

"The licensing of three private radio stations has greatly improved the broadcasting sphere in the country, which was dominated by state-run Radio Botswana for many years," said the anonymous radio news editor. He said these stations strive to produce their programs in terms of news and other local content, but they are still in their infancy, so there is a lot that can still be done. The radio news editor also mentioned the new privately owned television station, e-Botswana, but found that it is still too reliant on content from South Africa, although it has introduced local news bulletins.

The panel observed that due to resource limitations, most of the independent broadcast media still fail to meet expectations in terms of efficiently producing their own news programs. Furthermore, the panelists noted that even where such programs exist, there is a shortage of personnel to cover certain areas of the country; as a result, most of the news that is produced focuses on urban areas to the exclusion of issues in rural areas.

Currently, the media outlets with the widest reach are the two state-owned radio stations RB1 and RB2, which Tsiako described as "tools of the ruling BDP."

"The public is often left in the dark on who owns the media; they are left to speculate, looking at the trends in reporting shown by particular media outlets," said Butale. He added that a member of parliament raised the issue of media ownership by government in the July 2012 session, showing that the issue is fast becoming a concern. "The growth of the Dikgang Publishing Company and its acquisition of *The Guardian* and Sun group of newspapers have also been seen by some as a worrying development," said the anonymous print editor. He said newspapers see forming big conglomerates with a financial muscle as the only way to survive under the constant threat of government pulling advertising.

Various government departments collectively make up a major share of the revenue private media earn from advertising. This alone holds private media under serious pressure to balance their mandate with that of the government, particularly when they hold different opinions.

There is limited representation of minority-language information sources in Botswana. The panel concluded that there is only one Setswana publication (*Naledi*), which circulates as an insert in the *Mmegi* newspaper, besides the state-owned *Daily News*, which is half in Setswana and half in English. Nearly 80 percent of Botswana speak Setswana. Baikgopodi Ditso, coordinator at the Women Against Rape NGO in Maun, said, "Private media and state media cannot cover issues of minority groups and other communities adequately, and our issues in the civil society and NGO sector are often left out of mainstream media, which have more bias to mega-narratives, such as politics."

The panel's anonymous print editor argued that it is still the state media that cover local and national news, as they have the widest reach; under-resourced private media are struggling to expand their coverage. The print editor added that coverage of international news is comprehensive, since there are South African channels that many view through a spillover signal and international channels that are provided through Multichoice Botswana, a digital satellite television service provider.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Botswana Objective Score: 1.88

The panel agreed that private media in Botswana operate like any other profit-making entity, striving to maximize sales while at the same time trying to adhere to high professional standards and ethics. However, panelists did cite occasions in which professionalism was under pressure. Tsiako said, "In my long career, I was made to apologize to business magnates, not because my stories were inaccurate but because the editors had to protect the business side of the media house."

The panel observed that some media owners are at the same time practicing journalists or editors for the same entities they own, which makes efforts to balance business and professionalism a much bigger challenge.

Botswana's media industry is overly dependent on revenue from advertising and, for print, circulation sales. Ntibinyane said that if local media continue to rely on one source of revenue, they will be vulnerable and will in return make compromises that negatively affect journalistic professional ethics. He suggested that the media explore alternative advertising options (not mainly from the government) to raise revenue, which minimizes the ethical compromises they find themselves having to make at times.

Various government departments collectively make up a major share of the revenue private media earn from advertising. This alone holds private media under serious pressure to balance their mandate with that of the government, particularly when they hold different opinions. In the past, the government has at times abused this power by threatening outlets or implying a quid pro quo on advertising. One example of this was the 2002 controversy over the Guardian/Sun Group, when the government issued a ban on advertising on these two sister publications because of their unfavorable coverage. Thankfully, the government has refrained from such intimidation for several years now.

There are a few agencies that control the advertising industry and hold the advertising accounts of all major companies. The panel's anonymous print editor said that at times, media houses find themselves having to compromise their editorial decisions for the sake of keeping the big spenders. The anonymous radio editor cited a case wherein Gabz FM, a local privately owned radio station, made some comments about the president that the president did not like but that were within journalistic ethical practices. He further stated, "The station was forced to make an apology statement on the matter out of fear of being victimized or losing some of

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.

its major advertising clients, who are, in most cases, allies to the president.”

Primary nongovernment advertisers include cellular operators Be Mobile, Mascom, and Orange, local diamond mining conglomerate Debswana, and prominent retailers such as Choppies and Pick ‘n’ Pay.

The media industry in Botswana relies heavily on advertising as its primary source of revenue. While the proportion differs somewhat across outlets, most devote 30 to 40 percent of their pages to advertising. As private newspapers rely heavily on advertisements to sustain themselves, the panel found the advertising-content balance to favor the former at many papers.

Panelists concluded that the government of Botswana currently views privately owned media as an enemy, and as a result, there are no financial schemes, subsidies, or tax breaks to assist them. The anonymous radio news editor pointed out that some media houses have turned to political sources for funding, which “makes them obedient to these funders and compromises the role of the media as a watchdog.”

Ndlovu commented that some media houses find themselves being forced to enter into shady deals with prominent people who may have interests that conflict with the objectives of an independent and pluralistic media. In October 2012, *Mmegi* reported that some members of the ruling party (BDP) joined forces to start a new publication titled *The Patriot*, which was expected to hit the market in late 2012.

In Botswana, market research is rarely used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of their audiences. Baitoile observed, “Most of the decisions which are made are based on assumptions derived from observation and lack statistical evidence to back them.” Baitoile said it is easy to get accurate statistics about their listeners since they are an online radio station. He added that research is very essential for market growth and decision-making in the industry, as well as for helping new entrants adapt to the market.

In Botswana, there are no accurate data on broadcast ratings and circulation figures, and there are no independent bodies that conduct such research. “Duma FM relies on assumed statistics based on our geographical coverage. Most media houses do guesswork, and as such the response to listener needs and desires is not always spot-on. Because of financial challenges we are not able to undertake effective market surveys,” said the anonymous radio news editor. Commenting further on this, Itumeleng Garebatshabe, broadcast engineer/IT analyst at SidFm, said that, again, the situation is slightly different with online radio stations because it is easy to acquire such information about their listeners. Garebatshabe

noted that software and log-in statistics make it very simple for them to have readily available statistics about their audience; it also allows listeners to subscribe therefore giving them information regarding their listeners. He says with that with the help of software they can easily access information on individual listeners and their needs, as well as attain timely feedback.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Botswana Objective Score: 1.77

Panelists said there are very few NGOs that support the media industry in fulfilling its role as a watchdog and fourth estate and that there is a need for a more vibrant and organized civil-society movement in Botswana.

The panel observed that media owners do not affiliate with trade associations, either as a group or individually. “Contrary to the current situation, where media speak in divided voices, it will help if private media owners approach issues affecting their industry with a united voice, as well as share resources where the need arises. Affiliation [with] a trade association will equip the owners with bargaining power and have professional representation,” advised Ndlovu.

The formation of the Press Council and the Editors Forum in 2002 and 2005, respectively, has not been sufficient to address all media-related issues. Ndlovu and Mogapi both shared the same view, saying there is a need for both organizations to increase their visibility and function as a unit. In addition to this, the anonymous print editor said the media industry will continue to experience challenges with staff retention until

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

As a result of their dependence on government, civil-society players are often reluctant to speak against government or provide any information they hold that may discredit the government.

a journalists' union is formed to advocate for better working conditions for media workers.

Adding to his remarks, Ndlovu also acknowledged civil society for the joint messages it has circulated in the press condemning the government of Botswana for introducing draconian laws that they said will not benefit the citizens but will infringe upon fundamental human rights, such as freedom of expression. Ndlovu stated that a few NGOs—MISA, Emang Basadi, Botswana Law Society—are to be commended for their significant efforts in advocacy. He added, however, "These bodies are faced with multiple challenges, including from the government, which continues to exploit gaps in the constitution to marginalize journalists' rights." The panelists felt that the public needs to unite and voice their views as one, as well as claim the bargaining power that comes with their numbers to influence the decisions of the ruling elites. Ndlovu advised that media efforts will yield very little results if there is no support from other non-state actors.

It was also noted that many NGOs in Botswana receive government funding, creating a dependence that compromises their autonomy and their partnership with the media on advocacy issues, such as media freedom, access to information, and freedom of expression. As a result of their dependence on government, civil-society players are often reluctant to speak against government or provide any information they hold that may discredit the government. Civil society does not speak with one voice to support media independence and freedom; rather, it is characterized by division along lines of funding.

The government of Botswana offers sponsorship to citizens who want to study journalism at the tertiary and university levels. However, Ntibinyane decried the low quality of the training given to journalism students in local institutions. "Most of these graduates cannot even compile a story, and this becomes a challenge, as editors are also not very experienced," he said.

Ntibinyane added that the media industry gained some sense of hope when Limkokwing University came into the picture in 2007. "The media industry believed that the institution would bridge the gap in education that exists in the media industry,

but I think after all these years we are still having the same problem. If you hire a graduate from these institutions, you will be bound for challenges, since they still struggle with the job," noted Ntibinyane.

Tsiako also condemned the quality of education that graduates receive from the two local universities offering journalism courses (University of Botswana and Limkokwing University of Creative Technology), saying, "This now raises a need for each media house to try hard to attract experienced personnel who will continuously guide these young men and women." The University of Botswana is a public institution, while Limkokwing is a Malaysia-based private university with campuses in several cities around the world.

Butale said that it is very important to provide short trainings to equip media practitioners with essential and up-to-date knowledge and skills that would improve their reporting. Examples might include ethical reporting on HIV/AIDS or discrimination issues, which the university curricula do not specifically address. Ntibinyane advised that there should be a closer working relationship between the local training institutions and the media firms. He believes this will help the institutions produce graduates with skills that can be updated as conditions in the industry, and the issues of interest to their audience, evolve over time.

The panel concluded that there are a few strong firms who control Botswana's printing industry. Ntibinyane noted that Dikgang Publishers is the only privately owned printing facility in the country. He described this as essential to the media sector, allowing private firms to act independently of the government and compete in the market. The state operates a single government publishing house for the state newspaper and a state magazine, *Kutlwano*.

The panel observed that Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (BTC) owns almost all the telecommunications and infrastructure. "[The] government continues to have an upper hand in media distribution; its newspaper, *Daily News*, has the highest circulation, and only the two government radio stations enjoy nationwide coverage," said the anonymous print editor on the panel.

Tsiako posited that the government will continue to dominate in circulation, since it has significant resources to produce and distribute a free publication that reaches throughout Botswana. Mokgoabone recommended that Botswana's transmission infrastructure should be separated from the government, since the government currently limits the coverage capacity of private radio stations, as well as mobile-phone and Internet service providers. Botswana has poor network coverage, and Internet access is expensive.

However, the government of Botswana has invested in fiber network cabling to curb the high prices. The panelists acknowledged this development by the government, saying it will enhance communication within the country and abroad, as well as reduce communication costs. An anonymous print editor lamented that despite this, local mobile operators still insist on retaining the same pricing structures. *Mmegi* reported on August 16, 2012, that the BTC had reduced its wholesale Internet rates by 59 percent, but users will see only a 15 percent reduction in their access charges.

List of Panel Participants

Ntibinyane Ntibinyane, journalist and bureau chief, *Botswana Guardian* and *The Midweek Sun*, Francistown

Bright Kholi, news editor, *The Ngami Times*, Maun

Thapelo Ndlovu, media activist, Gaborone

Romang Mogapi, information officer, MISA Botswana, Gaborone

Itumeleng Garebatshabe, broadcast engineer/IT analyst, SidFm, Gaborone

Sidney Baitoile, editor, producer, and owner, SidFm, Gaborone

Baikgopodi Ditiso, Coordinator, Women Against Rape, Maun

Douglas Tsiako, news editor, *Mmegi*, Gaborone

Kabo Mokgoabone, senior reporter, *The Sunday Standard*, Gaborone

Two additional panelists, a radio news editor and a print editor, participated on condition of anonymity.

Moderators

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