



unesco

A silhouette of a group of people on a hill, some holding cameras on tripods, against a bright yellow and orange sunset or sunrise sky. The scene is overlaid with a blue grid and circular patterns.

Assessment
of Media
Development in

Ethiopia

*Based on UNESCO's
Media Development
Indicators*

Published in 2022 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
7, place de Fontenay, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
and

UNESCO Addis Ababa Liaison Office to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa/
National Office for Ethiopia, Niger Building, 1st Floor (ECA Compound), PO Box 1177 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

© UNESCO 2022

ISBN 978-92-3-100570-1



This publication is available in Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>). By using the content of this publication, the users accept to be bound by the terms of use of the UNESCO Open Access Repository (<http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>).

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Research team:

This assessment was conducted in 2019 by an independent team of researchers selected from the School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University:

Mulatu Alemayehu Moges (Ph.D.) – Lead Researcher; Dagim Afework Mekonnen – Researcher and Coordinator; Getachew Dinku (Ph.D.) – Researcher (from January 2019 to May 2019); Asmeret Haileselesie – Researcher (from January 2019 to August 2019); Hikma Ahmed – Assistant Researcher; Martha Feye – Assistant Researcher

National steering committee:

Abel Adamu, Abere Adamu, Atseku Haileselesie, Cherer Akililu, Dan Yirga, Ejigayehu Amha, Elshaday Negash, Gizaw Tesfaye, Jaylan Abde Gebremedhin, Solomon Goshu, Soud Ousman, Tamrat G. Giorgis, Tewodros Negash, Wubshet Hussien, Zekarias Sentayehu, and Zekiriya Mohammed

UNESCO review and editing:

Hendrik Bussiek, Media Consultant; Guy Berger, former Director for Strategies and Policies in the Field of Communication and Information, UNESCO; Aderaw Genetu Tassew, National Professional Officer, UNESCO Addis Ababa; Lydia Gachungi, Regional Adviser on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, UNESCO Addis Ababa; Misako Ito, Regional Adviser for Communication and Information, UNESCO Nairobi Regional Office.

Coordination by:

Aderaw Genetu Tassew, National Professional Officer, UNESCO Addis Ababa
Sophia Wellek, Media Consultant.

Photos: UNESCO

Graphic design: UNESCO

Cover design: UNESCO

Typeset: UNESCO

Acknowledgement:

The project to assess the Ethiopia media landscape was made possible thanks to the generous support of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). The original version of the report will also be available on the websites of both UNESCO and the Ethiopia Media Sector Alliance.

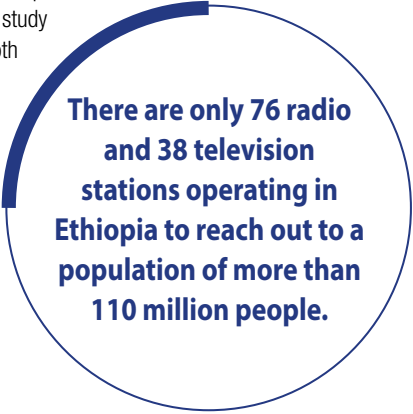
SHORT SUMMARY

Plural views for democracy and sustainable development!

Freedom of expression, free flow of information and diverse views as well as independent media ensure healthy democracy and sustainable development. With current challenges to information quality and freedom of expression, a vibrant media system helps ensure that diverse, accurate, and timely information is available and accessible.

This study on the development of the Ethiopian media using UNESCO indicators shows the state of media in the country. It unpacks how media regulations, associations, networks, training institutes, ownership structure, technologies, and other factors have impacted on press freedom, diversity and plurality of the media. The study indicates that in its current condition, the Ethiopian media – both offline and online - needs strong support and collaboration among the state, local and international organizations, journalism associations, educational institutes, and other players.

With a population of more than 110 million people, with great diversity in languages, politics, culture, societal values, and other aspects, the availability of diverse media and plural views in Ethiopia is vital for peaceful co-existence, democracy and development.



**There are only 76 radio
and 38 television
stations operating in
Ethiopia to reach out to a
population of more than
110 million people.**



unesco

*'Since wars begin in the minds of men and women
it is in the minds of men and women that the
defences of peace must be constructed'*



unesco

Assessment of
Media Development in

Ethiopia

*Based on UNESCO's
Media Development
Indicators*

Note to the Reader

The major data of the Ethiopian Media Development Assessment was collected in late 2019 and early 2020, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict that broke out in the northern part of Ethiopia in November 2020. We would like to note for the reader that the analysis of the report and the findings may not reflect some of the developments afterwards. Hence, to help the reader contextualize the development, the following contextual summary of developments are offered.

Key Context of Ethiopia since the start of the MDI assessment

Ethiopia is undergoing a multitude of transitions including demographic, economic, social, and political. Notable progress had been made towards the opening-up of political and civic spaces since early 2018, with the release of political prisoners and journalists, expansion of civil liberties including through adoption of a new Civil Society Organization Proclamation in March 2019, a Media Proclamation in February 2021 and reform of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). While widely welcomed at home and abroad, the openings have also been accompanied by significant and sometimes violent civil unrest, leading to large-scale internal displacement amid polarized political contestation, growth in hate speech particularly through social media.¹

The COVID 19 global crisis that heralded huge disruptions to day-to-day operations and the conflict that broke in November 2020 in Northern Ethiopia reversed some of the progress made in the civic and political space, and took much of the attention away from the reform and slowed down further reforms on laws and democratic institutions. There were a series of actions against journalists by the government in 2020 and 2021. According to the EHRC report of 27 May 2022, 16 journalists and media personnel were detained, with their arrest apparently contrary to the Media Law which prohibits pre-trial detention of persons charged with committing an offence through the media. The EHRC report noted prolonged pre-trial detention, non-disclosure of whereabouts, and detention in irregular detention facilities.² Two journalists were also reported killed in 2021. There are also reports of interruption of Internet access in conflict areas.

More recently, a peace deal was signed by the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) on 02 November 2022 as a critical step to ending the two-year conflict. According to media reports, the peace deal includes the protection of civilians and end to hostile propaganda, rhetoric and hate speech. Moreover, access to telecommunication and internet services would also be restored. In this context, the recommendations of this report will be of continued relevance to Ethiopia's road to media development.

-
- 1 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2020 -2025- UN Ethiopia and A/HRC/44/49/Add.1, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression on his visit to Ethiopia
 - 2 EHRC. Over a dozen media personnel in unlawful detention <https://ehrc.org/over-a-dozen-media-personnel-in-unlawful-detention/> Accessed on 16 September 2022.

Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	10
Foreword	13
Executive summary	15
Purpose and justification	26
Background	27
Methodology	28
Category 1	
A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media	32
A. Legal and policy framework	32
B. Regulatory system for broadcasting and print	43
C. Defamation laws and other legal restrictions on journalists	47
D. Censorship	53
Category 2	
Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership	60
A. Media concentration	60
B. A diverse mix of public, private and community media	62
C. Licensing and spectrum allocation	67
D. Taxation and business regulation	68
E. Advertising	69

Category 3

Media as a platform for democratic discourse	74
A. Media reflects diversity of society	74
B. Public service broadcasting model	78
C. Media self-regulation	83
D. Requirements for fairness and impartiality	85
E. Levels of public trust and confidence in the media	87
F. Safety of journalists	89

Category 4

Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpin freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity	96
A. Availability of professional media training	96
B. Availability of academic courses in media practice	100
C. Presence of trade unions and professional organisations	101
D. Presence of civil society organizations (CSOs)	103

Category 5

Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media	108
A. Availability and use of technical resources by the media	108
B. Press, broadcasting and ICT penetration	110

Annex 1

List of informants	117
---------------------------	------------

Annex 2

List of media analyzed	124
-------------------------------	------------

Addis Ababa Declaration. World Press Freedom Day 2019.

“Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation	125
---	------------

Abbreviations and acronyms

AAMMA	Addis Ababa Mass Media Agency
AAU	Addis Ababa University
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Rights
AMMA	Amhara Mass Media Agency
BDU	Bahir Dar University
CCRDA	Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DDMMA	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
EBA	Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority
EBC	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party
EFPPJA	Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association
EJA	Ethiopian Journalists Association
EMMTI	Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute
EMWA	Ethiopian Media Women Association
ENJU	Ethiopian National Journalists Union
EMSA	Ethiopian Media Sector Alliance
ENMS	Ethiopian National Media Support
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FBC	Fana Broadcasting Corporate
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
EEJA	Ethiopian Environmental Journalists' Association
GCAO	Government Communication Affairs Office
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MDIs	Media Development Indicators
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OBN	Oromia Broadcasting Network
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PSB	Public Service Broadcasting
SJC	School of Journalism and Communication
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region

- TMMA** Tigray Mass Media Agency
- TPLF** Tigray People's Liberation Front
- UDHR** Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UNDP** United Nations Development Program
- UNESCO** United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization





Foreword

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and an enabler of other rights. It is one of the cornerstones of democracy. However, this right will only be realized when there exists an enabling environment where citizens have information to exercise their freedom and when journalists can freely report on issues of public concern, without fear of attack from powerful bodies.

This comprehensive study presents an overview of the development of the media and media freedom in Ethiopia, following political reforms introduced by the government since 2018. UNESCO Addis Ababa took this opportunity in early 2019 to initiate a nationwide assessment of the environment in which the media work, using the UNESCO Media Development Indicators (MDI) framework. This was one of UNESCO's engagements with the Ethiopian government, including the organization of the Global World Press Freedom Conference 2019 hosted in Addis Ababa jointly with the African Union (AU), following the announcement of the reforms.

The UNESCO MDIs were drawn up to gauge a wide spectrum of media development and performance, with the ultimate objective of determining specific needs, guiding the formulation of media-related policies and improving the targeting of media development. In accordance with the MDI framework as applied in many other countries worldwide, this report looks at five major areas: 1) the system of media regulation, 2) media plurality and diversity, 3) the role of media as a platform for democratic discourse, 4) professional capacity building and 5) infrastructural capacity.

The study was undertaken by a team of researchers from Addis Ababa University, with a national multi-stakeholder advisory team guiding the process. The bulk of the research was conducted in late 2019 and early 2020, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict that broke out in the northern part of Ethiopia in November 2020. Nevertheless, the major findings of the research and the recommendations continue to have resonance for the future.

The study depended primarily on the qualitative data collected from relevant legal and other documents and from in-depth interviews with over a hundred key media stakeholders in Ethiopia, as well as on additional quantitative research. The national stakeholders, primarily through the multi-stakeholder oversight team, validated the findings and the recommendations. International experts also provided inputs on the drafts, in addition to the UNESCO team at headquarters and in Addis Ababa who closely followed and provided the necessary quality control at all stages of the work.

UNESCO presents this study as a contribution not only to the achievement of Ethiopia's Ten-Year Development Plan 'Ethiopia: An African Beacon of Prosperity', for the 2020 to 2030 period, but also to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 16, to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

I would like to acknowledge Addis Ababa University, the Government of Ethiopia, as well as media stakeholders and journalists who participated both as members of the national committee and provided data. I would also like to thank the IPDC board for financing the assessment.

Yumiko Yokozeki, Ph.D.

Director a.i., UNESCO Liaison Office in Addis Ababa and
Representative to Ethiopia

Executive summary

Category 1: A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media

A. Legal and policy framework

Ethiopia has ratified international declarations that protect freedom of expression such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and its constitution clearly protects people's right to free speech. However, for a long time, these declarations have not been fully translated into practice, owing to lack of institutional capacity to ensure protection of this right and presence of restrictive provisions in media laws like the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation and Broadcasting Service Proclamation. Despite these laws that guarantee editorial independence, state media in Ethiopia have experienced state interference. The editorial independence of some private media is also undermined by ownership control and political influence brought to bear by individuals and groups. As of 2018, however, the Government had taken measures to open the media landscape, such as freeing imprisoned journalists and revising restrictive media and access to information laws, as part of its political reform efforts. In a bid to suppress the spread of disinformation and hate speech, a new law titled Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation was enacted, eliciting debate on its potential chilling effect on freedom of expression.

B. Regulatory system for broadcasting and print

The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA), the statutory media regulatory institution, is responsible for registering and monitoring broadcast media, issuing licenses and allocating frequencies, as well as enforcing media regulations. With respect to carrying out its operations independently and transparently, EBA has limitations. The authority reports regularly to the House of Representatives, but according to the Broadcasting Service Proclamation, its General Director is appointed and its budget allocated by the executive branch of the Government as opposed to the legislative. However, the draft law that is expected to replace the existing laws gives these powers to the House of Peoples' Representatives.

C. Defamation laws and other legal restrictions on journalists

Even though the Ethiopian Constitution, the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation, and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service Proclamation guarantee the right to freedom of expression, they also contain provisions that undermine this very right. These provisions give the executive the power to initiate criminal defamation suits, impose harsh financial penalties, arbitrarily deny licences and permits, and take unjustified administrative measures. The Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008 also grants government communication officers and public relations experts the power to deny or grant access to information at their own discretion.

D. Censorship

The Ethiopian Constitution prohibits censorship of any form in Article 29 where freedom of expression is stipulated. Due to restrictive provisions, contained in the above-mentioned Proclamations and the Anti-Terrorism Law, as well as direct and indirect pressure from officials, powerful individuals, media owners or informal groups, the Ethiopian media, both private and public, practice self-censorship to a certain extent and deliberately avoid publishing critical views for fear of repercussions. Before the political changes in 2018, the Government used anti-terrorism laws and state-of-emergency periods to filter or ban online platforms. This eroded the exercise of freedom of expression by citizens and journalists. Initially, under the new Government, all blocked websites were unblocked, and the online space was opened up. However, there have been recurrent internet shutdowns which raise questions of the necessity and proportionality of such blanket (as distinct from more targeted) measures, and which have a negative impact on free speech and democracy. The 2020 Proclamation on Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression has been enacted and journalists and rights groups feared that it might be used as an instrument to suppress freedom of expression, hence undermining democracy.

Category 2: Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership

A. Media concentration

Ethiopian media laws clearly address issues of media concentration. For instance, Article 7 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation prohibits undue concentration of ownership and promotes media plurality and diversity. When screening licence applications for available frequencies from commercial media, a committee of experts in the EBA pays close attention not only to the content the applicant intends to deliver but also to details of ownership, shareholding etc. The Proclamation does not allow foreign citizens and political parties and their leaders to own shares in media in Ethiopia.

B. A diverse mix of public, private and community media

Ethiopia has a diversity of media in terms of ownership - public, commercial and community. Commercial and community broadcasting is a relatively recent phenomenon. As of 2019, there were 32 commercial broadcasting media, 50 community radio stations and 19 public service media on-air in the country. Except for the public and community broadcasting services, all others are stationed in the capital. The number seems relatively high. However, considering the size of the Ethiopian population, the diversity of interests, and the democratic role the media ought to play, this number is still low. There is limited systemic and structural support from the Ethiopian Government for media, for example providing financial and technical support for communities to establish their own radio station. The EBA seeks to ensure that different communities are granted licences and facilitates training workshops for journalists working in community radio stations.

C. Licensing and spectrum allocation

The EBA grants licences and allocates frequencies to public and community media upon request, whereas commercial media are expected to apply for available frequencies in a competitive bidding process. Overall, frequency allocation to community, commercial, and public broadcasting services has been carried out in a manner that ensures diversity of media ownership and plurality of media is achieved. However, while the EBA maintains that it carries out licensing and frequency allocation according to clear guidelines and transparently, commercial broadcasters question the authority's independence and transparency.

D. Taxation and business regulation

The general tax rules and regulations also apply to all media. Media organizations pay extremely high taxes for the importation of equipment. So far, there is no support from the State in terms of tax exemptions or a special tax scheme for media companies, or through providing incentives as done for other sectors.

E. Advertising

Ethiopia has an Advertising Proclamation that contains provisions on ethical issues, the ratio of advertising to content in print publications and broadcast programs and other related areas. However, there is no policy that aims at achieving a fair allocation of advertisements by government agencies to the various media organizations. As a result, the income of commercial media, both print and electronic, is adversely affected and this weakens their institutional capacity and their roles in society.

Category 3: Media as a platform for democratic discourse

A. Media reflects diversity of society

In terms of reflecting the linguistic diversity of Ethiopia, the media in general has shown significant progress recently. Ethiopia counts over 80 languages. In contrast to privately owned media (where only three languages are used predominantly), government media are using nearly two-third of local languages. One third (of the 80 languages in the country) are still left without representation. Most government media, both print and broadcast, rely heavily on Amharic, the working language of the Federal Government, four regional states and two city administrations in the country. They also run publications and broadcasting services in a few other local languages. In other regional states media use the respective working language of the region, and run a few hours of broadcasts a week in selected few other languages in the regions. When it comes to community broadcasting, most services are available in marginalized and remote areas and reflect the diversity of languages of the communities they represent.

Moreover, the mainstream media fall short of serving the needs of different sections of society, most notably in addressing issues of women, farmers, people living with disabilities, and children, and thereby reflect either elite and government interests (in the government media) or give overriding importance to entertainment (in the commercial media). This is clearly a detriment to the creation of informed citizens, which is one of the requisites of democracy. Divergent views within society on political, economic and social issues are either

unrepresented or underrepresented. When it comes to employment practices, some women journalists now occupy leadership positions as editors and managers but still make up only 30 percent of journalists in Ethiopia. The media industry in general lacks policies to adapt employment practices in line with the diversity of genders, ethnic groups, including minorities or religious groups.

B. Public service broadcasting model

The Broadcasting Service Proclamation and other proclamations on the establishment of public broadcasting services in federal and regional states note that public broadcasting services should serve the interests of the public and are accountable to the respective houses of people's representatives. In practice, however, public service broadcasting is under strict government control and influence and hence fails to live up to societal expectations.

Public service broadcasters are administered through a board of directors appointed by the respective parliaments upon recommendation by the Prime Minister or Regional Presidents. A disproportionate number of board members have political affiliations with the ruling party and the broadcasters are dependent on government funding, which harms their editorial independence. Some respondents from the national public broadcaster indicated that interference from the authorities in editorial decision making is not uncommon. However, since the beginning of political reforms in 2018, respondents noted that there are considerable improvements in ensuring editorial independence of public service broadcasting, hence diversity of views is better served. Other than government interference, public service broadcasters in Ethiopia, both national and regional, do not face any discrimination or hindrances in terms of their operation.

With respect to participation of the public and CSOs, public broadcasting services have a very low performance. The national broadcasters for example, at the time of writing this report, offered only two programs that allow for audience engagement. However, respondents asserted that the public is often indifferent or discouraged when given a chance to participate. Social media is now widely used to engage the public in public service programming. Respondents from state-owned broadcasting services noted that there is no attempt to engage CSOs either in the process of appointing members of the governing board or in everyday news/programme broadcasts.

C. Media self-regulation

Until 2019, there was no statutory or voluntary media council in Ethiopia. There are different professional associations formed by media practitioners, but these are weak and lack credibility because of their small number of members, and hence their inability to enforce self-

regulatory codes. A successful attempt at establishing the first media council as a voluntary self-regulatory body for the media industry in Ethiopia was made in 2019. Nevertheless, respondents indicated that whether or not the new media council will manage to garner support from all members of the media industry and become efficient in enforcing codes of conducts is yet to be seen. Very few media organizations have an in-house ombudsperson to handle complaints and make sure that journalistic practice complies with laws and ethical standards. .

D. Requirements for fairness and impartiality

The existing statutory broadcasting codes included in the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service Proclamation (533/2007) and Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation Establishment Proclamation (858/2014) contain provisions that set out requirements for fairness, impartiality, accuracy and balance. National and regional public broadcasting services have similar codes in their respective organizations. However, most respondents from broadcasting services at both federal and regional levels note that in actual practice those requirements are not being met. Editorial guidelines and codes of conduct designed by individual media houses to further explain to journalists what is stipulated in the broadcasting codes are barely implemented, journalists rarely discuss them, and media houses hardly enforce them.

E. Levels of public trust and confidence in the media

Though there is no large-scale representative data on the matter, most respondents asserted that the media are not much trusted by the Ethiopian public, with government media faring even worse than private media. This is mainly owing to the perception that government media do not address the real concerns of the public but rather disseminate government propaganda. According to some respondents, this has also led to the public's lack of interest in making their views heard in the media whenever one of the few opportunities for public participation arises.

F. Safety of journalists

Respondents indicated that in most parts of the country where there is conflict and violence, at the time of writing this report, journalists were being physically assaulted and threatened and faced intimidation on social media merely for doing their job. Practitioners from all kinds of media told the research team stories of unlawful detentions and imprisonment without charges, as well as intimidation by some political officials and businesspersons. In its current state, they said, the country is unsafe for journalists and there is no protection from their

organizations. This has affected the practice of independent journalism and created an environment of fear in which journalists either self-censor or decline reporting assignments for fear of repercussions.

Category 4: Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpin freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity

A. Availability of professional media training

Ethiopia does not have specialized training facilities to provide tailor-made courses for practicing journalists. Workshops are being offered by various groups but not on a regular basis and which also often do not meet the needs of the industry. Training opportunities are mostly initiated by external organizers and more in line with the interests of the organizers rather than those of journalists. In addition, most of them are theoretical rather than practice-oriented. Training materials are not available in languages other than Amharic and English. Local course organizers or media organizations do not have policies to encourage participation of women and there is a shortage of training on media management and leadership.

Ethiopia's media landscape has been opening up since 2018 and professional capacity building for journalists is one of the priority areas identified by the media sector. Unfortunately, the delink between formal journalism education and the media industry is glaring and there is no mid-level college or in-service training. Graduates joining the media industry lack the necessary practical skills and working journalists have limited opportunities to refresh their theoretical and practical knowledge and skills.

B. Availability of academic courses in media practice

As of 2019, more than 20 universities in the country were offering journalism and communication either as a field of study or as a course. Many practising journalists are graduates of these universities. However, the facilities of universities, their training methods and the availability of course materials are insufficient. Courses related to democracy, development and human rights are included to some extent in the curriculum of most universities sampled in this study. However, despite the importance of these subject matters in relation to the work of journalists they are not given enough emphasis or time.

C. Presence of trade unions and professional organisations

Ethiopian laws allow journalists to establish associations. At the time of writing, around 10 journalists' organizations, both national and regional, had been registered. However, they cannot be described as strong enough to protect the rights of journalists and their professional autonomy. Some are struggling to survive, others battle with issues of leadership and integrity. Most of them fail to do justice to their advocacy role because of polarization in the media. It is promising, therefore, that a media council and an editor's guild have started operations at the time of writing this report.

D. Presence of civil society organizations (CSOs)

Only a few CSOs are providing support for media or monitoring media activities in the country, and few attempt to offer training in a sporadic and untargeted manner. Generally, the impact of CSOs in support of media development is characterized as poor. This is mainly due to Proclamation no. 621/2009 which provided for the registration and regulation of charities and societies. In connection with current reform efforts, it has now been replaced by Proclamation No. 1113/2019 and many CSOs and international organizations are developing an interest in supporting the Ethiopian media. For instance, the Ethiopia Media Sector Alliance (EMSA), which brings together many international media support organizations, has been established recently, as has Ethiopian National Media Support (ENMS), a local non-profit CSO.

Category 5: Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralist media

A. Availability and use of technical resources by the media

Access to modern technical resources for journalists is very poor across most media organizations and practitioners, which compromises the quality of their work. Poor access to ICT facilities for newsgathering, production and distribution, as well as lack of training for journalists on how to use ICT equipment effectively, have resulted in poor quality of production and transmission. The recurrent internet shutdowns by the Government have also impacted negatively on journalists' access to information.

B. Press, broadcasting and ICT penetration

Most media organizations, both print and broadcasting, are located in the capital and they concentrate on national issues, leaving local issues ignored. Given the Government's monopoly on printing, the limited market, and other factors, print media is highly inaccessible – all newspapers together have a weekly circulation of less than one-hundred thousand copies. Public and community broadcast media in most regions, on the other hand, are doing a promising job in terms of covering large areas and reporting on political, economic and socio-cultural issues in their region and other parts of the country. However, some marginalized groups are still without access to such media and hence their concerns remain uncovered, mostly because of lack of access to electricity, internet and ICT facilities as well as lack of money to afford such access where it may exist. Thus, the digital divide has reinforced the more traditional divide between people in urban and rural areas.

Key recommendations

More detailed recommendations are provided under each separate section later in this study.

1. The Government of Ethiopia should continue working on revising legal provisions in the different laws to align with the Ethiopian Constitution, Article 29, which guarantees freedom of expression and access to information, and commit to enforce them to create a media enabling environment for journalists and the media to exercise their rights, without fear of repercussion.
2. The Government should put in place and implement a comprehensive national media policy that guarantees freedom of expression, access to information, and editorial independence, and ensures a practice free from both direct censorship and self-censorship in accordance to the provision in the country's constitution and the internationally accepted standards. Such policies should also address the need to provide a wide variety of supports to the media, including subsidies and tax breaks in imported goods used in the media sector.
3. The Government should prioritise journalism training by supporting middle level and in-service training in order to create a pool of media trainers and improve the standard of journalism in Ethiopia. Higher education institutions that provide journalism education should improve quality of the training and create more specialized journalism and media education, and be equipped with technical facilities, teaching materials and skilled trainers.
4. The Government should create policy to bring about fairness and transparency in how government advertising is distributed across public and commercial media organizations. Such policies should also address the need to manage the influence of advertising on media content.
5. The Government and the Ethiopia media sector as a whole could make more effort to ensure that they serve diverse people living in the country, in terms of both giving voice to their perspectives and providing them with the information they need and equal business opportunities, regardless of gender, political orientation and ethnicity. To this end, both national and regional broadcasters should be transformed into truer public service broadcasters having a mandate to serve the public interest, which is protected in practice against both political and commercial interferences.
6. Initiating an independent public funding body, which could be managed and controlled by all stakeholders has become imperative to raise funds and allocate for the local media to financially strengthen their capacity and support them to sustain themselves.

7. Appointment of media governing bodies, including board of directors and management bodies of public broadcasters and media regulatory institutions could be more transparent and involve the public, media actors, and CSOs. The process could be entirely overseen by the House of People's Representatives at both federal and regional levels.
8. All media organisations in Ethiopia should formulate a gender equality policy to promote gender balance and safety of women journalists in the media. The Media Council, CSOs, and the Government should support the implementation of such policies across the media industry.
9. Government and CSOs should join efforts in providing capacity building, technical, and financial support to strengthen the operations of community media organizations, as well as to establish more media in the country.
10. Government, CSOs, and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority should support the Media Council as it will be instrumental in defending journalists' rights and exercise self-regulation, which will help end unjustified administrative measures and maintain journalistic professional standards.
11. The Government should not only prioritise the safety of journalists and protect media workers from threats, intimidation, harassment, physical assault, and imprisonment in line with the Target/Indicator 16.10.1 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also take effective legal and other measures to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against journalists and other media practitioners, and ensure that victims have access to effective remedies.
12. The Government, journalism schools, CSOs, and others should design and implement a media and information literacy education programme for all, which will help strengthen public participation in the media, promote informed and ethical consumption of media content, and encourage active engagement in making media responsive to people's needs. Besides, they should not only support the existing training institutions but also initiate middle level and in-service training centers in the country.
13. The Government, CSOs and media development agencies should support the digitalization of media operations through improving ICT facilities in media across the country, which should focus on ensuring sustainability of media operations. In addition, the government should initiate projects that can critically review the digital migration policy and strategy of the country and also provide sufficient ICT equipment to 'public' broadcasting services all over the country.

Introduction

This study of the media and its development in Ethiopia is the first of its kind in that it is both comprehensive and uses parameters that are recognized internationally. A team of researchers from Addis Ababa University's School of Journalism and Communication was tasked with conducting the research based on the media development indicators (MDIs) developed by UNESCO and endorsed by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) in 2008. A steering committee consisting of different media stakeholders in the country has been following the process of data collection closely and commented on the draft report presented by the research team.

The assessment is expected to provide valuable and reliable analysis for all interested bodies and civil society in general, both locally and internationally, to draw on in order to bring about sweeping reforms in the media landscape of the country.

Purpose and justification

2018 and 2019 were remarkable years for Ethiopia. The resignation of former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn from the position he held for six years following the death of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was indeed a turning point in the country's recent political history. What citizens have been calling for and sacrificed their lives for came to fruition – reforms that can transform Ethiopia into a genuine democracy.

The democratic reforms that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (Ph.D.) embarked on just a few weeks after his appointment included freeing political prisoners, journalists, and prisoners of conscience who had been languishing in jail for nothing other than expressing their opinions freely and doing their jobs. This was followed by the opening up of the political space by allowing armed groups once dubbed terrorist organizations to come back home and help build a democratic Ethiopia. The new administration also sought to increase women's participation in power. As a result, at the time of writing, about half of the cabinet ministerial positions as well as the presidency were held by women.

Major reforms were set in motion regarding the justice system and the national electoral board, among others. However, political elites and citizens are concerned that, unless the

reforms are concretized through a general strengthening of democratic institutions, the changes being undertaken may not last. One of the institutions that can help solidify the reforms is the media.

A plethora of research shows that the media in Ethiopia are one of the country's weakest institutions, bogged down by challenges from both within and outside. The government has long been decried for stifling media freedom through restrictive laws that resulted in incarceration and exile of journalists and closure of critical media. The media industry has been debilitated in that media as businesses are not provided with the required government support to flourish as an investment and make impactful contributions to society.

Having gone through many difficulties owing to government policy and lack of professionalism, Ethiopian journalism seems to be benefiting from the political liberalization, but a lot still remains to be done to make the notion of the media being a 'marketplace of ideas' a reality in Ethiopia. In order to bring about concrete change and make meaningful interventions, the new administration will first need to have a comprehensive understanding of the existing media landscape and the main areas that require serious attention.

Existing research on media in Ethiopia, mostly conducted at universities as part of requirements for graduate degrees, largely focuses on particular aspects of the media and lacks a broader perspective. There were some attempts by the now defunct government communication affairs office to do a national level media assessment. However, this current study looks at the Ethiopian media landscape in all its facets, based on UNESCO's media development indicators (MDI), and on this basis provides stakeholders, both local and international, with key policy recommendations on the overarching media development needs of the country.

Background

Ethiopia is an ancient country and one of the few on the continent that have never been colonized. Ethiopia borders on Somalia and Djibouti in the East, Eritrea in the North, Kenya in the South, and Sudan and South Sudan in the West. It has a rich historical and cultural heritage and is home to more than 80 ethnic groups that have their own languages, culture and traditions. Until the takeover of power by the military junta, known as the Dergue, in 1974, Ethiopia had been a monarchy for thousands of years. In its long history, Ethiopia endured civil war, recurrent drought, and aggression by colonial powers.

Having overthrown the Dergue, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF),³ a coalition of four regional parties representing the four large ethnic communities, namely Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), restructured the country into nine regional states⁴ and two chartered cities, forming the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia as stipulated in the 1995 Constitution. Since then, Ethiopia has followed the parliamentary system of political administration.

The population of Ethiopia is now estimated to be more than 110 million, the majority (about 70%) being young people. Its area is 1.3 million sq. km. Major languages spoken in the country include Amharic (the working language of the federal government, four regional states and two city administrations), Afan Oromo (a language spoken by the largest ethnic group in the country – the Oromos), and Somali. The two major religions with the largest number of followers are Christianity (dominantly orthodox) and Islam. The national currency is the ETB – Ethiopian Birr.

Ethiopia's economy is dependent on agriculture. The government has introduced various policies and strategies in a bid to encourage local and foreign investors to invest in manufacturing. The aim is to transform the economy from agriculture-led into industry-led and ultimately balance the trade deficit. However, there is still a long way to go, as the country's imports are far greater than its exports. The economy suffers from inflation and a shortage of foreign exchange. An official World Bank report indicated that due to various reasons, inflation had reached 15% by the end of November 2019.⁵ In 2020, the figure went up to more than 20%.⁶

Methodology

The study used a three-pronged approach to collect relevant data, namely a review of documents, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative content analysis is also applied to support the qualitative data.

Document analysis mainly focused on reviewing pieces of legislation, research reports, media policy documents, editorial policies, media regulations, official reports of professional associations and government offices, and training documents.

3 Since 2019, three members of the EPRDF coalition have merged and, together with other affiliated parties, established a new party under the name Prosper Party (PP).

4 As a result of the November 20, 2019 referendum on the self-administration of Sidama Zone, the number of regional states increased to ten.

5 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?locations=ET>

6 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/455089/inflation-rate-in-ethiopia/>

With reference to the Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), one hundred twenty informants were identified from various institutions and groups that include, but are not limited to, private and government media, journalists' professional associations, regulatory institutions, academic institutions, political parties, government, and law professionals (see Annex 1). Based on the relevance of the data and with a view to ensuring a diversity of sources, interviews were carried out mostly with professionals and decision makers. FGDs were held with community radio journalists, regional media practitioners, and journalism students in various campuses in selected universities. Interviews and FGDs took place from February to August 2019. All informants gave their consents to the team to use their views in the study. However, some preferred to remain anonymous and hence their names were not mentioned and only referred as "anonymous Source/ Respondent" in the study.

The material gained from these sources is supported by quantitative data collected through content analysis of selected media over a certain period of time.

Of the nine regional states and the two city-administrations that Ethiopia is composed of, four regions, namely Tigray, Oromia, Amhara and SNNP, as well as the two city-administrations, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, were chosen as the major sources of data. The justification for focusing on these particular regions is threefold: (1) They are home to more than 80 percent of the country's total population; (2) they have the highest level of media concentration and this is where the country's most influential media houses are located; and (3) they account for the majority of ethnic communities found in the country.

For the quantitative data, 15 television stations and newspapers, all dominant players in the Ethiopian media landscape, were selected and their contents were analyzed systematically over a three months' period. A list of analyzed media is provided in Annex 2.

Structure of report

The report has six sections. The first part (this part) focuses on the introduction of the study and the method used to collect and collate data from the various sources. The body of the paper is given over to the presentation and analysis of the findings, following the structure as provided by UNESCO's five categories and their respective indicators.

The second section is about category one which deals with the system of media regulation in place in Ethiopia and the question whether it is conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media.

The third part or category two examines the extent of media plurality and diversity in the country, including the issue of economic viability and media ownership.

The fourth section, category three, examines how and to what extent the Ethiopian media serves as a platform for democratic discourse, looking at how the media deals with diversity and what role the public broadcasting service exists plays. Self-regulation of the media, public trust in the media and safety of journalists are also covered under this category.

The fifth part, category four, relates to the professional capacity of journalists in the country and the availability of support structures like training institutions and professional bodies or efforts by media owners or government to enable media practitioners to do the best possible job.

Finally, the last section, category five, deals with the ICT infrastructure and its use by the media in Ethiopia.

Category 1

**A system of regulation
conducive to freedom of
expression, pluralism and
diversity of the media**



Category 1

A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media

A. Legal and policy framework

1. Legal and policy framework governing the media in Ethiopia

1.1 Freedom of expression is guaranteed by law and respected in practice

A major step taken by the EPRDF, which came to power in 1991, was to ensure freedom of expression in the country. In the transition period,⁷ it endorsed a press proclamation (Press Proclamation 34/1992) that allowed people to express their ideas freely and to own media outlets. Subsequently, the right to freedom of expression was protected under the 1995 constitution and other media laws such as the Broadcasting Service Proclamation of 2007 and the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2008.

The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a signatory to international and regional legal instruments which guarantee freedom of expression. Ethiopian laws dealing with freedom of expression are generally consistent with the provisions in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), as well as the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 34-

Article 9(4) and Article 13(2) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) stipulate:

⁷ Ethiopia was under a transitional government between 1991 and 1995. This government was established immediately after the fall of the Derg, and came to an end after the endorsement of the Ethiopian Constitution and the establishment of the federal structure of government.

All international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land. The fundamental rights and freedoms specified in this Chapter shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia.⁸

In fact, the wording in Article 29 (1 & 2) is similar to that of these international instruments. It reads:

- 1)** *Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference.*
- 2)** *Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice.*

Art. 29(6) points out that “freedom of expression and information cannot be limited on account of the content or effect of the point of view expressed” and that any limitation is possible only to

protect the well-being of the youth, and the honour and reputation of individuals. Any propaganda for war as well as the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity shall be prohibited by law.

This is in line with provisions of the ICCPR.

The mass media law of Ethiopia also has a number of provisions that protect the freedom of expression and of the press. For instance, Article 4 (1) of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2008 provides:

Freedom of the mass media is constitutionally guaranteed. Censorship in any form is prohibited.⁹

Article 4 in its sub articles 2 and 3 further stipulates:

- 2)** *Restrictions on the freedom of the mass media shall only be made by laws issued in accordance with the Constitution.*
- 3)** *All public bodies shall have regard to the right of the mass media, in fulfilling its public function, to:*
 - a)** *seek, receive and impart news or information;*
 - b)** *express opinion or criticism on various issues; or*
 - c)** *participate in the process of forming public opinion through other means.¹⁰*

⁸ Ethiopian Constitution. Proclamation No. 1/1995. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Federal Negarit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

⁹ Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Article 29 of the Ethiopian Constitution about press freedom is crafted to meet international standards. The problem, according to Abdu Ali, political and legal analyst with Sheger FM Radio Station, is that “there are no autonomous judiciary, institutions and associations which help in the execution of Constitutional provisions. Constitutional guarantee is mostly nominal”.¹¹

While there seems to be agreement among study participants that constitutional safeguards for press freedom in Ethiopia are in place, there were diverse views when it comes to specific media laws. Most interviewees were highly critical of the repressive, restrictive and punitive articles they contain. Some journalists referred to these as “the biggest enemy to freedom of expression”. Laws cited in this regard include the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2008, the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of 2009, the State of Emergency Proclamation and its directives of 2016, as well as a number of provisions in the Ethiopian Criminal Code. Cumbersome licensing requirements included in the Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007 were also mentioned as an impediment to a free press.

Parallel to the concerns of key informants, a Human Rights Watch report of 2015 highlights the fact that Ethiopian media laws contain problematic provisions that grant broad powers to initiate defamation suits, impose harsh financial penalties, demand corrections in print publications, and empower government to arbitrarily deny licences and permits.¹² The most common technique employed against the media in Ethiopia, the report says, were threats and harassment by the ruling party cadres, government officials, and security officials.

Amare Aregawi, General Manager of Media and Communications Center, a company that publishes *The Reporter*, an English weekly, and *Reporter*, an Amharic bi-weekly, believes that the Ethiopian media in general and the private media in particular have been suffering from “various direct and indirect impositions by the state”.¹³ Similarly, Nigussie Tefera (Ph.D.), former head of Population Media Center, contends, “In relation to the private media, the government had taken illegal measures on journalists who were critically reporting on issues that had to do with the ruling party and its state”.¹⁴

Members of political parties also share the view of these prominent media professionals. For instance, Andualem Aragie,¹⁵ the Vice Chairman of Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ), established in May 2019 as a coalition of individuals from former parties that include *Ginbot 7*, Blue Party, EDP, and *Andinet Party*, recalls that, “Ethiopian public media were not

11 Abdu Ali (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

12 Human Rights Watch. (2015). Journalism is not a crime, Violation of Media Freedom In Ethiopia. At: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/21/journalism-not-crime/violations-media-freedoms-ethiopia>

13 Amare Aregawi (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

14 Nigussie Tefera (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

15 He was sentenced to life in prison in June 2012 with a claim that he was attempting dismantling the Constitution. He was released from prison in 2018 after the coming of Abiy Ahmed to power and elected Deputy Leader of Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andualem_Aragie

independent in the past. They were the servants of the ruling party. Some of them were even used in the oppression of the freedom of expression of others”.¹⁶

Key informants agreed that freedom of expression in the media is in better shape now due to the new government’s reforms. Violations have been minimized and various measures have been taken to promote freedom of expression. The release of journalists and politicians from prison, allowing diaspora media to work in the country freely, and the ongoing revision of mass media laws and other repressive laws, such as the Criminal Code and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No. 652/2009, can be taken as positive steps. Ethiopia has accordingly been ranked by Reporters Without Borders in place 110 out of 180 countries in 2019 and 99 in 2020.¹⁷

Some informants argue that freedom of expression is still not uninhibited. While they commended changes made they also referred to some incidents of restrictions of freedom of expression in the current media landscape.¹⁸ A reporter from the Amhara Mass Media Agency (AMMA) explained that government officials still interfere with the editorial independence of the media, especially when conflicts occur in a particular area.¹⁹ What is even more concerning, according to the reporter, is the pressure exerted by “social media activists” on some media outlets and individual journalists. Journalists working for the public media in particular are being harassed more often because stories on social media label them as government propagandists.

An editor in South Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State media mentioned technical or bureaucratic challenges that hobble the process of information gathering for stories. For instance, the source said, it is not enough for journalists to show their identification cards to collect information from some sources, including government agencies. They are also required to produce “formal support letters” from their media outlet to get access to information.²⁰

Violations of the right to freedom of expression are reported to have happened in connection with the political crises and conflicts in some areas of the country throughout 2019. In a focus group discussion held with journalists and journalism students at Bahir Dar University, it was learned that the current conflicts in parts of the country limit the movement of journalists thereby hindering their chance of getting authentic information from the field.

Not everybody is sure whether the positive developments initiated in 2018 can be sustained, especially after reports about the detention and prosecution of some journalists in 2019.

¹⁶ Andualem Arage (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁷ <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2020#>

¹⁸ The arrest of EBC journalist by Benishangul Gumuz regional police, detention and prosecution of Ahadu Radio journalists by Oromia’s regional court, brief detention of two Mereja TV journalists by police in Legetafo were mentioned as cases in point.

¹⁹ Semachew Eshete (2019). Personal Interview. Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

²⁰ Ibid

A recent report by Fojo Media Institute suggests that it is very difficult to predict how media freedom will evolve.²¹

1.2 The right to information is guaranteed by law and respected in practice

Article 29 (3) of the FDRE Constitution states that

freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed.

The article goes on to say that freedom of the press shall specifically include the following elements:

- a)** *that censorship in any form is prohibited*
- b)** *the opportunity to have access to information of interest to the public.*²²

This right is further strengthened by the provisions of Article 11 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (2008), which declares:

The objectives of the access to information are:

- 1)** *to give effect to the right of citizens to access, receive and impart information held by public bodies, subject to justifiable limits based on overriding public and private interest;*
- 2)** *to establish mechanisms and procedures to give effect to the right in a manner which enables persons to obtain information as quickly, inexpensively and effortlessly as is reasonably possible and,*
- 3)** *to encourage and promote public participation, public empowerment to foster a culture of transparency, accountability and efficiency in the functions of public bodies and to encourage and promote good governance.*²³

This article states clearly that the right of access to information applies equally to all citizens. Similar rights are enshrined in Article 12 (1) of the same Proclamation:

21 Fojo Media Institute. (2019). Ethiopia: Reflections on Media Reform. Retrieved from: <https://fojo.se/publications/ethiopia-reflections-on-media-reform-english/>

22 Ethiopian Constitution. Proclamation No. 1/1995. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Federal Negarit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

23 Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

all persons have the right to seek, obtain and communicate any information held by public bodies, except as expressly provided for by this Proclamation.²⁴

These provisions are in line with Principles 26 and 28 of the 2019 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa. According to these Principles:

Every person has the right to access information held by public bodies . . . expeditiously and inexpensively. [...] The right of access to information shall be guided by the principle of maximum disclosure. Access to information may only be limited by narrowly defined exemptions, which shall be provided by law and shall comply strictly with international human rights law and standards.

Though the Ethiopian legal framework generally facilitates and ensures the free flow of information, the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation includes a few claw-back clauses likely to impair the right to access information. For instance, Article 14 (3) states:

Upon receiving request for information, the public relations officer shall as expeditiously as possible either provide the information requested upon payment of the prescribed fee, or provide a written response stating the reasons for rejecting the requests. However, the response shall in any case be made in not more than 30 working days, of the receipt of the request.²⁵

Article 14 (9) of the proclamation provides that

any public body to whom a request for access to information regarding a matter deemed urgent is made shall provide the requested information within a period of not more than 10 working days.²⁶

These two articles give discretionary power to public relations officers not only to delay but even to reject a request for information. The articles do not consider the importance of timeliness for the information seekers.

Provisions on exemptions from the right of access to information have been issues of concern over the years. Some see them as infringement on this right because they are general, vague and give wide discretionary powers to public relations officers. Articles 16, 17, 18 and 19 of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation all deal with exemptions on

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

²⁶ Ibid

the grounds of protection of personal, commercial and confidential information. Articles 20 to 26 justify exemptions in the interest of protecting the safety of individuals and property, protection of proceedings of law enforcement, legal investigation, and protection of records “privileged from production in legal proceedings”, information pertaining to defense, security and international relations, cabinet documents, economic interests and financial welfare of the country, and commercial activities and operations of public bodies.²⁷

Proclamation No. 590/2008 also includes provisions on mechanisms of appeal against the refusal of information. For instance, Article 31 states that

*any person who is aggrieved by the decision of the public relation officer under this part may lodge his appeal to the concerned head of public body within 30 days from the day the decision is made.*²⁸

The head of the public body to which the appeal is lodged is expected to give a decision within 10 days. According to Article 31(4),

*Any person who is aggrieved by the decision of the public body may lodge his appeal to the ombudsman²⁹ within 30 days of receiving that decision.*³⁰

Media scholars and journalists in Ethiopia and beyond have been critical of these lengthy periods stipulated for obtaining information and lodging appeals in cases of denial. Given their limited financial and human resources and the urgency with which such information may be required, media houses find it very difficult to go through all the steps stipulated by the proclamation. As a result, journalists get discouraged and see no point in lodging appeals, given the often perishable nature of the information they are after.

According to Deneke Shanko, an official from the Ombudsman Office,³¹ the media file hardly any complaints with his office. In fact, since its establishment in 2008 there was only one media-related case, and that case was solved amicably.³² Article 32 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2008 gives the office powers to oversee the implementation of access to information provisions, to prepare different directives, to give guidance on the manner of lodging appeals, etc.³³ However, according to Shanko, the Ombudsman Office does not prepare and implement regulations and directives

27 Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

28 Ibid

29 Ibid- Article 3 states, “Unless otherwise expressly provided under this Proclamation provisions referred in the masculine gender shall also apply to the feminine gender”

30 Ibid

31 He is currently serving the organization in the position of legal and appeal directorate director

32 Deneke Shanko (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

33 Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

and “it couldn’t enforce the proclamation either. Even if we have been hearing that the media complain about denial of access to information, the Ombudsman Office does not receive a single appeal from the media. Due to this, the right to access to information seems to exist only in the law”.³⁴

According to journalists and media managers interviewed, the Access to Information Proclamation did not meet their expectations of making government-held information accessible. Frew Abebe, Editor of *Sendeq* newspaper, which is now out of the market, thought the law lacks the necessary detail and as a result is “wrongly interpreted and is used as a reason to deny us [journalists] information unnecessarily”.³⁵ He suggested that more clarification was important so as to redraw the blurry line between protecting personal privacy and giving open and free access to information which is of public interest. Abdu Ali shares Frew Abebe’s views. He said that the right to information is often restricted using personal privacy and national interest as a cover, and “the bureaucratic red tape and unnecessary long wait to get information is not justifiable”.³⁶

A recent report on media and freedom of expression in Ethiopia found that journalists in the private media complain that they are, very often, denied access to government-held information.³⁷ Participants of a FGD for this study, conducted among journalists at Bahir Dar, confirmed this assessment.

Information from owners of public, commercial, and community broadcasting services pointed to considerable discrepancies. Though there has been a relative improvement in access, community broadcasters and the commercial media in particular have been struggling with a lack of information issued by public offices while the public media have been given privileged access. An informant notes: “There is no access to information as much as before. The access has also not been liberalized. A few people, especially from the public media and those who have political attachments with the government, have unlimited access to any kind of information. This is a wrong practice”.³⁸ In a similar vein, Frew Abebe comments: “Even the current Prime Minister’s press conferences are often limited to a few select media houses. It is not clear what parameters they use to allow some and deny access to others”.³⁹

Previously, the now defunct Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO), though its information was severely censored/filtered, used to provide information regularly. That does not happen currently, according to Abel Wabella: “There is no genuine commitment to freedom

34 Deneke Shanko (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

35 Frew Abebe (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

36 Abdu Ali (2019). Personal Interview. Political and legal analyst of Sheger FM radio station, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

37 International Media Support (2018). IMS Assessment report – Ethiopia in transition: Hope amid challenges. Copenhagen, Denmark. At: https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ethiopia.final_.spread-1.pdf.

38 Abel Wabella (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

39 Frew Abebe (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

of expression and access to information. Information is now being presented with high restriction".⁴⁰ Press secretary of the Prime Minister Office, Nigussu Tilahun, however, noted that 50 media organisations have already been identified based on their coverage, interest and popularity to attend press conferences at the Prime Minister Office.⁴¹ This number was limited due to space limitation in the press conference room. Cabinet members, he said, have been advised to open their doors and release public information to interested media. While there are quite different perspectives and experiences among media stakeholders, the law clearly states, "All persons have the right to seek, obtain, and communicate any information held by the public bodies".⁴²

Abdu Ali believes that while the right to information is constitutionally guaranteed, its implementation is questionable as a result of poor documentation systems throughout the country that result in the lack and incompleteness of information that should be provided to those who need it.⁴³ This creates problems, particularly during times of conflict. The public seeks information instantaneously but due to the absence of clear information from the government side the people get either wrong or confused information as disseminated through social media.

The basic democratic right of obtaining information of public interest has not been implemented in the manner guaranteed in the Constitution. Lack of willingness, poor knowledge and management capacity within organizations, poor documentation, lack of a central data system or public relations structure, and lack of trust in the media are among the factors that have hindered full implementation of this right even after the 2018 reforms.

1.3 Editorial independence is guaranteed by law and respected in practice

International and regional frameworks require that editorial independence should be guaranteed by law and respected in practice⁴⁴. This means that programming or publishing decisions are to be made by the media alone on the basis of professional criteria and the public's right to know. In accordance with this international principle of protecting both general editorial policy and specific editorial decisions, the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation guarantees the editorial independence of the media in Ethiopia. In its preamble the Proclamation indicates the importance of the independent operation of the

40 Ibid

41 The Prime Minister regularly posts information on his activities and those of his office.

42 Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008 . Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

43 Abdu Ali (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

44 ARTICLE 19 The Global Campaign for Free Expression (2000). At <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/analysis/guatemala-freedom-of-information-draft.pdf>

mass media for ensuring the free exchange of information in the country. In its Article 4 the Proclamation stipulates:

Freedom of the mass media is constitutionally guaranteed. Censorship in any form is prohibited.⁴⁵

Article 6 gives the editor-in-chief a clear mandate:

The mandate of the editor in chief designated by the publisher encompasses the power to supervise the publication of the periodical and to determine the contents thereof in such a way that nothing may be printed therein against his will. Any practice or agreement that restricts this power shall be null and void.

When it comes to actual practice, not every media house in Ethiopia has complete freedom in making decisions on its editorial positions and on contents. Respondents from the government and independent media believed there were moments of interference and attempts to infringe editorial control from media owners, officials of the ruling party, the government and other powerful individuals (such as political activists) with a view to protecting their commercial and political interests.

According to informants, such interference is more visible in the publicly funded electronic media. Participants of a group discussion held at Bahir Dar and some individual informants from the SNNP region thought matters of funding and the involvement of political appointees in the decision making bodies of media (like boards of directors and CEO positions) are mechanisms of compromising editorial independence in the Amhara and SNNP regions. This is likely to apply to almost all government media outlets throughout the country.

Study participants from the government media sectors believed the executive body, which allocates budget for the media, would directly or indirectly try to control what is to be reported and how. As a case in point, they referred to the presence of committees at regional and federal levels that occasionally meet with media leaders to decide on what agenda the media should set. However, the Communication Head of the Amhara Regional State says, “the Amhara Mass Media Agency is still independent and free from any form of direct influence from the state though the regional state sometimes gets involved in setting the agenda”.⁴⁶

Participants from Amhara and SNNP regions pointed out that editorial independence is also affected by pressure from social media actors and political activists. In support of that idea, Daniel Berhane, blogger/political activist, noted that the mob groups that engaged in several attacks and violent demonstrations across the country in 2018/19 are making it hard for

⁴⁵ Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

⁴⁶ Asemahegn Asres (2019). Personal Interview. Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

the media to frame their stories the way they see it, especially on sensitive issues, because “journalists are subject to labeling, threatening and even verbal attacks”.⁴⁷

1.4 Journalists’ right to protect their sources is guaranteed in law and respected in practice

According to Principle 25 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, media practitioners

*shall not be required to reveal confidential sources of information or to disclose other material held for journalistic purposes except where disclosure has been ordered by a court after a full and fair public hearing.*⁴⁸

In similar fashion, Ethiopian journalists’ right to protect their sources is guaranteed by law. Article 45 (2) of the Criminal Code (Proclamation No. 414/2004) states:

*The publisher or editor of any publication may not be compelled to disclose the source of any matter printed in publication.*⁴⁹

However, according to sub article 3, journalists may be forced to reveal the sources of stories or the writer of stories when requested by a court:

- a)** *where a crime is committed against the Constitutional Order, National Defence Force or security of the State constituting clear and imminent danger, or*
- b)** *in the case of proceedings of a serious crime, where such source does not have any alternative and is decisive for the outcome of the case.*⁵⁰

When key informants were asked to assess the practical implementation of journalists’ right to protect their sources, they responded that no one had so far forced them to reveal their sources of information and they had never faced a problem in that regard.

⁴⁷ Daniel Berhane (2019). Personal Interview. Mekelle, Ethiopia.

⁴⁸ African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (2019). Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa.

⁴⁹ Proclamation No.414/2004. The Criminal Code Of The Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

⁵⁰ African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (2002). Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa. Banjul, Gambia.

1.5 The public and civil society organisations (CSOs) participate in shaping public policy towards the media

Ethiopia does not have a media policy as such. Some media-related issues are touched on in a booklet on policy documents of the Ethiopian government.⁵¹ According to some respondents, the public and civil society organizations (CSOs) have not participated in shaping this or other policies. Daniel Berhane, for instance, said that non-state actors do not have meaningful involvement in charting policies.⁵² In addition, the government had no intention to consult them about legislation and policy regarding the media. “Even if done, it is just for the sake of formality and political correctness”, he added. According to Berhane the ideas of some external partners get more recognition.⁵³

Another reason why the participation of non-state actors in the development of policies is limited, has got to do with their fragmentation. Like other civil society organizations, media associations in Ethiopia are extremely divided and thus too weak to make their voices heard.⁵⁴

The government usually prepares policies and laws, and informs the public through the media at the final stage (just prior to endorsement). It has been common practice for many policies and laws to be declared without or with little participation of the public and civil society organizations in the country. One key source for this study commented that there had been some positive change on the part of the Prime Minister’s Office: “Now we are invited to policy dialogues unlike previous times where we were kept outside. They are trying to open up chances for CSOs. Recently we have participated on a forum meant to deliberate on the role of CSOs in peace building especially in mitigating the rising insecurity”.⁵⁵

B. Regulatory system for broadcasting and print

1.6 Independence of the regulatory system is guaranteed by law and respected in practice

The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA) is established by Article 4 of the Broadcasting Service Proclamation of 533/2007. Article 5 says:

⁵¹ Democratization issues in Ethiopia, policy documents (2002).

⁵² Daniel Berhane (2019). Personal Interview. Mekelle, Ethiopia.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ International Media Support (2018). IMS Assessment report – Ethiopia in transition: Hope amid challenges. Copenhagen, Denmark. At https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ethiopia.final_spread-1.pdf

⁵⁵ Solomon Goshu (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

*The objectives of the Authority shall be to ensure the expansion of a high standard, prompt and reliable broadcasting service that can contribute to political, social and economic development and to regulate same.*⁵⁶

Article 7 stipulates the powers and duties of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, among them:

*to ensure that the broadcasting service is conducted in such a manner that contributes to the proper social, economic, political and cultural development of the country; issue, suspend and cancel broadcasting service licenses;... control illegal transmissions; plan, permit and control the use of the radio wave allocated for broadcasting service by the concerned organ and lease same;... decide on complaints arising in relation to broadcasting services.*⁵⁷

In addition, the Advertisement Proclamation (Proclamation No. 759/2012) gives the EBA the power to regulate advertisements disseminated through the “mass media” which is defined by the proclamation as including print media.

In order to assess the independence of the regulatory system, it is worth looking at how these and other regulations comply with the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (2019). Principle 17 says, among others:

- 1)** *A public regulatory authority that exercises powers in the areas of broadcast, telecommunications or internet infrastructure shall be independent and adequately protected against interference of a political, commercial or other nature.*
- 2)** *The appointment process for members of a public regulatory body overseeing broadcast, telecommunications or internet infrastructure shall be independent and adequately protected against interference. The process shall be open, transparent and involve the participation of relevant stakeholders.*
- 3)** *Any public regulatory authority that exercises powers in broadcast, telecommunications or internet infrastructure shall be accountable to the public.*

On complaints bodies, Principle 18 (2) stipulates:

Any regulatory body established to adjudicate complaints about media content shall be protected against political, commercial or any other undue interference.

⁵⁶ Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

⁵⁷ Ibid

In assessing the independence of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, the study team used parameters such as funding, appointment, institutional autonomy and the like. Article 14 of the Broadcasting Service Proclamation (2007) stipulates that the Government shall allocate the budget of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority. One can easily anticipate that this system of funding may affect the independence of the Authority.

According to the Broadcasting Service Proclamation, the Authority is accountable to the Office of the Prime Minister.⁵⁸ However, the Government decided in 2018 that the Authority should report to the House of People's Representatives.⁵⁹ This is more likely to help guarantee the independence of the regulatory system.

Article 8 of the Broadcasting Service Proclamation (2007) states that "the Authority shall have a Board, a Director General, a Deputy Director General, and necessary staff", and Article 9 (2) stipulates that "members of the board shall be drawn from different institutions and parts of the society and shall be appointed by the Government on the recommendation of the Minister"⁶⁰. Similarly, according to articles 12 (1) and 13(1), the Director General and Deputy Director General "shall be appointed by the government upon recommendation by the Minister [of Information, later, GCAO]".⁶¹ This clearly conflicts with the independence of the regulatory body.

Serious concerns related to the independence of the EBA have been raised by key sources for this study. Some are also worried about how the body is formed from the ranks of the ruling party. For instance, Tamrat Gebregiorgis notes that regulatory institutions such as the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority are themselves governmental authorities and, until recently, were purely partisan.⁶² The EBA is listed in Proclamation 1097/2018 as a "Federal Executive Organ".

A majority of respondents unequivocally said "No" to the question whether the EBA is independent. The appointment of higher officials of the regulatory body, they pointed out, is not only made by the government, but also not handled in a transparent and democratic manner. For example, Teferei Alemu⁶³ notes that the relationship between the former regulator and the media was more like that of a "boss" and a "poor worker". Nevertheless, Alemu and a few other respondents agree that currently, with a new head of the regulatory body having been appointed, the relationship has improved and is said to be good. However, unless the

58 Regulation of the Establishment of former Government Communication Affairs Office No. 158/2018

59 Definition of Power and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation no. 1097/2011.

60 Minister refers to the head of the former Ministry of Information, later on replaced by Ministry of Government Communication Affairs Office.

61 Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

62 Tamrat Gebregiorgis (2019). Fortune Newspaper Managing Editor, Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

63 Teferei Alemu (2019). Personal Interview. Senior Advisor of the Sheger FM radio station, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

independence of the EBA is supported by the appropriate legal framework, such kinds of change will not have a long lasting effect. Individuals are bound to operate within the given structure.

1.7 Regulatory system works to ensure media pluralism and freedom of expression and information

The Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (590/2008) has a provision on ownership of media which is likely to have a positive effect on media diversity. In its Article 7, the law stipulates that any person who exercises direct or indirect effective control of a media (broadcasting, periodicals) in an area with a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants may not exercise such control over another company in the same market. However, in the course of media reform efforts being carried out by the General Attorney's office, this provision has been amended and given better opportunity for those who want to engage in the media industry.

Ethiopia's media landscape, both print and broadcasting, is not plural. It is heavily controlled by the state and dominated by the Amharic language. Editorial content focuses primarily on events and issues in the capital Addis Ababa. And the 81 per cent of Ethiopians who live in rural areas are largely dependent on state-controlled radio and television broadcasts.⁶⁴

According to Mulugeta Sisay, Director of the Mass Media Licensing and Registration Directorate in the EBA, the Authority has been working to promote and ensure freedom of expression, through expanding the number of broadcasting media thus making the broadcasting sector more fair, pluralist and efficient.⁶⁵ As a result, as of 2020, the total number of electronic media in Ethiopia had increased to 101 (72 radio stations, 29 television stations) (see section 2.3. and table 1).

The right to freedom of information and expression is guaranteed in Ethiopian law. However, there is a huge gap regarding the enforcement of this right by way of regulation. In this regard, Deneke Shanko from the Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman (EIO) says, "Some changes have been registered in the past few months, however there is still violation of the right to freedom of expression and access to information. The regulator or the EIO cannot properly exercise its duties enforcing the freedom of information laws properly".⁶⁶ Similarly, Abdu Ali states that legal guarantees and the regulatory system alone do not ensure the exercise of freedom of expression.⁶⁷ Institutions that are supposed to be guaranteeing this right do not

64 Human Rights Watch. (2015). Journalism is not a crime, Violation of Media Freedom In Ethiopia. At: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/21/journalism-not-crime/violations-media-freedoms-ethiopia>

65 Mulugeta Sisay (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

66 Deneke Shanko (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

67 Abdu Ali (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

have institutional, financial and organizational independence, which makes it harder for this right to be exercised. Also, the public is not really aware of its right to information, Ali says. In his view the government should make an effort to raise public awareness in this regard, in addition to promulgating the respective law.⁶⁸

C. Defamation laws and other legal restrictions on journalists

1.8 The state does not place unwarranted legal restrictions on the media

Several articles in existing media legislation restrict the freedom of expression. Among other provisions, the registration of periodicals, licensing procedures of broadcasting stations, and media ownership provisions are strongly criticized by media professionals.

For instance, according to Article 20 of Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007, an applicant for a broadcasting licence must produce “legal evidence to ascertain its financial capacity and source of financing”.⁶⁹ Article 23(2) and (4) of the same proclamation do not allow broadcasting licences to be issued to the Ethiopian diaspora and religious organizations. Similarly, according to Article 5 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 590/2008, only legal entities have the right to engage in the publication of periodicals. Individual citizens as well as foreigners are not allowed to own periodicals.⁷⁰

The Broadcasting Service Proclamation of 2007 and the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2008 reaffirm constitutional protections against and prohibition of censorship, but they also contain problematic provisions that grant broad powers to government to initiate defamation suits, impose harsh financial penalties, demand corrections in print publications, and arbitrarily deny licences and permits.⁷¹

Informants say there are many other legal provisions that obstruct the freedom of expression. They impose rigorous penalties and give wide discretionary power to law enforcement organs.⁷² Thus, even though the law prohibits censorship, the threats of politically motivated

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

⁷⁰ Under the new revised law, foreign citizens and organizations shall have an effective control of not more than 25 % shareholders in owning print, online and broadcasting station. Also, an individual who has a legal entity of Ethiopian citizenship shall have a television, a radio, a newspaper, and an online media. This individual shall also have a share to own another medium with an effective control of not more than 25%.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch. (2015). Journalism is not a crime, Violation of Media Freedom In Ethiopia. At: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/21/journalism-not-crime/violations-media-freedoms-ethiopia>

⁷² FGD Among PhD students of Bahir Dar University (2019). Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

defamation suits and high fines, and the difficulty in acquiring permits, effectively limit what the private press is willing to print.⁷³

1.9 Defamation laws impose the narrowest restrictions necessary to protect the reputation of individuals

While the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, several articles in the existing media and media-related legislation in fact limit the basic right enshrined in the Constitution.

Both civil and criminal laws include provisions on defamation. Article 613 of the Criminal Code defines defamation and stipulates the penalty:

Whoever, addressing a third party, imputes to another, with the intent to injure his honor or reputation, an act, a fact or a conduct, where the allegation (not) accords with the truth is punishable, upon complaint, with simple imprisonment not exceeding six months, or fine.⁷⁴

In a similar manner, the Broadcasting Service Proclamation (533/2007) in its Article 30(4) states:

Any programme intended for transmission may not [...] maliciously accuse or defame individuals, nation/nationalities, peoples or organizations [...]

The Proclamation on the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information (590/2008) in its Article 41 stipulates:

In an action for defamation through the mass media the court may award, having regard to the seriousness of the moral damage, compensation up to 100,000 birr having regard to the seriousness of the damage.

Article 43 of the same proclamation gives individuals the right to initiate prosecution if they feel falsely accused by media:

prosecutions for defamation and false accusation committed against individuals or private organization through the mass media shall be instituted and conducted by the private complainants.⁷⁵

A couple of provisions in the Ethiopian Constitution also restrict freedom of the media in order to protect the reputation of individuals. Article 29 (6), for instance, specifies possible restrictions on freedom of expression. Legal limitations may be imposed to protect the well-

⁷³ Human Rights Watch. (2015). Journalism is not a crime, Violation of Media Freedom In Ethiopia. At: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/21/journalism-not-crime/violations-media-freedoms-ethiopia>

⁷⁴ Proclamation No.414/2004. The Criminal Code Of The Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

⁷⁵ Ibid

being of the youth, and the honor and reputation of individuals.⁷⁶ A cybercrime law passed in June 2016 also criminalizes online speech deemed defamatory or pornographic, and outlines penalties for internet service providers that knowingly host such “objectionable material”.

On defamation and calumny, Article 613 (2) of the Criminal Code (2004) states:

Where the defamatory imputations or allegations constituting the injury to honour or reputation are false and are uttered or spread with knowledge of their falsity, the criminal is punishable upon complaint, for calumny with simple imprisonment for not less than one month, and fine.⁷⁷

One can argue that some narrowly defined restrictions on the freedom of expression with the purpose of protecting the reputation of individuals are necessary, as explicitly stated in Art. 29(6) of the Ethiopian constitution. However, when the state legislates provisions on defamation it must ensure that these will not affect freedom of expression and other democratic rights and are in line with international standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or with the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa which states in its Principle 22:

- 1) *States shall review all criminal restrictions of content to ensure that they are justifiable and compatible with international human rights law and standards.*
- 2) *States shall repeal laws that criminalise sedition, insult and publication of false news.*
- 3) *States shall amend criminal laws on defamation and libel in favour of civil sanctions which must themselves be necessary and proportionate.*
- 4) *The imposition of custodial sentences for the offences of defamation and libel are a violation of the right to freedom of expression.*

According to an IMS assessment report the criminal defamation law passed in 2008 is prominent among a plethora of laws that violate media freedom in the country.⁷⁸ These laws provide the basis for long prison sentences for many journalists, making them liable to punishment for both criminal and civil defamation, thus restricting freedom of speech. Additionally, defamation laws shift the burden of proof to journalists. According to Tamrat Gebregiorgis: “There is weird law in Ethiopia. In many countries, truth is the last defense to journalists but in Ethiopia even an imputed intent to injure a person’s honour can lead to

76 Ethiopian Constitution. Proclamation No. 1/1995 The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Federal Negarit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

77 Proclamation No.414/2004. The Criminal Code Of The Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta

78 International Media Support (2018). IMS Assessment report – Ethiopia in transition: Hope amid challenges. Copenhagen, Denmark. At https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ethiopia.final_spread-1.pdf

prosecution. And the burden of proof is with the journalist. The burden of proof has shifted from the plaintiff to the defendant”.⁷⁹

1.10 Other restrictions upon freedom of expression, whether based on national security, hate speech, privacy, contempt of court laws and obscenity should be clear and narrowly defined in law and justifiable as necessary in a democratic society, in accordance with international law

International human rights agreements underline that national security, hate speech, privacy, contempt of court and obscenity as grounds for restrictions on freedom of expression should be clearly and narrowly defined in law and justifiable as necessary in a democratic society.

In Ethiopia, the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (2008), the Criminal Code (2004), the Broadcasting Service Proclamation (2007), the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (2020), the State of Emergency for the Maintenance of Public Peace and Security Proclamation (2016) and other related laws include provisions on limitations of freedom of expression for a number of reasons. Many journalists have complained that these provisions are too vague, and that the kinds of punishment stipulated are too harsh.

For instance, Article 10(2) of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No 1176/2020 imposes three to seven years of “rigorous” imprisonment on journalists found guilty of encouraging terrorism:

*whosoever in clear manner incites by statement, writing, using image or by any other conduct to cause the commission of any of the acts provided for under Article 3 (which defines acts of terrorism) of this Proclamation or publish, produce, communicate, distribute, store, sell, or make available to the public through any means anything with substance of such kind shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment from three year to seven years, provided that the crime was attempted or committed.*⁸⁰

With regard to contempt of court, Article 449 of the Criminal Code (2004) stipulates:

Whoever, in the course of a judicial inquiry, proceeding or hearing, (a) in any manner insults, holds up to ridicule, threatens or disturbs the Court or a judge in the discharge of his duty; or (b) in any other manner disturbs

⁷⁹ Tamrat Gebregiorgis (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

⁸⁰ Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No. 1176/2020. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

*the activities of the Court, is punishable with simple imprisonment not exceeding one year, or fine not exceeding three thousand Birr”.*⁸¹

Concerning obscenity provisions, Article 640 and 641 of the Criminal Code (2004) state:

Whoever makes, imports or exports, transports, receives, possesses, displays in public, offers for sales or hires, distributes or circulates writings, images, posters, films or other objects which are obscene or grossly indecent, or in any other way traffics or trades in them; or advertises, indicates or makes known, by any means, how or from whom such objects may be procured or circulated, either directly or indirectly, is punishable with simple imprisonment for not less than six months, and fine, without prejudice to the forfeiture and destruction of the incriminating material.

In addition, Article 641 makes express reference to obscene or indecent performances and the same punishment will apply to

*anyone who organizes or gives public auditions or performances, in a theatre or in a cinema, by projection or by radio or television broadcast, by video, or in any other way, which are obscene or grossly indecent.*⁸²

Again, there is no definition of what may be considered ‘obscene’ or ‘grossly indecent’, giving the courts wide leeway in their decisions on such matters.

At the time of writing, the government was in the process of revising some of these restrictive laws. On the other hand, it also endorsed the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation in March 2020 which prohibits hate speech and disinformation as defined in its Article 2:

“Hate speech” means speech that deliberately promotes hatred, discrimination or attack against a person or a discernable group of identity, based on ethnicity, religion, race, gender or disability;

*“Disinformation” means speech that is false, is disseminated by a person who knew or should reasonably have known the falsity of the information and is highly likely to cause a public disturbance, riot, violence or conflict; (...)*⁸³

81 Proclamation No.414/2004. The Criminal Code Of The Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

82 Ibid

83 Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation No. 1185/2020. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Federal Negarit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Although Article 6 exempts “a news report, analysis or political critique” from prohibition, there is concern that this Proclamation hinders legitimate discourse, in particular on social media. Article 8 stipulates:

Any enterprise that provides social media service should endeavor to suppress and prevent the dissemination of disinformation and hate speech through its platform.

Social media service providers should act within twenty-four hours to remove or take out of circulation disinformation or hate speech upon receiving notifications about such communication or post.

There is no provision for a remedy for users whose contribution is removed by a social media enterprise. And it is not clear how this provision is to be enforced. The law says in the same article:

the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority shall prepare a report which is notify to (sic) the public on social media enterprises whether they discharge their duty properly.

and

the Council of Ministers may issue a Regulation to provide for the detail (sic) responsibilities of service providers and relevant Governmental Institutions.

Another point of concern is the broad definition of ‘social media’ in Article 2:

“Social Media” means any social interactive method that facilitate the creation and sharing of information for more than one person at one time and Social networking through the internet

Article 7 (4) says:

If the offense of hate speech or disinformation offense has been committed through a social media account having more than 5,000 followers or through a broadcast service or print media, the person responsible for the act shall be punished with simple imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding 100,000 birr.

This provision contradicts the exemption in Article 6 for news reports, analysis and political critique. It could also affect the right to freedom of expression of journalists, bloggers and activists, even more so when taking into account that no user of social media has control over the number of followers he/she has.

The proclamation is not in compliance with Principle 23 (2) of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information:

States shall criminalise prohibited speech as a last resort and only for the most severe cases. In determining the threshold of severity that may warrant criminal sanctions, States shall take into account the:

- a) *prevailing social and political context;*
- b) *status of the speaker in relation to the audience;*
- c) *existence of a clear intent to incite;*
- d) *content and form of the speech;*
- e) *extent of the speech, including its public nature, size of audience and means of dissemination;*
- f) *real likelihood and imminence of harm.*

D. Censorship

1.11 The media is not subject to preliminary censorship as a matter of both law and practice

One of the actions taken by the EPRDF when it came to power in 1991 was abolishing press censorship law. Instead, the government provided a legal framework to ensure that the media are not subject to prior censorship. Both the FDRE Constitution of 1995 and subsidiary laws prohibit any form of press censorship. Article 29 (3) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia reads as follows:

Freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed.⁸⁴

Likewise, Article 4 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation provides:

Freedom of the mass media is constitutionally guaranteed. Censorship in any form is prohibited.⁸⁵

While the Ethiopian media is not subject to prior censorship by legal provisions, many raise concerns on the application of these provisions in daily practice. Key informants for this study expressed different views on the issue. Some argued that the media is not subject to prior censorship because the government has not established anybody to censor media content

⁸⁴ Ethiopian Constitution. Proclamation No. 1/1995 The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Federal Negarit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

⁸⁵ Proclamation No. 590/2008, Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information. Federal Negarit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

before publication or dissemination. Also, no organs of government have powers to screen and prevent the release of media products.

However, some respondents pointed to indirect influence exerted by certain provisions in legislation and clear interference from the government apparatus. In the words of Abdissa Zerai:⁸⁶

Due to the draconian laws put in place by the government, self-censorship has been the only means that ensures survival. Such fear often times leads the media professionals and/or organizations to subject themselves to too much self-censorship. After the reform, it might be getting better. But we need a study to ascertain it.⁸⁷

Daniel Berhane told the study team that the views of the entire political spectrum are not fairly represented in the media. “This is because the media are still under the influence of the government and its contents are subject to be filtered and editorial independence is not respected”.⁸⁸ Abreha Desta, an opposition politician, agreed. According to Desta, since the media, particularly in the regions, are under the influence of political parties, their contents are controlled directly by these parties and produced in accordance with their interests.⁸⁹

Other key informants from Bahir Dar University also affirm that there is a huge amount of interference from several governmental institutions, which makes the media subject to prior censorship both directly and indirectly. A journalist in AMMA said that journalists are not fully independent when it comes to reporting on conflicts, and that regional officials can interfere and prevent any programme or story on such topics from dissemination and instead set their own agenda.⁹⁰

1.12 The state does not seek to block or filter internet content deemed sensitive or detrimental

Nowadays social media has become a popular and preferred type of media among individuals, institutions, political parties and activists around the world. Social media is being used not only for providing information, education and entertainment but also as an arena of struggle, demonstration and public mobilization. In this way, social media has become a serious threat to the authorities, not just through making information widely available, but also through the spreading of sensational information, misinformation, and manufactured stories. As a result,

⁸⁶ Abdissa Zerai, Journalism professor at the University of New Mexico (personal interviews)

⁸⁷ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA

⁸⁸ Daniel Berhane (2019). Personal Interview. Mekelle, Ethiopia.

⁸⁹ Abreha Desta (2019). Personal Interview. Mekelle, Ethiopia.

⁹⁰ Semachew Eshete (2019). Personal interview. Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

the government has tried to use legal or illegal measures to control the potential fallout by periodically disrupting internet connections and blocking websites.

Since the state controls the infrastructure, it has enormous power and leverage to block services or filter internet content it deems sensitive or detrimental. In 2011, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) assessed the prevailing strategies for online oppression and found Ethiopia with its monopolistic control of the net to be among the ten leading countries using such tactics, showing how traditional mechanisms of repression have evolved into pervasive digital censorship.⁹¹

Freedom House states in its Freedom on the Net 2017 report:

*Internet and mobile phone networks were deliberately disrupted during anti-government protests and student exams throughout the year. Meanwhile, poor infrastructure, obstructionist telecom policies, and a government monopoly on the information and communication technology (ICT) sector make ICT services prohibitively expensive for the majority of the population.*⁹²

Moreover, Ethiopia used anti-terrorism and emergency laws as well as the Criminal Code to conduct surveillance and to block or filter internet contents. For instance, Article 14 (1) of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation states that the National Intelligence and Security Service may intercept or conduct surveillance on the telephone, fax, radio, internet, electronic, postal and similar communications of a person suspected of terrorism, and install instruments enabling the interception.⁹³

The state of emergency declared in October 2016 restricted certain online activities, including supporting protests on social media. Additionally, the Computer Crime Proclamation enacted in June 2016 criminalized online defamation and incitement and strengthened the government's surveillance capabilities by enabling real-time monitoring or interception of communications.⁹⁴

Prior to the political reforms undertaken since early 2018, the country experienced uprisings and protests in many parts. These were supported and communicated via social media. In response, the government blocked the entire internet several times. The practice of blocking or filtering internet content was confirmed by Prime Minister Ahmed in an address to the House of People's Representatives in April 2018. Before the recent reforms, he said, the

⁹¹ Committee to Protect Journalists (2011). Ethiopia named among top 10 Oppressors of Internet Freedom. At: cpj.org

⁹² <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/ethiopia>

⁹³ Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No. 652/2009. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta

⁹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/ethiopia>

previous government had blocked more than 260 websites, and he promised to refrain from such kinds of activities.

However, the current government has carried out shutdowns of the internet or SMS services, and blocked social media platforms such as Facebook. Such blocks occurred, for instance, during national exams, and following the Amhara Regional State crisis and other internal crises in mid-June 2019. Some international human rights protection groups, among them internet rights group NETBLOCKS reported these incidents.⁹⁵

All these interventions are not in compliance with Principle 38 of the Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa:

- 1) *States shall not interfere with the right of individuals to seek, receive and impart information through any means of communication and digital technologies, through measures such as the removal, blocking or filtering of content, unless such interference is justifiable and compatible with international human rights law and standards.*
- 2) *States shall not engage in or condone any disruption of access to the internet and other digital technologies for segments of the public or an entire population.*

95 NETBLOCKS. (2019, June 27). Ethiopia partially restores internet access days after blackout following reported Amhara coup attempt. At: <https://netblocks.org/reports/ethiopia-partially-restores-internet-days-after-amhara-coup-attempt-blackout-V8xxlo8k>

Recommendations

1. The Ethiopian constitution in its Article 29 guarantees freedom of expression without any interference. The Government of Ethiopia should translate this guarantee into general legislation by continuing to expunge restrictive provisions and create a conducive environment for journalists and the media to exercise their rights for the betterment of society, without fear of repercussions. Once the legislative reform is undertaken, the government should not only ensure that the laws are enforced in practice but also allow independent organizations, for instance the Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman (EIO), the Human Rights Commission, and others to assess implementation. It should also make sure that public bodies, as defined in law, provide information timeously and transparently.
2. Institutions that help ensure the laws are enforced, such as the EIO and others, should be strengthened through capacity building and regular training to enable them to compile reports to international bodies such as the Universal Periodic Reviews of the United Nation's Human Rights Council and the African Peer Review Mechanism of the African Union.
3. Government should amend provisions in the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation to, among others, define grounds for exemption from disclosure narrowly so that they comply with international human rights law and standards, serve a legitimate aim, and are a necessary and proportionate means to achieve the stated aim in a democratic society.
4. The Government should make sure that editorial independence of state media is free from direct and indirect interference by its officials at various levels of the administration. It should also devise policy instruments to protect the private media's editorial independence from being compromised by economic and political factors.
5. Civil Society Organizations should strengthen their engagement with the media industry so as to contribute to the overall development of the sector and the creation and maintenance of a democratic culture. The Government should create an enabling environment for CSOs to flourish, which will in turn benefit the media sector.
6. The appointment procedure for directors and boards of media regulatory institutions should be free from government influence and involve parliament, the public, media actors and CSOs. The process should be transparent.

7. As the internet has great potential to contribute to the diversity of the media and to public discourse in general, the internet service provision market should be liberalized and more competition introduced so that access and quality of service can be improved.
8. The government should ensure that any restriction of access to the internet is allowed only when absolutely necessary for a purpose recognized in international human rights law; proportionate in terms of time and scope; and fully disclosed as well as open to judicial review.
9. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority should design a comprehensive media policy that guarantees freedom of expression, the public's right to know, access to information, editorial independence, and freedom from both direct and indirect forms of censorship.

Category 2

Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership



Category 2

Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership

A. Media concentration

2.1 State takes positive measures to promote pluralist media

The state has been taking some measures to ensure media plurality and acknowledges the importance of pluralist media in several pieces of legislation. For instance, the Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007 allows commercial entities and different communities to participate in the broadcasting sector. In addition, the first press proclamation (1992) and the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008 allow private publishers to engage in the publication of periodicals.

The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA), which is in charge of overseeing, regulating and monitoring the Ethiopian media ecosystem, scrutinizes media ownership both during the licence application process as well as during operation through monitoring mechanisms. Article 7 of Proclamation 590/2008 states:

- 1) *Any person who exercises direct or indirect effective control over a company possessing a nation- wide broadcasting license or a broadcasting license for an area with a recorded population of more than 100,000 inhabitants, may not exercise direct or indirect effective control over another company holding such a license and servicing the same or an overlapping market.*
- 2) *Any person who exercises direct or indirect effective control over a company holding a nation- wide license or a license for an area with a recorded population of more than 100,000 inhabitants may not exercise direct or indirect effective control over a company operating a periodical servicing the same or an overlapping market.*

In a similar manner, Article 23/7 of the proclamation No 533/2007 states that an *organization applying for a television broadcasting service license while already having a license for television broadcasting service or more than one license for radio broadcasting service may not get a license.*⁹⁶

With regard to print media, Article 7/3 of the 2008 Proclamation allows owners to operate more than one print outlet in a given area only if they are in different languages:

*Any person who exercises effective direct or indirect control over a company operating a periodical may not exercise effective direct or indirect control over another company running a periodical published in the same language and servicing the same or an overlapping market.*⁹⁷

However, except for a few organizations (e.g. *Reporter English* and *Reporter Amharic*), no media house is indeed running print media in different languages in overlapping markets.

The data collected from sources indicate that there is some lack of clarity regarding the exact meaning of these legal provisions and their application. For instance, informants raised concerns about what they perceived as double standards, referring to Fana Broadcasting Corporation and Bisrat Media and Communication, which both have radio and television stations, as cases in point. A source from the EBA clarified that the law (Article 23, 7/8 of the Broadcasting Service proclamation 2007) allows for ownership of both a radio and a television service in the same area, as the two media are quite different in nature and expected to have different audiences.

Generally, the regulatory framework for the media to operate explicitly deals with issues of ownership with a view to ensuring media plurality in the country. Thus, in this particular case, the challenge lies more in enforcing the law to serve the intended purpose and addressing the effects of the emergence of new technologies.

There are some concerns that while the state attempts to control media ownership, the current technological change globally poses new problems with regard to minimizing monopolization of the media. Abdissa Zerai pointed out that the proliferation of internet and satellite technologies contributes to making the law ineffective, for example by giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to experiment with cross-ownership by using web platforms.⁹⁸ They could have live streaming on the web, use YouTube, podcasts, etc., while at the same time running conventional media formats. This complicates policing the media ecosystem in order to ensure there is no media concentration in the hands of a few providers.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.*

⁹⁷ *Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation NO. 590/2008. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.*

⁹⁸ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA

⁹⁹ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA.

2.2 State ensures compliance with measures to promote pluralist media

One way of ensuring compliance with a view to avoiding media monopolization is the setting of legal limitations regarding levels of ownership. Statutory limits on shareholding in media companies are fairly strict. For instance, Article 7/4 of Proclamation No. 590/2008 stipulates:

Until the procedure of determining and assessing effective control (of ownership) ... in the absence of evidence to the contrary, a person shall be regarded as exercising such control if he either directly or indirectly holds fifteen percent or more of the shares or capital of the entity.

According to an informant from the EBA the screening committee that assesses applications to grant frequencies meticulously scrutinizes each application for information on shareholders and what other media business they are already engaging in. In the allocation of frequencies to commercial and, in particular, to community broadcasting services the EBA seeks to encourage civil society and citizens to participate in both supporting and running such media¹⁰⁰. With respect to editorial policies regarding diversity of content Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), for instance, clearly stated that its mission is building a democratic society by effectively ensuring diversified views on the media that can be shared with the audience as a whole. In its motto, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) calls itself “*the voice of diversity and renaissance*”. An informant from the EBC said the broadcaster was working to ensure media plurality in the country by presenting diversified issues, views, and voices in different languages.¹⁰¹

The EBA stated that one of the requirements in the screening process for the awarding of frequencies to commercial media is for licence applicants to show how diverse their contents are and how their services are intending to meet the public interests of their audience.

B. A diverse mix of public, private and community media

2.3 State actively promotes a diverse mix of public, private and community media

Government media, both electronic and print, and private newspapers were the most dominant media in the first two decades of the Ethiopia People’s Revolutionary Democratic

¹⁰⁰ Mulugeta Sisay (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁰¹ Abel Adamu (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Front's (EPRDF) regime that came to power in 1991. There were no private or community broadcasting services in Ethiopia before 2007¹⁰². The public broadcasting services both at national and regional states level were owned and run by the government.

Following the endorsement of the Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007, commercial broadcasting and community broadcasting services have emerged and developed gradually across the country. The following table lists the types and numbers of broadcasting services licensed or actually on air in 2020:

Table 1- Electronics Media in Ethiopia in 2020 (Source EBA)

Types of licence	Area of operation		Number	Type of media		Remark
	Addis Ababa (federal)	Regional		Radio	Television	
Public broadcasting service	2	17	19	10	9	
Commercial broadcasting service	31	1 (Demtse Weyani)	32	12	20	9 radio stations on air, 3 under construction
Community broadcasting Service	2	48	50	50		32 now in operation
Total	35	66	101	72	29	

The Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007 describes the roles of the different types of broadcasters. According to article 16 (2) the role of the public broadcasting service is to

- a) *enhance the participation of the public through the presentation of government policies and strategies as well as activities related to development, democracy and good governance;*
- b) *present programs which inform, educate and entertain the public;*
- c) *present programs which reflect unity; of peoples based on equality;*
- d) *promote and enhance the cultures and artistic values of the public;*

¹⁰² The first community radio was started in 2007 at SNNP- its name is Kore community radio station.

- e) *e) serve political parties operating in accordance with the Constitution and the electoral laws of the country on the basis of fair and just treatment.*¹⁰³

In regard to commercial broadcasting services, Article 16 (3) stipulates:

Notwithstanding its profit-making objective, any commercial broadcasting service shall:

- a) *provide equal treatment to any community in its license area;*
- b) *transmission of its programs shall cover the whole area of its license;*
- c) *include regional and national news in its programs [...].*¹⁰⁴

According to Article 17 (3) of the Proclamation, a community broadcasting service

- a) *shall carry out its activities based on the needs of the community regarding development, education and good governance;*
- a) *promote and develop the language, culture and artistic value of the community;*
- b) *allow the participation of the members of the community in the preparation of its programs;*
- c) *transmit programs on issues involving the common interests of the community that could not get coverage by other broadcasting services;*
- d) *utilize the income derived from different sources for the operation of the broadcasting station;*
- e) *provide community centered informative and entertaining programs to promote the information culture and knowledge of the community.*¹⁰⁵

Unlike the electronic media, print media outlets are minimal in number and circulation. Data from the EBA indicate that 10 privately owned newspapers and magazines are on the market, predominantly in the capital. In addition, a total of 23 government owned newspapers and magazines are in circulation both countrywide and regionally.

This points to a more fundamental problem regarding types of media in the country. While the EBA classifies the EBC as a public broadcaster it will be shown under Category 3 B that the broadcaster it is not public in terms of its structure and independence. Considering its sources of funding, control, and affiliation to the ruling party, PBS stands for purely state-owned media. In the Ethiopian context, unfortunately, the term “public media” is a misnomer, with ‘public media’ and ‘government owned media’ being used interchangeably, and by doing so, indirectly legitimizing the government’s claim of offering a public media service.

¹⁰³ Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

2.4 Independent and transparent regulatory system

The EBA is authorized to license all broadcasting services (public, commercial and community). Data collected from sources in these broadcasting organizations for the purpose of this study show that the application process to obtain a licence is short and fast.

When there is an available frequency, applicants are invited to submit their proposal. Article 21/2 of 533/2007 sets criteria for the issuance of licences:

- a) *the reliability and sufficiency of the applicant's financial sources to run the service;*
- b) *the capability of equipments and technologies, listed in the applicant's project proposal, to render the service;*
- c) *the applicant's organizational capacity, knowledge and experience to render the service;*
- d) *the contents of the programme submitted by the applicant and social needs covered by the program;*
- e) *the transmission time allocated for the service.*

The authority sets up a committee to carry out the screening and processing of applications. The committee scrutinizes the application documents, then allocates the available frequencies to those who fulfil all requirements. Interested bidders or their legal representatives can attend the opening of the bid. The EBA also notifies all unsuccessful applicants and provides details on why they did not succeed.¹⁰⁶

In the case of public broadcasters (as well as commercial satellite broadcasting) the EBA checks only whether the relevant documents are complete. The process for community broadcasters is similar. Overall, the regulatory system works independently and transparently. The EBA allocates frequencies to potential applicants in line with international standards and seeks to ensure equitable access to the limited frequencies to potential broadcasters in order to safeguard media plurality in the country.

2.5 State and CSOs actively promote development of community media

Community radio broadcasting is currently expanding in both numbers and programming offered. The first such station to come on air in 2007 was radio 'Korre' in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). Support from the state for the development of community radios came in the form of easing up on legal requirements for this group of

¹⁰⁶ Mulugeta Sisay (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

operators. With a view to increase the number of community radios and promote media plurality in the country, the EBA simplified licensing procedures for community broadcasters.

The Broadcasting Service Proclamation states

*the community broadcasting service is a non- profit radio or television station established by the will and interest of a community and administrated and run by the community living in the specific area or who possess a common interest.*¹⁰⁷

Based on Community Radio Broadcasting Service Directive No. 02, 2008, EBA started granting licences to applicants from two types of community: geographic and common interest-based.¹⁰⁸ Since 2012, a new directive (Directive No 04/2012) allows other players, for instance, higher education institutions and local government administrations, to apply for frequencies as well. Five types of groups can now apply to run a community radio station: people who have a common interest; a community with the support of the local or regional administration; higher education institutions; community-based higher education community radio initiatives; and communities in a certain geographical location.¹⁰⁹

CSOs have contributed mostly in the initial period of establishing community radios. Setting up the necessary infrastructure and installation of transmitters and studio facilities was often carried out with the technical and financial support of CSOs, as in the case of Korre community radio. These days, however, CSOs are not very active in supporting community broadcasters. While stations are facing critical challenges in regard to technical facilities and scarcity of funding¹¹⁰, the contribution of CSOs is almost becoming nil¹¹¹. In addition, some informants argue, most international NGOs with the potential to render support to community radios are no longer active in Ethiopia due to the 2009 CSO law which restricted foreign financial support. Campus-based community radio stations are obtaining financial support from the higher education institutions where they are based.

The EBA and UN agencies¹¹² provide training to journalists and technicians in community radio stations. UNESCO, as one of the main stakeholders, has been providing continuous support¹¹³ to the community radio sector in various forms. However, given the continuous demand for training and capacity building and the lack of resources, the future of community

¹⁰⁷ Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

¹⁰⁸ EBA. (2008). Community Radio Broadcasting Service Directive No 02/2008. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁰⁹ EBA, 2012- Directive No 04/2012

¹¹⁰ Mulatu Alemayehu Moges, 2018 and IMS, 2018

¹¹¹ A focus group discussion among community radio managers.

¹¹² As an example, UN Women in collaboration with Ministry of peace and EBA provides training on gender responsive conflict reporting and peace journalism to some selected community radios from SNNP, Oromia and Somalia.

¹¹³ http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/strengthening_community_radio_in_ethiopia/

radio is currently in question. Stations are struggling to survive, which also puts in danger the diversity and plurality of broadcasting in the country as a whole.

C. Licensing and spectrum allocation

2.6 State plan for spectrum allocation ensures optimal use for the public interest

According to Article 17/1 of Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007, the EBA allocates frequencies in seven categories. The groups listed are 'terrestrial to air free radio broadcasting service', 'terrestrial to air free television broadcasting service', 'satellite radio broadcasting service', 'satellite television broadcasting service', 'satellite broadcasting service provided to customers for fee', 'receiving and broadcasting foreign programs to customers for fee', and 'cable television broadcasting service provided to customers for fee'.¹¹⁴ In fact, though, only four of these are currently being licensed, namely terrestrial to air free radio and television broadcasting services, satellite radio broadcasting services and services receiving and broadcasting foreign programs to customers for fee'.¹¹⁵ No licences have been issued so far for cable or satellite TV services.

Regarding satellite television, EBA does not allocate frequencies to satellite TV stations; rather it is only responsible for the issuance of license for their content productions.¹¹⁶ The interested applicants to own a television channel can deal with the satellite providers and process their satellite channels from them.

2.7 Independent and transparent regulatory system

In relation to the independence and transparency of the regulatory body, the EBA, two different opinions have been voiced by key informants for this study. The first group was concerned about the independence of the EBA because of the way board members, the general director and deputy director are appointed. As stipulated in Proclamation 533/2007, board members, who are recruited from different institutions and parts of society, are appointed by government and accountable to the minister.¹¹⁷ All current board members are drawn from

114 Article 17/1 of the Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta.

115 Mulugeta Sisay- Informant from EBA. (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

116 Mulugeta Tesfaye (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

117 The general director and the board members of the EBA were appointed first by the Ministry of Information, later by the head of the Government Communication Affairs Office. Both Ministries no longer exist under the new leadership. As a result, the responsibility for these appointments has now moved to the Prime Minister.

executive bodies of the state. The government also appoints the General Director. Thus, this group argued, the body cannot consider to be free from direct and indirect pressure from the state and the ruling party.

On the other side of argument, a source from the EBA quoted Proclamation 533/2007, Article 21 about the criteria for issuing licences. Though the governing bodies are appointed by the state, frequency allocations to broadcasters, this informant said, are clearly guided by a set of criteria stipulated by law (see 2.4). Thus, the independence of the regulatory body could not be called into question regarding the awarding of licences and following up on the performance of broadcasters.

The government has recently endorsed a new declaration that gives the power of appointing the general director of the EBA to members of parliament instead of the Prime Minister. This, it is hoped, will help to bolster the independence of the EBA.

In relation to the allocation of frequencies, particularly to the commercial media, some commercial broadcasters indicated their doubts about the independence and transparency of the procedure. The decision-making process, they said, is not really open and participatory. While all licensing requirements are clearly spelt out in the call for applications, there is no external body to oversee whether the evaluation process is indeed free from political and commercial interference. The EBA alone decides and the result is then communicated to applicants.

D. Taxation and business regulation

2.8 State uses taxation and business regulation to encourage media development in a non-discriminatory manner

Informants from the media leadership agreed that taxation and business regulations have been applied to all media sectors indiscriminately (print and electronic; public, commercial, and community broadcasting services). Data collected from heads of public, commercial and community broadcasters also showed that there was no support from the state in terms of tax exemptions or special tax schemes for media firms.

Interviewees complained about the high taxes imposed on imports of media equipment. Incentives provided to other investments and businesses in the country do not include media firms. "Business in the media industry in Ethiopia is not considered as an investment. For instance, if you go to the bank to apply for a loan, there is no room for the media to get a loan and expand their business. Also, media are not in the list of businesses to which the state

grants duty free privileges on their imports. Tax levied on media technology is more than tax levied on alcohol”, said Woldu Yemesle from the Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), which paid 134% tax to import media equipment when it established the television station.¹¹⁸

“There is no support for the media. Rather, it seems that the tax law is meant to discourage the media industry. The tax rate is amazing”, said another source.¹¹⁹ With respect to private print media, sources invariably indicated that government support for the development of newspapers and magazines is insignificant. For instance, one of the informants, Abel Wabela, notes:

It is almost non-existent. There is no support for the media as a social business that needs to be supported. Printing cost is highly rising, around 30%, and there is no support in that regard. The distribution system is also very monopolistic and traditional. There is very limited access to distribution. And there is no support in expanding or reforming the distribution system.¹²⁰

The lack of government support for the media in regard to taxation is a crucial problem for community radios in the country. An informant from the regulatory body noted that the EBA does not have a mandate to act on their behalf, for instance by writing support letters to the respective executive authorities for the reduction or waiving of taxes for media facilities.¹²¹

To sum up, the general absence of incentives to media organizations, whether in the form of preferential taxation or other measures of support, is seriously affecting the development of both the print and broadcast media. In particular, it is having a huge impact on the establishment of community radio stations, which often have limited resources to start their operations. Overall, the taxation and incentive system are far from favourable for the development of the media in Ethiopia.

E. Advertising

2.9 State does not discriminate through advertising policy

All private electronic and print media depend entirely on the revenue derived from advertisements. Respondents from the private print media note that printing costs are continuously rising and newspapers and magazines cannot cover them by the sale of copies.

¹¹⁸ Woldu Yemesle (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹¹⁹ Zerehun Teshome (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹²⁰ Abel Wabela (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹²¹ But this does not mean that it cannot lobby authorities explaining the merit of assisting the industry and the potential danger of not doing so.

The largest public service medium in the country, the EBC, is mandated to earn its income from advertisements and other sources since the state does not subsidize its budget any more (since 2016). Oromia Broadcasting Network (OBN) also gets only 40 % of its budget from the state, and the rest is covered from the revenue coming from leasing airtime, producing content in collaboration with partners, and from advertising. All other public media are wholly funded by the federal and regional governments. Community radios are encouraged to collect money not only from their communities in the form of regular contributions, but also from advertisements. This shows that almost all the media depend on the income from the advertisements for their survival.

There is no evident data to indicate that the country has an advertising policy to ensure that government ads are distributed fairly. An informant from EBA concurs that the authority does not have a code of conduct in this regard in relation to broadcasters. EBA is mainly concerned about 'what an advertisement should fulfil' (what is allowed and what is not allowed), in order to protect the public interest.¹²² There was an attempt by the former Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) to draft a policy to ensure a fair distribution of government's advertising among the various media. However, it has not yet been ratified or put into practice.

The lack of clarity and dependability affects the income of the private media, both print and electronic. Some respondents stated that government institutions often favour the public media in their allocation of advertising budget funds. This has raised some concerns from private media owners. Woldu Yemesel¹²³ (general executive manager of FBC), Zerihun Teshome¹²⁴ (Zami 90.7 FM radio station¹²⁵ owner, founder and CEO) and Teferie Alemu¹²⁶ (media and entertainment advisor to Sheger Radio) pointed out that advertisements, particularly Public Service Advertisements (PSAs), are not fairly distributed among the media due to various reasons. In the absence of a policy to govern the allocation of PSAs to media institutions, they said, government bodies and officials had their own preferences for certain media, but might also seek to pursue political interests through the allocation of PSAs. What makes the issue more worrisome is the fact that the government issued a directive in 2015 for all government departments and public bodies to stop sponsoring programs in the media and to reduce their budgets for public service advertisements.¹²⁷

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are no credible and competent institutions to undertake any proper rating of the media in the country with regard to reach and impact.

122 Anonymous informant from EBA (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

123 Woldu Yemesle (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

124 Zerihun Teshome (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

125 Zami FM 90.7 has changed its name to Awash FM 90.7 after it was sold to a new owner.

126 Teferie Alemu (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

127 The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation circulated a directive in 2015 to all government institutes to minimize their budgets on advertisements and printing material.

Without any hard facts and figures to go by, it is difficult to allocate advertising budgets to the media fairly and to assess objectively whether this is being done.

2.10 Effective regulation governing advertising in the media

The Proclamation on Advertisement (No. 759/2012) in its article 17/1 clearly stipulates how much of broadcast time can be allocated to advertisements:

- a) *20% of its daily or a particular programme transmission time;*
- b) *15% of a particular programme having a transmission time of not more than one hour; or*
- c) *12 minutes in a one-hour transmission time.*

For community radios, advertisements may not exceed 15% of its daily output or nine minutes per hour.¹²⁸ The proclamation also governs the print media. Space for advertising in newspapers and magazines must not exceed 60% of overall content of each edition.

Article 5 of the proclamation stipulates that advertising agencies or firms that produce such ads need a licence issued by the EBA. Article 25 lists advertisements which are not allowed to be published, for example on narcotic drugs, weapons, gambling, witchcraft, tobacco products and so on. Article 7 declares unlawful advertising that contains image, speech or comparisons that violates the dignity, liberty, equality of people in relation to language, gender, race, nation, nationality, profession, religion, belief, political, or social status.

An informant from EBA underscored that due to lack of a clear guideline, not only the broadcasters themselves but also foreign advertising agencies have been producing advertisements and disseminating them through the media, including the public media. Also, there were institutions that produce advertisements without having a licence. All advertisers now have licenses from the trade offices either from the federal or regional bureaus.

¹²⁸ A Proclamation on Advertisement. Proclamation No. 759/2012. Federal Neharit Gazeta: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Recommendations

1. Media organizations have an important role to play in keeping society informed. To ensure media diversity, the government should open the media sector for diverse groups of society, introduce policies to combat monopolization and create an enabling environment for both public and private media to flourish. One measure of such support could be subsidies and tax breaks, in particular on imported goods used in the media sector.
2. The government and parliament should put in place the necessary legal framework for the EBA to act as an independent regulator with a representative independent board. The EBA should develop clear guidelines for granting licences in a transparent manner and with a view to enhancing diversity in the broadcasting sector.
3. Mindful of the contribution of community radio stations to development and democratization, the government should provide support to community broadcasters in the areas of licensing, capacity building of journalists and other media staff, and tax breaks on technical equipment, in order to strengthen the existing community media and establish more such media. The challenges of community media in terms of their sustainability should be assessed regularly and mechanisms should be devised to address them.
4. A clear policy and an oversight mechanism are needed to ensure that Government advertising is allocated in a transparent and equitable manner across media organizations (public, commercial and community).
5. Media houses should strictly separate journalistic content and advertisements.

Category 3

Media as a platform for democratic discourse



Category 3

Media as a platform for democratic discourse

A. Media reflects diversity of society

3.1 The media – public, private and community-based – serve the needs of all groups in society

Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic nation composed of more than 80 ethnic groups with their respective languages. The Ethiopian media, in general, are decried for not reaching these groups in languages they understand. Media owners, managers, editors and reporters of both private and government media interviewed for this study all acknowledged that in terms of reflecting linguistic diversity media practice in Ethiopia is far from living up to societal expectations.

Most government media, both print and broadcast, rely heavily on Amharic, the federal working language of the country. The national broadcaster, EBC, runs one channel that entertains news, and current affairs, and programmes entirely in Amharic, and devotes a separate channel to all other languages, namely Afan Oromo, Tigrigna, Somali, Afar, French, Arabic, and English. The private media, on the other hand, are almost entirely in Amharic, with a few exceptions of media venturing into Afan Oromo, Tigrigna or English. “Most of the print products published in the capital are in Amharic, and to a lesser extent in English, and occasionally in *Afan Oromo*. In the broadcast arena, relative to the print media, there is more linguistic diversity at the national level”, Abdissa Zerai noted.¹²⁹

Among the broadcast media, radio offers more language diversity, compared to television, mainly thanks to the more than 30 community stations that generally broadcast in the local languages spoken in their areas of coverage. A source from the EBA, Mulugeta Sisay¹³⁰ indicated that close to 60 local languages were being used to produce and disseminate media content in the country in 2019.

In the regional media, which are largely broadcast media under the ownership of the respective regional governments, linguistic diversity is better served than at national level. However,

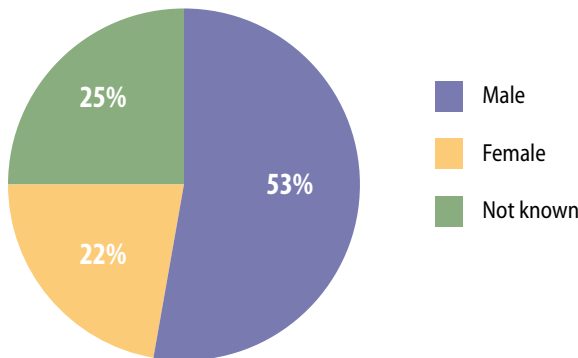
¹²⁹ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA.

¹³⁰ Mulugeta Sisay (2019) Personal Interview, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Abdissa Zerai noted that this still falls short of reflecting the full diversity of languages present in the regions, with the voices of some language groups not being heard on air at all.¹³¹ In addition, he says, “the regional media lack cross-sectional diversity, i.e., media in Oromia do not necessarily use languages spoken outside Oromia region, and the same applies to media in the Southern region, etc”.¹³² The only languages commonly used by these media are Amharic and English.

In terms of serving the needs of all sections of society, most respondents agreed that the media in Ethiopia lack diversity of content. Women’s voices, for instance, receive much less coverage than those of men (figure 1). An assessment of stories over a three months’ period from September 15 to December 15, 2019 in ten newspapers and television channels showed that women were quoted as sources in only 22 % of the overall number of stories focused on political, economic, conflict and other issues in the country.

Figure 1- Gender Diversity in News Stories in Ethiopian Media



Government broadcasters devote a great deal of airtime to government policies and the activities of government officials rather than to broader issues of interest to Ethiopian society at large or the impact of political decisions on people’s daily lives. The private media are doing much better in this regard.

The Ethiopian print media, according to respondents, are highly elite-centered and concentrated in urban areas, mainly the capital Addis Ababa, and they cater mainly for the interests of that elite.

With the exception of a few government-owned broadcast stations and one or two private publications, most television channels, FM stations, and the few existing print publications give

¹³¹ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA

¹³² Ibid

overriding coverage to entertainment. “While the stations focus on music and entertainment, they do raise social and economic issues and hold public phone-ins, but politics is out of their reach. This leads to homogeneity of content that makes it feel like there is only one station on multiple frequencies.”¹³³

According to respondents, community radio stations are doing better, in relative terms, as far as serving the needs of different sections of the society goes. They broadcast in languages spoken by their target communities, and they focus on local issues that mostly go unnoticed by regional and national media. They provide a platform for marginalized groups, and uneducated people.

Private newspapers and commercial radio stations are only accessible to people living in the capital Addis Ababa, and dozens of satellite channels are only accessible in urban and sub-urban areas. Government broadcasts, on the other hand, especially national radio and regional radio stations, reach most of the population, apart from a considerable number of people living in rural areas where there is still limited or no access to media, be it television or radio.

Most respondents agreed that state-owned media, be they national or regional, are accustomed to presenting only views that go along with government statements and political positions, and this does not seem to have changed since 2018, when the EPRDF embarked on reforms aimed at bringing about democratic changes in the country, including the media as one of the important democratic institutions. Government influence on media content has significantly diminished, informants said, but the evidence shows that divergent views on matters pertaining to political, social and economic issues are still either unrepresented or underrepresented. In the words of Abdissa Zerai: “Unfortunately, for the government, diversity has always meant ethnic diversity, not diversity of opinions or views. As a result, it exerted near monopoly control over the media in order to propagate and disseminate its own views to the public.”

One informant believes that a practice of giving more room to divergent views might create further divisions in society because those whose views are less/not represented in the media would feel marginalized.¹³⁴ Others said the lack of diversity of opinions and views was owing to state ownership of these media, while some indicated that it has to do with high levels of self-censorship or poor institutional capacity as well as low levels of journalistic professionalism.

¹³³ Wazema Radio (2018). Mapping the Ethiopian Media. At: <http://wazemaradio.com/mapping-ethiopian-media-briefing-paperreport/>

¹³⁴ Anwar Mohammed (2019). Personal Interview. Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

3.2 Media organisations reflect social diversity through their employment practices

There are few hard facts on the exact ratio of men and women journalists in Ethiopia. One report puts the percentage of women in the industry at less than 30 percent.¹³⁵ Most editors and managers interviewed for this study acknowledged that women journalists are not represented at all levels. Less than one-third of journalists are women and there is a clear dominance of men in newsrooms.

According to one female informant, the issue of gender equality is largely neglected in most media institutions. Though women can compete with male journalists, it is only when they have accomplished more than their men colleagues that they get recognition. Most media organizations do not have policies to encourage women journalists during and after recruitment, let alone quota for female applicants. Other informants in the industry noted that the recruitment policies of their respective media have always been based on competency, and hence affirmative action towards women applicants or statements in job offers such as “women applicants encouraged” are almost non-existent.

This does not necessarily mean that women are not represented in leadership positions at all. There are female media managers, editors-in-chief, directors, and division heads at different media institutions, but they are few in number. For example, *Capital*, the largest English weekly newspaper, has a female editor-in-chief, and a veteran prominent woman journalist leads Sheger FM 102.1. A couple of community radio stations have female heads and board chairpersons.

When it comes to representation of different ethnic and religious groups by means of employment practices, informants from media organisations said their policies had never been designed to bring about fair representation. The only factor taken into account was who had the ability to produce quality material in the respective medium, rather than who was from which ethnic group and who believed in what. There is no significant difference between private and state-owned media in terms of reflecting the diversity of society in their employment practices.

¹³⁵ Fojo Media Institute. (2019). Ethiopia: Reflections on Media Reform. At: <https://fojo.se/publications/ethiopia-reflections-on-media-reform-english/> See also Skjerdal 2017, p.12.

B. Public service broadcasting model

3.3 The goals of public service broadcasting are legally defined and guaranteed

According to key informants, what Ethiopia has is a government broadcasting service as opposed to a public broadcasting service (which is what the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007 stipulates), so no matter how independent the governance system might be, editorial independence will be critically harmed. The EBS, through its governing body, is accountable to the House of People's Representatives. Board members are appointed by parliament. Regional governments operate broadcasting similarly. (For more detail see 3.5)

According to Article 2 (9) of Proclamation 533/2007, 'public broadcasting service' refers to

a radio or television transmission service established for the purpose of educating, informing and entertaining the public, in the federal or a regional state to which government budget is allocated in full or in part and is accountable to the Federal House of Peoples Representatives or to Regional Councils.

Article 16 (2) of the same proclamation provides a list of functions that the 'public broadcasting service' shall discharge:

- a)** *enhance the participation of the public through the presentation of government policies and strategies as well as activities related to development, democracy and good governance;*
- b)** *present programs which inform, educate and entertain the public;*
- c)** *present programs which reflect unity of peoples based on equality;*
- d)** *promote and enhance the cultures and artistic values of the public;*
- e)** *serve political parties operating in accordance with the Constitution and the electoral laws of the country on the basis of fair and just treatment.*

Proclamation No 858/2014, on the establishment of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, in its article 5 states the objectives of the broadcaster:

- a)** *Broadcasting main and current issues happening in the country and abroad as well as educational and entertainment events on the radio, television and website in compliance with mass media and other relevant laws and utilizing feedbacks in the form of feedback receiving system or direct input coming from the public, and thereby enhance the awareness of the public on overall activities carried out in the country and become active participant in the development of the country;*

- b)** *Creating national consensus; supporting all national efforts made to protect and promote national identity and dignity, diversity, tolerance and democratic unity.*

Article 6 goes into more detail:

- 1)** *to collect news and news packages which are relevant and important for the society and deliver them to the beneficiaries on the radio, television and website in different local and foreign languages;*
- 2)** *to present educational and informative programs that mobilize the public towards development, good governance and building democratic system; to introduce government policies and laws to the public;*
- 3)** *to broadcast programs that help the society to build awareness regarding human and democratic rights;*
- 4)** *to receive and broadcast free public comments and disclosures;*
- 5)** *to present various programs that may build up the knowledge and innovative career of the public and satisfy its entertainment demands;*
- 6)** *to create relations with similar domestic and foreign agencies;*
- 7)** *to provide technical and training supports to regional mass - media agencies;*
- 8)** *to determine and collect service charges, and exempt partially or wholly as may be necessary; [...]*

In practical terms, it is very difficult to live up to all these objectives while there is interference by government, respondents contended. These interferences are major hindrances in making sure that diversity of views is reflected and national consensus built. Other respondents also commented that the practice had always been contrary to what was stipulated in the provisions (see 2.3).

Most EBC employees among the interviewees of this study said that though freedom of the media is guaranteed in the Proclamation on Freedom of the Mass Media in its article 4, external influence impacted greatly on the organization's ability to perform in accordance with expectations. According to them, the broadcaster is made to be reactive while it is supposed to be active, and while they were supposed to set the agenda, in practice the opposite was true: "We are given the agenda and we are only expected to promote that. It is very unlikely for us to practice otherwise", one respondent said.¹³⁶

The media in general, and broadcasting in particular, have, from their inception, been used by the state as instruments to disseminate propaganda. Especially in the years before the 2018 political reforms, government influence on media content increased as a senior editor at EBC noted: "Officials used to call and dictate what should be reported and what should not be. Our

¹³⁶ Anonymous Respondent (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

productions were sent to them before transmission and they decided what to keep and what to leave out. The now defunct Government Communication Affairs Office was overseeing day-to-day activities of journalists and strongly censored content”.¹³⁷

Commenting on current practice, respondents from EBC noted that not all types of content are influenced by political or government interests and journalists are trying to work independently on most issues. However, they say, there are some cases where content is produced and disseminated by external government bodies without involving journalists or editors.¹³⁸ For example, statements of the ruling political party are read as they are without structuring them as news. Compared to the time before the 2018 reforms, according to respondents, there is no direct influence on content and they have the freedom to report on any issue of their choice. Nevertheless, some government officials might still call and comment on the way reports have been done. These comments, if related to ethnic groups or identity, come frequently, and they influence decisions of journalists on covering similar issues in the future.

Respondents working at EBC and regional broadcasters agreed that, at the time when the interviews for this study were conducted, there was not as much direct control and outside influence as there used to be. “I am a senior editor, and no one has called me to dictate content. I have recently done a critical report on the reform and the PM himself, and no one said anything. So, the government’s practice of monitoring the media and influencing content has been little to none over the past one year”.¹³⁹ However, most respondents from the state-owned broadcaster also think that this is not because there are no attempts to exert influence, but because top managers make sure that they do not reach journalists.

Government media in Ethiopia have long been decried for merely serving as mouthpieces of the ruling party. From 2018 to 2019, the country underwent serious political reforms and many hoped, rightly so, that government broadcasting would function independently. However, as one respondent asserts, these media do not have financial freedom and are still dependent on the government to cover their expenses, which makes them vulnerable to any kind of influence brought to bear by the authorities. The government is still in a position to control content directly or indirectly. “This organization is practically led by a member of the ruling party, which means that content is very likely to be influenced to advance political interests.”¹⁴⁰

137 Anonymous Respondent (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

138 Anonymous Respondent (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

139 Anonymous Respondent (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

140 Ibid

3.4 The operations of public service broadcasters do not experience discrimination in any field

There have not been any instances of discrimination or hindrances in operation that EBC faced. The satellite carrier warned the national broadcaster a few times that subscription would be withdrawn because of delays in payments, which has to do with the shortage of foreign currency the country experiences every now and then. Regional government broadcasters have never faced discrimination of any kind.

Generally, it should be noted that government broadcasting organizations in Ethiopia are privileged in terms of access to transmission facilities as compared to privately owned media.

3.5 Independent and transparent system of governance

Article 8 of Proclamation 858/2014) on the establishment of the EBC stipulates the following with regard to the governance of the broadcaster:

- 1) *The Board shall comprise a chairman, a secretary and seven members, save this number may increase as it may be necessary.*
- 2) *The chairperson and members of the Board, who have been drawn from pertinent institutions and different classes of society, shall, upon recommendation by the Prime Minister, be appointed by House of Peoples' Representatives.*
- 3) *The Board shall be accountable to the House of Peoples' Representatives.*
- 4) *The term of the Board shall be five years.*

According to article 11, the Chief Executive Officer is also appointed by the House upon recommendation by the Prime Minister, while his deputies are appointed by the Board, on the recommendation of the CEO. In practice, the appointment of board members and executive officers has always been on the basis of candidates' political commitment to the regime, while some members are drawn from the opposition camp and religious leaders are included. According to Abdissa Zerai, who was previously a member of the governing board of EBC while serving as head of the School of Journalism and Communication in Addis Ababa University, "the governing bodies of the media are mostly political heavyweights. True, there might be a few politically unaffiliated members of the governing body." However, "since the whole operation is structurally designed to serve the government's interest, their presence won't make any difference".¹⁴¹

141 Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed undertook a reshuffling of board members on 21st of March 2019. The appointment of a prominent opposition figure and a celebrated religious leader, who were freed from prison as part of EPRDF's ongoing political reform, was highly commended by the public.

Nonetheless, four of the nine members of the newly formed board are members of the ruling party, some are even central committee members of member parties in the ruling coalition. It is also worth mentioning that the board chair and the chief executive officer of the corporation, who is a member of the board and serves as board secretary, are political heavyweights and the independence of the governing body is thus questionable. Government broadcasting services in the regional states follow suit and assign members to the governing boards in similar fashion.

The appointments procedure does not comply with Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa:

- 1) *States shall establish public service media governed by a transparently constituted and diverse board adequately protected against undue interference of a political, commercial or other nature.*
- 2) *The senior management of public service media shall be appointed by and accountable to the board.*

3.6 PSBs engage with the public and CSOs

As cited above, Proclamation No 858/2014 lists among the duties of the corporation the duty “to receive and broadcast free comments and disclosures” from the public. In practice, however, the EBC (and regional state owned broadcasting services) provide only a few platforms for such engagements, mainly focusing on entertainment and other apolitical issues such as sports.

EBC has only two programs on television that allow for audience engagement – *Tenawo Beбето* and *Kasma*. There are a few such platforms on EBC radio stations – FM 97.1, FM 104.7, and the National AM Radio. Informants from among EBC and regional broadcasting services staff in Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, Dire Dawa, and Addis Ababa all agreed that the level of engagement with the public in broadcasting is not satisfactory. They blamed broadcasters themselves for not designing programs and encouraging the public to participate actively. However, there are also issues from the public's side that account for the poor level of participation.

In Dire Dawa, for example, the regional TV channel, Dire TV, is not accessible through satellite, now by far the preferred mode of reception, and only few people still have a TV antenna. Having access to more national and international channels, which provide a wide variety of alternatives perceived to be better than what is locally produced, people lost interest in

Dire TV. Also, according to Musebuh Diren,¹⁴² a Somaligna Language Coordinator at the radio division in DDMMA, people do not perceive the broadcast media as independent and they think that it is pointless to engage with them, as such engagement is not likely to bring about any real changes.

The biggest challenge for the EBC, given its previous practice of broadcasting interviews which were manipulated to serve or echo the political interests of the ruling party, is finding people who are willing to speak to the media at all. “This challenge led to a practice whereby we use a single source repeatedly”.¹⁴³

A new trend in gathering feedback and engaging audiences is the use of social media. All government broadcasting services have pages on Facebook and respondents working in these organizations said that social media have become the preferred platform to engage with their audiences. In addition to getting feedback on news reports and programs, they also use these interactions to gather information and tips for news stories.

C. Media self-regulation

3.7 Print and broadcast media have effective mechanisms of self-regulation

The debilitating impact of restrictive laws that manacled all forms of media and journalism, policies of the government towards the media, and the lack of political will to build a democratic media system are all to blame for the underdevelopment of journalism and media in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the absence of self-regulatory mechanisms in the media landscape from the outset has also contributed to the decline of the sector.

Though they are not legal entities established to enforce codes at the industry level, there are a handful of professional associations in Ethiopia that still grapple with issues of survival and credibility, namely EJA, EFPJA, ENJU, ESJA, and EMWA. According to Tamrat Gebregiorgis, Managing Editor of Addis Fortune newspaper,

Except for very few, many of them suffer from legitimacy and governance crises for their rationale to exist was not a bottom-up drive. Many of them have leaders unaccountable to their members; the latter are passive participants who are not able to fulfil the most basic obligations of paying membership fees. Often, the leaders hold onto the associations to advance their interests, hoping to get funding from external sources.

¹⁴² Musebuh Diren (2019). Personal Interview. Dire Dawa Ethiopia.

¹⁴³ Nebiyou Wondessen (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

He further asserted that most journalists' associations are understaffed and under-resourced, are not really functional and do not engage with their members regularly.¹⁴⁴ Tekabech Assefa, President of EMWA, noted, "Our ultimate concern right now is keeping the association from closure. I work for no pay for example. The same goes for board members".¹⁴⁵

One respondent, Abel Wabella, who runs online news and analysis platforms, says that in the current atmosphere, with self-regulation in its infancy and the media unsure about their future role, the government is using this uncertainty for its own purposes.¹⁴⁶ For example, the Ministry of Peace recently held a discussion to establish a network of journalists and media professionals for peace and the Broadcasters' Association and the ministry did indeed set up a network of journalists. This, said the respondent, clearly shows that the government is trying to influence such self-regulatory mechanisms while some media organizations and professionals are trying to advance specific economic interests.

At the time of writing in 2019 and 2020, editors of various organizations, including regional, national, private and government media, were in the process of forming two new associations: the Editors Guild of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Broadcasters' Association. Both bodies aspire to promote professionalism.¹⁴⁷

There is a successful attempt by concerned members of the industry to establish the Ethiopian Media Council, a self-regulatory body that will engage in the enforcement of a code of conduct that members are to abide by. Having gone through many difficulties for a long time, the council has been formally recognized as an independent civil society organization in June 2019.¹⁴⁸ Members of the council include publishers, broadcasters and media associations, and numbered more than 50 by 2020. However, whether or not the body will attract membership from all corners of the industry and maintain credibility by enforcing its codes remains to be seen.

3.8 Media displays culture of self-regulation

Existing media laws, both the Broadcasting Service Proclamation and Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation, have provisions that oblige the media to respect the right of individuals to reply.

Article 40 (1) of the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2008 stipulates:

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁵ Tekabech (2019). *Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

¹⁴⁶ Abel Wabella (2019). *Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

¹⁴⁷ <https://newbusinessethiopia.com/politics/ethiopia-gets-first-editors-association/>

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/ethiopian-media-council-gets-formal-recognition>

Where any factual information or matter injurious to the honor or reputation of any person is reported in a mass media, such person shall have the right to have his [his/her] reply inserted, free of charge in publication in which the report appeared.

Similarly, Article 42 (1) of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service Proclamation provides:

Any broadcasting service licensee shall respect the right of a person to give reply concerning an issue when he alleges that a transmitted programme has encroached on his right or failed to be presented properly.

As there are no functional self-regulatory mechanisms to ensure that such requirements are fulfilled, it is contingent upon individual media organizations to respond to complaints from the public. Most government media have designated persons or units that gather complaints of all kinds and they do run replies and corrections in accordance with the law.

Private media, both newspapers and radio stations, also carry such messages. At *Ethiopian Reporter*, the largest bi-weekly Amharic and weekly English Newspaper, the editorial team reviews complaints and publishes replies.¹⁴⁹ *Addis Fortune* has its own in-house news ombudsperson. The organization carries out investigations, and if any journalism codes of conduct are violated, there is a debate on why and how such mistakes were made and apologies, corrections or replies are published accordingly.¹⁵⁰

D. Requirements for fairness and impartiality

3.9 Effective broadcasting code setting out requirements for fairness and impartiality

Media laws and other related proclamations that have impacted negatively on the practice of journalism in Ethiopia are being reviewed and legislative amendments are made. At the time of writing these attempts were only at draft level. There were also no self-regulatory broadcasting codes.

The existing statutory broadcasting codes set out in the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service Proclamation (2007) and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation Establishment Proclamation (2014) contain provisions on fairness, impartiality, accuracy, balance and others. Article 9 (4) of the 2014 proclamation stipulates that the governing board of EBC has the duty to “ensure

¹⁴⁹ Amare Aregawi (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁵⁰ Tamrat Gebregiorgis (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

political parties and classes of society with different views are given balanced radio and television service fairly". In the same vein, Article 30 the Broadcasting Service Proclamation says in regard to all broadcasters:

- 1) *Any programme to be transmitted shall reflect different and balanced viewpoints to serve the public at large.*
- 2) *The accuracy of the content and source of any programme to be transmitted shall be ascertained.*
- 3) *Every news shall be impartial, accurate and balanced.*
- 4) *Any programme intended for transmission may not:*
 - a) *violate the dignity and personal liberty of mankind or the rules of good behavior or undermine the belief of others;*
 - b) *commit a criminal offense against the security of the State, the constitutionally established government administration or the defense force of the country;*
 - c) *maliciously accuse or defame individuals, nation/nationalities, peoples or organizations;*
 - d) *cause dissension among nationalities or instigate dissension among peoples; or*
 - e) *incite war.*

Article 45 of the same proclamation stipulates what penalties will apply for violations listed in sub articles 1 to 3 of Article 30 "with a fine of not less than Birr 10,000 and not exceeding Birr 50,000". Violations of sub article 4 will be prosecuted under the Criminal Code.

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia used to design guidelines specifically for reporting on elections. However, such guidelines were barely enforced.

3.10 Effective enforcement of broadcasting code

According to informants, editorial guidelines and codes of conduct designed by individual media houses based on what is stipulated in law are barely implemented, journalists rarely discuss them, and media houses hardly enforce them. This has affected the quality of reports and led to numerous complaints from the public about the misconduct of journalists.

Some respondents mentioned that a few months before the installation of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority frequently threatened, both orally and in writing, to take measures if media failed to comply with the broadcasting code. The media houses referred to by the authority as violating the code have responded that the authority's allegations were politically motivated and not based on facts and the Authority did not pursue the matter.

Overall, respondents perceive the quality of journalism practiced by broadcasters as inadequate and note that both legal requirements as well as basic standards of fairness and impartiality are not being met. Interviewees from both public and private media organizations as well as from professional associations and universities lamented that the media are partisan and biased institutions that do not care about the public's right to know as much as they are expected to. Government media give fair coverage to political parties only very rarely, as they are in the habit of awarding preferential treatment to government and affiliated offices and officials. Commercial broadcasting is predominantly filled with entertainment content and open to bias or misrepresentation. In the words of Abdissa Zerai:

The public has developed cynicism and indifference towards most of the media institutions and the journalists who work in these institutions. As a result, I would say that most of the public sees news as part of propaganda. Having said that, there could be a few media organizations and journalists who work in these institutions whom the general public might trust in relative terms and see the news as real news.¹⁵¹

E. Levels of public trust and confidence in the media

3.11 The public displays high levels of trust and confidence in the media

There is no large-scale and conclusive quantitative data when it comes to public trust and confidence in the media in Ethiopia. A comparative study done in Addis Adaba in 2013 on the level of public trust in private and government media found that more than two-thirds of the respondents trusted the private media more than the government media, while overall trust in Ethiopian mainstream media was below 50 percent (Kebede, 2013).

It is fair to assume that this did not change up until 2018 when Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister. Most respondents interviewed for this study agreed that media is one of the least trusted institutions in Ethiopia currently, owing to its history of strict government control and being bound to serve the ruling party and government only, rather than the Ethiopian public.

A deputy executive officer, editors and reporters from the EBC interviewed for this study agreed that in the early days of Abiy's ascension to power up until recently, the public developed a more positive perception towards the EBC. Many people became eager to watch the station's news broadcasts, very unlike in the past when EBC was perceived as a

151 Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

mouthpiece of government. One editor noted that people went as far as to say, “*God, change my life like you changed EBC*”.

Nevertheless, EBC sources said, people still complain that EBC is reflecting only one view, namely that of the government. “People are now strongly commenting that EBC is going back to its old habits – doing propaganda. The last four to five weeks [February and March, 2019], we are being criticized for extensively covering the government’s agenda instead of setting our own/public agenda”.¹⁵² One respondent questioned whether it is possible to garner trust from all corners of society given the fluidity and diverse nature of people’s interests.¹⁵³ What one section of society appreciates might be perceived by another section as inappropriate and against their interest. “This affects what people perceive about our media.”¹⁵⁴

Another indicator of the public’s level of trust and confidence in the media is people’s willingness to participate in the media when they are offered the chance. Most respondents noted that the public appears to be indifferent when it comes to sharing their views and participating in discussion programs. “On issues that we raise and ask officials about, people complain that nothing has been done about it and feel that it is only talks and no walks. The public is not yet satisfied by what we have done so far, which is also what we believe”, one respondent said.¹⁵⁵

3.12 Media organisations are responsive to public perceptions of their work

Government broadcasting services offer some opportunities for engagement with their audiences. EBC, for example, has a free call-line to gather feedback. It also conducts audience surveys to gauge people’s level of satisfaction and learn about their concerns. In addition, a department or unit is designated to collect feedback through phone calls and other mechanisms. At a weekly meeting held every Saturday to plan content, the head of the feedback unit is present to report what people had to say about broadcast programs and news and what issues they wish to see covered. Respondents noted that such suggestions are being seriously considered in their planning. There is no such practice in other parts of the industry.

When it comes to private media, which are urban-centered and mostly entertainment-oriented FM stations and publications with very limited circulation, public participation is very low or non-existent. Some papers publish opinion pages, spaces for commentary, and

¹⁵² Nebiyou Wondessen (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁵³ Demis Mekuriaw (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁵⁵ Ephrem Aklilu (2019). Personal Interview. Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

letters to the editor. Most media organizations are also using the internet to respond to their audiences and engage them in their news production and content generation processes.

F. Safety of journalists

3.13 Journalists, associated media personnel and media organisations can practise their profession in safety

Following Prime Minister Abiy's coming into power in March 2018, Ethiopia was highly commended by international human rights groups as a country where no journalist is in prison. The release of those in jail was followed by the unblocking of more than 200 online news and analysis sites most of which were run from abroad.¹⁵⁶

However, it was not long before journalists and media personnel started facing harassment, threats and attacks again, unlike formerly though, not at the hands of state authorities. The government has lost its monopoly on violence, says Abel Wabella, so groups are now attacking whomever they want. Journalists are among those being targeted in such attacks, sometimes even particularly so, and there is no protection and guarantee for their safety. Officials and powerful business people also threaten journalists, and the environment is enabling for that kind of behaviour.¹⁵⁷ The first such attack in the new era happened on July 13 when a news crew from DDMMA in Meiso, Oromia State, were on their way to Addis Ababa to cover Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki's visit. After a first attack, the crew were taken to a police station and the driver was assaulted again. He did not survive the attack and passed away in hospital.¹⁵⁸

Staff members from the DDMMA interviewed for this study said they are subject to similar attacks and threats when they report about officials and powerful business people. "I was assigned to do a report about the environmental impact of a cement factory and people from the company called me and told me that I should stop reporting or they would attack me. Journalists working on the news desk are particularly vulnerable to such attacks."¹⁵⁹

Two other journalists, a TV reporter and a cameraperson, working for online TV channel Mereja, were attacked by a group of young people in Legetafo on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The journalists went there to cover a housing story, and after they finished shooting, they were detained by police and later beaten by a mob under the watch of the police, the

¹⁵⁶ https://rsf.org/en/news/new-era-ethiopias-journalists?fbclid=IwAR3kDfMtHfa_sLMwhNb1xtdQ2KUP4cB4p4n98dlAcNNw1ATOnOGhRcwBsk

¹⁵⁷ Abel Wabella a personal interview 2019.

¹⁵⁸ <https://cpj.org/2018/07/in-ethiopia-driver-for-news-crew-dies-from-injurie.php>

¹⁵⁹ Anwar Mohammed (2019) Personal Interview. Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

victims claimed. Eskinder Nega,¹⁶⁰ a prominent journalist who was imprisoned a number of times for doing his job, shared the story of a reporter who works for his weekly paper *Ethiopia*, and who was physically attacked by the Addis Ababa City Police.

An editor at EBC recalls an incident where he was threatened by medical staff. “I did a report about corruption at Black Lion Hospital. It was about MRI and CT-Scan machines that, according to purchase documents, were bought for ETB 103 million, but they were not physically available. People at the hospital then threatened that they would inject me with a poison or something.”

During the Burayu¹⁶¹ and Gedio¹⁶² crises, reporters were threatened multiple times by unidentified people. An EBC journalist based in Hawassa reported on the Sidama ethnic group’s demand for their area to become a regional state of its own - at the time it was a zonal administration that later in November 2019 held a referendum and became the 10th region in the country’s federal system. He was threatened and chased by people who perceived the report he did as biased and inadequate. He left the Hawassa branch after the incident and transferred to head office. “We are so afraid for our lives that we hide our cameras and recorders when we go into the field”, said a senior EBC reporter. Journalists working in SNNP MMA have been facing similar threats while reporting on such cases. A journalist resigned from his job due to fear of attack after he received online threats.

Respondents from state-run media agreed that, in today’s Ethiopia, covering the conflicts erupting in all corners of the country is a life-threatening job for journalists. People involved in these conflicts claim that reporters are late in covering the story or they don’t give it as much focus as they would give another ethnic group, hence they threaten to physically attack or kill them. As Nebiyou Wondessen, Editor-in-Chief at EBC recalls: “There was a conflict in Benishangul Gumuz region. We sent a reporter though it was a little late. As some people in Benishangul believed that we did not give them enough attention, they kidnapped our reporter for some time and he was freed with the help of the military. Such incidents happened four or five times a year”.¹⁶³

Almost all media organizations, government or private, do not have procedures in place for the protection of journalists. Even the state-run media with more means and capacity to do so do not provide any security or protection for journalists who report from conflict-ridden areas. Respondents said they are told that journalists work in the face of death, so they

160 Eskinder Nega, is a prominent journalist, human right activities, and recently he established a political party.

161 In September 2018, in Burayu town in Oromia, ethnic violence claimed the lives of 20 people said to be from a minority group in the area. Read more here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/24/world/africa/ethiopia-ethnic-violence-arrests.html>

162 In 2018, about 800,000 ethnic Gedeos were displaced from West Guji Zone in Oromia due to ethnic violence. Read more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/mar/14/shadow-falls-over-ethiopia-reforms-warnings-of-crisis-ignored-abiy-ahmed>

163 Nebiyou Wondessen. (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

should be ready for it. The absence of such policies has made journalists refrain from taking on assignments that might be dangerous.

In all parts of the country where there is conflict, in Oromia, Amhara, SNNPR, Benishangul, Gambella and others, several journalists have been physically assaulted and threatened on social media, merely for doing their jobs. All of these cases happened during the transition period and in areas which were beyond the rule of law. None of them were followed up by the authorities. These stories attest to the fact that, in its current state, the country is unsafe for journalists, and that they may be playing with their lives without any protection.

3.14 Media practice is not harmed by a climate of insecurity

Most respondents working in government media agreed that the practice of self-censorship, though it has decreased owing to the abatement since 2018 of direct political influence being brought to bear on their organizations, is still present for a number of reasons. Because of the harassment they have gone through, a majority of journalists are simply not interested in covering conflict and related stories any more. Also, with their organizations still under government ownership and control, they work in an environment where they always keep in mind how officials might react to their reports. As a result, they seek to flatter officials by reporting only on success stories and turning a blind eye to wrongdoing in fear of intimidation or harassment.

One example is that of a factory that grinds stone and emits huge plumes of dust. The public went to the broadcaster and complained. The editor assigned a journalist to report on the matter and sent him out with a cameraperson. The journalist found that the company was owned by a government official and promptly refused to do the assignment. He told his editor that he was afraid he would be harassed like other colleagues before him and his refusal was accepted.

According to respondents from the EBC,¹⁶⁴ politics in the country have become highly ethnicized, and this has affected the work of journalists as well. If, for example, a reporter is assigned to cover issues related to their own ethnic group, they may self-censor either by highlighting or hiding information in order to favour that particular group. To overcome such practices, EBC has organized training programs and holding intensive discussions to make sure that the practice of self-censorship diminishes and does not affect the quality of journalism.

With respect to the private media, respondents affirmed that no matter the influence, threat, harassment, attack or intimidation they face, they would always do their job

¹⁶⁴ Nebiyou Wondessen. (2019) Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

uncompromisingly. For example, Eskinder Nega said that he had never taken any of the threats and harassment he faces as discouraging. He rather sees them as signs that he is doing his job right.¹⁶⁵

Recommendations

1. Being cognizant of the importance of media diversity and plurality for a democratic society, the Government of Ethiopia should create a conducive environment where the media can work freely and independently to promote and report diverse views. For this to happen, the government should continue making sweeping legislative reforms in a manner that ensures media pluralism, freedom of expression and access to information.
2. Public media institutions should ensure that they reflect linguistic diversity in the country, represent the full spectrum of diverse views, and address gender equality as well as other issues of real concern to all sections of society, including farmers, the poor, the disabled and children. CSOs should also play a role in building the media institutions' capacity in realizing this ideal. Moreover, the government and the media institutions should ensure that all groups in the society are fairly represented in the media.
3. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation needs to be transformed into a truly independent public broadcaster governed by a transparently constituted and diverse board adequately protected against undue interference of a political, commercial or other nature. The senior management of the EBC shall be appointed by and accountable to the board.
4. Media organizations, both private and public, should design effective ways to increase participation of the public in media. Moreover, they need to devise a mechanism to continuously assess the needs of their audiences and endeavour to live up to them. This should include being responsive to public complaints.
5. CSOs, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, and the Government of Ethiopia should support the strengthening of the new media council as it will be instrumental in defending journalists' rights and exercise self-regulation. Such self-regulation will help end unjustified administrative measures and maintain professional standards.
6. Media organizations should strengthen self-regulatory bodies such as the media council and in-house news ombudspersons to ensure that the practices of media house and individual journalists comply with their codes of ethics.

- 7.** Media organizations, be they public or private, should design clear editorial guidelines and codes of conduct for journalists, and such codes should be available to all members of the respective organizations and be discussed and reviewed regularly.
- 8.** The Government of Ethiopia, as well as private and public media organizations, should design a policy for the protection of journalists' safety. The various levels of government, media organizations, and the public at large should protect journalists from any danger while they are doing their job of creating an informed society. The Government, prosecution authorities and the judiciary should take effective legal and other measures to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against journalists and other media practitioners, and ensure that victims have access to effective remedies.
- 9.** Media organizations and media developers in the country should work more to increase women journalists in the media firms at every level from top media management to junior positions. They also should more in ensuring the full implementation of policies and laws that promote affirmative action regarding women participants in the media outlets.

Category 4

**Professional capacity building
and supporting institutions
that underpin freedom of
expression, pluralism and
diversity**



Category 4

Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpin freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity

A. Availability of professional media training

4.1 Media professionals can access training appropriate to their needs

Training opportunities for media professionals in Ethiopia are scarce. The shortage shows both in the number of media training institutions as well as in the variety of fields of training. At the time of writing there was not a single formal or accredited training institute that provided media training on a regular basis. Before 2005, there was one such body – the Mass Media Training Institute (MMTI). This offered both short-term and long-term training to local journalists. However, after it merged with Addis Ababa University (AAU) in 2005, MMTI stopped courses tailored to the needs of working journalists.

This does not mean that there are no short-term training opportunities for journalists in the country. Media training is currently being done either in academic institutions, in-house by the media themselves, or by other interested organizations. In some cases, government institutions, embassies, international organizations and NGOs organize training workshops for journalists at various places in the country¹⁶⁶. However, the training is not consistent.¹⁶⁷

Local media houses like EBC, FBC and Addis Fortune have active in-house programs that provide training for both newcomers (in the form of induction to the station and the basics of journalism) and permanent staff. The FBC is expanding its training department to open up the

¹⁶⁶ Recently, with the support of UNESCO, Ethiopia Media Sector Alliance (EMSA) has developed curricula that can be used by media industries and academic institutes in Ethiopia to facilitate training workshops. In partnership with Ethiopian National Media Support (ENMS), UNESCO organized a three-day Training for Trainers (ToT) on a middle level and in-service training curriculum for Ethiopian media (November 25 to 27, 2020).

¹⁶⁷ Tewodros Negash, IMS, Personal Interview, 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

service to other interested organizations as well¹⁶⁸ and the EBC has already done so. Zami FM also offers in-house training for its journalists.¹⁶⁹

The School of Journalism and Communication (SJC) at Addis Ababa University (AAU) also has a department for short-term training. In collaboration with other organizations, SJC has offered quite a number of training opportunities to interested journalists and PR/ communication professionals. However, the department does not carry out any needs assessment studies to provide training that keeps pace with developments in the field and is of relevance for the active practice of journalism. When interested organizations need training, the school merely plays the role of facilitator and assigns staff member as trainers.

Most journalists interviewed for this study reported they had been involved in some sort of training programs in the course of their professional careers.¹⁷⁰ They also deplored the fact that training is irregular, more theoretical than practical, and not based on the needs of professionals and media firms. The organizers usually determine the subject matter and the venue. Though such short courses may be good refreshers, they have little direct impact on the practice of journalism. When training opportunities become available, some media houses ask all journalists to attend without taking into account their individual experience and needs. A key source from the EBC noted that journalists and editors, for example, are not interested in getting in-house training but prefer outside providers, and they are hardly interested in filling their needs during the need assessment phase.

International media such as BBC, VOA, Aljazeera Media Network and Radio France International have also organized training for local journalists. In 2018, EBC staff members have received in-service training from Aljazeera professionals. Though they are few, training opportunities offered by international media are appreciated for their relevance and hands-on quality. Opportunities for journalists to develop or upgrade their skills through exchange programs are also few. Some, mostly editors and media managers, had the chance to go abroad, particularly to China, with programs designed to coincide with the interests of the Chinese sponsors. An exchange programme has also been carried out between Norway and Ethiopia to strengthen the capacity of the journalism schools of Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar Universities. In the course of this five-year development program, each year ten MA and four PhD students from the two universities have been getting the chance to go to Norway and attend courses and other forms of training. Academic staff members from the two countries have exchanged places and taught in the respective partner universities.

Journalists who seek to specialize in a particular field usually do so based on their interest, and no support is available from their employers except when other institutions provide training

168 Woldu Yemesel (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

169 Zerihun Teshom, Personal Interview, 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

170 Yehonase Benti, Tateq Edibo, and Temesgen Mulatu, journalists in OBN, Personal Interview, 2019, Adama, Ethiopia

in their field of interest. However, such training is often inadequate. Government offices, for example, focus mainly on their own interests, which may be irrelevant for media institutions.

When it comes to ICT skills, journalists often learn from each other rather than through formal training.¹⁷¹ In some media organisations, journalists were found to be competent in the use of digital technology. However, most journalists reported that they have poor access to internet connectivity as well as ICT facilities. Clear gaps were also reported in equipping professionals with new technology and in utilizing the available technology (see category 5 for further details on this).

The only distance-learning opportunity for journalists in Ethiopia is offered by the Bahir Dar University Department of Journalism and Communication under its distance-learning program. This is believed to extend the opportunities for interested individuals to get access to journalism education.

Some media institutions such as the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation sponsor journalists to pursue a master's degree at Addis Ababa University. At the time of writing around 70 staff members were enrolled in MA studies in regular and continuing education programs over a period from 2018 to 2020. Similarly, Walta Information Center, regional media (OBN, AMMA, DDMMA, etc.), the Federal Government Communication Affairs Office (while it was still in existence), and regional communication affairs offices sponsor journalists to attend MA programs at Addis Ababa University and other universities. This is evidence not only of the increasing interest of media houses in the training of their staff, but also the fruitful collaboration between media organisations and academic institutions.

With regard to the quality of training offered, information collected from a large number of journalists points to deficiencies in four major respects. The first one is the availability of training material in the local languages. Most training is conducted in either Amharic or English. Training material is not available in languages other than Amharic and English.¹⁷²

The second concern is accessibility of training to all. The few training programs available are concentrated in urban areas, like the media themselves, which limits accessibility for marginalized groups. When it comes to women, some media institutions allocate a certain quota to women journalists, but most do not treat women differently from men. Some media representatives interviewed said they have never taken gender and marginality into account when selecting journalists for training.

The third concern relates to training evaluation and post training activities. Most interviewees do not remember evaluating the few training opportunities they had.

171 Yehonase Benti, Tateq Edibo, and Temesgen Mulatu, journalists in OBN, Personal Interview, 2019, Adama, Ethiopia

172 Yehonase Benti, Tateq Edibo, and Temesgen Mulatu, journalists in OBN, Personal Interview, 2019, Adama, Ethiopia

The last concern is the diversity of topics and skills covered. The few training programs available are mostly focused on journalism (writing and reporting of stories). Some deal with awareness creation with the purpose of enabling journalists to set the agenda on issues and report on them in the future. The sources noted that there is very limited training on programme production (technical skills).

With respect to community broadcasting, accessibility of training in general and training that caters to the practical needs of journalists in particular is very rare in some stations and non-existent in many others. In terms of content, accessibility to women and marginalized groups, and types of training, there is no significant difference between training opportunities for community radio stations and other privately owned or government media organizations both at regional and national level.

4.2 Media managers, including business managers can access training appropriate to their needs

There is no training offered for media managers, either in-house or by external training institutions. None of the respondents had ever taken part in any programme that covered good systems of management, transparency and dialogue between management and staff. Only very few media houses, for instance the EBC, are trying to provide at least some minimal training on management.

4.3 Training equips media professionals to understand democracy and development

Training rarely covers investigative journalism, media ethics or risk awareness. The same goes for democracy and human rights.

A few programs organized by international bodies such as the UN, embassies and NGOs were aimed at creating awareness about the media's potential for fostering democracy and respect for human rights. UNESCO has been assisting Ethiopian journalists in receiving training on access to information, election reporting, voter and civic education, safety of journalists, media and information literacy and democracy and development related with the aim at fostering democracy in the country. UNDP in collaboration with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia provided two different workshops to journalists, editors and communication and PR officers on media and democracy as well as on elections and the role of journalists and communication /PR officers during elections. Internews – a USAID funded project - has been facilitating continued training for Ethiopian journalists on conflict-sensitive journalism and election reporting. Such endeavours are rare and sporadic. In fact, the shortage of training

programs on media and democracy as well as human rights can be attributed to the (now revised) CSOs laws that limited the activities of CSOs strictly to developmental work.¹⁷³

B. Availability of academic courses in media practice

4.4 Academic courses accessible to wide range of students

Academic courses in journalism and media practice are available across the country and growing numbers of journalists are being taught following the upsurge of such programs. Both undergraduate and postgraduate programs are offered by several public universities. Currently, close to 20 universities are providing journalism education at first-degree level and a few of them (e.g. AAU, BDU, Hawassa, and Jimma Universities) also at postgraduate level (MA and Ph.D.). In addition, more than 20 universities currently offer journalism courses under other disciplines. These students will not obtain a degree in journalism but take journalism as a supportive course for other fields of study, for example English Language and Literature or Amharic Language and Literature.

Training or education material is invariably in English, the medium of instruction at all institutes of higher education in Ethiopia. Participants in this study have underlined the need for material in local languages.

In most universities, especially the newly opened ones, shortage of materials is rife. Courses are mostly theoretical and practical exercises are limited. Media technology in universities is obsolete, which widens the gulf between the industry and academia.

The study finds that while the attempt to expand journalism programs in higher institutions may be commendable, the courses offered do not meet the required standards. This relates to availability of materials, training facilities for both theoretical and practical courses, and availability of courses in local languages.

To add one more point, as most curricula are adapted from the Addis Ababa University School of Journalism and Communication, which can be described as the initial journalism educator, courses at the emerging universities are more or less similar. None of them offer anything unique or cover any specialized field of journalism. Overall, therefore, journalism education at university level is not only lacking a need driven approach but also diversity. Bahir Dar University designed and, for a short period, tested a curriculum for students majoring in journalism and minoring in various disciplines including law, business and economics, political

science, sport, etc. However, students preferred to opt for a general journalism degree due to fear of minimizing job opportunities.

4.5 Academic courses equip students with skills and knowledge related to democratic development

Academic journalism programs cover a wide range of subject matter including media law and ethics but mainly focus on journalism courses. At the School of Journalism and Communication at AAU only a couple of courses related to democracy and development are included in both MA and BA curricula. There are courses, for instance, on critical thinking, media and democracy as well as media and development in the undergraduate program, and on media development, democracy and management in MA programs at AAU- SJC. The main goal of these courses is to enhance journalists' /students' understanding of the role of media in a democratic society and their appreciation of democratic values. They are also designed to produce critical journalists and raise their cognitive skills. For this reason, the courses are often overly theoretical and lack aspects of practical application. Also, they are not contextualized and adapted to local circumstances, but focus mainly on a Western perspective.

Considering the importance of these courses for producing qualified graduates and thereby strengthening efforts to build democratic institutions in the country, there is not enough emphasis on building disciplinary knowledge in the subject areas of journalism that students will be expected to cover as professionals.

Practitioners say journalism schools in general produce low quality. They also question the competence of instructors at academic institutions. However, some say graduates are often judged too harshly and not too much should be expected from cub reporters, citing the technological and practical gap between the academic institutions and the industry as a source of the problem.

C. Presence of trade unions and professional organisations

4.6 Media workers have the right to join independent trade unions and exercise this right

The right to form unions is recognized under Article 42 of the Ethiopian constitution:

Factory and service workers, farmers, farm labourers, other rural workers and government employees whose work compatibility allows for it and who are below a certain level of responsibility, have the right to form associations to improve their conditions of employment and economic well-being. This right includes the right to form trade unions and other associations to bargain collectively with employers or other organizations that affect their interests.

Various trade unions are operating in the country. However, there is no trade union for media workers. Instead, journalists have formed a number of professional associations which also have the right to affiliate with international counterparts, as for example the sports journalists' association, which is a member of different international sports associations.

Though most associations for media professionals are inclusive in the sense that they accept all practicing journalists, there are also some that target specific groups. Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA) can be taken a case in point in establishing association by focusing on only women journalists. A source from FBC noted that he along with his friends had established the Ethiopian Environmental Journalists' Association (EEJA) to work on environment and health related issues, but it was forced to shut down due to financial and technical problems related to the previous CSOs law. Currently, he has no idea whether it is possible to establish a journalists' union. This is because the previous CSOs law limited the activities of associations which work in the field of advocacy. It is expected that such CSOs will become more active under the new revised law.¹⁷⁴

The lack of influence of professional organizations may be a reflection of the heavy pressure the state used to exert on independent journalists. Some pro-ruling party journalists did establish journalists' associations but these were not active in the defence of journalists' rights.

Some initiatives towards the establishment of professional organizations have been spearheaded by international bodies. For instance, UNESCO held a consultative meeting to propose an Ethiopian Media Sector Alliance (EMSA), with the purpose of facilitating an effective and coordinated media development initiative in the country by bringing together national and international partners. The alliance encourages synergy and information sharing among media development stakeholders and advocates for common sector priorities.

4.7. Trade unions and professional associations provide advocacy on behalf of the profession

This study found that there are currently more than 10 professional journalists' associations. However, informants noted that none of them provides advocacy on behalf of the profession. Most do not hold general assemblies and journalists are not active members. There is poor capacity and, it seems, little will to discharge their functions. As a result, the associations are not in a position to take an active part in the debate on media ethics and standards. They never developed their own code of ethics or spoke out in defence of freedom of expression, access to information, or the safety of journalists. Most journalists interviewed do not see these professional associations as a force to be reckoned with.

There is reason to be optimistic however. The promulgation of the new CSO proclamation, which allows foreign and foreign funded organisations to engage in previously prohibited areas such as advocacy for human rights is a good move. The new law has also lifted funding restrictions.

It needs to be said, though, that the previous CSO law was not the only reason for the lack of strong professional associations that could advocate for journalists' rights and demands. The divisive nature of politics in the country that systematically splits media and journalists into pro- and anti-government camps has contributed to the media to be weak. This polarization has taken root within the media itself and prevented it from speaking with one voice.

As mentioned above, the Ethiopian Media Council, the first self-regulatory media body in the country, received the long-awaited registration in June 2019, three years after its formation in 2016. Even more recent is the establishment in August 2019 of an editors' forum, the Editors' Guild.

Moreover, the above-mentioned Ethiopian Media Sector Alliance (EMSA), a multi stakeholder coordination platform with the Ethiopian Media Council as one of its leading members, aims to address the challenges of the Ethiopian media (both offline and online) and work towards the creation of a vibrant media sector in the country.

D. Presence of civil society organizations (CSOs)

4.8. CSOs monitor the media systematically

Various sources indicate that the support of CSOs in capacitating, motivating and monitoring the media and their activities in the country is minimal. There are some international agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO, IMS, etc., that directly and indirectly provide some forms of technical support. UNESCO recently conducted a media mapping study of community radios to establish

their range of activities and provide future guidance. It also offers training to communication officers and ombudspersons on topics such as access to information. UNDP along with other governmental and non-governmental organizations also allocates funds for training. Recently, in collaboration with UN Women, and the EBA, two training workshops were organized on gender-responsive conflict reporting and peace journalism as well as develop a guideline on gender-sensitive conflict reporting for public, commercial and community broadcasters.

Tewodros Negash, International Media Support (IMS) Media Development Advisor to Ethiopia, notes that CSOs in general attempt to provide sporadic and short-term training activities to local journalists. While these efforts may be appreciated, he described them as a hit-and-run form of training that does not necessarily fit the interests and real needs of the media¹⁷⁵.

So far, other local NGOs are nowhere to be found when it comes to supporting the media. The introduction of the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation had a chilling effect on the few civil society organizations working on media freedom. Only a handful of them survived the law while others foundered.¹⁷⁶ The now defunct law stipulated that Ethiopian charities and societies working on human rights were not allowed to receive more than 10 percent of their funding from foreign sources.

There is hope now that CSOs (local and international) will be able to work in support of the media, encouraged by the recent reforms in Ethiopia in general and the revision of the CSO law in particular. The new Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation No 1113/2019 has been in force since March 2019. It states in its article 62 (6): "Foreign Organizations may implement project activities or work in partnership with Local Organizations by providing financial, technical or in-kind support"¹⁷⁷.

Some international organizations, among them IREX, DW Akademie and Internews, are ready to monitor the activities of the media in the country and have also have started providing technical support and training to working journalists in Ethiopia.

4.9. CSOs provide direct advocacy on issues of freedom of expression

The new administration has recognized CSOs as development partners. CSOs are now invited to policy dialogues and planning sessions and the government in general seems to be open towards civil society and ready to welcome its input. The above mentioned new CSO proclamation in its article 56 (f) allows civil society organizations to "conduct research and policy advocacy activities in the sectors in which their members operate".¹⁷⁸ It is expected to broaden the civic space and bring resilient and robust civil society groups to the fore.

¹⁷⁵ Tewodros Negash, IMS, Personal Interview, 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷⁷ Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation No 1113/2019 Negarit Gazette

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

Recommendations

1. The Government of Ethiopia, together with media professionals, journalism school, and CSOs, should design and implement a programme of media and information literacy education for all, which will help develop the public's participation in the media, informed consumption of media content, and active engagement in making media responsive to its needs.
2. The Government of Ethiopia, CSOs, donor agencies, and higher education institutions should support existing journalism training institutions across the country as well as help establish middle level and in-service training centers that cater to the needs of journalists.
3. Understanding the fact that media leaders play a major role in making sure that journalists stick to professional standards and make impactful contributions to society, CSOs and journalism training institutions should provide regular leadership training, workshops, and exchange programs.
4. Higher education institutions that provide journalism education should improve the quality of their training by acquiring modern technical facilities, developing appropriate teaching material, also in local languages, and employing skilled trainers. More emphasis should be given to media education, specialization in various fields of journalism, and practical aspects of the profession in order to prepare students for their jobs and meet the needs of the industry.
5. Journalism training institutions and media houses should develop close working relationships to share their practical and theoretical experience and thus enhance the quality of journalism in the country.
6. Donors and volunteers should support the formation of CSOs that actively promote and advocate for media freedom, quality standards in journalism, and the development of independent media as an important factor for realizing democratic values and sustainable development objectives.

7. Journalism training institutions should not only allocate a certain number of positions for women journalism students to be enrolled in the universities and training centers but also invest more on developing courses or revising their curriculums which enable to build skills of journalists to do gender responsive and gender transformative journalism.

Category 5

**Infrastructural capacity
is sufficient to support
independent and pluralist
media**



Category 5

Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media

A. Availability and use of technical resources by the media

5.1 Media organisations have access to modern technical facilities for news gathering, production and distribution

Lack of sufficient ICT equipment for journalists to gather information and produce content is a major problem for Ethiopian media organizations. Key informants clearly indicated that most of them are struggling with the scarcity of both facilities and trained personnel able to operate them. This goes even for the public media. For instance, journalists in DDMMA complained that they have very limited access to ICT equipment and lack training on the use of these facilities. In addition, the few available computers are not interoperable so that material cannot be shared easily between reporters and editors and finalized for transmission. As a result, they are not able to do live transmissions.¹⁷⁹

Regional stations in AMMA, OBN, and SNNP MMA (both radio and television) seem to be faring better both in terms of accessing and using ICT facilities for production and transmission. Interviewees from AMMA appreciated the regional state's commitment to supporting its broadcaster and helping it to become one of the leading media organizations in the country. Some journalists, except those newly employed, were given sufficient training on how to access and work on ICT. All staff members have good access to the internet and laptops are provided to every deputy editor.¹⁸⁰

Interviewees from other public service broadcasters painted a mixed picture. Some said they have fair access to technical facilities, others spoke of having "only one computer with internet access" in a specific department¹⁸¹ or of having sufficient internet access but not

¹⁷⁹ Anwar Mohammed (2019). Personal Interview. Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁰ Muluken Seteye. (2019). Personal Interview. Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

¹⁸¹ Mihret Million. (2019). Personal Interview. Hawassa, Ethiopia.

sufficient technical equipment for newsgathering and production. This often forces journalists to wait for colleagues to finish before they can do their work and puts them at the risk of missing deadlines.¹⁸² In some cases laptops, recorders, headphones and other pieces of equipment for the production of news stories and programs are reportedly unavailable due to budget constraints.¹⁸³ As stated earlier, all imports of media equipment are heavily taxed (see category two).

All in all, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation appears to provide better access to technical equipment for its staff than other media houses. “EBC trains journalists on how to edit and send their news stories to the network. Journalists somehow try to use the easiest technology to edit their news stories and programs.”¹⁸⁴ With respect to private media organizations, journalists interviewed for this study stated that they were given training to effectively utilize the technical facilities provided to them.

Respondents from almost all media organizations complained about similar difficulties in accessing archival material, with books in the media libraries incomplete, unorganized catalogue systems and outdated material not being digitalized.

The scarcity of ICT infrastructure is a common problem in the community radio sector. Participants in focus discussion groups noted that ICT facilities for transmission and production are a bottleneck for them in carrying out their job properly. Transmission is frequently interrupted due to either failure of the transmitter or a mixer. Lack of trained technical staff often results in a delay of maintenance until the station manages to get in help from the center, mostly from the EBC.

Print media outlets have similar problems regarding ICT and other technical facilities. Privately-owned print media in particular struggle not only with the lack of such facilities in their production processes but also the absence of any system or reliable mechanism to actually get their newspapers and magazines out to their readers. There is no institutionalized system to circulate print media outlets. The interests of the vendors mostly determine their fate.¹⁸⁵ Limited investment in printing houses has also led to private newspapers and magazines not having reliable access to printing facilities. The state-owned Berhanena Selam Printing Press prints almost all state-owned and most private newspapers and magazines in the country. One informant, Befeqadu Hailu, noted that Berhanena Selam is criticized for “giving priority to state-owned print media over private print media”, regardless of which is first in line, and there were even times when actual printing would be interrupted in order to serve the state-owned media first. Private print media, therefore, would always make an extra effort to submit their copy well ahead of time so as to avoid hiccups in the printing process.¹⁸⁶

182 Amhare (2019). Personal Interview. Hawassa, Ethiopia.

183 Zelalem Genemo. (2019). Personal Interview. Hawassa, Ethiopia.

184 Abel Adamu. (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

185 Rekik Tesera. (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

186 Befeqadu Hailu (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Almost all nationwide broadcasting media and most print media based in Addis Ababa now have diverse platforms to deliver information to the largest possible audience and compete with each other on who is fastest in uploading breaking news, aired news, programs and latest printed editions. Online media such as YouTube channels are also working hard to send out information as fast as possible.

B. Press, broadcasting and ICT penetration

5.2 Marginalized groups have access to forms of communication they can use

Most key informants agreed that marginalized communities are not well served by media across the country. For instance, Daniel Birhane, a blogger and active social media user, noted that Ethiopian media are centered in and on the capital and do not embrace the linguistic and cultural diversity of the nation including marginalized groups. Some of these might be represented to some extent but there is no actual vibrant discourse.¹⁸⁷

A media scholar Abdissa Zerai¹⁸⁸ also pointed out that Ethiopian media are largely limited to urban areas, and cater for a relatively educated audience. The bulk of the population are living in rural areas in the country. This section of society, he says, is neglected both in terms of the kind of information likely to resonate with them and the language used to deliver the information, which is often that of the elite and not easily accessible or understandable. According to Abdissa, the gatekeepers of the media tend to be men and have a particular class orientation and subconscious class bias, so that much of the information they produce may not be relevant to the needs of some marginalized groups even if they understand the language.¹⁸⁹

According to Jawar Mohammed, a social media activist and media director, women continue to be underrepresented as users of information media and probably “uninterested” as well, because most media are politically oriented. Another respondent argues that women might lose interest in political content because “our political language is violent and disturbing. What needs to be done is to change the way we talk politics. Be more civil in our political engagement so that it would be appealing to women, who are mostly peace-loving”.¹⁹⁰ Soliyana Shimelis, a woman social media activist and Communication Officer at the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia agrees. She says the media have not given any thought to this

¹⁸⁷ Daniel Birhane (2019). Personal Interview. Mekelle, Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁸ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA.

¹⁸⁹ Abdissa Zerai (2019). Personal Interview. USA.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

question at all and do not make any specific effort to increase access to information for women and marginalized groups. She adds that they are not even working properly for the public as a whole, let alone for specific target groups.¹⁹¹

It is here possible to recap that portraying women as they are not interested in dealing with political contents which are considered hard to cover has continue to be a stereotype in the country.

The reach of community-based broadcasters is, by definition, limited to their licensing area and their respective target communities. Similarly, commercial broadcasting services, which are mainly concentrated in the capital, direct their services to areas that they consider profitable. This is bound to result in considerable inequality of access and parts of the population not being served by these media. For instance, the Tigray Mass Media Agency (TMMA) and DW are the only TV stations operating in Tigray. One community radio station is on air in the western zone of the Tigray and another station will be established by Axum University.¹⁹²

Some electronic media, in particular the state broadcasters, are now using more local languages, which makes them more accessible. Commercial broadcasters generally prefer Amharic, the national language.

Print media are accessible only to few citizens, given the low level of literacy in many communities. Although the figures are said to be rising in recent years they do so from a fairly low base. As of 2017, according to the World Bank, Ethiopia had an overall adult literacy rate of 51,8%, with a male literacy rate of 59,2%, and 44,4% for women.¹⁹³ Obviously, this also impedes access to modern forms of communication and information via ICTs for large parts of the population.

5.3 The country has a coherent ICT policy, which aims to meet the information needs of marginalized communities

Ethiopia's current ICT policy of 2016 has several objectives that include making ICT universal, affordable, and safe; developing human resources for the application and development of ICT; modernizing government in terms of public services and good governance; and expanding ICT to benefit the agriculture, education and health sectors. The policy focuses on seven areas that are referred to as *pillars*. These are: government, agriculture, education, health, ICT industries, entrepreneurship and innovation, and youth and women. The policy outlines the major goals and strategies under each pillar, all of which aim at making the most of ICT

¹⁹¹ Soliyana Shimelis. (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁹² Liya Kassa (2019). Personal Interview. Mekelle, Ethiopia.

¹⁹³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?locations=ET>

to achieve government's vision of Ethiopia becoming a middle-income country. In general, it underscores the need to leverage ICT to bring about development that benefits all citizens. It also emphasizes the need to expand access to ICT for women and youth across the country as an instrument of empowerment, bridging access gaps and increasing participation of women and the youth in the ICT industry.

Ethiotelecom is the only telecom service provider in the country and there are no other competing providers for both internet and telephone (including mobile) services as of 2019. However, the government is undertaking a partial privatization of the sector by selling 45% of Ethiotelecom to foreign companies.

The number of mobile service subscribers in 2020 stood at about 44.45 million, a little over one third of the population, with 1.05 million fixed line customers, 42.9 million mobile phone users and 21.6 million data and internet users.¹⁹⁴ According to Ethiotelecom's Executive Director Cherer Akilu, extending the accessibility of telecom services and ICT to marginalized groups is one of their major aims.¹⁹⁵ A tariff reduction introduced in August 2018 lowered prices by up to 40% for the mobile voice service, 43% for the mobile SMS service, 43% for the mobile internet service, 54% for the fixed broadband and 41% for the mobile M2M service. Nevertheless, prices remain high in comparison to other countries. According to data gathered by the UK based Cable.co.uk in 230 countries between October 23rd and November 28th 2018, Ethiopia ranked 60th with a price of 2.91 USD for one gigabyte (GB) compared to the cheapest country, India, with a price of 0.26 USD and the most expensive one, Zimbabwe, with an exorbitant 75.20 USD for one GB.

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.ethiotelecom.et>

¹⁹⁵ Cherer Akilu (2019). Personal Interview. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Recommendations

1. The state should provide sufficient ICT equipment to 'public' broadcasting services all over the country.
2. International organizations and donors should consider assisting the community broadcasting sector by providing ICT equipment, because these media are the main providers of information to marginalized groups in the country.
3. Training institutions should offer courses, including in-house training, on the use of ICT facilities for journalists to enhance their skills, to modernize production processes and help them to deliver a better product.
4. Ethiotelcom should further lower prices for access to their services in order to improve the lives of poorer sections of society in particular.

References

- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2019) *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa*
- Article 29, Global Campaign for Free Expression. (2002). Access to the Airwaves.
- Principles on Freedom of Expression and Broadcast Regulation. (I. S. SERIES, Ed.) London, UK.
- Broadcasting Service Proclamation No. 533/2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.
- Dagim Afework (2013). Media and Democracy in Ethiopia: Roles and Challenges of the Private Media since 2005. Unpublished MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, School of Graduate Studies, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Daneil Bekele. *XIX- Legal Framework of the freedom of expression*. Global campaigns for freedom of expression.
- EBA (2008). *Community Radio Broadcasting Service Directive No 02/2008*. Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- EBA (2012). *Community Radio Broadcasting Service Directive No 04/2012*. Ethiopian Broadcast Authority Addis Ababa. Ethiopian Constitution. Proclamation No. 1/1995. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta
- Fana Broadcasting Coporation. (n.d.) An Editorial Policy of Fana Broadcasting Corporation. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- FOJOMedia Institute (2019). *Ethiopia: Reflections on Media Reform*. JOJO. Kalmar: Linnæus University.
- Getaneh Mekunent (2013). An Examination of Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information (590/2008) and Its Practice in Ethiopia, Unpublished MA Thesis, Addis Ababa Univerity, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Girmachew Kebede (2013). *Public trust in Ethiopian Mainstream Media: the case of Addis Ababa*. Unpublished MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Human Rights Watch (2015). *Journalism is not a crime, Violation of Media Freedom in Ethiopia*.

ICT Policy. (2016). *The National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy and Strategy*. A final Draft. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia , Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

IMS (2018). *Media and freedom of expression assessment: Ethiopia in transition: Hope amid challenges*. International Media Support. Copenhagen: International Media Support.

ITU (2016). *Guidelines for the review of spectrum pricing methodologies and the preparation of spectrum fee schedules*. Telecommunication Development Sector, International Telecommunication Union Telecommunication Development Bureau Geneva.

Mulatu Alemayehu Moges (2017). *Why Silence? Internal Conflict Reporting in Ethiopian Newspapers*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway.

Mulatu Alemayehu Moges (2018). *Mapping out Community Radio in Ethiopia*; Unpublished, commissioned by UNESCO.

NETBLOCKS (2019, June 27). *Ethiopia partially restores internet access days after blackout following reported Amhara coup attempt*. At: <https://netblocks.org/reports/ethiopia-partially-restores-internet-days-after-amhara-coup-attempt-blackout-V8xxlo8k>

Proclamation No. 590/2008. *A proclamation to Provide For Freedom Of The Mass Media And Access To Information, Proclamation No. 590/2008*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

Proclamation No. 759/2012. *A Proclamation on Advertisement*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

Proclamation No.414/2004. *The Criminal Code Of The Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Federal Negarit Gazeta.

Regulation No. 158/2008. *Council of Ministers Government Regulation on Communication AffairsOffice Establishment*. Addis Ababa: Federal NegaritGazeta.

Skjerdal, T. S. (2012). *Competing Loyalties: Journalism Culture in the Ethiopian State Media*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway.

Skjerdal, T. S. (2017). *The Ethiopian journalist: Loyalist and change agent*: Synkron Media, Birkeland, Norway.

UNESCO *Reserving Spectrum For Community Broadcasting*. Accessed from https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_cmedia_sustainability_policy_4_spectrum.pdf.

World Development Report. (2016). *World Development Report 2016, Digital Dividends Overview*. Retrieved June 28, 2019, from www.eldis.org/document/A7120

Annex 1

List of informants

Name	sex	Title	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
Abdu Ali	M	Political and law analyst at Sheger FM Radio	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Anonymous	M	Editor – FANA Broadcasting Corporation	March 11, 2019	Addis Ababa, Fana compound
Abel Adamu	M	Deputy manager of EBA	March 17, 2019	EBC office
Abel Wabella	M	Founder, Addis Zeybe, a newspaper and Gobebean Street, Online Media	June 22, 2019	Addis Zeybe Office
Aber Adamu	M	Ethiopian Press Agency	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Abera Yenework	M	Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Abdissa Zeria	M	Journalism Professor at the University of New Mexico,	April 2019	Online
Abreha Desta	M	Arena Political party member	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Abriha Kahsay	M	Journalist at Tigray Mass Media Agency	March 2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Abu Chale	M	Reporter at AAMA	March 15, 2019	Addis Ababa
Adan Assefa	M	OBN editor	March 21, 2019	OBN office Adam
Ahmed Nego	M	Manager of Sude community radio	March 10, 2019	Addis Ababa, Tourist Hotel
Alemishet Teshome	M	Haramaya University Community Radio – manager	June 14, 2019	Adama
Amare Aregawi	M	General Manager of Media and Communications Center	April 29, 2019	Addis Ababa
Ameha Mekonnen	M	EHRC	April 2, 2019	Addis Ababa
Amhare Birku	M	SNNP - MMA	March 2019	Hawassa
Andualem Arage	M	EZEMA	April 2019	Addis Ababa

Anwar Mohammed	M	Senior reporter, Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Asemahegn Asres	M	Amhara Communication Bureau Head	March 2019,	Bahir Dar
Assegid Kidan Mariam	M	Reporter at AAMA	March 15, 2019	Addis Ababa
Astarkachew Wolde	M	Editor at Walta TV	29/03/2019	Addis Ababa, Beklo bet
Ayele Addis	M	PhD student at the Department of Media and Communication in Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Bedada Fura	M	Adama community radio facilitator	June 14, 2019	Adama
Befeqadu Hailu	M	Online journalist	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Biruk Amare	M	Radio programme producer and Journalist, SNNPR Radio and TV station	March 11, 2019	SNNPR Radio and TV Station
Bojja Gebissa	M	OBN deputy Director	March 22, 2019	OBN office-Adama
Cherer Aklilu	F	Executive director at Ethio telecom	June 2019	Addis Ababa
Anonymous	M	Editor – FANA Broadcasting Corporation	March 11, 2019	Addis Ababa, Fana compound
Daniel Berhane	M	Blogger/Activist	12/03/2019	Mekelle
Debebe Haile Geberal	M	Independent consultant	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Demis Mekuriyaw	M	Senior reporter, EBC	June 2019	EBC
Deneke Shanko	M	Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman	April 2019	Addis Ababa
Desalegn Yeshambel	M	PhD Student at the Department of Media and Communication in Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Ephrem Aklilu	M	Radio Case Team Leader, Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Eskinder Nega	M	Managing Editor, Ethiopis Newspaper	June 2019	Ethiopis Newspaper

Eskiyas Tafese	M	Head, Government Communication Affairs Office, Dire Dawa City Administration	March 13, 2019	Government Communication Affairs Office, Dire Dawa City Administration
Fentaye Namera	M	Wollega University community radio	June 14, 2019	Adama
Fisseha Mekonen	M	UNDP	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Frew Abebe	M	Former Journalist of Senedeq (Editor-in- Chief)	April 2019	Addis Ababa
Freweyni G/Hiwot	F	Editors at Tigray Mass Media Agency (TMMA)	13/03/2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Furtuna Kahsay	F	Mekele University, Head of School Journalism and Communication	16/03/2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Gebrehiwot Tesfay	M	Editor at Dimtse Woyane (DW)	14/03/2019	Mekele, Dimtse Woyanes' compound
Gente Molla	F	Debremarkos FM – manager	May 18, 2019	Addis Ababa
Anonymous	M	One of the directors at EBA	March 14, 2019	EBA, Addis Ababa
Haimanot Gebeyehu	F	Addis Ababa City Communications Affairs head	February 20, 2019	Addis Ababa
Haimanot Workneh	F	AAMMA	February 2019	Addis Ababa
Hassen Ige	M	Director, Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Hilina Meskelu	F	Amhara Mass Media Agency	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Jamal Mohammed (Ph.D.)	M	Associate Professor of Journalism and Communication Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Jawar Mohammed	M	OMN Director General	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Jone Kebede	M	Korre Community radio technical manager	June 14, 2019	Adama

Kaleab Tsegaye	M	Radio programme producer and journalist, SNNPR Radio and TV station.	March 11, 2019	SNNPR Radio and TV Station
Kassech Barega	F	Editor at AAMA	March 15, 2019	Addis Ababa
Liya Kassa	F	TNRS Communication affairs head	March, 2019	Mekelle, Government communication affairs office
Mache Debesay	F	Journalist at Tigray Mass Media Agency	March/2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Mahlet Abay	F	Journalist at Tigray Mass Media Agency	March 2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Melaku Berhanu	M	Arts TV	April 2019	
Melaku Yifru	M	News Editor, Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Mensur Abdulkeni	M	Sports journalist	February 10, 2019	Addis Ababa
Meron Mesfin	F	Journalist at LTV	27/03/2019	Addis Ababa, National theatre park
Mesenbet Asseffa (PhD)	M	Assistant Professor of Law	April 2019	Addis Ababa
Meseret Atalay	M	Ethiopian Journalists Association	22/03/2019	Addis Ababa, National theatre park
Mesfin Gizaw	M	Editor at AAMA	March 15, 2019	Addis Ababa
Mesfin Heliso	M	Wolaita community radio manager	June 14, 2019	Adama
Mihret Million	F	TV programme producer and journalist, SNNPR Radio and TV station.	March 12, 2019	SNNPR Radio and TV Station
Misgina Siyum	F	Editors at Tigray Mass Media Agency (TMMA)	13/03/2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Mulugeta Sisay	M	Director of the Mass Media Licensing and Registration Directorate in the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA)	March 15 and 2019	EBA office
Muluken Assgidew	M	PhD student at the Department of Media and Communication in Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar

Muluken Sitiye	M	Head of Amhara Mass Media Agency	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Muluken Yewondwossen	M	Deputy editor, Capital Newspaper	April 20, 2019	Addis Ababa
Musebuh Diren	M	Somali Language Case Team Leader, Radio Division Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Nebiyou Wondwosen	M	Editor-in-Chief, EBC	June 2019	EBC
Negesse Belay	M	PhD Student at the Department of Media and Communication in Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Negussu Tilahun	M	Press Secretary of The Prime Minister	September 22, 2019	Hilton Addis Ababa
Nejat Tegegne	F	Radio programme producer, Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Netsanet Alemayehu	F	National Radio Chief, EBC	June 2019	EBC
Netsanet Hailu	M	OBN editor	March 21, 2019	OBN office- Adama
Nigussie Tefera (PhD)	M	Population Media Center	May 2019	Addis Ababa
Rekik Tesera	F	Berera newspaper	April 2019	Addis Ababa
Roza Mekonnen	F	Journalists in Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC)	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Sahle Baidemariam	M	Editors at Tigray Mass Media Agency (TMMA)	13/03/2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Samuel Kebede	M	Deputy Executive at AAMA	May 02, 2019	Addis Ababa
Seada Riyale	F	TV Programme Case Team Leader, Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency	March 13, 2019	Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency
Seba Nano	F	Educational programs (TV) Editor	March 11, 2019	SNNPR Radio and TV Station
Setegn Engedaw	M	Amhara Mass Media Agency	March 2019	Bahir Dar

Shambel Beyi	M	Adolarede Community Radio Manager	June 14, 2019	Adama
Sheferaw Taddesse	M	OBN editor	March 21, 2019	OBN office- Adama
Simachew Eshete	M	Amhara Mass Media Agency	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Soliyana Shimelis	F	Communication Director, National Election Board of Ethiopia	April 2019	Addis Ababa
Solomon Abadi	M	TMMA Director	13/02/2019	Mekelle, Tigray Mass Media Agency
Solomon Goshu	M	Policy adviser at FES	February 20, 2019	Addis Ababa
Soud Ousman	M	Ministry of Science and Innovation	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Tameq Edenu	M	OBN journalist	March 20, 2019	OBN office - Adama
Tamirayehu Wondimagegn	M	Senior producer, ETV News Program, Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC)	March 2019	Addis Ababa
Tamrat Gebregiorgis	M	Managing editor, Addis Fortune	February 07, 2019	Addis Ababa
Tateq Edibo	M	OBN	March 2019	Adama
Tebebu Belete	M	Ahadu Radio Head	April 2019	Addis Ababa
Teferi Alemu	M	Media and Entertainment Advisor to Sheger FM Radio.	April 1, 2019	Sheger Office- Addis Ababa
Tekabech Assefa	F	Chairwoman, EMWA	February 5, 2019	Addis Ababa
Temesgen Mulatu	M	OBN journalist	March 20, 2019	OBN office - Adama
Temsgen Desalegn	M	Managing editor, Fitihi Magazine	February 30, 2019	Addis Ababa
Teshager Shiferaw (Ph.D.)	M	Assistant professor of Journalism and Communication, AAU	May 26, 2019	Addis Ababa
Tewodros Negash	M	International Media Support (IMS) Advisor	June 10, 2019	Addis Ababa, office

Tsegab Wolde	M	Newsroom (TV) Editor, SNNPR Radio and TV Station	March 12, 2019	Hawassa
Woldu Yemesle	M	General Manager of FANA corporation	March 13, 2019	Addis Ababa, Fana compound
Workalem Abebe	F	Radio production editor at SNNPR Radio and TV Station	March 13, 2019	SNNPR Radio and TV Station
Yehinnes Benti	M	OBN	March 2019	ADAMA
Yekite Dagne	F	PhD Student at the Department of Media and Communication in Bahir Dar University	March 2019	Bahir Dar
Yematawork Berhani	F	Reporter at AAMA	March 15, 2019	Addis Ababa
Zelalem Genemo	M	Deputy Manager at SNNPR Radio and TV station	March 12, 2019	SNNPR Radio and TV Station
Zerihun Teshome	M	General manager Zami FM	April 6, 2019	Hilton Addis Ababa
Anonymous	M	CCRDA	April 17, 2019	Addis Ababa

Annex 2

List of media analyzed

	Language	Ownership	Media type	Target Area
OBN	Oromiffa	Government	TV	Regional
OMN	Oromiffa	Private	TV	Regional
DW	Tigrigna	Private	TV	Regional
Tigray TV	Tigrigna	Government	TV	Regional
Amhara TV	Amharic	Government	TV	Regional
Asrat	Amharic	Private	TV	Regional
ETV	Amharic	Government	TV	Federal
LTV	Amharic	Private	TV	Federal
ESAT	Amharic	Private	TV	Federal
The Ethiopian Herald	English	Government	Newspaper	Federal
Addis Zemene	Amharic	Government	Newspaper	Federal
Reporter	English	private	Newspaper	Federal
Fortune	English	private	Newspaper	Federal
Ethiopis	Amharic	Private	Newspaper	Federal
Berera	Amharic	Private	Newspaper	Federal



Addis Ababa Declaration

World Press Freedom Day 2019

"Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation"

We, the participants at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day International Conference, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1-3 May 2019,

Recalling Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers";

Further recalling Article 21 of the UDHR, which states: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures";

Reaffirming Aspiration 3 of *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, which envisions "An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law";

Further reaffirming that UN Member States are responsible for organising, conducting and ensuring transparent, periodic and genuine electoral processes, and that in the exercise of their sovereignty, Member States should involve all electoral stakeholders including the media throughout all electoral operations;

Cognisant of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 16.10 which calls on States to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements";

Acknowledging the "Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda" adopted by the UN, the OAS, African and OSCE special rapporteurs on freedom of expression in March 2017, that called attention on the use of public statements to denigrate, intimidate and threaten the media, which increases the risk of threats and violence against journalists, undermines public trust and confidence on journalism as a public watchdog, and may mislead the public by blurring the lines between disinformation and media products containing independently verifiable facts;

Reaffirming the fundamental importance of election processes to the integrity of democracy and the fact that both rest upon a free flow of information and ideas, as well as uninterrupted means of communication, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the UDHR;

Recognising that respect of fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression, including press freedom, is a necessary element to a safe, inclusive and conducive environment for electoral participation;

Reaffirming the central importance of freedom of expression, a free, independent, pluralistic and safe media, and respect for democratic principles, to promoting peace and reconciliation, including in societies suffering from conflict;

Emphasising that informed citizens, who have access to diverse and independent media sources and who benefit from Media and Information Literacy skills, are more likely to feel empowered to exercise their democratic rights and to accept the outcomes of credible, free and fair elections;

Recalling that free, independent and pluralistic journalism – both online and offline – serves an essential role in democracies by strengthening accountability, by facilitating peaceful, credible, inclusive, transparent, free and fair elections, and by ensuring that citizens are informed about issues of public interest, including those being debated in elections;

Convinced that respect for the public’s right to information, the expansion of Media and Information Literacy, and ensuring the safety of journalists, with cognisance of the particular threats to women journalists, and others exercising their right to freedom of expression, are key to addressing current challenges to elections;

Further recognising the tension between, on the one hand, the enormous potential of ICT innovations to deepen and broaden electoral processes and, on the other hand, the increasing threat posed by malicious actors’ efforts to collect and manipulate data - and use social media and social messaging, to interfere with citizens’ capacity to make informed decisions and undermine the fairness of elections;

Concerned about the growing prevalence of disinformation as well as hate speech, which may undermine elections, as well as the challenges in finding appropriate regulatory and other means of addressing such speech while respecting the right to freedom of expression;

Recalling that the State’s responsibility to prevent any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, as well as the “Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence” adopted on 5 October 2012.

Now therefore:

Call on each UNESCO Member State, including their Electoral Management Bodies, to:

- **Create, strengthen and/or implement**, as agreed in various conventions, an enabling legal and policy framework in line with international standards to guarantee respect for freedom of expression and privacy, to foster a diverse, independent media sector, and to ensure that relevant officials are properly trained so as to abide by that framework in practice;
- **Adopt and/or implement** right to information laws and policies and the required mechanisms to give effect to them, as per Sustainable Development Goal 16.10;

- **Put in place** transparent and effective systems to protect journalists, including press cartoonists, artists, ‘artists’ and others who are at risk of attack for exercising their right to freedom of expression, thereby ensuring that they can carry out their public watchdog role effectively, including during elections;
- **Remove** existing legal obstacles, and avoid adopting broad and vaguely-worded regulatory responses to the problems of disinformation, and repeal measures that fail to respect international standards of legality, legitimate purpose and necessity, or which otherwise risk unduly restricting the right to freedom of expression;
- **Consider releasing** imprisoned journalists by assessing their cases in terms of international standards for freedom of expression such as the requirements of necessity and proportionality for any limitations of this right, and review related laws under which such journalists may be held;
- **Refrain from** imposing Internet or other general communications shutdowns, as well as other measures that unduly or disproportionately limit the exchange of information, including via systems of filtering or blocking of content, platforms or applications;
- **Abstain** from delegating, legally or through political pressure, the regulation of online content to internet companies in a manner which goes beyond what is permitted under international law (privatising censorship);
- **Invest in** Media and Information Literacy among the general public, with a particular focus on the youth, in various ways, including by incorporating these competencies into formal, informal and non-formal education programmes;
- **Protect** voters’ registration data and secure critical election infrastructure, including voting equipment, ensuring that election-related measures and practices are underpinned by integrity, as well as protect and respect freedom of expression, press freedom and privacy as it relates to data protection;
- **Explore and implement** effective ways to ensure a level playing field for electoral contenders and the free flow of information and ideas during election campaigns and voting days, including through transparency and regulation related to electoral campaigns’ spending and political advertising, while ensuring that any such measures respect international guarantees of freedom of expression and citizens’ privacy as it relates to data protection;
- **Avoid** making, sponsoring, encouraging or further disseminating statements which they know or reasonably should know to be false (disinformation) or which demonstrate a reckless disregard for verifiable information (propaganda), as well as statements that undermine the credibility of journalists and media or label them as enemies, liars or opposition;
- **Promote** a code of conduct among political actors to avoid the use of disinformation campaigns in electoral processes and the establishment of accountability mechanisms related to the violation of such a code;

- **Foster** and use academic and scientific research on social media and social messaging effects, as well as safety of journalists, in order to guarantee that institutional and state responses are based on rigorous and extensive public analysis;
- **Advocate** for ethical and safe spaces for disseminating and receiving verified information and enabling peaceful dialogue to strengthen democracy;
- **Promote** multistakeholder dialogue with the players of the electoral ecosystem such as electoral authorities, political parties, intermediary platforms, media regulatory authorities, information and data protection authorities, media outlets, journalists, civil society organizations, parliamentarians, among others in order to address disinformation while respecting international commitments on freedom of expression and privacy.

Call on UNESCO and the rest of the UN to:

- **Encourage** the development of electoral assistance strategies aiming at building trust between all electoral stakeholders, including the media, throughout all electoral operations in order to build ownership and capacity for the delivery of credible, inclusive and transparent elections;
- **Further encourage** Member States, especially those undergoing peaceful transition towards democracy, to ensure that all proper constitutional and institutional guarantees are in place to guarantee that elections take place with due process and inclusion of all stakeholders in order to ensure public trust and acceptance of election results;
- **Continue** to provide leadership in the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and strengthen impunity accountability mechanisms and relevant stakeholder coalitions and networks of focal points, and within Member States where appropriate;
- **Work with** media organisations, NGOs, electoral management bodies and other stakeholders to share good practices on the media's role in elections, including by supporting the work of the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for UN Electoral Assistance (ICMEA);
- **Monitor** and where necessary, proactively discourage, the potential over-regulation of digital electoral communications that can disproportionately limit freedom of expression and privacy;
- **Continue**, through regional and country offices, and in co-operation with media organisations, to train journalists on ethical and professional election reporting, including in relation to journalists' safety, electoral laws and to identify, debunk and investigate disinformation;
- **Continue** to monitor the implementation by States of SDG 16.10 on public access to information and respect of fundamental freedoms, including by supporting the collection of data regarding the two Indicators under this SDG Target;
- **Disseminate** good practices on fact-checking techniques of media content and transferring relevant skills to the relevant stakeholders;

- **Further reinforce** Media and Information Literacy programme initiatives;
- **Collaborate** with regional IGOs, as well as with Member States, civil society and other interested stakeholders, to find ways to ensure a level electoral playing field and the free flow of information during elections which respect the right to freedom of expression;
- **Collaborate** with academic institutions and networks, as well as other educational centres and think tanks, to enhance research in and understanding of freedom of expression and media development issues, drawing on UNESCO's research tools such as the Journalist Safety Indicators and the Media Development Indicators;
- **Carry out independent analysis** of disinformation campaigns during election processes and their impact on elections;
- **Enhance** capacity building strategies, such as UNESCO's Judges Initiative, in order to offer to relevant players updated knowledge in the application of universal freedom of expression standards to the issue of disinformation;
- **Support** training for journalists and other media workers in order to challenge gender stereotyping and misrepresentation of women in the media, and to sensitize the media and the electorate on the need and benefits of women in leadership positions.

Call on regional Intergovernmental Organisations to:

- **Strengthen** existing governance mechanisms such as the Africa Peer Review Mechanism, as well as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance which provides for democratic, credible and peaceful elections managed by impartial and independent electoral management bodies under conditions that guarantee press freedom, access to information and safety of journalists;
- **Share good practices** such as the "Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa" which cover the roles of authorities responsible for appointing the Election Management Bodies; Election Management Bodies; Political Parties and Candidates; Law Enforcement Agencies; Election Observers and Monitors; Media and Online Media Platform Providers; Media Regulatory Bodies; and Civil Society Organisations;
- **Further share** good practices such as Resolution 48 of the 2018 General Assembly of the OAS reaffirming the right to freedom of opinion and expression as essential ingredients during electoral periods to achieve accountability from political actors, as well as to strengthen open debate and the right of citizens to receive information from a plurality of sources in order to exercise their political rights;
- **Adopt** mechanisms such as the emerging African protocol on safety of journalists, as well as strengthen the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and implement systems of focal points for the safety of journalists.

Call on journalists, media outlets, electoral practitioners, Internet intermediaries and social media practitioners to:

- **Ensure** that media and internet companies respect the human rights of their users and others;
- **Work to** ensure that the public is provided with a diverse range of accurate information about parties, candidates and issues, and about any efforts to manipulate or influence the election, so that voters can make informed electoral choices;
- **Make public** the ownership, editorial line and political position of a media house, and maintain a separation between verified news on the one hand, and comment and opinion on the other;
- **Support** effective and accelerated systems of self-regulation, whether at the level of specific media sectors (such as press complaints bodies) or at the level of individual media outlets (such as ombudsmen or public editors), which include standards on striving for accuracy in the news and which offer a right of correction and/or reply to address inaccurate statements in the media;
- **Consider** adopting revised ethical and operational guidelines for reporting in times of elections and make them widely available to their staff so as to support the provision of comprehensive, accurate, impartial and balanced news coverage of elections and electoral issues;
- **Develop** guidelines and policies for the use of artificial intelligence tools in content creation and distribution by media organisations and internet companies, taking into account the impact that this form of automation may have on freedom of expression and human rights in general;
- **Consider** exposing disinformation and propaganda, particularly during elections, in fulfilment of a journalistic watchdog role in society and the news media's mandate to contribute to debates on matters of public interest;
- **Explore** putting in place fact-checking tools that identify whether or not news is verified, and clearly identify whether or not a news story has been fact-checked;
- **Allocate** efforts and resources to strengthen journalism and address the online filter-bubbles and the viral spread of disinformation and other content that undermines human rights, ensuring respect for the right to freedom of expression;
- **Consider** mechanisms to ensure that digital advertising, including political advertising, makes the source clear, and avoids the misrepresentation of identities and invisible funding;
- **Improve** the transparency of internet companies' terms of service and other policies, in relation both to their content and the way these are applied in practice, and put in place systems which respect due process guarantees, including, where appropriate, by establishing independent external oversight mechanisms;

- **Support** systems of self-regulation among political parties and other electoral practitioners to address disinformation and hate speech which, amongst other impacts, may undermine elections;
- **Make** an effort to give greater prominence on online platforms to news content that is verified through independent journalism, and promote the credibility of edited and verified sources of information.

Assessment of Media Development in Ethiopia

Based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators (MDI) that function as a reference framework for various national applications, this handbook assesses the state of media development in Ethiopia during the research period 2019/2020. The MDI are a global research standard endorsed by UNESCO's intergovernmental committee of 39 Member States, called the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

In a country like Ethiopia which is rich in languages, politics, cultures, and values and which experiences an exponentially growing population, media and the access to plural information is crucial for peace and development. This study finds, however, that the number of media and the diversity of their contents have not grown commensurate with the country's character, while public trust also remains low. The independent journalism and media self-regulation are also in their early stages.

This country report formulates data-driven, context-specific, and action-oriented recommendations to the government, journalism schools, civil society organizations, development partners and the media to achieve a strong Ethiopian media landscape that is supportive of freedom of expression and journalist safety, as well as conducive to the development of free, independent, and pluralistic media.

List of countries in which MDI-based assessments have been completed to date: *Bhutan, Croatia, Ecuador, Egypt, Gabon, Libya, Maldives, Mozambique, Nepal, Palestine, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Tunisia.*

For more information, see
www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/intergovernmental-programmes/ipdcl/initiatives/media-development-indicators-mdis/



unesco

The International
Programme for
the Development
of Communication

