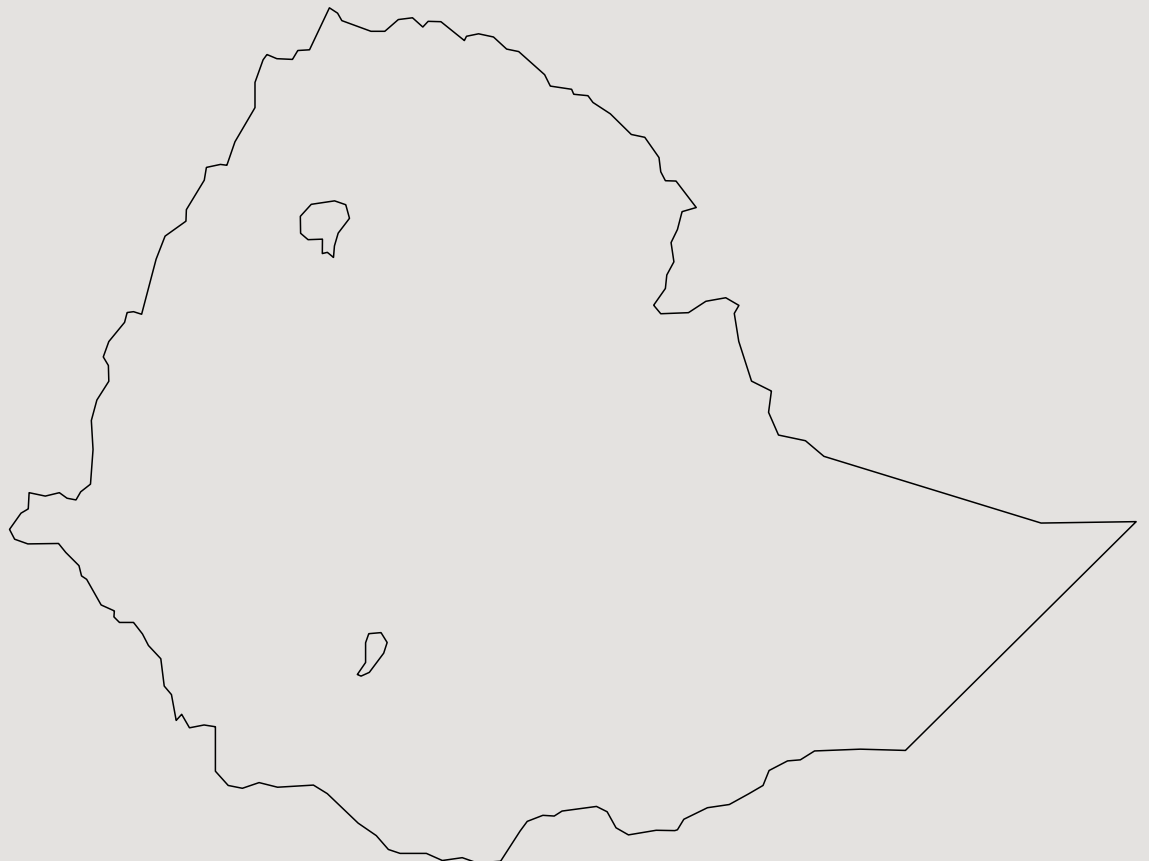


October 2018

*Media and freedom of
expression assessment*

Ethiopia in transition:
Hope amid challenges

Ethiopia



IMS Assessment report –

Ethiopia in transition: Hope amid challenges

Published in 2018 by International Media Support,
Copenhagen

Editor

Helle Wahlberg

Author

Rashweat Mukundu, IMS Sub Saharan Africa Adviser, and
Finn Rasmussen, Head of IMS Africa Department

Layout

Nanette Vabø

ISBN


978-87-92209-94-8


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info@mediasupport.org

www.mediasupport.org

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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a media environment assessment in Ethiopia led by International Media Support (IMS) within the context of the present socio-political developments in the country.

IMS carried out two missions to Ethiopia to Addis Ababa and Adama in the period 3 - 8 June 2018 and a follow up mission from 25 - 31 August 2018. The mission took place in the wake of signs of change and the promise of potential media reform brought forth by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed – changes which could allow for an opening space to work with Ethiopian media to identify their needs and strengthen their capacity.

The specific objective of the mission was to carry out an assessment of the media landscape in Ethiopia, and to delve into specific areas related to communication and community engagement in order to identify possible avenues for future media development activities by IMS. The assessment covers both the private and public media sector, centering on the restrictions and enabling factors for strengthening free, independent and professional media in Ethiopia.

The team engaged with a wide section of the media, government and international community in Ethiopia. These included Ethiopian media and development sector actors, Ministry Information and Communication officials, media regulatory bodies, private and state media actors in print, radio, TV, bloggers, political analysts, embassies and international and local non-governmental organisations. These meetings contributed to an in-depth understanding of the current socio-economic and political context in relation to media, freedom of expression and humanitarian and developmental issues in Ethiopia.

IMS is aware that the situation in Ethiopia remains fluid with a combination of positive and negative developments that all have a bearing on the media reform process and developments. Regardless of this, there is the potential and need to support the process of change in Ethiopia based on the opening of the political space and growing citizen participation in the socio-political transition in Ethiopia.

The government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has initiated a number of positive actions pointing towards reform. IMS noted that while there is an interest in reforming Ethiopia in many sectors, the process needs a broad national framework and an inclusive approach to enable citizens to participate more actively.

Parallel to these developments, Ethiopia hosts approximately one million refugees from neighbouring countries. Additionally, thousands of Ethiopians have been internally displaced. This community has its own specific needs that require attention from both the Ethiopian government and the international community. More importantly, there is a need to support the information and communication needs of this community and ensure that their voices are heard and relationships with host communities are positively influenced.

2. Socio-political context

There is consensus that despite its ongoing political challenges Ethiopia's socio-political environment is changing for the better following a change in government leadership that saw a new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed inaugurated in April 2018. Mr. Ahmed has indicated a willingness to institute broad-based socio-political and economic reforms that if completed, will change the trajectory of Ethiopian development in the foreseeable future. A notable change is that the government is working hard to communicate its vision through the presence of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his senior staff on social media.

The release of political prisoners and journalists in the period between January and June 2018, among them political opposition leader Andargachew Tsige, has been received positively. International partners including embassies and development actors are of the view that the government is aiming to improve relations with the international community. The new prime minister has also put an end to the state of emergency through a parliamentary proclamation on 5 June 2018 reflecting further on an intention to open the political space. Equally notable is the engagement and dialogues by the new prime minister and government with many sectors in Ethiopia including business, civil society and as promises made for reforms in the socio-economic and governance sector.

Prime Minister Ahmed has acted on his promise to build peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea by signing a peace agreement with Eritrea in July 2018, opening embassies in one other's respective countries and allowing trade to resume. Apart from this, Prime Minister Ahmed has also called for security sector reforms in Ethiopia.

An end to protests in the Oromo and Amhara regions is also seen as part of Prime Minister Ahmed positive achievements from the time he took office. The protests had destabilised Ethiopia leading to the declaration of a state of emergency and deaths of hundreds. The Oromo region had particularly seen unrest over land and political representation issues. The ascension of Mr. Ahmed, an Oromo, to the prime ministership has contributed to a thaw in ethnic tensions. This as it may, political analysts and journalists say ethnicity remains a defining factor in Ethiopia's politics. The fears of continued influence of ethnicity in Ethiopia's politics were brought into the open mid-September 2018 when Ethiopia was gripped by riots driven by ethnic undercurrents, while other ethnic groups resisted what is seen as a domineering posture by the larger ethnic group, the Oromo.

Reports indicate that over 23 people were killed in the riots and human rights defenders reported security sector violations of citizen rights through wanton beatings and arrests. Ethiopian authorities responded to this new wave of protests by switching off mobile internet access from 17 - 19 September. A former adviser to the Minister of Information states that Mr. Ahmed cannot rule Ethiopia by populism but needs the support of the party. The riots and tensions within the ruling party could be indications of other ethnic groups fighting back, groups which dominated Ethiopia's politics and economy since the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991.

While Prime Minister Ahmed appears in charge, the lack of political consensus on the path that Ethiopia should take may also threaten the pace and quality of reforms. In all these processes the media appear to have fallen victim to the changes with the "private" TV ENNTV having been shut down in July 2018, for allegedly not covering the prime minister's activities. Others, however, point out that the prime minister simply cut off state funding to TV ENNTV which had been set up and sustained through clandestine public funding. Concerns remain on the ban on ownership of printing presses by the private media, with the mainstream media having to rely on state-owned printers. Proprietors of The Reporter were also restricted from publishing a magazine even though state owned media publishes magazines. Private media players say there is need for equality in the law.

There is consensus, however, that the ongoing reform process is irreversible, and society is determined to move away from the politics of the past. Journalists who talked to IMS say they are past the state of fear and are beginning to tackle once taboo socio-political topics. This change may be proven by the exposés by the state-owned Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation



A woman takes part in celebrations for the return of the formerly banned anti-government group the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) at Mesquel Square in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 15 September 2018. Tens of thousands of people gathered in Addis Ababa to welcome the OLF, the latest once-banned rebel group to return following a string of Ethiopian political reforms. Last month, the OLF reached a deal on returning home following an accord with representatives of the government.



Photo: Michael Tewelde / AFP

of the decay of the prison system, with the station talking openly on issues of torture and the poor state of prisons. Other state-owned media that include the Oromia TV stations and radio have equally pushed the boundaries covering controversial issues more openly. These changes in media confidence on its role need to be balanced by professional capacity development, so that the media acts ethically and professionally and becomes platforms for positive social dialogues on various issues affecting Ethiopia. Media actors and the government agree that media professionalism remains a key issue, more so the skill capacity of journalists.

It is also important to note that media professionalism can only flourish in an environment of media freedom. In this regard the ongoing media policy underway in Ethiopia must be supported and seen through. The prime minister has pledged to reform repressive laws and has on various occasions acknowledged the role of media in the anti-corruption drive. Media reforms are part of the reform agenda proposed by the prime minister. Consultations on the media reform process have been initiated by the government and UNDP.

An indication of the positive impact of pronouncements on policy reforms is that citizens are exhibiting more confidence in engaging in political debates and express their views online and in other social spaces.

Another indicator of positive change are new investments in the media, including a new newspaper and TV station. These developments are building upon a media sector which has been expanding over the last few years, but equally operating in a difficult policy environment. Diaspora media are among the potential investors and entrepreneurs. Other indications of change include proposed privatisation of State Owned Enterprises (SoEs).

The developments above do not, however, mitigate the fact that change will be slow and incremental. The conflation of the state and the ruling party means that reforming state institutions and the culture of impunity will take time.

Ethiopian society nevertheless remains divided on the sustainability and quality of the ongoing political change. Opinion is divided on whether the new government will institute far reaching democratic reforms or whether changes will be cosmetic and made largely to stem the tide of political discontent in Oromia and other regions. Despite an end to the protests, Ethiopia still faces safety and security challenges as evidenced by a grenade attack that killed two people at a rally with the prime minister in the capital Addis Ababa on 23 June 2018. The attack has raised fears that the pro-reform Abiy Ahmed could be facing resistance from unknown forces which may delay the pace of reforms or stall them altogether.

Questions are also being posed as to whether the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which has long survived on political suppression of the media, civil society and opposition political parties, would be prepared to open up the political space. A lingering challenge is that Ethiopia remains a closed society or sorts, with organised civic groups and the media restricted by the Charities and Societies and Anti-Terrorism Proclamation law. External funding for media and human rights advocacy or monitoring work remains restricted. Despite this, the Ethiopian government has expressed its intention to reform many of these laws and open space for political dialogue. Much will also depend on whether the ruling EPRDF Executive Council, the real power behind the "throne", sees value in the agenda of reform, thereby allowing the prime minister the space to carry out his reform agenda.

Ethiopia's transition will likely be aided by the collapsing elite cohesion in the ruling party and government that also triggered a change in leadership. In the context of the grenade attack in Ethiopia in 23 June 2018, senior police officers have been arrested and the future of the current security order remains uncertain. There is a realignment of forces in the ruling party that may see continued ethnic divisions as the formerly marginalised ethnic groups consolidate power to the detriment of other groups.

Sceptics of the change process point out that media outlets continue to operate under very difficult policy and economic conditions. It is also important to note that Ethiopia still faces huge developmental challenges with unemployment remaining high, communities losing farm land to the rapid urbanisation and access to health, housing and education remaining a challenge across the country. Ethiopia also has a refugee challenge to handle, hosting millions of refugees from conflicts in Somalia and South Sudan in addition to internally displaced Ethiopians.

3. Humanitarian challenges in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is host to around a million refugees largely from neighbouring South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. In addition to the refugee population, recent rounds of internal conflict coupled with natural disasters have created another million internally displaced persons, most notably in the Oromia and Somali regions. The influx of refugees has brought further conflict to Gambella, where refugees now outnumber Ethiopians. The government has committed itself to close down refugee camps and integrate refugees into the community, although work on the ground to translate this into action and communicate it to citizens and refugees has barely begun.

This year Ethiopia has suffered its fourth consecutive year of an exceptional drought emergency. Acute food insecurity is affecting up to seven million Ethiopians. It is recognised that Ethiopia has come a long way since the devastating famine of the 1980s. Nevertheless, despite being on course to become a middle-income country, the humanitarian and developmental needs in Ethiopia remain enormous.

Positive political developments between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the resulting opening of the border between the two countries that allows for the movement of goods and people has come with its own challenges. Humanitarian organisations working in the Tigray area report that there is an ongoing influx of Eritrean refugees, now including women and children as the border is open and public transport is working. Humanitarian groups describe this as something close to an emergency that needs urgent attention. Vulnerable communities' safety and security is not entirely guaranteed under the new circumstances. In some areas such as the Somali region, a change in the security order may threaten peace as the incumbents still hold sway amongst various contending groups. Awareness through information on the new dynamics in the refugee and IDP areas is key to effective and efficient decision-making by both the government of Ethiopia and the international community.

With the 2018 Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan, Ethiopia seeks to approach the humanitarian challenges from a prevention and risk management approach. Strengthening communication efforts would be a natural element of such a framework.

4. Overview of the Ethiopian media environment

Ethiopia has 25 publicly owned radio stations, some national and others regional. Ten private radio stations operate in Ethiopia. A number of other radios have regional stations and in all 31 community radio stations are operational. Ethiopia has four public newspapers and several other state-owned regional newspapers. There are 19 privately owned newspapers. Newspaper print runs are however very low with leading private newspapers having only 15,000 copies of each issue in relation to operating in a population of over 100 million. Newspapers argue that they could print more copies were it not for the ban on private printing presses. Private newspapers that rely on state owned printers face challenges of late printing and shortages of newsprint ink.

The Ethiopian government has control over all telecommunication services in the country enabled by the support of the international community keen to combat the terrorism threat emanating from Somalia.

Equally notable is the appointment of a new Minister of Information and Communication. In a meeting with IMS in July 2018, the Minister outlined his vision as inclusive of the need to enhance access to information, noting that the mainstream print media is limited to major urban centres. He also indicated a need to strengthen the government information sharing capacity through training of the ministry and of other government departments.

The Minister of Information and Communication also stated that capacity building must include that of both the public and private sectors to enable the media and public-sector officials to play their role and meet information needs of society. He noted that Ethiopia still faces challenges concerning media literacy, hence the prevalence of hate speech on social media platforms and the ministry wishes to contribute to a more inclusive identity framework in Ethiopia away from the divisive ethnic based politics and issues.

IMS noted a message coherence on the capacity building issues raised by the Minister and the Ministry's regulatory bodies including the Ethiopia Broadcasting Authority, as well as the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation. The Broadcasting Regulatory Authority stated that Ethiopia has diverse languages, political views and cultures that must all find a platform for expression in the mainstream media. In this regard, the Authority is prepared to enter into partnerships to address skills and ethics, as well as developing and implementing media sector codes of conduct.

The Journalism School at the University of Addis Ababa working with UNDP carried out a national audience survey on media based on a sample of 10,000 respondents. The research has the ownership and participation of government agencies and civil society organisations, including the Broadcasting Authority. The research has outlined six areas of focus in reforming the media including media policy reform issues. These are:

1. Media policy, laws and regulation
2. Access to Information – policy and practise
3. Independence of media regulators
4. Self-regulation of media
5. State and regional state-owned public media
6. Media trainings (curriculum development)

“Ethiopia has diverse languages, political views and cultures that must all find a platform for expression in the mainstream media”

In IMS's view, all the issues captured by the research are crucial to both the short and long-term media reform agenda in Ethiopia. Key in this process, however, is the need to firm up the principles of the reform agenda and for example, what will inform the government's intentions in this process. Once the principles of media reforms and the role of the media in the democratisation process are established it becomes far easier to work on reforms based on such principles. The agenda set by the Ethiopian government and UNDP is very broad and needs prioritisation, as well as strong capacity and the involvement of a range of media sector actors. It is a process that needs coordination and balanced representation, so that it is not entirely controlled by the government.

A man reads a newspaper showing the news of newly elected leader of Ethiopia's ruling coalition Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in Addis Ababa on 28 March 2018. Ethiopia's ruling coalition on 27 March elected as leader Abiy Ahmed, from the country's largest ethnic group the Oromo, paving the way for him to become prime minister, state media reported.



Photo: Zacharias Abubeker / AFP

5. Media and freedom of expression assessment

IMS assessment of the media context in Ethiopia is guided by the UNESCO Media Development Indicators (MDIs). The MDIs are an important diagnostic tool for all stakeholders to assess media development in a given context and to thereby determine the areas in which assistance is most needed. The MDIs provide an aspirational picture of how to construct a media ecology that ensures freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media¹.

The MDIs also provide a framework within which the media can best contribute to, and benefit from, good governance and democratic development. The MDIs look at all aspects of the media environment and are structured around the five following categories:

- A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media
- Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership
- Media as a platform for democratic discourse
- Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpins Freedom of Expression, pluralism and diversity
- Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media

In line with UNESCO's MDI framework, IMS has carried out an assessment of Ethiopia's media environment structured under the following headings.

5.1 MDI i: A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media

Ethiopia has libel laws within its statutes with a criminal defamation law passed in 2008 being the prominent among a plethora of laws that violate media freedom. The law also allows prosecutors to seize materials before publication in the name of national security. A cybercrime law passed in June 2016 criminalises online speech deemed defamatory or pornographic, and outlines penalties for internet service providers that knowingly host such "objectionable material". The Charities and Societies Law and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation law limit the work of both the mainstream media, media associations and media advocacy groups. In this regard, Ethiopia's Media Associations are not only weak, but ineffective as they cannot receive external support nor fully organise themselves around their various mandates.

It is partly because of the Charities and Associations law that the Media Council remains unregistered, with the government struggling to find out under which law the Council falls. Other examples of continuing bad practices include delays in frequency allocation to the aspiring local satellite TV, Africa Renaissance Television Services (ARTS).

Private media journalists also complain that they are denied access to government information, often not invited to government media events. The prime minister's press briefings are often limited to a few select media houses. Informants with whom the IMS team spoke during

1 See <https://en.unesco.org/programme/ipdc/initiatives/mdis>

the mission also mentioned that other state institutions such as the judiciary were not independent, thereby adding to the legal challenges that media actors are faced with.

While the safety and security of journalists and media houses has drastically improved, senior editors say residual threats remain due to the polarised state of politics in Ethiopia. A blogger arrested for 18 months and released as part of amnesty, says the police did not beat him and others on arrest and in prison largely due to the political pressure applied by international condemnation of their arrest. IMS is of the view that dialogue between the media and the security sector is needed to establish a more sustainable and long term professional relationship based on mutual understanding and respect for media rights.

Actors that include Justice for All (JFA) and UNDP have initiated media policy reform processes working with the government. Research on media needs and issues has been completed and provides a basis for a strategic focus on media policy reforms. JFA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding on media policy support with the Government Federal Communications Office in January 2018. JFA is also planning to support capacity building of government communication officers as part of improving Access to Information.

It is therefore important that the UNDP, as well as the Justice for All and the incoming Fojo Media programme, agree to identify media policy reform as key to the democratisation of the media in Ethiopia. Indications from the UNDP and Justice for All are that the government is interested in addressing media reforms and improving the media operating environment.

In line with the above, IMS notes the need for a more inclusive and strategic media reform process. Likewise, due to the relative isolation of media advocacy actors, it is important to strengthen linkages with media advocacy actors in the region to build the expertise of local media groups and enhance solidarity around the reform process.

Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega, who was given an 18-year prison sentence in 2012 on accusations of links to the banned Ginbot 7 group, reacts with journalist Temesgen Desalegn and people after being released from Kaliti Prison in Addis Ababa on 14 February 2018. Ethiopia released a jailed opposition leader and journalist on 14 February and dropped charges against a group of bloggers in a wave of prisoner releases and pardons.



Photo: Yonas Tadesse / AFP

Senior media people in Ethiopia are taking on advocacy roles in their individual capacity. Some have suggested the setup of think tank platforms that brings media, CSOs and government representatives around the table on media and other national issues. The media reform process must actively seek to enhance the capacity of media associations so that they engage more actively in the change process. In this regard, IMS believes that media policy reforms are not only about the policy outcome, but about the process. The sustainable implementation of media policy reforms is largely based on an empowered media and civil society sector that takes ownership of the change process and defends it while practising journalism.

5.2 MDI ii: Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership

While there is growing access to TV and online media platforms, diversity of content is a challenge as most of Ethiopia's TV channels lack capacity, remain fearful of the existing restrictive legal regime and are largely city-based. In 2017, more than 18 million Ethiopian households were covered by satellite TV, exercising a tremendous impact on Ethiopian citizens.² Media access research commissioned by the Swedish Embassy and conducted by FOJO shows that: *“The privately-owned Kana TV, that holds the leading position, so far primarily broadcasts dubbed foreign soap operas. The channel is nevertheless planning to start broadcasting self-produced news in near future. If they manage to do so, Kana News will be viewed by around a third of all Ethiopian TV-viewers”*.

In interviews with IMS, KANA TV says audience surveys show that Ethiopian audiences favour local content both in news and entertainment. However, the station says Ethiopia lacks capacity in content production.

Apart from owning the biggest broadcast entity Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), the government also owns regional TV and radio stations that are restricted on broadcasting political content, but very active and diverse in their coverage of local issues that include developmental, as well as local community issues.

Ethiopia's independent media are not only small, but also self-censor and steer clear of controversial political issues out of fear of harassment. The dominating media are the state-owned broadcasting stations and newspapers, and these tend to support the government's political positions and policies. A 2012 Advertising Proclamation also prohibits advertising from firms whose capital is shared by foreign nationals. According to private TV stations, the issue in Ethiopia is no longer that of licensing prohibitions, but rather developing sustainable business models for the sector as well as enhancing local content and more geographic representation. Ethiopian media is generally not strong on business models or integration of ICTs in its operations, a matter that needs attention in a globally changing media structures.

New dynamics on media ownership are likely to materialise if progress on political reforms continue positively. Some of the larger Ethiopian media in the diaspora, such as Oromia Media Network, are considering investing in the national media sector. This will add to the diversity of ownership and plurality of opinions in the media.

“Ethiopia's independent media are not only small, but also self-censor and steer clear of controversial political issues out of fear of harassment”

5.3 MDI iii: Media as a platform for democratic discourse

Expectations of change have been raised by the release of jailed journalists in early 2018. There has been talk by the government that critical diaspora-based media is free to operate in Ethiopia,

“The government-established community radio stations play a notable information sharing role, challenging government restrictions on coverage of sensitive issues”

and the government has also promised that some repressive laws will be reformed. Media coverage at a national level remains elitist. From a positive point of view, the state-owned broadcaster EBC is showing an interest in reforming and has changed its programme content to enhance diversity and the plurality of voices. According to the Director General of the state broadcaster, they have stopped allocating TV time to state-owned entities, instead asking that such entities and ministries justify coverage of their particular news items by the state broadcaster. The EBC is also working on improving their responsiveness to audiences through social media-based feedback platforms that include SMS and Facebook. An awareness of increased competition from private stations is also pushing the EBC towards reform. The EBC says that audiences want to hear varied voices and issues

for which reason the state broadcaster plans on a more equitable coverage of the 2020 elections.

The ECB also manages regional TV stations of which 80 % of content is local and 20 percent is national. Broadcasters that include the EBC and Kana say the commercial imperative is taking over the public interest imperative and this has the potential to undermine a more inclusive broadcasting sector.

The government-established community radio stations play a notable information sharing role, challenging government restrictions on coverage of sensitive issues including recent ethnic-based protests. While operating within set boundaries, the community radios are playing a public interest journalism role that has the potential to strengthen community platforms for dialogue, debate and access to information.

IMS meetings with community radio stations, however, pointed to a scenario in which community or regional media tend to focus more on local community issues and have become more representative of local voices. Community radio stations informed IMS that they tailor-make programmes according to community interests and have been able to provide a space and a voice for a diversity of voices on various issues. Community radio stations say local communities prefer to listen to the local stories, an important pointer on the relevance of the stations as platforms for local dialogue and access to information. In one such success story, a community radio station was able to bring communities warring over cattle thefts together, building peace in a context where lives could have been lost.

This focus on local content by community radio stations is supported by the licensing conditions which require that 80 per cent of content consists of local programmes and 20 per cent is content of national relevance. The same information was shared by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority which noted that regional state-owned TV stations are increasingly being assertive about their editorial independence and that there is need for a mechanism on how the state-owned TV stations could be more professional and inclusive in terms of a broad representation of community voices.

Community radio stations appear to be doing an important job in reporting critical issues on politics, developmental issues inclusive of health, agriculture, and climate change. In some instances, community radio news stories have found their way into national media, an indication of possible partnerships on story sharing amongst community, regional and national media.

Private TV stations says they broadcast public discussions on various issues including the protests in 2016, using crowdsourcing as well as live political discussions. Leading media

groups admit that coverage of issues outside main urban centres is limited and much of media content is Addis Ababa sourced. Social media platforms as well as mobile text messaging are being used to enhance public participation in media programmes. Almost all media houses including radio, TV stations and newspapers say that they are using online media platforms to enhance access to information and interact with audiences.

IMS was also informed that a new newspaper focused on investigative journalism is likely to start publishing in 2018, another indication of the change in Ethiopia's media landscape. Media and political analysts, however, maintain that there is no critical reporting of key national issues such as ethnicity since most media are still seen as partisan.

Journalists from both private and public media have shown an interest in building capacity on public interest journalism. Media analysts say capacity in public interest journalism must target both mainstream media, and bloggers so that quality of information on social platforms could be improved.

5.4 MDI iv: Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpins freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity

The challenge, as already stated above, is that media advocacy groups are weak and unable at this moment to fully express and represent the sector interests in the ongoing media policy reform agenda. In this regard, IMS sees the need to strengthen the skills of media advocates either in their individual or organisational capacities, so that they can fully take part and own and contribute to the media policy reform process.

Existing journalist and media associations include the Women Journalists Association as well as a publishers' association now with only five members left out of a membership of 20 following media house closures over the last few years. The publishers' association is not registered due to the restrictive NGO and associations law. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA) has expressed an interest in engaging in strengthening media professionalism and self-regulation mechanisms and support this need as a way of reforming state regulatory agencies. Private and state media including the State broadcaster are part of the Media Council initiative and senior staff across the state and private media expressed a willingness to be part of the reform process, more so implementation of the media council mandate.

In discussions with the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, there was a notable interest in a combined state, private media and international community engagement on building the capacity of the media. The head of the EBA says that mainstream media are "taught to listen and not criticise" and is struggling to report on the socio-political transition in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian media is used to reporting on so-called developmental issues that include health and education and this tended to echo government positions in an environment where the mainstream media is politically controlled. The expected role of the media therefore does not match the capacity required, says the head of the EBA. The EBA is prepared to work with the broadcasting sector to raise professional capacity as a way of dealing with unprofessionalism. "It is better to raise capacity before enforcing any codes," says the EBA. The EBA mandate includes licensing, monitoring and media capacity and the authority is willing to engage with international partners including with community radio stations to enhance media capacity.

Lack of media professionalism also extends to a lack of gender equality in media both in terms of representation of women journalists in newsrooms as well as in editorial content. IMS

“Lack of media professionalism also extends to a lack of gender equality in media both in the newsroom and in editorial content”

was informed that some media houses have signed a gender mainstreaming and equality pledge, but there are concerns about commitment to and enforcement of these binding media codes and gender policies. Reports of sexual harassment of female media workers as well as limited opportunities for female journalists were mentioned by those with whom the IMS team spoke.

The Minister of Information indicated a willingness to engage on capacity building of government institutions on access to information. The presence of the prime minister and his chief of staff on social media networks may indicate a willingness to embrace social media and move away from viewing social media as a threat.

New TV stations including Kana as well as newspapers such as The Reporter say they are training media staff in-house because journalism graduates from University are not prepared for the newsroom. The journalism school at the University of Addis Ababa, however, states that it is in constant touch with media industry actors to improve training.

Having said this, there appears to be no adequate platforms for continued engagement between the media industry and training institutions. The School of Journalism at the University of Addis Ababa says it is increasing links with regional and international media institutions and is open for support in enhancing its training capacity. The school is currently in partnership with a Norwegian media training school tied to a student exchange programme. The Journalism School churns out hundreds of students every year and many of these students struggle to get employment in the media sector. The School of Journalism agrees that a lot of changes need to be made to improve the curricula which is decided by the government. The school is prepared to provide training support to community radio stations using its consultancy unit.

In discussions with various sector players, Public Interest Journalism was noted as a potential entry point for support to the media. Public interest journalism capacity building and programming does not have to be adversarial to the government but can focus on developmental issues and support ongoing governance issues such as the anti-corruption push by the prime minister.

IMS is of the view that public interest journalism is not just critical journalism, but in-depth coverage, exploration of various voices and issues and exposition of malpractices that lead to social transformation at policy and practice level. There is a possibility therefore to build the capacity of the Ethiopian media sector actors on public interest journalism to enable the media to play its watchdog and informative role on developments in Ethiopia.

Analysts also state that other institutions such as the judiciary are key to media democratisation as they carry the burden of interpretation of the law, but also potentially make rulings that improve the media and the free expression environment. Bloggers say the role of the judiciary is key, hence a need for media policy reforms to include dialogue and capacity building of the judiciary on media policy issues.

5.5 MDI v: Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media

Ethiopia's media infrastructure remains poor with restrictions on private investment in the printing press as well as telecommunications. As a result, private newspapers suffer under the weight of costs and limitations of using government owned printing presses. The telecommunications companies are largely owned directly and indirectly by government proxies. The Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA) is the primary regulatory body overseeing the telecommunications sector. In practice, government executives have complete control over ICT policy and sector regulation.

Internet access is below 15 per cent while mobile phone penetration stands at about 50 per cent. There is a continuing growth in access to social media primarily amongst the young population of Ethiopia. It is important therefore that such online voices be bolstered so that they contribute to public dialogue.

Access to ICT services remains prohibitively expensive for most Ethiopians, largely due to the government's monopoly of the telecoms sector, which in turn provides consumers with few options. Prices are set by state-controlled EthioTelecom and are kept artificially high. The switching off on access to social media platforms on mobile telephony during the September 2018 protest is yet another indicator of the challenges that Ethiopia still faces.

IMS meetings with community radio stations also showed a huge infrastructure challenge with some community stations failing to serve their target communities because of a lack of transmitters and technical backup. IMS was informed by the GCAO that some radio stations had shut down due to equipment challenges. Equipment failures and a lack of technical skills to maintain equipment are among challenges facing community radio stations in Ethiopia.

Political analysts are of the view that the government has started a process of reform which may be difficult to hold back, and media investors may benefit from the thaw in the political situation. Newspapers that had retreated to online platforms either as a result of being banned or of intimidation may therefore open again, including leading ones such as *The Standard*. It remains to be seen if the diaspora media will set up shop in Ethiopia following a call by the government that they would be welcome to do so.

6. Recommendations

Media development

- Pathways and platforms towards positive change both within government and from a citizen perspective must be identified and supported. Media advocacy groups, weak and influenced by the government, require strengthening to better influence the process of change.
- There is need to locate media reform within international principles that include UNESCOs MDIs.
- The Government of Ethiopia must consider more transparent and broader representation and ownership of the media reform agenda by the media sector and civil society including public awareness on media and freedom of expression policy reforms.
- There is a need for capacity building of regional or community-based media not only in a professional editorial capacity, but also with equipment.
- The Ethiopian media needs support in developing business models that enhance financial sustainability and hence more editorial independence. This includes integrating ICTs in newsroom work.

Governance and developmental agenda in Ethiopia

- Regardless of a difficult political environment, Ethiopia has a thriving mainstream and social media sector that could provide platforms for dialogue on key governance and developmental issues. In this regard there are opportunities and potential to support citizen access to information through public interest journalism and broaden social media activism using social media-based information sharing platforms targeting youths.
- IMS is of the view that the Ethiopian media scene and media developmental support needs anchoring in a set of international principles, so that objectives and actions are more strategic and take note of all elements that inform media policy reforms and media capacity building.
- Ethiopia community radio stations and private media has the potential to play a significant role in providing quality information to citizens and pushing the boundaries of public accountability and governance issues through quality and professional journalism. There is a need to bolster the presence, capacities, courage and role of the community, private and state media on areas such as public interest journalism. Private news media actors say they still face exclusion from the government and have a limited skills base.
- There is a need to strengthen existing media and information platforms including dialogue. The Ministry of Communications has an opportunity to engage the media sector on the processes of media reforms. A good example is the willingness of the Broadcasting Authority to engage on broadcasting reforms and capacity building of broadcasters.
- Community media voices need to be amplified. This may be achieved by supporting community radios to enhance their relevance and professionalism in tackling complex conflict, developmental and social challenges. The willingness of the Ministry of Communications to engage in support for community radios must be used as an entry point for broad-based media reforms.

Humanitarian communication and community engagement

- Ethiopia faces huge humanitarian, developmental and security challenges. The country hosts tens of thousands of refugees from neighbouring Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea, and drought and conflict-induced internally displaced people. Media has an opportunity to address the specific needs of such communities. IMS is proposing action that include supporting Refugee and IDPs Information platforms, support for citizen journalism and connecting mainstream media with refugee and IDP communities.

7. Annexes

Annex 1: Persons and institutions that met with the IMS team

Government

1. Ahmed Shide, Minister for Government Communications Affairs Office (GCAO)
2. Tamrat Dejene Dadi, Ministry of Information, Director for Media Development and Deputy Director General of the Government Communications Affairs Office (GCAO),
3. Solomon Tesfaye, Director of Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA)
4. Seyoum Mekonen, CEO of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporations (EBC)

Private media and other resource persons

1. Mekuria Mekasha, Director of Journalism School of Addis Ababa University (AAU)
2. Amare Aregawi, Chairperson of Media Council, owner and GM of The Reporter Newspaper, Horn of Africa Press Institute (HAPI) and African Renaissance Television Service (ARTS)
3. Hallelujah Lule, Political analyst and Programme Manager at Amani Africa
4. Biruk Werku, Newsroom head at ENN TV
5. Hailu Teklehaimanot, Communications and Marketing Manager at KANA TV
6. Eyouel Solomon, Programme Manager of 105.3 Afro FM Radio Station
7. Befeqadu Hailu, Zone 9 Blogger
8. Tamrat Dejene, Media Development and Diversity Director General at Government Communication Affairs Office
9. Andualem Sisay, Correspondent and journalist: newbusinessethiopia.com.
10. Omer Redi Ahmed, Journalist and communications consultant
11. Eyouel Solomon, 105.3 Afro FM.
12. Fassika Tadesse, Fortune Editor-in-Chief
13. Abel Wabela, Blogger and Online Content Producer
15. Meaza Birri, Sheger FM

Community radio stations

1. Ejigayehu Amana, Manager of Kombolcha Community Radio Station, Amhara Region
2. Jhony Kebede, Technical Manager of Kore Community Radio Station, Southern Region
3. Ismael Toha, Manager of Argoba Community Radio Station, Afar Region

Justice for all

1. Daniel Gezahagne, Vice President
2. Wubshet Shiferaw, PhD, Lawyer and Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor
3. Ambaye Oyatu, PhD, Social Anthropologist and Senior Advisor for Conflict and Dispute Resolution

UNDP

1. Shimels Assefa, Team Leader, Governance and Capacity Development Unit
2. Fisseha Mekonnen, Governance Programme Specialist, Governance and Capacity Development Unit

OCHA

1. Paul Handley, Head of Office
2. Choice Okoro, Head, Strategic Communications Unit
3. Adam Bouloukos, Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator

UNHCR

1. Gavin White, Senior External Relations Officer
2. Kisut Gebre Egziabher, Communications Officer

DRC

1. Patrick Philips, Head of Programme

Life and Peace Institute

1. Sabrina Ensenbach, Team Leader, Horn of Africa Regional Programme

Danish Embassy

1. Mette Thygesen, Ambassador
2. Åge Sandal, Deputy Head of Mission
3. Peter Fjeldgaard Hansen, Programme Officer

Swedish Embassy

1. Anette Dahlström, Counsellor
2. Moa Lagercrantz, Counsellor

BBC MA

1. Judy Houston, Acting Country Director
-

Annex 2: IMS mission team

Jesper Højberg, IMS Executive Director
Finn Rasmussen, IMS Head of Department for Africa
Rashweat Mukundu, IMS Sub Saharan Africa Adviser
Louise Tunbridge, IMS Programme Manager, Kenya office
Jesper Nymark, Director of Danwatch
Hadra Ahmed, Consultant, Nubia Media and Communications Plc

IMS conducts assessments of the situation of media and freedom of expression in various countries to inform our media development interventions.



paving the way for good journalism

IMS is a non-profit organisation working to support local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition.

CONTACT

info@mediasupport.org

VISIT

www.mediasupport.org

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