AFRICAN MEDIA BAROMETER

An analysis of trends in AMBs
for 28 countries over 11 years

2011/2021

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11 YEARS IN REVIEW

THEMATIC TRENDS IN THE AFRICAN MEDIA BAROMETER

FROM 2011 TO 2021

Phillip Santos

CAPE VERDE
ISLANDS

ALGERIA

MALI

CHAD

ETHIOPIA

SENEGAL

GUINEA

NIGERIA

BURKINA
FASO

CAMEROON

UGANDA

KENYA

IVORY COAST

BENIN

GABON

DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF
CONGO

TANZANIA

MALAWI

GHANA

TOGO

CONGO

ANGOLA

ZAMBIA

MOZAMBIQUE

MADAGASCAR

ZIMBABWE

NAMIBIA

MAURITIUS

BOTSWANA

ESWATINI

SOUTH
AFRICA

LESOTHO

See above 32 AMB Countries (2005-2021)

Foreword

The African Media Barometer (AMB) is our flagship project at *fesmedia* Africa, the regional media project of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Namibia. It was developed in 2004 in partnership with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). Its indicators are largely based on the *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa* by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), making it a home-grown index. The main objective of the AMB is to monitor developments in the media and democratic processes at country and regional levels and provide platforms and tools for dialogue among stakeholders.

Since its inception, the AMB has served as a trusted source of information on the state of media environments and key developments in freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and access to information in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Several press freedom and access to information campaigners have used the AMB over the past two decades to advocate and lobby for reforms and enactment of laws that promote enabling environments, a robust and free press, freedom of expression, and access to information with varying degrees of success and impact. The AMB has been referenced in academic research, policy advisories, advocacy papers, as well as studies or important analyses of the media landscape in Africa by multilateral institutions and international non-governmental organisations.

The past decade has seen an increase in AMBs compared to the 2000s, when the index was in its infancy. An exponential number of countries have committed to conducting the AMB, with some having done so more than four times. It became evident to *fesmedia* Africa, partners and stakeholders that a closer look at developments at subregional and regional levels was needed to understand commonalities and differences in the media landscapes of the different countries. This report presents an analysis of trends in 68 AMBs conducted from 2011 to 2021. It unpacks recurring themes and recommendations in countries and commonalities between countries in terms of positive and negative developments. It is evident

from this report that while gains are celebrated, serious challenges remain or are emerging across Sub-Saharan Africa, even though some countries are doing much better than others in terms of media freedom and freedom of expression, which are necessary ingredients for democracy.

We strongly believe this trends analysis will be helpful for all stakeholders, including journalists, academics, civil society organisations, lawmakers and governments who wish to draw lessons from other African countries and juxtapose them with lessons from home to improve their media landscapes. I hope this publication will find its way into the hands of change champions who will use it to bring about the change desired by citizens.

I wish you happy reading.

Freya Gruenhagen
Director, *fesmedia* Africa

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1. Introduction

News media and other forms of mediated expression play an essential role in the creation, sustenance, and progressive transformation of democratic and democratising societies. News media in these societies are expected to perform the monitorial, facilitative, and, where necessary, both radical and collaborative roles (see Christians *et al*. 2009). The monitorial role encapsulates the collection and dissemination of information while providing oversight on the operations of public officials and institutions, as well as significant commercial interests whose influence on public affairs is both obscure and consequential (see Christians *et al*., 2009; Pickard, 2020). In the facilitative role, the media occasions key ingredients in civic republican democracies, such as the inclusive and egalitarian participation of citizens in a society's activities and social processes (Christians *et al*. 2009; Habermas 1992; Dahlgren 2005).

Unbalanced social experiences (caused by issues such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, level of education and spatial dynamics) have created an array of contemporary social justice needs. It may therefore be necessary for the media's roles to extend beyond their usual responsibilities in democratic or democratising societies. For instance, in its performance of the radical role, the media is expected to advocate for "absolute equality and freedom of all members of a democratic society in a complete and uncompromising way" (Christians *et al*. 2009: 179). In carrying out this role, journalists challenge and expose the negative effects of concentrated power—be it political or commercial—and ensure that "no injustice is ever tolerated" (Christians *et al*. 2009: 179). The African continent is confronted by a plethora of social justice issues stemming from a wide range of challenges such as inequality, gender-based violence, poverty and unemployment. Some of these result from poor governance, inept leadership, corruption and so on, which suggest the critical role of the media in providing surveillance over public affairs in the public's interest. The collaborative role entails the media's cooperation with centres of power in the interest of the public rather than those in power (see Christians *et al*.

2009). Consistent with normative collaboration, one could argue that African state media must always be oriented towards serving the public interest or greater good of society as spelt out in national constitutions and other frameworks.

Nonetheless, for the media to be able to perform these roles, an enabling socio-political and economic environment is imperative. Such an environment must be adaptive and

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flexible to cushion news media from the occasional shocks imposed by crises, ongoing transformations spawned by technological developments, and the shifting experiences of 'audiencehood' by citizens. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how quickly the media's sustainability can be threatened during a crisis (see Santos and Mare 2021; Radcliffe 2020). Likewise, how easily legislation to restrict the media's operations and access to information by audiences can be deployed during a crisis (see Mawarire 2020).

The prevalent criminalisation of misinformation by several African countries during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic showed the authoritarian potency of restrictive legislation inherited from colonial administrations and the pullback factors provided for in national constitutions when expediency dictates such deployment. During crisis conditions, such restrictions seem legitimate or are legitimised in terms of the threat posed, albeit with an impact on citizens' agency, as access to information becomes restricted. Thus, without an enabling and open socio-political environment, it is difficult for the media to operate as a function of democratic processes. Therefore, a consistent, systematic and contextual appraisal of these conditions is imperative, hence the importance of the African Media Barometer (AMB), published by *fesmedia* Africa in partnership with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).

2. The AMB and Democracy in Africa

The AMB is a meta-evaluative tool which can be used to appraise the conditions within which the cogs and institutions of democracy operate on the African continent. This tool provides policymakers, the academe, civil society and other key social institutions with a reference point for reflecting on achievements and highlighting the challenges of the media in Africa. Given the central role of the media in building and sustaining democratic institutions, the AMB indicators relate to structures that can potentially restrict or enable the media's ability to perform its roles. These indicators include the state of freedom of expression, media diversity, media independence and sustainability, media regulation, media ethics, and the welfare of journalists. However, it is also essential to examine the impact of the AMB by conducting a retrospective longitudinal study such as the one which has culminated in this report.

This study provides a descriptive account of emerging and recurring trends and themes which, in turn, can indicate the areas in which progress has been registered (or not), recommended actions/interventions, the nature and extent of such progress (or regression) and new challenges. The challenges highlighted by the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2019 Human Development Report (such as growing inequality, migration, and climate-change-induced crises such as droughts and floods) can only be effectively addressed by incorruptible and competent public officials and institutions. Their effectiveness, in turn, depends on vigilant, well-resourced, plural, diverse, professional and critical news media. For this reason, it is essential to continuously evaluate progress made and the actions required to address the challenges faced by news media, as they are a central function of any democratic society.

3. Methodology

This report is a qualitative textual study using thematic analysis to analyse trends. It covers AMBs published between 2011 and 2021 in respect of trends in the media environments across sub-Saharan Africa, recurring themes in these environments, and recurring recommendations.

This report does not provide country summaries, as these already exist in individual AMBs. Instead, it highlights significant themes which are expanded upon by giving examples.

"This report provides a bird's eye view of the recurrent and emerging challenges on the African media scene…"

This report provides a bird's eye view of the recurrent and emerging challenges on the African media scene and positive developments, such as the enactment and implementation of progressive laws and policies, while considering their implications for the development of democracy on the continent. An instrument for processing the data (see Appendix A) was developed to allow the researcher to discern thematic trends in the four sectors analysed by AMBs. These are the state of freedom of expression, the media landscape, the broadcasting sector, and professional standards in journalism practice.

The discussion of the emerging thematic trends below is based on analysing these discernments at a macro level.

4. African Media Barometer Thematic Trends: 2011-2021

Generally, the AMBs published between 2011 and 2021 show that almost all national constitutions have freedom of expression provisions, with some countries also making specific provisions for freedom of the press. However, this broad constitutional provision is often undermined by pullback conditions in the same constitutions, and in some cases, by restrictive media and non-media laws. Most countries do not have legal provisions for access to information. This is a persistent problem around which most governments do not seem to have urgent redemptive action and interventions. Countries that still need to enact access to information legislation include Mali (2021 AMB), Senegal (2018 AMB), Namibia (2018 AMB), Botswana (2020 AMB), Madagascar (2019 AMB), Cameroon (2018 AMB), Burkina Faso (2019 AMB), Eswatini (2018 AMB), Togo (2021 AMB) and Malawi (2016 AMB).[1]

Regarding the media landscape, most countries seem to have a fair degree of pluralism. However, this does not always translate to significant diversity in news content and subjects. The general trend is that pluralism is primarily evident in print media, although some countries have also significantly opened the broadcast sector. For instance, the 2012 AMB for Mali shows that the country had 250 newspapers and over 300 private radio stations. However, subsequent AMBs for Mali (2016, 2021) show a decline in newspaper numbers due to economic factors and an exponential increase in broadcast services, particularly radio and digital platforms. In 2021, Mali had more than 400 radio stations, 235 newspapers and 100 online

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1   **Mali** has no specific law on access to information, yet access to information is guaranteed by Act N° 98 - 012 of 19 January 1998.
    Madagascar has no specific law that guarantees access to information but the Malagasy Charter on Access to Information and Knowledge Sharing is a non-binding text that has been implemented by the Committee for the Safeguarding of Integrity (CSI).
    Burkina Faso has a law on access to public information and administrative documents adopted in 2015 (Law No. 051-2015/CNT) which is not enforced due to the absence of an enforcement decree.
    Eswatini's government released a draft Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Bill in 2007, but it had not been passed into law in 2018.
    In **Togo** the law on Freedom of Access to Information, adopted in 2016, is not fully implemented because the President of the Republic has not yet signed its implementing decree.

media. In 2012, Tanzania had 763 newspapers, 26 television stations and 85 radio stations. In 2016, Cameroon had 600 newspapers, 120 radio stations and 60 television stations. In 2019 Burkina Faso had 164 radio stations and 21 operational television channels. Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and South Africa, among others, also display this tendency. However, regarding broadcasting, most governments and legal frameworks do not make explicit provisions for editorial independence among state-funded broadcasters or media in general. For example, the 2019 AMB for Nigeria highlights the national broadcaster's lack of editorial independence and financial stability, the latter of which could be the cause of the former. The 2018 AMB for the Republic of Congo notes that state television and radio were divisions in the Ministry of Communication, their workers were civil servants (see also 2021 AMB for Togo), and these media, respectively, had no board of directors to oversee their activities. This suggests that in 2018, the government of the Republic of Congo had direct control over state media's operations and editorial content. The AMB also noted that the

"Other countries that have not explicitly guaranteed editorial independence for national broadcasters include Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar, and the DRC."

state newspaper had not been operating for the two years prior, emphasising the constriction of public communication and democratic spaces in the country. The AMB did not indicate whether the state-owned publication resumed service. In the 2021 AMB of Benin, it was mentioned that the public broadcaster operated under the powerful influence of the country's presidency. However, its content was noted for meeting the public interest and covering local issues. Other countries that have not explicitly guaranteed editorial independence for national broadcasters include Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar, and the DRC. The case of Kenya is unique because government control over the media is not only covert but also expansive. Unlike the direct control exercised through state media in other parts of the continent, political influence in Kenya operates through the distribution of government advertising across the board. As indicated in the country's 2016 AMB, competition for this highly sought-after government advertising has compromised the quality of editorial content in the media. In addition to the overt government control exercised through the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, whose board is appointed by the former, advertising operates covertly to influence the content of

media reports. In the Republic of Congo, state media have no allocation in the national budget, and there is no state support for the media, neither in terms of direct assistance nor through tax exemptions. Effectively, based on these examples and more, it can thus be asserted that national broadcasters in Africa remain vulnerable to political interference. They are also underfunded, which limits their ability to perform public service broadcasting which, at the very least, carries the responsibility of informing, educating and entertaining.

The AMBs also showed that journalists who worked for state-funded media were generally underpaid and most likely to practice self-censorship to remain employed, if not to protect their own lives, depending on the circumstances and context. The

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same broadcasters are also often poorly equipped. These challenges have been highlighted by the AMBs in Nigeria, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Madagascar, Benin, Eswatini, Mali, Kenya, DRC and Senegal. In some countries, regulation is fragmentary and imprecise; in others, the regulation of telecommunications and broadcasting is harmonised (see 2018 AMB for Senegal; 2018 AMB for Namibia). In terms of professional practice, many tendencies seem prevalent in most countries. There is constant reference to the encroachment and pervasiveness of corruption in journalism (i.e. payment for coverage), weak investigative journalism, and hyper-focus on political stories at the expense of local and other subject areas. There are also high levels of precarity where journalists are under-represented in labour unions or professional associations. For example, see the following AMBs: Benin (2021), Burkina Faso (2019), Madagascar (2019), Cameroon (2018), Zambia (2021), Togo (2021) and Kenya (2016).

4.1 Political context as determining force

Many AMBs conducted in sub-Saharan African countries between 2011 - 2021 (see list in Appendix B) show a pattern in the relationship between the political context within which the media operates and the internal and external dynamics of such media. Generally speaking, the stabler the political environment of a country, and the more functional its democratic institutions are, the freer, more viable and more

professional the news media are. Namibia, South Africa, and Mauritius are exemplary in this regard. For instance, though Namibia retains some restrictive apartheid-era laws, such as the Protection of Information Act (1982) and the Criminal Procedures Act (1977), it has not used any of these laws to restrict the media since attaining independence in 1990. Namibia has also demonstrated a progressive tendency by enacting the Witness Protection Act of 2017. In these contexts, there is provision for, and implementation of, constitutional provisions enabling freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

As shown above, the media landscape in a politically stable context tends to be plural and diverse while functionally professional and critical. Conversely, the more uncertain, unstable and transitional the political environment is, the more precarious the state of freedom of expression/the press and

"Conversely, the more uncertain, unstable and transitional the political environment is, the more precarious the state of freedom of expression..."

the less assertive media are in their monitorial and watchdog roles. Countries that demonstrate policy stasis and regression (in terms of fully embracing the freedom of expression and the media) include Mali (see AMBS for 2012, 2016, and 2021), Madagascar (2019 AMB), Lesotho (2019 AMB), Cameroon (2018 AMB), and Benin (2021 AMB). In the case of Mali, whose constitution guarantees freedom of expression in line with key international instruments, it is noted that "the crisis, which has divided the country into two with the North occupied by Islamist and separatist invaders, has put some freedoms on hold, especially in the occupied areas. Similarly, the coup d'état on March 22 has weakened the freedom of the press". The restrictive impact of the Malian security crisis has persisted since 2012. In 2016, it was noted that the "resultant successive states of emergency imposed" in reaction to the crisis "limit individual and collective freedoms" and have made "the question of religion…a taboo subject that certain newsrooms practice self-censorship for fear of being targeted by 'fundamentalist Islamists'". In 2021, it was noted that "journalists systematically refuse specific programmes for fear of being physically hurt or seeing their facilities attacked". The 2021 AMB refers to incidents where journalists were kidnapped, resulting in negotiations for their release between the state security apparatus and the kidnappers. The Republic of Congo provides another example in which the political environment can effectively limit freedom of

expression and the media. As noted in the 2018 AMB, "public authorities are often quick to invoke the protection of public order as a pretext to stifle this freedom, which is most often suppressed during electoral periods when tensions are running high". Ironically, it is during the same periods that an unencumbered media is indispensable to democratic politics. Furthermore, in the Republic of Congo, it also seems that where oversight is needed the most, journalists tend, sometimes due to death threats, to shy away from such topics as "national security, mining, oil, contracts, forest management, logging…", which allows corruption and other unscrupulous activities to flourish.

Although Madagascar guarantees both freedom of expression and freedom of the media through several legislative instruments, the unstable political context has meant that "those who dare to openly criticise the government may be subject to retaliation in their private and professional lives in the form of threats of dismissal, relocation or legal proceedings" (Madagascar AMB 2019; 2020: 6).

The AMB continues to note that "journalists, whether from the opposition, private or public media, are careful about what they say, publish or express in the public arena, namely through their respective

"...there is a consistent and recurrent gap between the enabling constitutional provisions for freedom of expression..."

media houses" since "arrests and lawsuits against journalists have been carried out in recent years" (Ibid.). In these contexts, there is a consistent and recurrent gap between the enabling constitutional provisions for freedom of expression (and in some cases, freedom of the press), a country's legislative infrastructure and the actual operating conditions of the media.

This pattern occurs throughout several countries and lingers if the political conditions remain unchanged. In transitional societies, as was the case in Malawi (2012 AMB) between the Mutharika and Banda presidencies, the picture reflects the tension between the democratic tendencies fostered by the emerging political dispensation and the authoritarian tendencies reflecting the legacy of the preceding system. It also shows the reluctance of new political actors to embrace democratic practices fully. In respect of this, the AMB's recommendation was to encourage local civil society actors to lobby for legislative interventions or engage in programmes to

educate and sensitise society on the need for reforms to create an enabling space for news media. The 2016 AMB for Malawi highlights positive progress in the range of information sources available to citizens, live coverage of court proceedings, legislative and policy reforms, and an enabling operational environment. However, several archaic restrictive laws and political overreach threaten freedom of expression and the media in the country. A recommendation in the 2012 AMB for Malawi was to "continue with the access to information campaign" by "lobbying the government to put in place a framework for ATI legislation". The 2016 AMB for Malawi indicates that access to information remained a challenge for journalists in the absence of an enabling law, despite the constitution's provision for access to information.

In other countries, such as Mauritius, the recommendation has been to promote freedom by decriminalising media offences.

The 2012 and 2020 AMBs for Zimbabwe show progress in the government's engagement with civil society and willingness to consider reforming media laws. However, it is unclear from the summaries and recommendations whether such a change in attitude was induced by the earlier recommendations or reflects the country's political changes.

There may be a need to develop a mechanism or instrument for establishing the connection (or lack thereof) between reforms (or lack thereof) in the different countries and the proposed recommendations or findings of future AMBs.

In some cases, although recommendations are made, progress is not followed or tracked in subsequent AMBs. For instance, the 2011 AMB for Cameroon recommended the decriminalisation of libel, but there was no follow-up on this issue in the 2014 AMB. Similarly, the question of access to

"In some cases, although recommendations are made, progress is not followed or tracked in subsequent AMBs."

information was broached in the 2011 AMB, again in 2014, but neglected in 2018. It is unclear whether this is due to the panellists engaged or the shifting contextual difficulties caused by changes in the political environment.

4.2 Retention of restrictive colonial laws and constitutional pullback conditions

One of the most consistent trends in several sub-Saharan African AMBs is the restrictive colonial or apartheid laws and the provision of pullback conditions (circumstances under which freedoms can be legally limited) to freedom of expression in national constitutions. While the specific dynamics differ between countries, the general trend is that restrictive laws phrased in national security remain on the statute books and pose a potent threat to freedom of expression and the press. For example, in Zambia, the enactment of the digital security law, and the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021 promote the "responsible use of social media platforms" have had a corrosive effect on the country's media environment (2021 AMB for Zambia). In Togo, restrictions imposed by the law on secrecy and confidentiality, and the laws on public order, states of emergency and terrorism have made it difficult to realise the full assertion of freedom of expression and the media. The Media Act of 2013 and the Kenya Information and Communications (Amendment) Act of 2013 also effectively undermine freedom of expression and the media as they contain proposals that restrict media freedom and impose heavy penalties on journalists and media houses.

Similarly, in Malawi, pieces of legislation such as the Penal Code of 1930, the Protected Flag, Emblems, and Names Act (2014), the Police Act of 1946, the Official Secrets Act of 1913, and the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act of 1968 restrict the freedom of expression and press freedom as guaranteed in the constitution. In Benin, the enjoyment of freedom of expression and freedom of the press is hampered by several provisions of the Digital Code passed in 2017, Law 2017 – 44 of 5 February 2018 on the Intelligence Code, and Law 2019-05 of 18 January 2019 on the organisation of national defence secrets. In Madagascar, the law governing communication and the Communication Code can be used to restrict freedom of the press and democracy. In addition, despite South Africa's widely acknowledged free media economy, if apartheid-era pieces of legislation such as the National Key Points Act of 1980, the Defence Act (1957) and the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 are invoked, they can undermine news media. As indicated in the 2018 AMB for South Africa, some of the above laws have been used to "hinder critical reporting on public money spent on former President Jacob Zuma's private homestead at Nkandla".

As is evident in the AMBs, the paradox about this scenario is that such laws are often invoked in times of political and economic crisis (when assertive and free media are required the most), with a chilling and restrictive effect.

"...the paradox about this scenario is that such laws are often invoked in times of political and economic crisis..."

The 2020 AMB for Zimbabwe highlights some restrictive pieces of legislation, old and new. It notes that "the Official Secrets Act remains in effect and must be signed by those working for the state, restraining them from revealing information to the media". Likewise, it points to how "the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act has also been used to ban theatre productions seen as anti-government". Through analysing the AMBs, it seems apparent that most national constitutions explicitly provide for freedom of expression and/or freedom of the press; however, they also contain conditions that undermine this freedom.

The news media's operational environment is encumbered by overt and restrictive laws, including non-media-related laws with hidden provisions that can undermine the media when needed. The 2018 AMB for Cameroon notes that the country's legislative restrictions on freedom of expression "are insidious in character". The report mentions that "administrative authorities are empowered to maintain public order" and that power has been "repeatedly used to ban demonstrations, protests and press conferences". It asserts that laws such as the Social Communication Law of 1990 "leave the notion of public order vague and subject to interpretation which administrative authorities can it (*sic*) discretionally". In addition to such infringements on freedom of expression, the 2018 AMB also notes that "Cameroon has several pieces of legislation that directly restrict freedom of expression".

The 2021 AMB for Zambia highlights the Cyber Security Act and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021 for its potential to create a chilling effect on media operations as the Acts are not specific about what constitutes "responsible use of social media platforms". This is in addition to what the AMB characterises as an "already treacherous environment for the operation of free and independent media".

The disjuncture between enabling constitutional provisions and other statutory instruments and the actual operational environment of the media is highlighted in many AMBs, including those for Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Mali, Cameroon, Benin, Botswana, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique. In the case of Botswana, the most

recent AMB (2018) observes that whilst freedom of expression is explicitly guaranteed in the constitution, "there are a raft of laws with clauses that negate the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression". These include the Cinematography Act of 1970, the Public Service Act of 2008, the Media Practitioners Act of 2008, the National

"These legislations render democratic and progressive constitutional provisions on freedom of expression nominal rather than substantive..."

Security Act of 2005, and the Cybercrime and Computer Related Crimes Act of 2007. These legislations render democratic and progressive constitutional provisions on freedom of expression nominal rather than substantive as they justify restrictions in respect of their legislative focus.

Reasonable exceptions include Burkina Faso and Namibia. Recommendations have focused mainly on repealing laws that criminalise defamation, aligning laws affecting the media and the free expression of rights with national constitutions, and international instruments promoting freedom of expression and access to information. Nonetheless, the degree to which national laws contradict or undermine constitutional provisions on freedom of expression also, by extension, flies in the face of international instruments that promote freedom of expression and the media, whether or not the respective countries have ratified these.

4.3 Relatively free print and restricted broadcast media

A surprising trend across the continent, even in politically unstable countries such as Mali, the DRC and Cameroon, is that governments seem reluctant to restrict the number of print media publications and their coverage. The trend in the broadcasting industry differs, and even in stable democracies such as South Africa, Namibia, Gabon and Botswana, governments have demonstrated a desire to control the national or state-funded broadcaster and, in countries such as Zimbabwe and Mauritius, the larger broadcasting industry through regulatory mechanisms and licensing processes. The 2018 AMB for Botswana highlights that "media diversity, particularly in the broadcasting sector in Botswana, is hampered by its laws", which limit the broadcasting sector to "commercial broadcasters and state broadcasters" through the Communications Regulatory Authority Act of 2012.

The 2018 AMB for Mauritius notes that "private broadcasting has not prospered and since 2002, the country only has three private radio stations, has no community radio stations and no private TV channels". It further notes that "broadcasting is dominated by the state-owned Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), which runs six radio stations and is the only national TV broadcaster". The national broadcaster "is not seen as an independent body and its board members are considered to be sympathetic to whichever government is in power". Other countries in which this trend is manifested include the DRC, Nigeria, Eswatini, Guinea, Tanzania, Mali, Namibia, Zambia, and Gabon. It is also evident that in countries where the government controls the broadcasting sector, or at least the state/public broadcaster, the latter almost always functions with limited editorial independence.

Nonetheless, several sub-Saharan African countries seem to have a flourishing 3-tier broadcasting system (public/state, commercial and community broadcasting), with some registering more than a hundred radio and television broadcasting services.

> "The AMBs also show that ... governments' desire to retain control or influence over electronic media becomes rather more assertive..."

South Africa and Senegal are good examples of this. The AMBs also show that, with media convergence becoming the norm of most contemporary news media, governments' desire to retain control or influence over electronic media has increased, as indicated by proposed legislative instruments designed to respond to the growth and prevalence of digital media in Africa. For instance, the Namibian government promulgated the Communications Act of 2009 and, at the time of the 2015 AMB, was working on the Electronic Transactions and Cyber Crime Bill (partly enacted in 2019 as the Electronic Transactions Act 4 of 2019) as well as the Film Bill, all of which can potentially be used to restrict freedom of expression. In addition, the 2021 AMB for Zambia refers to the country's enactment of "a controversial digital security law, the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021, ostensibly to promote the 'responsible use of social media platforms'".

However, the AMBs show that most African governments did not adequately and timeously respond to the evolving digital media ecology, at least at the level of regulation. Countries that have made inroads in this regard show a degree of paranoia

through laws that promote the interception of digital media communication. Nonetheless, most countries have not actively restricted the establishment and operation of digital communication portals such as blogs.

The subject of digital migration (shifting from broadcasting with analogue technologies to broadcasting with digital technologies), crucial to expanding citizen participation in public dialogue, is not consistently given attention across the countries covered by the AMBs referenced in this report. The significant recommendations regarding the state of the broadcasting sector on the continent focus on the need to promote the editorial independence of national broadcasters, the establishment of more effective, unified and functional regulatory mechanisms for the industry, and the provision of consistent training for broadcast journalists.

4.4 Government interference with regulatory institutions

One way African governments exert influence over broadcast media (in particular) is by interfering with the sector's regulatory structures. This is achieved through retaining control over the appointment of board members and the centralisation of

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funding. The degree of power and the will to exert such control over broadcasting regulatory bodies differs between countries, but the chilling effect[2] remains real to them all.

For instance, on the one extreme, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) consists mainly of the ruling party and former military members, which exposes the authority to political interference. Notably, as highlighted in the 2020 AMB for Zimbabwe, "the process of fairness and diversity in the issuing of licences rests with the BAZ, but the independence of the body is questionable". In Ghana, the 2017 AMB highlights the fragmented regulatory framework for broadcasting in which the government retains influence through the National Communications Authority (NCA), which focuses on technical and licensing issues, as opposed to the National Media Commission, which is perceived as independent and focuses on media content.

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2   The self-policing and acquiescence of regulatory bodies with political actors due to the latter's influence.

This setup provides the government indirect influence over broadcasting content as it is possible for the NCA to grant licences only to broadcasters considered politically correct and pliable. In another example, the Benin Broadcasting Authority (ORTB) is under powerful political influence from the Presidency of Benin, particularly the television division (2021 AMB for Benin). In Ethiopia, state-owned media continue to report the narrative provided by the government and follow the official line in their coverage of events and issues affecting political authorities (2019 AMB for Ethiopia). The media regulatory body of Mali (2016 AMB for Mali), the Supreme Communication Authority, is under political influence as three of its nine members are appointed directly by the President of the Republic, and the president of the institution is one of those three. In addition, the Independent Media Council of Uganda's independence is compromised, given that its head is a presidential advisor.

On the other extreme, despite the Namibian government's potential to control the regulatory body, the Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN), it remains mainly professional.

Recommendations regarding the regulation of broadcasting focus on the need to harmonise related communications services, prevent anti-competition tendencies and promote the independence of regulatory bodies.

4.5 The commercial imperative and communicative space

The AMBs also highlight that private commercial media are generally less accessible and responsive to marginalised communities because they are motivated by profit. Despite the massively plural and fairly diverse media in South Africa, narratives about people from peri-urban and rural areas are largely neglected by news media. Likewise, South Africa's poorly-funded public media, primarily the broadcast media, seem to retreat from the public service mandate and focus on urban populations, although their content is diverse.

The 2018 AMB for Botswana notes that "newspapers are almost exclusively available in English and urban areas, with their accessibility to the wider public outside these domains limited". The desire to minimise costs and maximise profits seems to be the forerunner of elitist journalism; corruption in journalism; unethical journalism (discussed below); and the neglect of investigative journalism, which

is perceived to be costly and a potential irritant to the much-valued advertising community. Based on tendencies evident in the AMBs, it seems that the commercial angle of African media is likely to deepen and entrench the marginalisation of poor people (at least at the discursive level), especially those in rural areas whose value to potential advertisers is often not apparent. While some countries have legislative and administrative provisions for financially supporting the media, the actual money available is usually inadequate or non-existent.

4.6 The resource curse, journalistic standards/practices and training

As with many other aspects of the social world in Africa, one of the consistent themes in the AMBs is that of limited resources in terms of the financial stability of news media, as well as the government agencies or regulatory bodies whose work is directly linked to such media. This has directly impacted several key aspects of media operations in sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, due to lack of resources, the AMBs showed that journalists often found themselves working in dismal conditions with little or no pay; journalists sometimes engaged in corrupt activities to supplement their income; and journalists practised self-censorship to ingratiate themselves with proprietors and escape the wrath of hostile political actors. This was evident in countries such as Togo (2021 AMB), Madagascar (2016 AMB), DRC (2012 AMB), Kenya (2016 AMB), Republic of Congo (2018 AMB) and Mali (2016, 2021 AMBs).

The 2016 AMB for Madagascar flagged the "negative impact on work quality" of journalists' onerous working conditions. Although much improved after 2016, these conditions were also noted in the country's 2019 AMB. In Nigeria, the 2019 AMB highlighted a direct link between the journalists' low pay, poor working conditions, and poor journalism. This tendency also flourished in countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Togo, DRC, Mali, and Malawi. The 2018 AMB for Benin observed that journalists' working conditions and salaries remained precarious, resulting in bad practices, especially corruption. In the same year, the AMB for Cameroon asserted that corruption in the media was "worsening in spite of progress in other areas, such as access to training and awareness of professional standards". The 2017 AMB for Ghana highlighted that "one major issue is in the area of ethics and professionalism" and the significant proliferation of 'brown envelope' journalism,[3]

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3   When journalists are paid in cash or kind to cover or not to cover a story.

which indicates increasing corruption in journalism. The same practice is evident in AMBs for Eswatini (2018), Madagascar (2019), Uganda (2016), Gabon (2016) and Zimbabwe (2020), among others.

In addition, the AMBs show that African news media are sometimes forced to abandon stories that focus on marginalised and minority social groups in favour of those more likely to resonate with advertisers and dominant political interests. The 2018 AMB for South Africa observes that although the country has a wide choice of information sources across a broad media spectrum, "access is skewed in favour of upper-income audiences…while the lower-income population has limited access to diverse and plural information sources". It makes this critical observation: "[D]ue to the fact that the South African media is largely corporate, and advertising driven, the poor and marginalised are the least important group for the media to reach because of their low disposable income". In the 2016 AMB for Kenya it was observed that the "increased commercialisation of the media has undermined the media's role as a development and information tool". The hyper-commercial element in Kenyan media, the AMB highlighted, meant that "intense competition for government advertising by the different media outlets has resulted in compromised editorial content". In effect, the AMB took note of the fact that Kenyan "media tend to promote commercial and political interests, largely ignoring social and cultural factors, as well as minority groups".

Another element severely affected by limited resources is the digital migration of African broadcast media, which arguably keeps many people outside the information loop and undermines their political agency. Nonetheless, this challenge is not as limpid as

> "Another element severely affected by limited resources is the digital migration of African broadcast media…"

it seems at face value. While digital migration inevitably opens up the space for more players in the broadcast sector, thereby expanding the communicative reach, it has had the opposite effect in other settings. For instance, in Kenya, digital migration has been noted to escalate the cost of accessing the media. Following its successful implementation of digital migration in 2015, the country's 2016 AMB notes that the process "cut off some people who found the costs of purchasing the set top box and the monthly subscription charges too high". Predictably, rural populations were the worst affected. The consistent recommendations in response to the above

challenges centre around three major issues: the need for continuous training for journalists; the need to adopt and implement both an internal and a general code of ethics; and the establishment of strong labour unions or associations for journalists.

4.7 Gender dynamics

The AMB summaries did not emphasise the gender dynamics in African media. However, they highlighted two important issues: the inclusion of women in newsrooms and patriarchal attitudes towards the coverage of women by news media. These are both discussed below.

The AMB summaries acknowledged the progressive, albeit still unsatisfactory, inclusion of women in newsrooms and leadership positions. The 2016 AMB for Côte d'Ivoire noted that "in spite of the existence, since 2014, of a Charter on Gender Equality in the media professions, media houses are still struggling to ensure a place for women in their content. Equal opportunity is promoted in the Ivorian press, but women occupy few positions of responsibility". The same trend was identified in the 2018 AMB for South Africa, where it was observed that "women continue to be marginalised in the newsrooms". Although this AMB acknowledged that "the number of women reporters has increased", it also pointed out that "there are very few women at editorial and management levels". The 2021 AMB for Benin mentioned that the media did not give much space to women, although their access to the media was not restricted. In addition, this AMB highlighted that only a very small percentage of women were promoted in private and state media. It was also noted in the 2019 AMB for Ethiopia that "there is a glaring lack of gender diversity in the media", a situation attributed to the country's "patriarchal society where men are considered to be above women in status and power". The 2016 AMB for Kenya confirmed the marginalisation of women, noting that few were in editorial positions and that there was a lack of affirmative action policies to address such gaps. The 2017 AMB for Ghana observed that "women media practitioners have also failed to organise themselves in an association, and thus there are very few gender and media activities in the country". More significantly, the same report also observed that "many newsrooms have no sexual harassment policies or policies that work to promote women to editorial and management levels". These tendencies have a stubborn prevalence across the continent.

The AMB summaries invariably highlight the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and tendencies in the coverage of women by news media. This is attributed to socio-cultural perspectives, although the media's role in entrenching these could be emphasised. The 2015 AMB for Nigeria noted that "bias against women has not completely gone away. Men's views are still favoured when discussing 'important' issues like politics, business, conflicts and current affairs". The subsequent AMB of 2019 also noted that "the media have failed to break ranks with a society that has remained vastly patriarchal". Likewise, the 2018 AMB for Senegal notes that "when women are the subject of press articles, it is usually because they are victims of abuse or their rights have been violated". The 2015 AMB for Zimbabwe noted that "while there has been an improvement in gender representation, women continue to be stereotyped and caricatured in some media". The 2020 AMB for Zimbabwe did not reflect a significant improvement in this state of affairs. It also observed that "there are a few cases of positive coverage of women, and stereotypes (regarding both men and women) continue to be reinforced".

A conspicuous omission in the AMB summaries is that of LGBTQI people about whom there is little commentary. Where their concerns are raised, they only feature as a cursory

"A conspicuous omission in the AMB summaries is that of LGBTQI people about whom there is little commentary."

point of reference, which is overtly done in the AMBs for Malawi and Benin. The 2016 AMB for Malawi noted that the country's media "is steadily opening up for discussion of LGBTI issues", while the 2021 AMB for Benin noted that "the media does not promote equal opportunities, regardless of race or ethnic origin, social group, gender or sex, religion, disability and age". It asserted that "in a society that has not fully integrated minorities such as homosexual, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, it is difficult for the media to give them comprehensive coverage". From these examples, it can be argued that the media, which is expected to highlight social practices that undermine the full expression of citizenship and the self-determination of oppressed social groups and individuals in Africa, seem to be failing to meet this remit.

Another significant observation is that the AMB summaries do not speak consistently about gender issues, which is an area that may require more focused attention in the future.

5. Significant Themes

The African Media Barometer reports published between 2011 and 2021 show significant consistencies in the recommendations made, which are linked to the persistent and emerging challenges observed in the media environments across sub-Saharan African countries. The discussion below outlines the general trends regarding positive and negative developments noted by each country's AMBs and the subsequent recommendations. The discussion covers only countries with more than one AMB produced within the timeframe mentioned above.

Benin

2011 AMB
Against a range of negative developments in Benin's media environment that included government interference with the operations of the national broadcaster, the precarious working conditions of journalists, and corruption in journalism, this AMB recommended that key stakeholders be pressurised to transform the Benin Radio and Television Office to a public media house; parliament be lobbied to pass the bill on the new information code, and the establishment of awards for journalist and media houses.

2014 AMB
Points highlighted in this AMB included the government's continued grip on the public broadcaster and the Broadcasting and Communications Authority (HAAC), the aggravation of media corruption, and the failures of the HAAC to protect journalists and the media. Given this scenario, and probably in acknowledgement of a lack of progress on the issues raised in the 2011 AMB, the 2014 AMB recommended raising awareness about the AMB and promoting discussions on its content in popular media.

2018 AMB

The 2018 AMB noted some positive developments, which included improved mobile service coverage, the growth of online media, and training opportunities for journalists. However, the AMB also indicated that state authorities continued to maintain a firm hold on the media, that the media were becoming polarised rather than pluralistic, working conditions and salaries of journalists remained precarious, and a new intelligence law, Law No. 2015-07 of 20-03-2015 on the Code of Information and Communication, as well as Law No. 2017-20 of April 20, 2018 on the Digital Code, threatened freedom of expression. It recommended advocacy to push bills for laws relating to the media, which were pending and the removal of provisions and laws that limit freedom of expression.

2021 AMB

This AMB resonated with the 2018 AMB in highlighting positive improvements in journalists' training availability, mobile internet penetration, and coverage of emerging issues such as climate change, agriculture, entrepreneurship, violent extremism and gender. Furthermore, it noted developments in specialised journalism and the increased presence of women in decision-making positions (a significant milestone compared to preceding AMBs). However, these were juxtaposed with negative developments, such as the high cost of the internet, the prevalence of restrictive laws and decisions, decreased media funding, increased fake news in the media and attacks on freedom of the press. In addition to traditional threats to freedom of expression, these emergent issues (such as fake news and reduced media funding) were equally destructive. In light of these challenges, this AMB recommended workshops for exploring possible economic models of the press, reviewing the codes of ethics in the country, and conducting systematic research into the state of freedom of expression in the country.

Botswana

2011 AMB

The 2011 AMB noted that, despite positive changes to the country's political environment, government media remained under the control of the executive, a journalists' union had not yet been formed, journalists in public media continued to be harassed, diversity was lacking, and defamation laws were used against the media. It recommended MISAs involvement in passing the Access to Information Bill

into law. MISA was also encouraged to facilitate the establishment of a journalists' union. Specialised training for journalists and forming an influential editors' forum were also recommended.

2014 AMB

Although this AMB acknowledged positive changes in the political environment, it also highlighted several negative developments. These included poor journalistic practices, the prosecution of journalists under archaic laws, the enactment of broadcasting regulations (namely the Communications Regulatory Act of 2012), and the presidency's hostility towards journalists. This AMB raised many issues similar to those raised in 2011.

2018 AMB

The 2018 AMB did not outline any significant improvements on the issues mentioned in the proceeding AMBs. However, it raised new issues as focal points, such as media sustainability and funding, and the need to research the country's media environment.

Cameroon

2011 AMB

Despite improvements in media training and diversity in Cameroon, the 2011 AMB highlighted a lack of progress in issuing TV licences, the government's penchant to attack journalists and the media, decreasing professionalism in journalism, and limited media reach in the country, among other things. It recommended the decriminalisation of libel, advocacy for an Access to Information Law, and tax breaks for media inputs such as newsprint. Other recommendations focused on strengthening journalists' representation and improving their training.

2014 AMB

This AMB highlighted positive improvements in attempts to reform the media sector and law, reduced court cases against journalists, and the proliferation of digital journalism. Nonetheless, poor quality broadcast journalism, corruption in the media, lack of an Access to Information Law, and lack of media sustainability were noted as persistent challenges. Recommendations focused on increasing efforts to establish access to information legislation and to implement the media reforms proposed in 2011.

2018 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included increased coverage of women's issues, the expansion of digital media, and improved tolerance of public broadcast media. Negative developments included the deteriorating political situation, increased hate speech, and media sustainability issues. It recommended lobbying for a code of ethics, media reforms that tackled media sustainability and improving journalists' working conditions. A notable omission in this AMB was access to information legislation, a persistent issue in previous reports.

Côte d'Ivoire

2012 AMB

This AMB highlighted developments such as the announced intention to privatise state media, allocation of funds for media development, tax and customs exemptions for the media and strengthened support for media businesses. Recommendations focused on seeing the privatisation of state media through, establishing a collective bargaining platform to review journalists' working conditions, and setting the criteria for assessing eligibility for media development funding.

2016 AMB

A significant number of positive developments were highlighted in this AMB, including the introduction of a law on access to information; the regulation of economic governance of print media; the commencement of the liberalisation of the televisual sector; the beginning of the revision process of the law on the press, Law No. 2004-643; and the migration from analogue to digital. The negative developments mainly covered media inaccessibility to the public due to high costs, and sustainability issues due to decreasing revenues. Recommendations focused on advocating for the revision of the press law of 2004, discussion of the role of public or state media, more consideration of gender issues, and the need to determine a statute for community radio personnel and correspondents of private press.

Democratic Republic of Congo

2012 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included an improved framework for regulating broadcasting; enhanced implementation of a code of ethics; the adoption of a collective bargaining framework; the establishment of several

radio and television stations; improved internet access; and the establishment of professional organisations. However, it also pointed to challenges such as government interference with the operation of regulatory bodies; a decrease in organisations that support democratisation, and an increase in the assassination of journalists, which is a severe threat to free press. Recommendations included a further review of the operations of the state broadcaster Congolese National Radio Television, continuous training of journalists, campaigning for access to information legislation, the decriminalisation of press offences, and campaigning for freedom of the press and safety of journalists.

Eswatini

2011 AMB

The 2011 AMB for Eswatini (then Swaziland) took place amid political tension owing to an ongoing multi-pronged social crisis. The few positive developments included the registration of the Media Complaints Commission (MCC) for media self-regulation, greater recognition of the importance of training, improvement in the working conditions and salaries of those in the media and the adoption of gender policies by several media houses. Negative developments included the government's heavy-handed approach when dealing with the media, growing hostility towards the media by both the government and opposition politicians, and a disregard for ethical issues in journalism. Against this backdrop, the AMB recommended the activation of the MCC, lobbying for a law reform commission to look at all laws in general, strengthening media organisations by encouraging journalists' involvement in the development of their profession and facilitating greater collaboration between media and training institutions.

2014 AMB

In this AMB, Eswatini was credited for creating a platform for interaction between editors and senior politicians, establishing the MCC, enhancing journalism training through a 4-year degree programme at the University of Swaziland, increasing access to the internet, and establishment of the Community Radio Network in 2013. Negative developments included the harassment of editors, the inactivity of the local journalists' association, and slow legislative reforms. Recommendations included publicising the MCC, reviewing its code of ethics, and advocating for legislative media reform.

2018 AMB

This AMB acknowledged some positive developments regarding issues not raised in the preceding AMB. For instance, it highlighted the easing of the broadcasting licence application process, progress towards the institutionalisation of efforts aimed at media development, the formation of a media consortium for advocacy work on issues that affect the media, and the ongoing consultations on the Broadcasting Bill. Negative developments included increased brutal attacks against journalists, increased corruption in journalism, self-censorship and poor content, and the inactivity of media associations. This showed a significant escalation in challenges faced by the media during the four years between AMBs. Recommendations in the 2018 AMB included advocacy around media law reforms and journalists' working conditions and protection.

Ghana

2011 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the expansion of media operators and, by extension, greater media diversity and pluralism. It also mentioned an improved quality of journalism and the availability of training institutions. Nonetheless, it also highlighted sluggish progress regarding the public broadcasting reform, no progress in the development of the Right to Information Bill and the Broadcasting Bill, and a decline in professional journalism standards. Recommendations included strengthening the National Media Commission through increased funding and independence from state authorities, streamlining broadcasting regulation, and advocacy for an independent and well-funded Ghana Broadcasting Corporation.

2013 AMB

Positive developments in this AMB included increased advocacy for the Right to Information Bill, improved quality in journalism at some publications, and increased access to the internet. Nonetheless, these improvements were counteracted by developments such as political polarisation and the tabloidisation of news, the arrest of journalists, corruption in journalism, and the stalling of the Broadcasting Bill and the Right to Information Bill. Notably, the issues that required intervention increased from the previous AMB. Recommendations touched on several challenges, including the need for journalists to be acquainted with various codes of ethics; development of policies that promote equality, especially in terms of gender; advocacy for the

Broadcasting Bill; educating the media on the implications of monopolies; and advocacy for the mobilisation of funds from the Media Development Fund.

2017 AMB

The 2017 AMB highlighted a significant increase in digital media use and challenges to the quality of journalism. The Right to Information Bill and Broadcasting Bill had not yet been passed. Recommendations revolved around continuous training on the code of ethics, advocacy for passing the Broadcasting Bill into law, increasing the number of women in newsrooms, using female news sources and raising journalists' salaries.

Kenya

2012 AMB

In this AMB, it was highlighted that social media use had grown rapidly; media had adopted multiple channels through which to reach their audiences; media policy had improved, and the environment had become more accommodating; new publications and broadcast services were launched; the new constitution promised progressive legislation; and alternative media gave voice to grassroots people and highlighted issues ignored by mainstream media. Investigative journalism was more prominent, investment in the media sector increased, and local content volume increased, including children's programming. A significant negative development was that politicians had taken over media houses and influenced editorial decisions along partisan lines. Recommendations included more media engagement in civic/voter education through media/civil society partnerships for media training, promotion of media literacy, increased advocacy for press freedom, passing other legislation to support freedom of expression and the media, and training journalists for conflict reporting.

2016 AMB

This AMB mentioned increased media outlets, including regional publications outside the capital. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of radio stations grew from 103 to 147, and television stations from around 20 to 67. It was also noted that the successful digital migration process was expected to lead to more television channels. Other positive developments included increased citizen engagement; more regional reporting owing to devolution; more expert voices; and increased partnerships between local and international media, allowing for improved training

opportunities. Furthermore, social media usage and influence had grown, and civil society organisations' advocacy capacity had increased. Negative developments included clampdowns on the media following a change in government in 2013, increased commercialisation of the media which undermined its developmental and informational roles, increased state interference and censorship of the media due to security and terrorism concerns, greater political capture of the media, a narrow range of voices in the media, online hate speech and political incitement, and the narrowing of access to the media because of the costs associated with digital migration.

Recommendations included documentation of the activities and programmes in the media sector, training for journalists focusing on emerging issues, the media and CSOs to work together to strengthen media freedom and impact policy-making, strengthening the institutional and advocacy capacity of journalistic organisations, journalistic groups to engage citizens about the role of the media in society, and improving training and capacity building for journalists. It also recommended strengthening internal dialogue, consultation and networking among media sector players to improve research and advocacy for the media and freedom of expression, as well as the need for *fesmedia* Africa to lead the campaign on access to information and media freedom.

Lesotho

2012 AMB

This AMB noted the increased use of digital media and popularity of private radio stations, the passage of an enabling Communications Act, and the introduction of new radio stations. The major challenges include the Minister of Communications' control over the appointment of board members at regulatory bodies. Recommendations included establishing self-regulatory mechanisms, awareness training regarding the Communications Act, and training opportunities for journalists.

2015 AMB

Positive developments mentioned in this AMB included an increase in civil society action, an increase in radio stations and newspapers, increased access to the internet, and the creation of the Broadcasting Dispute Resolution Panel. Negative developments included restrictions on freedom of expression, political polarisation of the media, increased intimidation of journalists by defence forces, limited protection for journalists, corruption in the media and limited training

opportunities for journalists. Recommendations included establishing a journalists' union, establishing an association to look into media issues, and interventions that improved journalism practices.

2018 AMB

Progress observed by this AMB included the discontinuation of criminal defamation, the expansion of digital discursive spaces, the acquisition of a printing press, the introduction of community radio stations and increased public media tolerance. Negative developments included a lack of media policy, sensationalism, the impotence of the Broadcasting Disputes Resolution Panel, and partisanship in the media. Recommendations focused on the need to capacitate the media through mobilisation of funds, spearheading media reform processes, advocating for a strong self-regulating media, and promoting professional journalism.

Madagascar

2012 AMB

Positive developments noted in this AMB included the increased diversity of publications, radio and television stations; increased journalism training schools; better access to information; and the inclusion of female journalists in newsrooms. Negative developments included political and economic interference in the media, the absence of an enabling legal framework, poor working conditions for journalists, and the impotence of professional journalism organisations. Recommendations included ensuring the adoption of a legal framework to enable media development and improving journalists' working conditions.

2016 AMB

This AMB highlighted transformations fostered by the increased adoption and use of digital tools and media. It noted improvement in multi-mediality in the collection of information, its treatment and the quality of writing, sound and image. It also reported increased programme diversity, with local shows enjoying preference. Negative developments included the media's involvement in information blackmail and limited regulation, which opened up space for abuse of power by authorities and, arguably, by the media itself. Recommendations included improvement in the working conditions of journalists (as this impacts the quality of their work and ethical practices), the development of a self-regulatory framework and body

by media and civil society, improved access to international broadcast networks, professionalisation of the private sector as the basis for attracting investments in the industry, and the provision of educational content.

2019 AMB

The positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the adoption of a Communication Code (the revision of which was still in progress), amendments to the Cybercrime Act in 2016, an increase in programmes that promote culture in the public service, the growth of religious media, and the development of social media in facilitating public debates. Recommendations included establishing a consensual journalists' union to strengthen freedom of expression, establishing a platform for interaction between civil society and the media, passing access to information legislation, providing civic education on gender issues, and setting up a coherent ICT policy.

Malawi

2012 AMB

The 2012 AMB for Malawi, a country with a long history of authoritarian rule, highlighted several positive developments enhancing freedom of expression. These included the granting of new television and radio licences, repealing of Section 46 of the Penal Code, reduction of threats against the media under the new government, the appointment of press officers in each ministry, elimination of VAT on newspapers, and the declaration by President Joyce Banda that the public broadcaster would be opened up to the opposition and alternative viewpoints. In addition, it noted the successful lobby by the media for the amendment of the Civil Procedure Act, which required the government to be given three days' notice for getting an interdict against the state, and the introduction of two new media products, *The Business Times* and *Nkwaso*, the revival of the investigative desk at *The Nation*, the general improvement of salaries and working conditions of media workers, and the supportive content-sharing initiative between private and community radio stations.

There were also several negative developments, many of which were associated with the outgoing government of Mr Bingu wa Mutharika. They included the harassment of journalists during the past regime, the withdrawal of government advertising from *The Nation*, attacks on civil society organisations shortly before the collapse of Mutharika's government, the shutdown of *Capital Radio* and intimidation

of journalists during press conferences. Other negative developments included integrating vocal and robust civil society activists and critical media personnel into the government, corruption and lack of ethics in journalism, the dormancy of the Media Council of Malawi due to financial reasons and the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority's lack of transparency.

The AMB recommended continued advocacy for Access to Information legislation and taking the ATI policy to parliament in November 2012. It also advised lobbying the government for a framework for ATI legislation, the urgent revival of the Media Council of Malawi, the establishment of a research collaboration unit to look into issues affecting the media, and a campaign to turn the state broadcaster into a true public medium.

2016 AMB

Positive developments mentioned in this AMB included an increase in television and radio stations, increased competition which improved standards, positive media legislation and policy, live coverage of court proceedings, work towards enhancing media training, reduction of cases involving the arrest of journalists and their harassment, and the passing of the Gender Equality Act (2014) which imposed quotas in government departments and training institutions. Negative developments included poor salaries for journalists, the introduction of VAT on imported broadcasting equipment and newsprint, arrests of ordinary citizens for expressing their views, reversal of efforts to transform the state broadcaster into a true public service broadcaster, a poor economy that affected salaries and the media sector, difficulties in accessing the President, and cross-ownership within the media sector which narrows content diversity. Recommendations included multi-sectoral lobbying for the implementation of ATI legislation, evaluating the performance of the new Communications Act (2016) through MISA Malawi, transforming the state broadcaster into a truly public broadcaster, repealing insult laws, making the Media Council of Malawi more accessible and visible in tackling unethical behaviour, translating the code of ethics into vernacular languages and investigating issues that affect the media.

Mali

2012 AMB

Despite the security and political tensions in the country, several positive improvements were noted in this AMB, including an increase in the media coverage rate, the establishment of new private radio stations (325 were operational at the time), the launch of a second television channel, provision of 3 Video Outside Broadcast Vehicles for the national broadcaster ORTM (Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision du Mali), and the establishment of a digital earth station for transmission and reception by satellite based on C and Ku band. Furthermore, the AMB noted a review of laws and regulations, the enactment of a law on broadcasting, preparation of several bills, expansion of training opportunities, and a reduction in the cost of telecommunications. Negative developments included the poor performance of the Observatory of Professional Conduct of Ethics in the Print Media (self-regulatory body), burning and destruction of radio stations, reduction in assistance to the media, the halting of construction works at the school of journalism, frequent incidents of aggression against and intimidation of journalists, the non-implementation of the collective bargaining agreement, the non-enforcement of the new law on broadcasting, poor working conditions for media workers and decline in the quality of media content. Recommendations included displaying the code of conduct and ethics in media houses, sensitisation on the existing collective agreement, specialisation of journalists in various areas, and mechanisms to develop a partnership between the media and other institutional and financial support organisations.

2016 AMB

This AMB highlighted some positive developments, including the National Communication Forum in 2012, plans for a School of Journalism being considered, the establishment of the High Authority for Communication (HAC), ongoing reforms to the ORTM, the emergence of new broadcasters and other media, adoption of the Media Charter for the Respect of the Image of Women and their Right to Information and Expression, and the promise of an increased president's subsidy for the media. Negative developments included a political environment hostile to criticism, no support for the media in the national budget, slowness in passing laws affecting the press, and failure to implement a collective bargaining agreement. Recommendations included setting up a 'peer tribunal', decriminalising press offences, intensifying journalism training and utilising the AMB as an advocacy and reference tool.

2021 AMB

Several positive developments were acknowledged in this AMB, such as the diversification of information sources, access to specialised training for journalists, increased gender inclusivity in the media, economically viable press groups, and the expansion of digital appropriation by the media and society. However, negative developments argued that Mali continued to limit freedom of expression and the media. For instance, the AMB highlighted that the country was characterised by a lack of legal protection of journalists/media sources, internet censorship, lack of consultation when drafting laws, lack of editorial independence of the state-owned press, economic precariousness of media companies, advertising used to exert pressure, lack of regulation of the advertising sector, lack of consideration of the public interest in allocating frequencies, lack of ethical practices, lack of collective bargaining, deteriorating security conditions, lack of press subsidies, lack of regulation of the press online as well as fake news and legal troubles.

Recommendations included advocacy for press-related legislative reforms, organising a Malian Media Consultative Forum, building capacity on the fundamentals of journalism, introducing a national event to promote good journalism, and promoting the AMB as an advocacy tool.

Mozambique

2011 AMB

The 2011 AMB noted that the media in Mozambique was growing in terms of publications and radio and television stations, that the environment was enabling freedom of expression (although the government exerted influence on public media), there was growing public trust in the media, and that there were fewer legal cases against the media. Recommendations emphasised the need to approve broadcasting legislation and for civil society to continue working towards the strengthening of freedom of expression.

2014 AMB

In this AMB, consistency in the growth of the media was noted, the Law of the Right to Information was approved, a Response Committee for Advocacy of Freedom of the Press was set up, and the growth of social media use and increased training opportunities for journalists were highlighted. Continued emphasis on the need to defend freedom of expression and the interests of journalists implied continued

threats against both. Recommendations emphasised the need to monitor ethical matters through self-regulation mechanisms, reform restrictive media laws, monitor the application of international instruments, transform public broadcasting, watch digital migration, and approve public broadcasting and community radio laws. Furthermore, this AMB recommended the implementation of codes of conduct as mechanisms for self-regulation, as well as improved training opportunities and support for investigative journalism.

2018 AMB

In this AMB, as with the two preceding reports, concerns were raised about the erosion of freedom of expression due to an environment of fear. In addition, self-censorship, increased cost of media licences, and a decline in journalism quality were highlighted. This AMB did not mention any positive developments and noted Mozambique's deteriorating general media situation. Recommendations included awareness training about the democratic role of the media among members of state functionaries such as the legislature, judiciary and executive; reform of restrictive laws; introduction of legislation around broadcasting; consultations and review of the media situation in the country; and monitoring the quality of journalism.

Namibia

2011 AMB

This AMB highlighted several positive developments, including the establishment of the Media Ombudsman, positive changes to the public broadcaster, the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), the expansion of citizen engagement through short message service (SMS) and social media, and the digitisation of the country's media. Negative developments included *Sister Namibia* magazine's indifference to lesbian issues and the absence of Access to Information legislation. Recommendations included the need for the Ombudsman's responsibility to extend to monitor the content of advertising, greater media literacy, build a relationship between civil society and mainstream media, promote access to information, and expand media diversity.

2015 AMB

The positive developments in this AMB included the increased use of social media, the establishment of the Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia, the inclusion of young people in the media, and improvements in the operation of the NBC. Negative developments included lack of protection of confidential sources

and whistle-blowers, restrictive additions to the Research, Science and Technology Act of 2004, lack of consultation in the development of relevant legislation, lack of diverse voices, inadequate regulation of competition, limited independence of the national broadcaster, and the poor working conditions of journalists.

Recommendations included a review of journalists' salaries, the establishment of a formal structure representing journalists, systematic training of journalists, the development and passing of an access to information law, checking the Electronic Communications and Cybercrimes Bill for restrictive provisions, the improvement of journalists' working conditions, strengthening self-regulation mechanisms, engaging with the question of ethics in journalism, and enhancing media literacy and diversity in citizen engagement.

2018 AMB

Positive developments in this AMB included the expansion of the media sector due to new media houses and community radio stations, increased citizen engagement in social media, revision of the Code of Ethics in 2016, and the digitalisation of the NBC. Recommendations included enacting the Access to Information Bill, further research into Namibia's media landscape, establishing a journalists' union, mainstreaming key populations, balanced and sensitive coverage of minority groups, media law reform and the activation of a fund to support community broadcasters.

Nigeria

2011 AMB

Positive developments mentioned in this AMB included passing the Freedom of Information Act in 2011, appointing an Ombudsman in 2009 to control and regulate journalism, a more diverse media due to new radio and television station licensing, and improved relations between the government and media. Negative developments highlighted that journalists continued to be targeted by violence, the welfare of journalists was poor, a decrease in newspaper circulation, the closure of state-owned newspapers due to lack of funding and the biased reporting of the state broadcaster. Recommendations included improving the welfare of journalists to ensure professionalism, transforming the state broadcaster into a public broadcaster and more independence for the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission.

2015 AMB

This AMB noted positive developments in opening the democratic space, for example, the licensing of 17 community radio stations distributed across the country's political zones following years of advocacy by civil society, the explosion of social media and online journalism, and an increase in internet radio stations. Negative developments included the country's failure to meet the deadline for digital migration, the passing of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act (2015), and the ineffectiveness of the country's broadcasting regulatory functionaries. Recommendations included advocacy for better-funded public media, removal of taxes on newspaper inputs through the implementation of the Florence Convention, promoting locally produced newsprint, developing a comprehensive ICT policy with a clear vision and direction, and creating a self-regulatory body for the media.

2019 AMB

The positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the expansion of open civic space through the proliferation of the media, adoption of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011, the expansion of the broadcasting sector and the impact of digitalisation in stimulating an entrepreneurial spirit in the media industry. Negative developments included a lack of adequate reporting of corruption in the public and private sectors, corruption in the media due to economic conditions, social divisions in the media, restriction of media freedom by the state, and the concern that several proposed Bills would overregulate the media. Recommendations included reformation of the broadcasting law and independence of the public broadcaster; harmonising policy for the media and communication sectors; promoting the independence of regulatory bodies; improving journalism's verification mechanisms; building sustainable economic models for the media; updating the code of ethics; and training and advocacy on gender, human rights and people living with disabilities.

Republic of Congo

2013 AMB

Positive developments in this AMB included the elimination of imprisonment for media offences, which was replaced with fines, and the relocation of the public broadcaster to a more comfortable and better-equipped building. The AMB also acknowledged that collective bargaining in 2009 had improved journalists' working conditions. Negative developments included observations that media freedom had

not yet been fully embraced/implemented, and media growth was accompanied by increased pro-government propaganda. Recommendations included the publication, launching and wide distribution of the AMB as a critical advocacy tool, the establishment of a media resource centre, the creation of a platform for dialogue between media organisations and the state in the areas of legal reforms, a special status for journalists and advocacy for support towards the development of Congolese media.

2018 AMB

No positive developments were highlighted in this AMB. Negative developments included that the government was ready to limit access to digital portals, which ordinary citizens mostly use, that many private outlets had been recently closed, and that training opportunities outside the university system were declining. Recommendations suggested improving the country's legal and regulatory framework and ensuring that existing enabling laws are fully implemented; lobbying public authorities to provide financial and material support to the media; building the capacity of trade unions and journalists' associations; and promoting dialogue between trade unions, associations and public authorities.

Senegal

2013 AMB

In this AMB, Senegal was noted for stagnation across the board. Recommendations included conducting intensive advocacy campaigns and lobbying for the adoption of the draft Press Code; strengthening the specialisation of journalists; discussions on the infractions made by the media, including denying newsmakers a right to reply, encouraging and supporting research on the media; strengthening the capacity of journalists' associations to act with regards to legal matters affecting their members; strengthening the bond between citizen organisations and professional media organisations; and advocacy to improve commercial radio stations' access to information.

2018 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the transition from analogue to digital at Senegalese Radio Broadcasting (RTS), the promotion of 7 out of 12 women to positions of responsibility at RTS, the potential addition of community

television to existing community radio stations, the diversification of cultural expressions in community radio, RTS's introduction of regional television channels and the setting up of television web channels. Negative developments included the poor organisation of the advertising sector and distribution of advertising revenue in the absence of a law governing the sector, lack of transparency in the management and allocation of the frequency spectrum, poor governance of state media, ineffective unions of journalists, and a Press Code that is characterised by severe penalties for press offences. The AMB also noted poor governance in the management and distribution of the assistance fund for the media; the absence of a collective bargaining agreement; the impotence of the self-regulatory body, CORED; lack of innovation in the media sector; and the absence of a law on access to information. In addition, it highlighted the persistence of biased reporting in the media; and the granting of community radio station frequencies to politicians.

Recommendations included reforms in the advertising sector; fast-tracking the implementation of the Press Code, which was adopted in 2017; enhancing advocacy for good broadcast spectrum frequency management; supporting broadcasting media in the transition to digital broadcasting; re-initiating advocacy for the good governance of public service media and advocacy for the passing of an Access to Information Act as well as launching and disseminating the 2018 AMB.

South Africa

2013 AMB

Positive developments in this AMB included revising the Press Council and Press Code after an extensive consultation process, launching Africa Check (a donor-funded facility aimed at promoting accuracy in the news), the entrance of the *Daily Maverick* onto the media market, and the growth of online journalism, and the approval of new broadcasting licences for community radio stations. In addition, the increased usage of social media, which improved citizen participation, was commended. However, the same period was noted for the devastating closure of magazines, the passing of the Protection of State Information Bill in 2013, persistent problems at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), political hostility towards media, and widespread job losses. Recommendations included revising broadcasting regulations, transforming the SABC into a public broadcaster, organising journalists under an effective trade union, and campaigning against the Secrecy Bill.

2018 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the reluctance to move ahead with the statutory Media Appeals Tribunal after self-regulation of the media proved effective, the flourishing of investigative journalism, the proliferation of social media, and the independence of the SABC Board. Negative developments included shrinking media funding, job losses, and the proliferation of fake news. Recommendations were to regulate aspects of media convergence under one department and repeal criminal defamation law. The AMB also called for strengthening the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa to allow for more effective monitoring and enforcement of broadcasting licence stipulations and research into media sustainability.

Tanzania

2012 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the Media Council of Tanzania's facilitation of training for journalists, the media's role in educating citizens about the constitutional reform process, the establishment of Tanzania's Editors Forum, and the fact that the bills on Access to Information and Media Services were in the process of becoming laws. Negative developments mentioned were that the government's actions were limiting freedom of expression and the harassment of journalists. Recommendations included the resuscitation of the Tanzania Union of Journalists, that pressure be exerted towards the passing of the Access to Information and Media Services Bills into law, and that media must unite and lobby for the inclusion of issues that affect the media in the new constitution. Also recommended was a skills audit in the media sector and ensuring the enforcement of the code of ethics.

2015 AMB

This AMB noted that social media was extending freedom of expression in Tanzania and that digital broadcasting would boost accessibility by increasing viewer numbers. Other positive developments included growth in vibrant investigative journalism and heightened interest by citizens in the constitutional review process. Nonetheless, the report also noted several negative developments, which included excessive use of force towards the media by security officials, a lack of meaningful consultation on new media-related legislation that could potentially suppress freedom of expression, the suspension of newspapers for allegedly publishing

seditious articles, reduced funding for state media, increased interference by the state in the public broadcaster's editorial content and delays in the constitutional review process. Recommendations included a campaign for journalists' safety, a movement for draconian laws to be reformed, and the protection of internet rights and freedoms.

2019 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included an increase in media outlets, the expansion of social media, more training opportunities available, and organisations being more vibrant in defending the cause of the media and a free press. Negative developments mentioned the shrinking of political and media space, the introduction of repressive laws in 2015, and the use of professional bots and trolls to control free expression. The negative representation of women in the media and limited access to official sources were highlighted as emerging challenges. Recommendations included advocacy against repressive legislation, increased training on media safety and diversity, and reviving media trade unions.

Togo

2013 AMB

Positive developments of this AMB included more training for journalists and more opportunities for women in the media. Negative developments included attempts by authorities to control media content, failure of public authorities to honour their commitments, persecution of journalists who were regularly brought before the court, polarisation between journalists working for public media and those working for privately owned media, aggressive attitudes towards journalists by politicians, and poor working conditions and low salaries for journalists. Recommendations included a more critical civil society, increased state aid to the media, the development of a collective bargaining agreement, the transformation of state media into public service media, and improved relations between the media and security forces.

2017 AMB

The 2017 AMB highlighted some positive developments, which included a less aggressive media, better management of newspapers, more respect for first-generation rights, improved rights in terms of access to information, the increased political will to comply with regional and international standards, less interference by

the political class, and the transition to digital production. Negative developments included the deteriorating quality of journalism, greater instability among journalists, worsening working conditions of journalists, increased untrained media practitioners, and reluctance to promote the interests of women and minorities.

2021 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included improvements to the legal framework following the passing of a progressive Media and Communication Code (2020), improved training opportunities for journalists, public participation in broadcast programmes, legal recognition of online journalism in the new code, improved quality of media productions, ongoing negotiations over collective agreements to improve the working conditions of journalists, diversification of media content and improvement in investigative journalism practice. Negative developments included an increase in the prosecution of journalists, poor working conditions and low wages of media workers, low compliance with ethical codes, increased self-censorship, decreased credibility of media outlets, breakdown and fragmentation of media organisations, and the shrinking of the advertising market. Recommendations were to promote the findings of the AMB and set up a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, media company management training, and advocate for improving journalists' working conditions.

Uganda

2012 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included improvements in internet access, growing media audiences, increased social media users, new publications, access to ICT included in the national development plan, the abolishment of legislation outlawing sedition, the merging of the Communication Commission and the Broadcasting Council, and increased citizen engagement. Negative developments included the harassment and killing of journalists, increased self-censorship, the Uganda Communications Regulatory Authority Bill's failure to address issues raised by media freedom advocates, government interference with the state broadcaster, and increased corruption in the media. Recommendations included increased literacy on the role of the media in a democracy and strengthening journalists' unions to protect them from harassment.

2016 AMB

Positive developments noted in this AMB included an increased number of media houses, increased media diversity and quality of news coverage, enhanced training opportunities for journalists, a greater understanding of the role of the media, and the legal support extended to journalists by civil society. Negative developments included state restrictions on media coverage of political stories and the dramatic increase in social media use without established standards. The AMB recommended free legal support for journalists due to high litigation rates, combating media corruption and improving journalists' working conditions, more training on newsworthiness and the observation of professional standards, and conducting more research on media issues.

Zambia

2013 AMB

Positive developments in this AMB included the introduction of new media organisations, the growth of internet and mobile phone usage, the introduction of blogs which expanded the public sphere, improved access to radio stations through the use of mobile phones, the movement of several community radio stations online, and unanimity on media laws that require reforms. Negative developments included the harassment of journalists, declining professional standards, unethical social media usage, government aversion towards criticism, decreased diversity, and increased self-censorship in the media. The AMB recommended a commitment to make the media's self-regulatory body (the Zambia Media Council or ZAMEC) operational, dealing with falling professional standards, the transformation of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) into a public broadcaster, auditing available training and gaps in training, as well as lobbying the government to implement the ICT Policy.

2017 AMB

This AMB noted various developments in the country's media scene. On a positive note, some new newspapers, including *The Daily Nation*, were introduced; and momentum on Access to Information legislation was maintained. The negative developments included closing media-related websites, increased violence during election periods, and the victimisation and intimidation of media activists and union leaders. This AMB recommended that strong media institutions were required to

protect journalists, that ZAMEC be operationalised, that mainstream media respond to donor needs to ensure continued funding, that regulatory bodies be converged, and improvement in professionalism and enforced broadcasting guidelines be provided by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). In addition, it was recommended that the media find new avenues for generating revenue.

2021 AMB

This AMB acknowledged the emergence of community radio and television stations, enhanced freedom of expression, and the emergence of social media platforms that expanded citizen engagement. However, moves towards self-regulation had not yet been tabled before parliament. However, it also highlighted negatives such as political interference with the operation of rural radio stations and COVID-19's impact on the sustainability of media houses, which left them vulnerable to influence by their sources of finance. Other negative developments included revoking at least one television station's licence, the polarisation of the media online, and fatigue around the lobbying for access to information. It recommended auditing laws that infringe on the Bill of Rights, repealing laws that infringe on freedom of expression, that media owners should ensure professional standards by making resources available, that media workers organise around a strong professional body, and the need to increase safety online where most audiences now access the news.

Zimbabwe

2012 AMB

Positive developments noted in this AMB included the increased engagement of civil society in media legislation campaigns, strengthened self-regulation, more print media products on the market, and the promotion of women into decision-making posts. Negative developments included lingering restrictive legal framework, the harassment of media activists and journalists, fear-induced self-censorship, an increase in criminal defamation cases, the appointment of board members for public media and regulatory authorities on political grounds, failure to transform the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) into a public broadcaster, the unwillingness to licence community radio stations, the lowering of professional standards, and an increase in corruption by the media. Recommendations included that MISA encourage its members to cover media reform issues, encouraging the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations to put pressure on the Broadcasting

Authority of Zimbabwe to licence community radio stations, encouraging MISA to intensify campaigns to transform ZBC into a public broadcaster, and calling for a discussion on ethics and professionalism in the media hosted by universities or other autonomous professional institutions.

2015 AMB

Several significant positive developments were highlighted in this AMB following the adoption of a new constitution in 2013. These included media provisions in the new constitution, outcomes of the Information and Media Panel of Inquiry, licensing of new players in the broadcast sector, growth in ICTs, an increase in mobile penetration, a marked increase in online newspapers, the striking off of criminal defamation, and progress on digital migration. The negative developments included the closure of some media houses (*Zimbabwe Mail, Southern Eye, The Zimbabwean* and *Flame News*), the detrimental impact of the economic crisis on the media, threats made against private media by politicians, the arrest of state media officials, ongoing harassment of media workers, the detention of citizens for expressing their opinions, and lack of contracts for many media workers. Recommendations focused mainly on advocacy activities and included advocacy for media ethics classes in all training institutions, the elimination of gender disparities, the alignment of media laws to the provisions in the constitution, raising awareness of provisions of the new constitution and challenging laws not aligned with the constitution. It also recommended the involvement of media trainers; increasing awareness on media issues such as media performance, standards, and corruption, information sharing; action on critical issues such as sexual harassment, development of internal policies on gender, corruption, and freebies; and the orientation of new journalists on ethics.

2020 AMB

Positive developments highlighted in this AMB included the improved relationship between the media and government; the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting had been proactive in disclosing information; there was some commitment by the government to reform laws that affect the media; and digital media had increased the participation of under-represented communities. Negative developments included delays in media law reform, the decline in standards of journalism, the public broadcaster's lack of independence, poor salaries and working conditions of journalists, and the absence of private and community television stations. Other negative developments highlighted were the lack of diversity

amongst new radio stations, concerns about print media sustainability, the impact of internet shutdowns on democratic processes, the decline in levels of ethical practice, and the proliferation of fake news, disinformation and misinformation. Recommendations included a discussion on the establishment of an employment council for journalists; the alignment of laws that affect the media with the 2013 constitution; a recognition of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe as a self-regulatory body; improved salaries and working conditions for journalists; investment in the training of journalists and editors; collaboration between media houses, journalists and training institutions; the need to support law reform efforts of media and civil society organisations; and standardisation of training curricula.

6. Analysing the Recommendations

6.1 Recurrent issues in the recommendations

The previous chapter shows discernible trends regarding recurrent challenges in the media environments across the sub-Saharan African region. These include reluctance by governments to enact access to information; political influence on the editorial aspects of state/public broadcasters and media regulatory bodies; retention and promulgation of restrictive laws; harassment of journalists; the marginalisation of women from leadership positions in the media, and their negative representation in media content; poor working conditions and low salaries for journalists; weak representation of journalists; falling journalistic standards; and corruption in the media.

As noted above, these tendencies are primarily shaped by the political context within which the media and civil society operate and have a corrosive impact on developing a democratic culture on the continent.

> "...these tendencies are primarily shaped by the political context within which the media and civil society operate.."

Nonetheless, progress is also discernible in some countries where legal provisions have now been made for access to information (Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique and Nigeria); several community radio stations have been licensed; media diversity and pluralisation have been achieved to a significant degree; and where digital media are allowed to flourish with little hindrance. The recommendations also point to the continued need for a strong and influential civil society involved in improving the operations of journalistic organisations, and developing an enabling and adaptive policy framework in sub-Saharan Africa.

6.2 Emerging issues in the recommendations

There is also a visible pattern in emergent issues affecting the media across sub-Saharan Africa. Key among these are those related to media sustainability, the safety of journalists, sluggish development of ICT policies, fake news, misinformation and disinformation, and the lack of convergent regulations. These challenges are fostered by the media's changing operational environment, which has become decidedly digital, and the impact of crisis conditions on revenue generation. Given the rapid changes in the industry, adaptive policy-making is proving difficult and slow for most African countries, hence the persistence of these emerging challenges.

Ultimately, one could argue that the continuous transformations in the socio-political and technological contexts shaping news media operations preclude any possibility of a permanent solution to both recurrent and emerging challenges. However, they do suggest the need for continuous struggle in pursuing the democratisation of both media entities and the broader social environment in which they operate.

7. Conclusion

A few conclusive points can be made from the thematic analytical treatise highlighted.

All the AMBs consistently demonstrate that African countries provide for at least freedom of expression, although a number also specify freedom of the press in their national constitutions. Most have ratified international instruments which provide for and seek to enhance fundamental freedoms. However, the AMBs also show that this promising picture is tainted by the inclusion of significant pullback conditions in the same national constitutions, and the enactment and retention of restrictive laws on the statute books. Furthermore, the AMBs indicate that several African countries, such as Namibia, have been slow to enact laws promoting access to information, especially information held by state functionaries.

The AMBs show that African media are generally plural but less diverse in content, and primarily patriarchal in their coverage of women. Although print media is expansive in most

> "The AMBs show that African media are generally plural but less diverse in content..."

African countries, circulation figures are dropping, and the cost of newspapers and magazines limits accessibility. Most countries have a significant number of broadcasting services (in particular radio, which remains the cheapest and most accessible medium on the continent) across the three tiers of state/public media, commercial media and community media. However, it is also noted that both print and broadcast media face sustainability challenges due to falling advertising revenues and limited state support for the media, which threatens to constrict the communicative space and the range of issues and social groups covered. In addition, the AMBs show limited desire by most African governments to provide guarantees, in law, for editorial independence in the state/public media.

The practice of journalism is an area of concern. The quality of journalism seems to be dropping due to poor working conditions, job precarity, poor training, low pay, and weak representation through professional and labour unions. These factors push journalists to abandon key social stories and to extort money to cover stories. In countries such as South Africa, junior journalists are preferred in place of experienced ones to cut costs, lowering the quality of content. Furthermore, the ethics problem is recurring, with some AMBs indicating gaps in the availability and implementation of both internal and field codes of ethics.

The AMBs indicate that most African countries have fallen behind in providing adequate regulation of digital media. They also highlight a tendency towards potential infringement of citizens' rights through provisions for the interception of communication between individuals, where laws that speak to digital media have been broached. Most recommendations in respect of each of these elements emphasise the role of civil society in lobbying and partnering with key stakeholders, including the media and state functionaries, in pursuit of reforms and interventions that are useful in mitigating the highlighted challenges.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the African Media Barometer is an indispensable tool for evaluating the state of the media as a key oversight functionary of democratic politics,

> "... the African Media Barometer is an indispensable tool for evaluating the state of the media..."

processes and institutions in each African country. It provides a comprehensive continental understanding of contemporary challenges faced by the media in terms of specific key indicators and recommendations. Country-specific recommendations and evaluations are vital given the differences in socio-political and cultural experiences, realities and histories between countries. The AMB also allows us to trace progress regarding recommendations made to specific recurrent and emerging challenges and to think about necessary interventions to promote a free press and access to information in the future. It is also imperative to evaluate the AMB's impact on policy reforms and the democratic enhancement of the media space in Africa. This requires engagement with policymakers and other stakeholders to understand whether and how their policy-making decisions are shaped, not just by the AMB itself but by other sources of information and ideas informed by the data and information contained in the AMBs.

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APPENDIX A

	LESOTHO - 2018: THEMATIC TRENDS			
Indicator	Freedom of Expression/ Media	The Media Landscape	The Broadcasting Landscape	Media Practices/Professional Standards
	Military threats against investigative journalists that write critical articles about the LDF. Journalists do not completely feel free to express themselves without fear. Self-censorship. Legal framework still significantly restrictive on the media (14 according to MISA). 2016 – Constitutional Court ruled that the Criminal Defamation Law in the Penal Code was unconstitutional. Law was repealed.	Media polarisation. Media landscape not diverse in terms of content and organisation. Little support for the media from government. Difficult for new entrants to sustain themselves. No daily paper (since the first AMB). Advertising market constricted. Government uses advertising to stifle critical media.	Government maintains strict control over broadcasting which is largely controlled through the Communications Ministry. The Lesotho Communications Authority not seen as autonomous as it is appointed and controlled by the political head of the Ministry. Government does not licence organisations perceived as hostile. Lesotho Broadcasting Bill 2004 remained un-enacted to protect control. State broadcaster not sufficiently funded which compromises their ability to provide quality and diverse content.	Journalists at state media operate as both journalists and civil servants. The media seem to have problems with accuracy attributed to lack of training, lack of knowledge of specialised subject areas and the tendency to focus on government officials. Sensationalisation of news is a problem. Corruption in the media rife. No recourse outside the court system for people with grievances against the media. Poor working conditions and low salaries. Defunct or dysfunctional professional bodies.
GENERAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS				
Context provided – Political instability seems endemic to Lesotho although the situation seemed to have improved at the time the 2018 AMB was written.				
RECOMMENDATIONS				
Need for media law reform.	Mobilisation of funds for local media organisations (not clear whether this is at the national or community levels). Media law reforms and strong self-regulatory media.		Need for transforming the state broadcaster into a public broad-caster.	Revival of professional bodies. Using awards to promote quality journalism.

APPENDIX B

List of AMBs analysed

Benin	4	(2011, 2014, 2018, 2021)
Botswana	3	(2011, 2014, 2018)
Burkina Faso	1	(2019)
Cameroon	3	(2011, 2014, 2018)
Côte d'Ivoire	2	(2012, 2016)
Democratic Republic of Congo	1	(2012)
Eswatini	3	(2011, 2014, 2018)
Ethiopia	1	(2019)
Gabon	1	(2016)
Ghana	3	(2011, 2013, 2017)
Guinea	1	(2011)
Kenya	2	(2012, 2016)
Lesotho	3	(2012, 2015, 2018)
Madagascar	3	(2012, 2016, 2019)
Malawi	2	(2012, 2016)
Mali	3	(2012, 2016, 2021)
Mauritius	1	(2018)
Mozambique	3	(2011, 2014, 2018)
Namibia	3	(2011, 2015, 2018)
Nigeria	3	(2011, 2015, 2019)
Congo Brazzaville	2	(2013, 2018)
Senegal	2	(2013, 2018)
South Africa	2	(2013, 2018)
Tanzania	3	(2012, 2015, 2019)
Togo	3	(2013, 2017, 2021)
Uganda	2	(2012, 2016)
Zambia	3	(2013, 2017, 2021)
Zimbabwe	3	(2012, 2015, 2020)

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