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Ten Years of Broadcast Media Deregulation: The Liberator As A Drag

Broadcast media operators and stakeholders rolled out drums in August in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the deregulation of the sector. Despite the clicking of glasses, opinions of stakeholders are still divided as to the impact the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), has made in the sector. While some say the broadcast sector has achieved its potentials, others contend that there is still room for improvement.

Basically, the NBC came into being about 10 years after that experience. It is saddled with the responsibility to oversee the deregulation of the sector and monitor the activities of broadcasters with a view to ensure that they meet standards.

But in the last three years, the regulatory body has attempted to assert itself and prepare adequately for the performance of its statutory duty, particularly during election period. This is reflected in the series of capacity building programmes organized by the commission for practitioners across board in the industry. That
In fact, the 10th anniversary celebration of the Commission on August 27 in Abuja was used by many to charge it to be more assertive. The information and National Orientation Minister, Professor Jerry Gana specifically urged the commission to assert its regulatory authority to sanitise the broadcasting sector.

The minister was emphatic on the need to critically investigate complaints by individual and group on the operation of some broadcasting station and apply the rules.

"There is need to protect the personality and integrity of individuals from unnecessary attack, if not, very soon people will refuse to serve the nation", he said.

According to Gana, a major impact of democracy since 1999 is the restoration of the freedom of expression. But he cautioned that it should be properly cultivated to ensure that it is not abused.

Gana cited the growth made in the broadcasting industry in the last three years as another dividend of democracy. He, however, urged the practitioners, through their mediums, to give Nigerians a clear sense of direction so that they are not manipulated to cause chaos in the on-going political process.

But the thrust of the key-note address presented by the former information minister, Professor Walter Ofonagoro was the significance of setting a minimum standard of qualification for those that would be involved in the election coverage through commentaries and analyses on radio and television.

While commending the NBC for success in its regulatory functions so far, Ofonagoro expressed fear that a dearth of a qualified and experienced man-power might affect the industry as politics gather momentum towards and during the forthcoming elections.

He emphasized the traditional role of the broadcast media to inform, educate, mobilize and sensitise the citizenry for effective and constructive participation in the electoral processes, while noting that there is also the need to perform these functions within the set down rules.

Therefore, he advised the NBC to show firmness in enforcing the rules and broadcasting code in the interest of peaceful transition and national political stability.

"I therefore urge all owners and practitioners in the broadcasting industry in Nigeria, both government-owned and private, to note the enormous responsibilities and challenges posed on the industry and the nation by the present transition process and to take all necessary measures to effectively meet the challenges in the overall national interest," he remarked.

Ofonagoro posed the questions; "what is to be done when election officials decide to announce false election results - (i.e.) what the radio and television journalist present knows to be falsified results?"

Saying that "this is not a hypothetical question as the situation actually arose during the 1983 elections into the State Houses of Assembly and some governorship positions. Should the journalist knowledge prevent him from carrying out his duty which is simply announcing what the election officials have given to him?" he further queried.

He asked further: "Is he bound to feel that a level playing field requires equal opportunities being given to the opposition parties to denounce the announced falsified results? What is the position of the NBC in this type of scenario?"

Mallam Nasir Danladi Bako, director-general of NBC noted that in the last 10 years, the NBC has recorded significant progress in the deregulation and regulation of the broadcast sector. He said that "the once forgotten commission" had been able to license and monitor more than 260 public and private broadcasting stations in the country.

Corroborating Bako, the commission's pioneer director general, Dr. Tom Adaba recalled: "It was challenging. There were a number of pressures and intrigues. In fact, many of the people interviewed were told not to come to the NBC because they were skeptical that, in three months, the commission would be gone."

Adaba was, however, full of gratitude for the gain of what NBC spearheaded 10 years ago. "It (private broadcasting) was one of the best things ever done to this country, knowing the sensibility of the broadcasting media. It has moved the media industry into modernization. Certainly it is a different environment now."

Since 1999 when a change of leadership was effected with Mallam Bako as the new Director General, efforts were made to break new grounds to see that the airwaves are effectively monitored and regulated. Workshops designed to sanitise the broadcasting industry were organised regularly for all the electronic media
organizations in the country. The commission also organized training courses in news, programmes, presentation, engineering and management for journalists and management officers of the broadcast organisations.

The commission has also undertaken trainings of its staff locally and internationally to sharpen their skills and equip them with international standards. The initiative, which is continuous, the NBC said, is aimed at restoring broadcasting's glory and guarantee professionalism in the industry.

The ten years of NBC’s existence, however, has not been a bed of roses. One area that has generated so much controversy and pitched the commission against broadcasters are the issues of sanctions against 'misconduct' by broadcasters, local content requirements and piracy. Others are issues of exclusivity of broadcasting rights, political broadcast, profane music and video clips and non-payment of fees and taxes, are always involved when the complaint of breaches comes up.

In the pursuit of its functions particularly, in the area of sanction, turning points were reached in 1999 and 2000 when the commission decided to roll out a full measure of sanctions to defaulting stations on the payment of licence renewal fees and 2.5 per cent of each station's gross income, in accordance with the NBC Act. While some stations complied, other embarked on what the commission termed "campaign of calumny and chicanery using their stations as weapon to confuse the general public, which is another offence altogether."

The fall-out, however, was the revocation of the licences of all defaulting stations. This forced concerned broadcasters to pay the fees. Still disappointed, however, they took the commission to the law court where the case is still pending.

There are other blight to the operation of the Commission and its enabling laws. Some observers believe that the NBC lacks independence in its operations. They points out that the Commission is run by a government-appointed, Director General, whose appointment is not subject to legislative review. The situation they argue gives room for the appointment of persons who are politically sympathetic to the executive. Indeed, for almost two years, the present director general acted as a sole administrator due to the failure of the government to appoint a board as provided for by the NBC Act. The ACT provides that the board shall consist of a chairman and nine other members who "shall be persons of proven integrity, experience and specialized knowledge in the broadcasting industry...." It took the Media Rights Agenda going to court to compel the president to constitute the board for the NBC and other media related organisations (see page 8 for more on the legal framework).

Again, the Commission seems unable to supervise the activities of public funded (State and Federal owned) broadcast stations. In most cases, these stations operate as a law unto themselves. They very often ignore set down legal codes and professional ethics in their operations and in very uncritical manner supports the government of the day. This is largely influenced by the fact that subvention to the public broadcast stations are subject to the whims and caprices of government officials. They employ themselves and are employed as executive mouthpiece and tool for executive propaganda. Opposing views are either blacked out or distorted and the managers of these stations do not see their actions as disservice to their viewers and the general public.

In spite of these glaring and prevalent misdemeanors, many believe that the NBC issues reprimand only when the voices being denied access is of interest to it.

Another area where the NBC has not made significant stride is the opening up of the airwaves for community broadcasting. It has been established all over the world that community broadcasting is the most important vehicle of getting people to speak out their desires and contribute towards national growth, and to pass out vital information that can turn around the socio-cultural problems of a given society. These, community broadcasting can achieve because they are available, accessible, acceptable, accountable to and express the needs and wants of their host communities. They are purely public service in nature, grassroots based, cheap to acquire, sustain and maintain such that their host communities can identify with them.

In comparative terms, the broadcast licensing process in South Africa, Ghana and Republic of Benin enjoy more liberalism and allow community broadcasting with their roles explicitly spelt out. The result is that in those countries, broadcasting has permeated the rural communities and opened access to political participation and development for the people.

As the celebrations party rented the air last August, the new set of licences issued recently to 16 radio and five television stations operators was cited as one of the major achievements of the NBC. Also launched at
the ceremony marking the tenth anniversary were two books - *Broadcasting Regulation in Nigeria* and *Nigerian Broadcasting Code*.

"Today we have re-launched the code so that practitioners will know. This is one of the events we used to make sure that more people get to know that there are guidelines, rules and regulations that guide the broadcasting industry. These are what form the code. It is also the instrument with which we operate. Every broadcaster should know. Not only that, he should have it and study it perfectly," remarked Mallam Bako.

As all stakeholders bask in the euphoria of the achievement of the last ten years 10 years, the NBC will do well to consolidate its achievements and move steps further to have a truly liberalized industry. The commission appears to have realized this fact. In this direction, the Commission envisages to be more independent. Also, it wants to move away from the same status as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), which the Commission regulates. The Commission says the NTA and FRCN “see the NBC as their stable, since all of them are under the information and national orientation ministry.”

Although the NBC is adjudged to have fared well, the acid test of experience as the airwaves' regulator in the last ten years of its existence will be the on-going search for peaceful political transition. The fact that the commission has not midwifed any democratic political transition may pose a challenge for the regulatory outfit whose birth on August 24, 1992, remains a watershed in the history of broadcasting in Nigeria.

We can only wish the NBC a Happy Birthday and best of wishes for the future.

### The Fruits of Liberalisation:

**Independent Broadcast Stations In Nigeria**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Radio</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIT, Lagos</td>
<td>Ray Power, Lagos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Channels TV, Lagos</td>
<td>Ray Power II, Lagos</td>
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<tr>
<td>DBN TV, Lagos</td>
<td>Cool FM, Lagos</td>
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<tr>
<td>MST, Obosi</td>
<td>Minaj FM, Obosi</td>
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<tr>
<td>MITV, Lagos</td>
<td>Rhythm 93.7, Lagos</td>
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<tr>
<td>DITV, Kaduna</td>
<td>Jeremy Radio -Warri</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITV, Benin</td>
<td>Independent Radio, Benin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minaj TV, Lagos</td>
<td>Star FM, Lagos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galaxy TV, Ibadan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL: 9**

**TOTAL: 8**

**Global Satellite Television**

| AIT, Lagos         |
| Minaj Cable Network (MCM), Obosi |

**Satellite re-distribution**

| Comet Associates Limited, Lagos |
| Disc Broadcasting Services, Lagos |
| Transmit Network Limited, Lagos |
| Entertainment Television Limited, Lagos |
| Here and There Cable Television, Ibadan |
| Delta Telecommunications & Electronicals, Ilorin |
| Worldlink Network Limited, Effurun |
| Modern Communications, Aba |
| Communication Trends Nig. Cable and Satellite, Port-Harcourt |
| West Midlands Communication, Ibadan |
Bauchi Satellite/Cable Limited., Bauchi
IBW Cable Satellite, Communications, Benin
Hash-Tronics Satellite Communications, Kano
ABG Communications Limited, Kaduna
Details Nigeria Limited, Lagos

TOTAL: 17

Recent broadcast licences but yet to begin operation

Specialized Broadcasters
Atlantic FM, Lagos - broadcast in French
Spectrum FM, Lagos - to specialize in news
Brilla FM, Lagos - focus on sports
Unilag FM, University of Lagos - academic

Others
Radio Gotel Limited, Yola, Adamawa State
Joy FM Limited, Makurdi, Benue State
Nagarta Radio, Kaduna, Kaduna State
Pacific FM, Oshogbo, Osun State
Choffan Communications Limited, Oraifite, Anambra State
Zuma FM, Abuja, FCT
Okin Communications, Offa, Kwara State
Sunshine Radio Limited, Ondo, Ondo State
Radio Savannah Limited, Kano, Kano State
Unity Broadcasting Company; Crowder Communications
Films Laboratory and Production Services Limited, Kano, Kano State.
Silverbird Communications (TV), Lagos
Nagarta Communications Gusau
Unity TV Communications, Abuja
Monarch Communications, Lagos
Choffan Communications, Akwa

NBC Decree: The Good and the Bad

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Decree 38 of 1992 has become synonymous with broadcasting in Nigeria. This reason is not far fetched; the promulgation of the degree was not only preceded by a prolonged debate on the merits and disadvantages of permitting private participation in broadcasting, the industry has also witnessed a revolution since its promulgation.

The decree establishes the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and vested it with the power to enforce the decree, particularly the provisions, which relate to approval of licenses and allocations of frequencies, among others.

However, revolutionary as the decree has been to the broadcast sub-sector of the Nigerian media, some of the provisions have met with stiff opposition from many players in the industry and sundry press freedom and freedom of expression groups. The contention is that those provisions are inimical to the development of a free, independent and optimally functioning broadcast medium.

Specifically, sections of the decree which have continued to incur the disapproval of participants and watchers of the industry, include Sections 2(1)(b) as well as section 9(2) and 9(3). Section 2(1)(b) of the decree established the NBC with the power to "receive, process and consider applications for ownership of radio and..."
television stations, including cable television services, direct satellite broadcast and other medium of broadcasting."

Section 2(1) as well as section 9(2) and 9(3) of the decree suggest that the granting of licences is a function exercised by the Commission. It is clear that the ultimate decision as to who should be granted a broadcasting licence is made by the Head of State for section 2(1)(c) of the decree restricts the function of the commission (vis-à-vis the granting of licences) to merely "recommending applications through the Minister (of Information) to the President, Commander-in Chief of the Armed Forces for the grant of radio and television licences." The decision to grant a broadcasting licence is thus a purely subjective one.

Although section 9(1) and (2) of the decree set out objective criteria (such as the corporate status and ownership of the applicant for a broadcasting licence, non-affiliation with any foreign interest, compliance with such objective criteria "shall not entitle an applicant to the grant of a licence".

The decree thus affords latitude for a licencing decision to be motivated by purely political consideration, and stands in sharp contrast to the licencing process in other African countries such as South Africa, where the Independent Broadcasting Authority (the equivalence of the Nigerian NBC) allocates frequencies only after public hearings, and based on publicly available criteria.

Establishments licenced to broadcast under the Decree No. 38 of 1992 are subject to strict monitoring and control by the Commission in relation to purely technical as well as editorial matters. Thus, the Commission is empowered to approve the transmitter power, the location of stations and areas of coverage of a licenced establishment, as well as to regulate the types of broadcast equipment to be used by it. Operators of licenced stations are obliged to make their broadcast facilities (including equipment and station logbook) available for inspection by the inspectorate staff of the Commission.

With regard to editorial matters, the Commission exercises some control over the programming of licenced establishments since, under the third schedule to the decree (which sets out the standard terms on which broadcasting licence is granted), a licence must contain a schedule of proposed programmes over a given period of time, accompanied by a synopsis of each of the programme plans.

The editorial independence of licenced establishments is further undermined by section 9(1)(e) of the decree, which obliges operators of licenced stations to ensure that such stations are used "to promote national interest, unity and cohesion."

The implication of this provision and the effect it has had in practice is to preclude licenced stations from featuring, say, stories concerning the plight of ethnic minorities such as the Niger Delta indigenes who have been vocal in their demand for a better deal from the Federal Government and the oil multinationals regarding the environmental degradation of their communities, since such stories are likely to be considered by the government as promoting ethnicity or disaffection.

The overall effect of various provisions of the decree is that the controls exercised by the commission in respect of licenced establishments are invariably dictated by the interests and policies of the government.

Thus, not only are all the members of the Commission appointed by the Head of State, but Section 6 of the decree also specifically provides that the Minister of Information may give the Commission directives of a general character relating generally to particular matters with regards to the exercise of its functions, and it is the duty of the Commission to comply with such directives.

One such matter in respect of which the Commission is obliged to comply with directives given by the Minister of Information would apparently be in respect of the Commission's disciplinary powers over "erring" broadcasters.

By section 2(1)(n) of the Decree, the Commission is empowered to apply sanctions, including revocation of licences of stations, which do not operate in accordance with "the public interest." Since officers of government invariably perceive their interests as being synonymous with "the public interest", sanctions are likely to be applied for purely political considerations.

In an apparent effort to strike a balance between political and religious interests, Section 10 of the decree precludes the grant of broadcasting licences to religious organizations and political parties. This, however, operates against the background of a public broadcasting system, including the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), which is controlled by the federal government and which traditionally advances the political interests of officers of government or the ruling party.
In such context, it is arguable that the concept of pluralism in broadcasting will be better advanced by a system of equitable allocation of frequencies to political interests, rather than one which completely outlaws political proprietorship or broadcasting facilities, while giving the ruling party the latitude to advance its own political interests through the public broadcasting system.

Another section of the Commission, which has received the objections of the private broadcast operators, is Section 13(1)(e) and 14(2) which prescribe fees payable by licenced stations.

The wide spread fear is that, it could be used as an instrument of censorship by the NBC, which could arbitrarily increase these regimes of fees to serve political purposes. A recourse to the situation under the Wireless Telegraph Act Caps 469 Laws of the Federation, 1990 vesting the power to review fees on the national assembly would be most appropriate.

In addition to this, the NBC also requires all privately owned broadcast stations to pay 2.5 percent of their gross turnover as annual charges without regard to operational exigencies.

Following continued outcry by stakeholders, the government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar intervened. On May 26, 1999, three days before it handed over power to a democratically elected civilian government, the military regime of General Abubakar promulgated an amendment to the NBC Decree No. 38 of 1992. By the amendment called NBC (amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999, the following four functions were added to the original decree. The amendment decree gives the power to collect radio and television fees to the NBC, brought NTA under NBC authority, pegged local content of broadcast stations at 60 per cent and mandates the NBC to arbitrate in conflicts in the industry.

The power given to the NBC to collect television and radio licence fees was a fulfillment of the pledge made in this regard by the then information minister, Chief Nwodo (Jnr.) at the opening ceremony of the head office complex of MiNAJ Radiovision and several other forum.

But in doing this, the decree only left more confusion without successfully addressing the salient issues that the IBAN had along been calling attention to. The decree gives the power to collect these fees to the NBC contrary to the Constitution passed into law three days later which vest this responsibility on the local government. The area, among several others, that the IBAN had consistently called on the government to address is not just the collection of these dues, but how proceeds from the collection would be shared among broadcast stations, which are to benefit from it.

Breath of Fresh Air Hits Ghanian Media

After many years of repression and strong-arm tactics under the military regime and the no less despotic civilian era of John Jerry Rawlings, reprieve came the way of Ghanaian media in January 2001. Thanks to the change of baton in the government of the Anglophone West African country following general elections held in December 2000 which saw the emergence of Mr. John Agyekum Kufour as the new President. Despite the cessation of repression, however, the economic environment for media operation remains suffocating.

These were the views of Mr. Haruna Attah, publisher/managing editor of Accra Mail newspaper in a recent interview with Osaro Odemwingie.

According to Mr. Attah, government/media relations in Ghana especially after the coup of 1982 was characterised by mistrust.

This, according to him, arose from government’s excessive control, especially of the public media. The independent media, he added, "were under much threats and every thing was subjected to serious clubbing from the government." The result, he said, was that many journalists, including himself, suffered imprisonment in the hands of the government.

The situation, he added, has however experienced a huge positive change since the enthronement of the current government in January 2001.

On the economic environment for media practice, Mr. Attah said the Ghanaian media is highly distressed due to the high cost of media input. The problem, he said, is compounded by the fact that there are no investible funds from the banks for media operations.

He also spoke on a wide range of issues affecting the media (see interview below).
“Ghanaian Media is Quite Rudimentary” – Attah

Nigeria and Ghana share a lot in common. It is no wonder that some institutions in both countries have also had similar experiences. One of such institutions is the media. Until December 2000 when the present government of President John Kufour assumed office, replacing President Jerry Rawlings, the Ghanian media suffered abuses just like its Nigerian counterpart.

During the regime of President Rawlings, many leading journalists in Ghana suffered arbitrary imprisonments. One of them is Mr. Haruna Attah publisher/manager editor, Accra Mail.

Mr. Attah, is a graduate of Graphic Design from the University of Science and Technology, Ghana. He was into films and graphic designs for a number of years. From there he went into publishing, starting with a magazine called Imagine, up till 1992 when the ban on party politics was lifted. He had a chance to work for a newspaper, The Statesmen. He began as a columnist for the newspaper and later became its editor. After six years on the job he resigned and established his own newspaper, Accra Mail, where he is now the Managing Editor.

Mr. Attah spoke to Osaro Odewwingie who was in Ghana recently. This interview was originally conducted for Dr. Ayo Olukotun for a research project work he is undertaking.

Excerpts:

What has been the dominant issue in media/government relation in Ghana, taking it from 1986 up till this year?

Around 1986, the dominant issue was the existence of a newspaper law which says you could not establish a newspaper if you didn't have a licence at that time from the Ministry of Information and that was distinct from registration at the GPO (General Post Office). So you would register with the GPO as it is done all over the world, and in addition to that you had to obtain a licence to operate. That was used basically to deny those people that the government of the day, PNDC, did not want to publish. This continued till 1992 when the newspaper law was repealed after the adoption of the 1992 constitution.

Between 1986 and that time, newspapers had to use different guises to do their publishing. Sports papers were very popular then because sports was considered apolitical. So a few of my colleagues at that time who wanted to publish did sports newspapers. In-between they could get in some of their political messages. That was the disposition and the landscape was very dry. There were not many newspapers then. It was after the repeal of the newspapers licencing law in 1992 that there was a blossoming of newspapers including the electronic media.

How do ethnic issues play out in the Ghanaian media both in terms of ownership and in terms of focus/reportage? Is it positive or negative?

Luckily, for us ethnocentricity hasn't been a very important thing in our country. Save for the northern region ethnic flare up, that was between the Konkonbes and the Gombes in the early and mid 90's, that unfortunate social cancer has not beset us so much. We have tried to down play it. Of course during the reign of the PNDC there was the perception that one ethnic group, that is the people from the Volta region, were dominating the country because Rawlings’ Chief of Security and top military brass were from the same region. These were played up in the media, but for some reasons they were not used as an excuse for any mayhem and that kind of thing. Every now and then the ethnic thing comes up but it was never quite feasted into what one sees in other African countries.

By some coincidence, I want to believe so, a lot of the owners of independent newspapers come from one region, that is the centre region. If you look at the papers, whether it is The Chronicle, The Crusading Guide, The Dispatch, in fact almost all of them are owned by Fantis or people from that region. But of course, like I am saying it is a co-incident because they don't use it for ethnic hegemony. So I would say yes, ethnic things are there but they have not dominated our work. I come from the North of Ghana and I was editing The Statesman which belongs to someone from the Eastern region. Now I have my newspaper and I employ all sorts of people from around the country.

What is the topography, by which I mean the spread, of media organisation. Are they all Accra-based or scattered around the country?

Oh!, clearly Accra-centered. In fact, apart from Accra, there is hardly any other place you can talk of. Kumasi ... you can count on your finger tips. Newspapers, both government and privately owned ones are
concentrated in Accra. In Kumasi, you have a few newspapers that operate in the Ashanti Region. A few attempts have been made to establish newspapers in the North like The New Ghanaian but all floundered.

**What could be the reason(s) for the failure of those attempts to get media organisations off in the North?**

It has to do with the economy. Everything is concentrated here (in Accra); business is concerted here. So if you are going to do a newspaper in the north, you would not get a good printer, you wouldn't get the other auxiliaries; plate making, in terms of even materials to buy when you fall short. And so on, and so forth.

Then again there is no market. People around the country want to read the news from the capital and not the other way round. Regional newspapers… people do not show much interest if it is not from Accra. Also in advertising; can you imagine that most of us in the capital where all the big advertising companies are based cannot get adverts. Can you imagine the situation if you are 600 kilometers away where there is no advertising, where there is no business.

Ghana is a very small country unlike Nigeria. The market we are all targeting is a very, very small market unlike Nigeria where one state alone would take the whole population of Ghana. So all of these factors make it difficult for the media to survive.

**How strong is the independent media in Ghana in terms of its reach?**

Very, very vulnerable. It is not strong at all. As I speak to you now, I should be very, very honest, some of my colleagues would mention all sorts of circulation figures. But I can be very honest with you and say that right now I do 4,000 copies.

**How serious is the media taken in Ghana? To what extent is it able to influence government policies and actions?**

It has great influence. And we also have the figures, the pass along rate in about four to five times. So even when I say I do 4,000 copies, actually I have about 20,000 people reading it. Because here in Ghana one person buys a newspaper and an average of five people read that same newspaper. So I am talking about 20,000 people who read my newspaper every day. And because it is not bloody-minded, it is actually considered a serious minded newspaper. I supposed that is why it doesn't have big circulation figure because from what we get from the vendors it is almost as if the paper is not "hot". That means it is not bloody-minded, it doesn't go out to hit people below the belt or go for the jugular. That means those who read my paper, for example, are people who want to go out and buy the paper without the headline being the attraction. So in that case, I will say it is a fairly influential newspaper and we have been going on for two and a half years now. That should tell you something. But the others have varying degrees of circulation figures according to them, but I really don't know the place they are getting tens of thousands, which they claim.

**What has been the nature of government/media relations in Ghana since 1986? It is possible to look at this as phases; Rawling, as a military ruler, Rawlings as a civilian president and this present Kufuor government?**

Well, we can even go as far as 1982 after the coup. Getting to 1986 the military was in government then. The PNDC had gotten hold of everything in this country. Around 1986 was the height of the power of the PNDC and so they controlled everything. The issue of independent media was totally unheard of. It was state-owned media, which was tight-fisted and controlled by the government then. And so the rest of us were just flaunting around. The status continued till 1992.

And even after 1992 when the military government transformed itself into what it called the NPC from PNDC, it metamorphosed into a concise civilian political party, the control was still there because then they won the election of 1992. So in effect they still had the vestiges of the PNDC and the whole thing was still there, excessive control especially of the state-owned newspapers. The independent newspapers were under much threats and everything was subjected to serious clubbing from the then government. That is why someone like me was jailed for alleged contempt. Because it was a story concerning Mrs. Rawlings we did which she said libeled her, she went to court. When the case was being heard she got lawyers to say we were in contempt for one thing or the other, but the trial judge was of the view that there was no contempt in his court then they took it to the Court of Appeal and the Appeal Court judge said we were in contempt of the lower court which had set us free in the first place. And I went to jail.
So that was the kind of relationship that existed between the media and the then government. A lot of my other colleagues went to jail during that period from that 1986 to way after 1992. They went to jail or had some problems or the other. Excreta were thrown at the newspaper offices and all sorts of impediments were put on our way. And of course this new government, which is very media friendly. They have even already canceled some of the criminal libel laws in the statue book. They are now pressing for the Freedom of Information law and so on. So as I speak to you right now, we feel a little better with this new dispensation than we felt in the past. Although in the past we have had democracy going but the media people were very much on the firing line as it were.

Looking at the brief period since this present government came to office, has there been a change in government/media relations and to what extent would you say the media is taken seriously and hence influences government policies?

Oh!, indeed the media is taken very seriously by the present government. Even if you use the way they respond to issues from the media as a yardstick, you can say they take the media very seriously because they are always on the radio stations explaining their actions, they send out releases, they talk to editors and so on. The latest issue that explains this very graphically is the issue of the $20,000 proposed for members of parliament to buy cars ostensibly to work with. It broke in the media, it broke in the state-owned Daily Graphic and everybody took it up. All the newspapers and radio were saying this wasn't the right time and so on. No one was questioning the right of an MP to own a car for his work, but people were saying it was probably insensitive because we have just declared ourselves highly indebted and a poor country and so on. It blew up and the President in fact came out to make it clear that the proposal didn't emanate from the legislature and that anyway, the Executive would need to give the final approval, but it hasn't. So that issue has been put oh hold and that is because it came out in the media and people talked and expressed themselves.

But there was even the issue of the Sahara oil contract. When there was a lot of talk about the Sahara oil the government had to explain so many times, in press conferences, press statements and interviews. So it has actually been taking the media very, very seriously. And they are also very ready to answer questions that are raised before them.

In fact, on the public relations point of view we met the President, that is the Ghana Journalists Association, and we said to him that in the West African Sub-region it seems that governments help the media by donating houses for press centres. So a couple of months ago, the President actually did give a media centre as it were. Of course that is part of public relation, but it does shows the kind of sensitivity they have towards the press.

Would you say the experience you related regarding your encounter with the state, arrest and detention was a norm or an isolated incident? If you say it was the norm, could you give me some names of persons who suffered similar fate as you? Besides, sentencing you to a term of imprisonment, could you recall the persecution going even as far as the prison, like being subjected to unusual rules in the prison?

Certainly, I easily remember many senior colleagues like George Biki who went in for 18 months and that was on criminal libel, the Editor of The Ghanaian Chronicle was persecuted, and there was another editor, I can't remember his name now. But he was also sent to jail. The editor of the Free Press was sent to jail, the list is endless. Other "lesser" pressmen were also thrown inside the jail. The publisher of The Ghanaian Chronicle and the publisher of the Free Press were actually facing criminal libel suits in court when this government took over power and then entered a nolle prosequi and quashed it. So, it was quite systematic.

In our case when we were sent to jail, they denied us what people sentenced to jail were usually entitled to. Our lawyers, for example, tried to file a stay of execution pending appeal but they denied that. Our lawyers also appealed, and to our minds there was grounds for the appeal to succeed, but they denied it. So we went to jail and served the sentence. But the most pathetic aspect, for us, was that on the day they were supposed to release us, they took Kweku Bako and myself from the jail house where we were detained and sent us to another jail somewhere where our relations and friends did not know, where we were not told for what reason up till today, I don't know why they did that to us. Until words got round that the editors who were supposed to have been released today are not found. It went out on the radio station and the government panicked, they started saying that we were not missing and they released us. But that they held us for almost a whole day after
we were supposed to have been released. I was in the prison at Akuse, Kwuku Baku was at the prison in Weneba. They took us from prison at mid-night, heavily armed men. So that relations and friends who had to go to the prison to pick us up didn't find us and the prison authorities would not disclose where we were. All these things have added up to that feeling for us that the attitude was one of vindictiveness, not just seeing that the course of law was being followed.

*Let's look at the Economy of media practice in Ghana in terms of the cost implication, circulation, advertising, other imputes.*

It is a highly distressed industry. The cost of newsprint is debilitating. Newsprint is not made in Ghana, it is imported by local businessmen. So we have to buy it from the open market. And at the time when our currency was suffering almost a weekly devaluation, the cost of newsprint kept changing. And when the cost changes and goes higher, it adds to your production cost while your cover price remains the same. So it was very, very difficult. And we didn't start our newspapers here as a major business investment. We went in most of the time without working capital as it were. We started with plugging back our earnings on a day-to-day basis. So we didn't have any solid foundation and that is affecting all of us.

Right now we are all finding it difficult to expand because there are no investible funds available either from the Bank, the government or from business people who just want to come and put maybe $1,000,000 into a big production. So we are very much into little, little production at the moment. Very few of us own our printing presses. Go to an average newspaper office in Accra you just have maybe about four (4) computers. Those that have up to say six (6) like mine are considered well equipped. So these are the operations without strong financial background.

Then two, the question of the market and circulation. We don't have the means to circulate. It is the state-owned media because of their history and due to their facilities that are able to circulate and go far. But they have not been willing to help with our circulation and even charge us for it. So we just have to make do with very inefficient and sometimes crude method of distribution. So I will do my paper today though it is daily, the people of Accra will read this morning but the people of Kumasi, just three or four hours away, would have to read it the next day because the transport to send them in a timely fashion is not available.

And then of course the lack of advertising which is a throw back to the military government of the PNDC. At that time, even in 1992, when the ban on politics was lifted business people were still afraid of the government. They did not want to be seen to be "encouraging" what they called opposition papers, because the independent papers were considered opposition papers. So businessmen would not advertise. Even advertising agencies themselves would not recommend clients that put this in this paper. So we have been starved of advert and everybody knows the implication. So it got to a head sometime this year when our normal 12 pages we couldn't do them because the costs were overwhelming. So if you notice all the private papers are now eight pages which in a sense are not newspapers but college rags because we are not getting the advertising to go with our publications. So we couldn't go on wasting newsprint, impression cost and so on without the corresponding advertising. So you notice that we are now basically eight-page newspapers.

And then there are other factors like the lack of a proper reading culture. If you drive around Accra, we just sell the newspaper by the roadside. One vendor is holding about 10 newspapers. He decides which heading he should sell, he should show to readers. He holds newspapers in an inefficient fashion. Once he decides that your headline is not catchy enough or he thinks you are not popular enough, he doesn't display your newspaper. Even an ordinary commodity, we all know that point of sale helps. So you realize that a lot of the newspapers will get returned and suffer not because they are poor, but because even the vendors are helping indirectly, or perhaps even directly, to sabotage efforts of these newspapers. Because we don't have the way of buying newspapers, Ghanaians are not people who could walk to the next corner and buy newspapers. They have to see it in the traffic when they are driving and then buy. And that tells you also the kind of readership of newspapers in this country. It is a lower-middle class thing, who owns a car, who is in a vehicle, or who is in a public transportation that will stop briefly in the traffic and buy a newspaper. But if we have a proper reading culture... I have lived in the city of Lagos sometime ago perhaps 1979 for six months. And my landlord used to come home in the evening to meet his newspapers, a lot of them, and he used to sit down to read them seriously. That shows a people with the culture of newspaper reading. Here it is yet to develop. So for example, when it rains...
people don’t read newspapers, because newspapers vendors stay indoors. When they don’t come out nobody buys newspapers.

**Can you say the same thing for the electronic media?**

The electronic media are a different kettle of fish. Because of their sense of immediacy, they do not have this kind of problem we have because for them all that you need is your little transistor radio or you can sit in someone’s office or home and listen. So they have a fairly big coverage and again there have been studies, researches, that show that they are quite effective and that they have a lot of influence especially at elections and so on. And they are extremely exciting if you are interested in them; basically because of the interaction they get from the public, listeners who call in to discuss all manner of issues that comes up. And the radio station interestingly also piggyback on us because they pick our stories and expand on them so the public would react to our stories rather than theirs. For instance, my newspaper front-page lead today is on the state of Aids in Ghana and I understand some of the radio stations picked it up and it went round. So they have their job cut out for them and theirs is much simpler than ours. And because of that they get more advertising than us.

Radio listenership does not need so much literacy to follow. We, in the print media are a little disadvantaged because you have to be literate to be able to get information from us. Electronic media also use local languages most of the time so they reach the people much more effectively than us.

**Could you say what the circulation of the most read newspaper is? Forget about official figures.**

The state owned *Daily Graphic* is basically the oldest paper, about 50 years old, they would do between 50,000 to 60,000 copies. That is our flagship if you call it that. So on a particular day, I don't think 200,000 people buy all the newspapers combined in Ghana.

**How many titles do you think there are on the newsstand in Ghana? How may broadcast station, as well?**

There are specific figures which I cannot say off-hand.

**What is the state of Information Technology in the Ghanaian media?**

Very rudimentary. Very, very rudimentary. In fact, when you go to some of the newspaper offices, even peer-to-peer networking (intercom) we don't have it. Some of them hardly use the Internet, some of them do not have a website. They do not even know that you could pick up information some for free on the Internet. So if you ask me about it here in our media rooms I will tell you it is extremely rudimentary. It is all because we don't have investible funds. People just use their 3, 4, computers and that is the end and do cut-and-paste.

Even basic things like camera-ready on laser shore. I think only a few newspapers including mine do it. The rest would print on paper, do cut and paste and send it to the press to do film and plate. So it’s quite rudimentary. It is only *The Daily Graphic* that is well developed and has the state of the art facilities. But for the rest of us, the printing is done on ordinary commercial printing. *Ghanaian Times*, also government-owned, has web offset, but it does not give very good picture quality. One or two companies also have web offset but they are reconditioned machines.

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The Aims and Objectives of Media Rights Agenda are:

a. to promote respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria;

b. to provide protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties;
c. to promote the highest standards of professional ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and

d. to bring about a conducive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and ensure the protection of the journalist’s right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose confidential sources of information.

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EDITORIAL: Traveling The Same Old Inglorious Road

The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), lately has come under severe criticism from people opposed to President Olusegun Obasanjo over the non-airing of their views on the impeachment of President Obasanjo. Specifically, NTA was accused of blacking out the impeachment notice served on President Obasanjo by the House of Representatives on August 13 to resign within two weeks or be impeached. The President was accused of violating the constitution severally by the lawmakers. The impeachment made headlines in all the broadcast stations except NTA.

A few days later, precisely on August 27, the station was to treat the event of the Upper House of the National Assembly, the Senate's discussion of the state of the nation in a manner many observers believe was less that professional. Many observers also believe that the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), the national radio network also publicly funded, skewed its report of the Senate's debate in a manner that favoured the Executive.

The Senate subsequently issued a summon on the Directors General of the media organisations and the Minister for Information and Culture, who supervises them. This followed the passage of a motion to this effect raised by one of its members who raised objections to the reports.

In a rather cheeky response, the minister for information at a public function in Benin City, Edo state capital, said the failure of the NTA to air the story of the ultimatum was due to "technical hitches". In a manner that trivializes the issue and to further incense the sensibilities of Nigerians, the minister said he has never told a lie in all his life.

The point must be made that the minister's explanation smack off sheer cheekiness. The question should be asked; did the NTA not broadcast any news on the day in question? If yes, which it did, what kind of technical problem does he mean? And assuming that there was indeed technical problem say on the video clip of the event, was that sufficient not to have an audio of the news read from the studio?

The issue should be looked at from a much more fundamental premise. This is especially so given that the action of the publicly funded media organisations concerned is not an isolated incident. In the past, such censorship has occurred. An instance is the black out given by FRCN a strike action embarked upon by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to protest the government's arbitrary increase in the prices of petroleum products.

The damage done to Nigeria's political space by the inglorious "Verdict 83" during the Second Republic also remains fresh in our memories. In fact, the history of uncritical support for government of the day or a section of the society by publicly funded media organisations in Nigeria and the attendant consequences as witnessed recently during the military regimes should not be lost on us, especially managers of publicly funded media organisations. Such managers should understand that rather than on the government of the day or its officials, their allegiance should lie with the public who ultimately remains their legitimate employer.

We therefore consider it unacceptable for this practice to rear its head as we approach another civilian-to-civilian transition. We wish to note that the broadcast medium is very important in the dissemination of information anywhere in the world. It has the power to stir up the populace to action as it did in parts of the country in 1983.

Broadcast stations - independent, Federal or State owned are meant to impartially disseminate information to their listening public. They owe their audience this duty which is both a demand and an ethic of the profession as well as its sacred and binding duty to the public it serves. It must reflect on all sides to any matter, when it demands more than one view or opinion, even if and when the matter is not a conflict and more so if it is. This is an imperative it must follow and adhere to in this civilian dispensation when civil liberties ought to be enjoyed to their fullest.

It is on this note that we at Media Rights Agenda condemn the recent act of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) when it deliberately and intentionally blacked out the House of Representatives' ultimatum to President Olusegun Obasanjo on August 13 to either resign or be impeached. This amounted to a flagrant abuse of the rights of Nigerians to receive information as contained in the nation's Constitution.

We like to remind managers of all public owned (state and federal) stations that the stations were established as medium for informing the Nigerian people of events and issues not for the purpose of propaganda.
for the executive arms of government and also not to serve as public relations tool to launder their image. The Chief Executives of the nation and the states only hold these stations in trust for the people through whose taxes these stations were established, funded and sustained. Indeed, the point needs to be made that censorship, whether effected on the demand of the government or self, remains condemnable and does not promote fairness and pluralism of voices which strengthens democracies.

To avoid a reoccurrence, we call for the total independence of both the NBC and all public funded broadcast stations. Their enabling laws should be reviewed to guarantee their independence and conformity to international standards and practices in the course of discharging the duties of journalism and in the exercise of the right of freedom of expression.

**Pleasure and Pain in One Year Of GSM Operation**

The commercial rollout of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) clocked one year in Nigeria on August 6, 2002. During this period, two of the private GSM networks, MTN and ECONET Wireless, deployed about one million lines.

They were able to achieve this feat by taking one commercial city at a time and deploying their services in these areas, after the launch in Lagos and Abuja. NITEL, the government-owned telecommunications company, despite the infrastructure it has on ground, began its commercial deployment of GSM one year behind schedule. It began on August 1 in 13 cities spread all over the nation.

As NITEL began its deployment, it faces stiff competition from the private providers who have captured most of the high net worth individual and corporate clients in the country since the past one year that they have been in business. NITEL's relatively lower tariff which at N21.00 per minute for peak period and N16.00 per minute for off peak period, however, appears set to give it a competitive edge. The private providers charge between N45 and N50 per minute for peak period and between N40 and N45 per minute for off peak period.

NITEL claimed to have rolled out 118,000 lines in Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Otta, Kaduna, Kano, Enugu, Onitcha, Aba, Port Harcourt, Warri and Bonny. It promised subscribers a seamless network with high voice quality and expansion of the existing network within the next one year. NITEL also assured of effective coverage of the country with three switching centres, one each in Abuja, Lagos, and Enugu.

Expectedly, Lagos had the lion share of NITEL GSM lines with 40,000 lines. The 118,574 lines deployed so far by NITEL, MTN and Econet have deployed over one million lines.

In addition to the disappointment of prospective subscribers over the inadequate number of lines that NITEL deployed, its services do not also include some of the popular features provided by the private providers. These include facility for sending and receiving text messages.

Besides, whatever advantage in terms of lower tariff subscribers may have been opportuned to enjoy in NITEL services, the company has not been able to resolve the problem of interconnectivity between it and the two private GSM networks. Many subscribers on the NITEL network are therefore cut off the over one million subscribers on the networks of the private providers.

Despite these hiccups, the arrival of GSM communication in Nigeria has helped business and social interactions to the delight of many Nigerians.

Despite this huge positive outcome, operations of GSM services continue to attract a plethora of complaints.

During the one year of GSM operation, various complaints had bedeviled the services and in fact still do. Subscribers have accused operators of ripping them off of their hard earned money through high tariffs and unfair billing method which approximates one second to one minute. Nigerians also complain that at N50.00 per minute, Nigeria's GSM tariff is the costliest in the world. Subscribers further complain about the validity periods of their call cards and the compulsion to buy at least N3,000 worth of call time monthly. Many also complain that in-coming calls are oftentimes prematurely diverted to voicemail for which they are charged the going rate for airtime.

But the operators debunked these. Afam Edozie, MTN's Chief Marketing Manager argued that Nigeria's rate is lower than those of Czechoslovakia, Mexico, and Poland and is at per with those of France and Australia.
Speaking further, he said Vodafone, BT Cellnet, One 2 One of the United Kingdom and Orange of France charge between 15 pence and 40 pence per minute while Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire charge between 110 Cents and 65 Cents per minute compared to 40 Cents in Nigeria. He also attributed the apparent high tariff cost to "the very significant cost of operating in Nigeria."

He added that for every call from MTN (and ECONET), the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) takes 2.5% tax; NITEL takes N12.00 for every calls terminating on its network, and another 5% Value Added Tax (VAT) goes to government.

Despite these explanations, the House of Representatives still felt that the tariff regime of both networks were high. It then set up a committee to investigate their operations. The committee came out with a damning report which MTN and Econet however challenged. The House Committee accused the operators of defrauding subscribers to the tune of N12 billion on account of their billing system. It asked the NCC and the Minister of Communications to set in motion machinery to get the operators to refund the money to subscribers. The committee claimed that it had computed, in conjunction with its technical consultants and other telecommunications expert, the cost to the average Nigerian the prepaid services of both networks of the average time loss per user and found that generally, subscribers lose a third of the call time guaranteed by their respective refill cards due to arbitrary billing system.

The committee also recommended that the Federal Government suspend all incentives to GSM operators until they substantially reduce their tariffs. It recommended N10.00 and N45.00 per minute for local and international calls respectively.

Even as Nigerians complain without apparent indications that succor is in sight for them, the GSM service providers are hurling blames at one another for their inability to agree on terms of interconnectivity. While NITEL blames the two networks of frustrating attempts to get them to interconnect with its GSM, the private operators deny that NITEL ever approached them for interconnectivity agreement. They claim they are ready to interconnect with NITEL GSM adding that they have interconnectivity with NITEL's landlines and there was no reason why they should refuse to interconnect with its GSM.

The problem of interconnectivity of the two private networks with NITEL revolves round sharing the revenue that accrues from calls generated from their networks that terminate in NITEL GSM and vice versa. The operators have been unable to reach a sharing agreement with NITEL. ECONET's CEO, Mr. Zachary Wazara said that NITEL miscalculated in fixing its tariff. He said while MTN and ECONET pay N18.00 per minute for calls terminating on each other's network as well as on NITEL fixed lines, NITEL discovered it could not break even paying N18.00 per minute for calls from its GSM line terminating on other networks. For this reason, Mr. Wazara said NITEL had been looking for people to blame.

Meanwhile, a human rights activist/lawyer, Mr. Ebun-olu Adegboruwa and two others have dragged the nation's Telecommunications regulatory body, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the three GSM services providers, NITEL, MTN, and ECONET Wireless to a Lagos High Court alleging that they have been exploiting Nigerians in the past thirteen months. Their grouse include high tariff and the inability of the two private networks to interconnect with NITEL GSM.

The Federal government has asked the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to supervise an early resolution of the disagreement through the signing of an interconnectivity pact agreeable to the three networks. That however is yet to be done and so the right to communicate: to share information and ideas are still being partially held in abeyance.

There is no doubt that the combined efforts of the two National Operators (a second operator was licensed on August 30, see story on page 12) the over 24 private Fixed Wireless Spectrum operators, and the two GSM operators will substantially liberalize telecommunications and its allied sector. It will also help Nigeria attain and surpass the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) recommendation of at least one telephone line to 100 citizens. Telecom-starved Nigerians, especially rural dwellers, who have been denied access to these services are expected to also benefit from the on-going liberalisation of the sector as it will open up these rural areas.

Equally expected is that the combined activities of all the telecommunications services providers will substantially bring down prices of their services thereby further liberalise the right to communicate, stimulate and boost the nation's social, cultural, economic and political sectors both locally and globally.
NUJ Spends N2.5m To Register Members

The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) has revealed that it has so far spent about N2.5million for the on-going registration exercise of its members. Its National President, Mr. Smart Adeyemi, who disclosed this to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Abuja that the amount was used to procure five computers, print forms and acquire other equipment for the exercise. He said that at the end of the programme, being handled by the Prince Tony Momoh-led committee in September, registered members would be issued with certificates permitting them to practice.

Adeyemi also disclosed that the NUJ had already submitted a bill to the National Assembly that would address the numerous problems in the profession. Mr. Adeyemi said that the bill also provides that besides registered members being issued a certificate of registration, they would also be required to sit for and pass special examinations before they could practise. The bill provides for a legal action to be taken against any employer who may engage the services of anybody who does not possess the certificate of registration and had not passed the required examination to practice as a journalist.

"If you practice journalism and you are not registered by NUJ, it means that you are carrying out illegal business," Adeyemi added.

He said the bill was meant to protect practitioners from "shylock" employers who gave little and expected so much from journalists. He added that it would be mandatory for newspaper establishments to have a pension and gratuity arrangement for practising journalists.

Economy Bane of the Media – Publishers

President of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Mr. Ray Ekpu, has blamed harsh business climate for the cause of distress in the Nigerian media. Speaking at a workshop on: Newspaper Publishing: Survival Strategies in a Depressed Economy, Mr. Ekpu said the distress in the Nigerian media is manifested in the large turn-out of managers of newspapers and magazines.

According to Mr. Epku, "the press is depressed and that is why we have loss of job, irregular and non-payment of salaries and irregular publications' appearance on the newsstand. These are symptoms of a deeper malaise which arises from the depressed state of the nation's economy".

The workshop held in August at the Lagos Airport Hotel, Ikeja.

Mr. Ekpu, said the workshop is in line with the training policy of the NPAN new executive council to improve the skills and update knowledge of members consistently. This, he said, would enable them operate "at an optimum level in a world that has been globalised and whose technology is in a rapid state of development and a rapid state of obsolescence".

The malaise according to Ekpu, who is also chief executive officer, Newswatch Communication Limited, publishers of Newswatch magazine is becoming unbearable for publishers of newspapers and magazines.

He described as a façade the impression of monumental growth in the industry anchored on the increasing numbers of publications. "How monumental is the growth? I don't consider those small size publications that come out with 12, 16 or 20 pages without many advertisements in them as a symbol of monumental growth. Yes, we may have seen a few new publications in the market but I think they just manage to survive.

"There is no newspaper in Nigeria today that prints 100,000 copies. So there is quite a lot of shrinking in the media business. I admit that we've had more publications, and the cover prices have gone up but the unfortunate fact is that the business is not doing well," submitted the NPAN president.

Mr. Epku attributed the depressed state of the industry to the decline in the nation's economy, which has brought about a downward slide in the value of the naira and a rise in the rate of inflation. Besides this, he said the decline in the disposable income of Nigerians and the inability of government and private organizations to pay staff salaries regularly, "have continued, in a vicious way, to make our industry a supreme casualty".

These factors according to the NPAN president have brought about increase in the phenomenon of free readers' association and the drift to newspaper vendors to selling of GSM recharge cards, which fetches them more money.

Mr. Epku also alleged that publishers also have multiple taxation to contend with. According to him, "the federal, state and local governments seem to be in the race to see who takes the first prize in the imposition of taxes with out a commensurate provision of amenities… why would any government charge Value Added Tax (VAT) on
the cover price of newspapers and magazines when these media already pay VAT as they purchase newsprint, art paper, ink, plates, films and other printing inputs as well as on advertisements published in their media."

He therefore appealed to the federal government to restrain the Federal Inland Revenue Service from "threatening and harassing" members of the NPAN on the issue of VAT. He noted that publishers are rendering a service that is different from many others and "in environment that is business unfriendly, we need no additional roadblocks."

In his keynote address, chairman of the occasion, Prince Tony Momoh, a former Information Minister, noted: "If newspapers live or die, it means that they have a life span. They live for as long as they are healthy, and die when their health fail."

In the address which he titled: Newspaper Survival Tips (see page 13), Prince Momoh traced the history of newspaper publishing in Nigeria. He identified salient developments such as birth of new publications, innovation and promulgation of laws.

He contended that the survival of newspapers will be assured where managers "spend some time on the impact of ownership structure, control mechanisms and the policies of the polity."

"In other words, those of us who are journalists must be told aloud and clear that we operate in a polity with rules, under situations where we are professionals, who work for businessmen, and bearing in mind that we must know our mission which the owners have identified and so define objectivity in that respect", submitted Prince Tony Momoh who also emphasized that "lack of all these little issues shorten the lifespan of a newspaper".

Alhaji Alade Odunewu, chairman, Nigerian Press Council, observed that the status of publishers have altered in favour of big businessmen who have profit as their motive as opposed to public spirited individuals who had no consideration for cost and profit.

But he contended that: "Survival is now dependent on approval of readers expressed in their willingness to buy and approval by advertisers expressed in their willingness to buy space".

Alhaji Odunewu said that today's publications may have fallen short of public expectation as purveyor of news because they are suffocated by writers and columnists who give much views and little in hard news.

Speaking in the same vein, Mr. Chris Doghudje, managing director, Zus Bureau, in his paper noted that editorial products of newspapers must be dictated by customers' requirements and not what your customers will like to read or give advertising supports to."

Mr. Doghudje, former managing director, Lintas Advertising in the paper titled: Marketing Imperatives for the Print Media in a Depressed Economy, said survival of a publication in a depressed economy like Nigeria's is dependent on the ability to practise segmentation, targeting or positioning.

"You need to do that in a depressed economy to be guaranteed a market and a future. You must not aim to be all things to all people." Apart from this, he argued that cover prices and advert rates must reflect the image of the publication rather than arbitrary increment.

Other strategies for survival put forward by the Zus Bureau boss include concentration of distribution of publications on catchments areas, promotion of the publication through advertising and public relations as well as diversification into other services like events marketing and engagement in publication of creative supplements or special projects.

**How to Survive the Mine that is Newspaper Publishing in Nigeria**

By Prince Tony Momoh

The Newspaper Act of 1917 defines a newspaper as "any paper containing a public news, intelligence, or occurrences or any remarks, observations or comments thereon printed in Nigeria periodically, or in parts or numbers." Until the amendment to the Act in 1964, a newspaper published by the government was not by the definition of the Act a newspaper.

A newspaper is the main product of the print medium. It is, therefore, not a radio station. To listen to a radio or watch a television, you must have access to a radio set or a television set. To read the newspaper, you must have access to a newspaper.
A newspaper is read by those who can read and those who have a culture of reading. Some people may be able to read but they may have no culture of reading. Some are more comfortable with radio and television while some are more at home with the printed word, which is the permanent form. But whether there is culture of reading or not, those who are affected by what is published will educate themselves on it, which means that where anything of interest to a person is published, that person will try to know what it was that was said of him.

In Nigeria, newspapers are read more in the South than in the North. In the South, newspapers are read more in the Southwest than in any other zone in the South. In the Southwest, newspapers are read more in Lagos than anywhere else.

Newspapers are produced by three groups of persons - newspaper owners who are business men and have the umbrella organisation called the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) who are the organisers of this outing; the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) that should monitor respect for the ethics of the profession; and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) that is the umbrella body of the general duties of men and women of the profession.

The owners ensure that they do not make their money only from the sale of the newspaper, but also from the sale of space to advertisers. We should take as given, the need to programme for the viability of the newspaper through aggressive sale of space and the product itself.

My impression in many newspaper houses that I have served as consultant, was that some of the workers lost focus. They did not know what the paper had been set up originally to do. They quoted to me profusely the theories of the press and their responsibility to ensure that the medium is a forum where everyone would have to say their say. They would not hear me loud and clear that people had their say in the context of the medium's ownership structure, the control mechanisms and the policies of the polity.

I think you should spend some time on the impact of ownership structure, the control mechanisms and the policies of the polity if you are interested in the survival of a newspaper. In other words, those of us who are journalists must be told loud and clear that we; operate in a polity with rules; under situations where we are professionals who work for businessmen, and bearing in mind that we must know our mission which the owners have identified, and so defined objectively only in that respect.

Let me repeat that the lack of understanding of all these little issues shorten the life-span of a newspaper. What I have said so far brings out the truth that newspapers live or die depending on the conditions, there are to make them live and how much those who are interested in doing business in that sector abide by the rules.

Let us relate what we have said so far to the situations in our various publications by diverting our minds to these questions so that we can know whether we are on the road to life or death? What is our mission? Where are we promoting it? With what equipment in men and machines? Because it is a business, when do we expect to break even and begin to make favourable returns if we have not done so already? Why are some papers that were started with a lot of fanfare now unable to make it? What lessons can we learn from them?

Newspapers live or die because of the human minds and material at work in owning them, in establishing them, and in operating them.

Prince Momoh, a journalist, lawyer and former Minister for Information, delivered this paper at the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) workshop on Newspaper Publishing; Survival Strategies in a Depressed Economy in Lagos recently.

Globalcom Wins License for Second National Telecom Carrier

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) on August 30 awarded the license for the Second National telecommunications Operations (SNO) to Globalcom Limited. This followed the firm's payment of US$200 million for the license.

Globalcom emerged winner out of the four firms that bidded for the license. It made the payment of an initial refundable deposit of US$20 million and later the balance of US$180 million.

The licensing of a Second National Carrier breaks the over forty-year monopoly of the first national carrier, the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL). The license bestows on Globacom access to multi-service operations such as local exchange, digital mobile (GSM) services, national and international gateways,
voice and data traffic and Fixed Wireless Access. Only NITEL, hitherto had access to these multi-services operations combined.

The NCC had on July 31 announced that four firms, AFZI (Telecommunications) Limited, Globalcom Limited, Omnitel Limited, and Renic Investment Limited, had successfully gone through the technical evaluation stage and were fit to proceed to the next round of the exercise. They all obtained, completed and submitted the application forms having paid US$50,000 apiece as application and processing fees to the NCC. They also submitted their detailed financial and technical plans to the NCC. These qualified all four firms to pay US$20 million refundable deposit and a single sealed bid on or before August 21 to qualify for the auction. The auction however did not hold as only Globalcom met the final condition of paying the deposit. The license was therefore awarded to it at the reserve price of US$200 million.

With Globalcom emerging the only firm that paid the initial US$20 million deposit by August 8, the NCC declared it winner of the license for second National Operator. It was given a provisional license on August 12 and requested to pay the balance of US$180 million reserved price set for the process before August 30 to get the Second National Operator license, a condition which it met.

NITEL's monopoly had manifested in general inefficient services such as unavailability of landlines including high cost and unnecessarily long delay in meeting request, erratic and generally unreliable services.

**BBC, German Radio Donate to VON**

The Voice of Nigeria (VON) recently received various broadcast facilities worth several millions of naira from the Deutsche Welle Radio of Germany (DW) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service with the support of the European Commission (EC).

In addition, the BBC World Service has offered a training programme for VON staff in internet/web design and precision On-line journalism in London with another four-week attachment for a VON programme producer at the BBC office in London.

A statement signed by VON's special assistant to the Director-General, Tope Idowu, listed the broadcast facilities donated by DW as a satellite intelsat 707 including a satellite dish with antenna, six pieces of integrated receiver decoder, six surge protectors and one automatic voltage regulator IKVA. Already, all the facilities have been installed in the VON office in Lagos.

The BBC World Service in collaboration with the EU on its part, donated six Sony mini disc recorders, six microphones, fifteen mini disc, two stopwatches, one stabilizer and one UPS. Other items donated are Multi-Choice DSTV satellite dish, journalism training books and softwares.

The donated broadcast facilities by the BBC are expected to be used by students and participants at the VON Training Centre at Ikorodu in Lagos state. The offer of training for VON staff was reiterated by the Head of the BBC World Service, Mr. Barry Langridge during a visit to the Director-General of VON, Mr. Taiwo Allimi in Abuja recently.

**Senate Summons Information Minister, DGs of NTA, FRCN and NBC**

The Nigerian Senate on August 28 summoned the country's Information and National Orientation Minister, Professor Jerry Gana; Director General, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Mr. Ben Murray-Bruce; Director-General, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Mr. Eddy Iroh and Director-General, National Broadcasting Commission, Mallam Danladi Bako, to appear before it to explain alleged biased reporting of the face-off between the House of Representatives and President Olusegun Obasanjo.

The government functionaries are to defend themselves over allegation of bias, total blackout, and sometimes refusal to report the activities of the National Assembly.

Senator Kura Muhammed (PDP/Kano) sponsored the motion for the summons. He faulted the coverage by the publicly-funded broadcast organizations of the ultimatum issued President Obasanjo by the House of Representatives (the lower House of the National Assembly) to resign within two weeks or face impeachment.
While moving the motion, Senator Muhammed noted that the broadcast organizations were established with taxpayers' money to disseminate information without bias to the Nigerian public. He, however, lamented that the organizations, especially NTA, had been carrying out its activities as if they exist only to serve the Executive arm of government.

He expressed shock at the failure of NTA to broadcast the impeachment ultimatum handed down to President Obasanjo by the House on August 13 in its news bulletin. He also accused the NTA of deliberately skewing its report of the Senate's debate on August 22 of the state of the nation in favour of the Executive.

He, therefore, urged the Senate to set up an ad-hoc committee to investigate the matter and report back in one week.

The Senate unanimously adopted the motion and set up an ad-hoc committee which it mandated to probe the allocations to the organizations and how they have been managed. The Senate also mandated the committee to advise it on the propriety of government funding of broadcast media.

**The Source Magazine to Pay N25 million for Libel**

For allegedly defaming a diplomat, Alhaji Sulaiman Dahiri, Summit Publications Ltd., publisher of *The Source* magazine has been asked to pay him N25 million for defamation and another N20,000.00 as cost to him.

An Abuja High court presided over by Justice S. E. Aladetoyinbo gave the order following a suit lodged by Alhaji Sulaiman, Nigeria's Consul-General in Karachi, Pakistan asking for N100 million for aggravated and exemplary damages for libel, a perpetual injunction restraining the magazine from further publishing the words complained about and a mandatory injunction to retract the offending publication and publish apology in three leading national newspapers.

The court also issued an order restraining *The Source* from further publishing the offending articles, to retract the said articles published in the magazine's issues of December 14, 1998 and August 21, 2001, and to publish unreserved apology to Alhaji Sulaiman in three national newspapers in Nigeria.

Alhaji Sulaiman claimed that the publications portrayed him as a fraudster, a crook, a criminally minded person, a gunrunner and a tribalist.

While the plaintiff gave evidence and called one other witness, Summit Publications only filed a statement of defence but did not appear in court to give evidence in support of it.

Justice Aladetoyinbo, in giving judgment in favour of Sulaiman said that the defendants' non-appearance in court means that they have abandoned their statement of defence and that since the evidence of the plaintiff and prosecution witness were unchallenged and uncontradicted, the court could rely on them.

Justice Aladetoyinbo further said that having gone through the said stories, he came to the conclusion that they were defamatory because they portrayed the plaintiff, inter alia, as awarding dubious and inflated contracts in questionable circumstances to unregistered companies; a corrupt, fraudulent, public officer a gunrunner and an unrepentant tribalist; a mediocre not qualified for his previous and present appointments.

Justice Aladetoyinbo said Sulaiman was entitled to aggravated damages because the publication appears to be malicious because it rejoiced when the plaintiff was not considered for ambassadorial appointment and the magazine refused to retract the offending publication even though counsel to the plaintiff had written to them.

**Court Discharges Two Journalists Accused of Sedition**

An Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, magistrate's court on August 30 struck out the sedition case preferred against two Abakaliki-based journalists for lack of diligent prosecution. The journalists, Messrs Emma Okike-Ogah and Ogbonaya Okorie were arraigned for authoring and publishing an "offensive" article in the November 7, 1999 edition of the locally published paper, *Ebonyi Times* against the Ebonyi State governor, Dr. Sam Egwu.

Mr. Kingsley Eze, a vendor, arraigned along with the two journalists for circulating the papers was also set free.

The journalists first appeared in court on March 1 accused of "conspiracy to commit misdemeanor and publishing a seditious article in an unregistered newspaper." The newspaper vendor was charged with
possession of the November 7, 1999 edition of the *Ebonyi Times*, which contained the alleged seditious publication.

The publication allegedly accused Dr. Egwu of bribing the state legislators to approve a list of Commissioners, which they did not see. The offending story was entitled: What Is Happening In Ebonyi State? It raised some allegation, which it expected the governor to answer. The story claimed further that the governor, spent N49 million to entertain the State's immediate past military administrator, Navy Capt. Walter Feghabo.

The arraigned men pleaded not guilty to the charges and were subsequently granted bail in the sum of N5,000.00 and a surety. The case was adjourned to March 31.

But hearing in the case could not commence on the adjourned date, as the prosecuting counsel did not show-up pleading appearance at another court. The case suffered several adjournments.

When the case came up for hearing on August 30 counsel to the journalists and vendor, Mr. Emeke Anosike, applied for striking out of the case on the grounds of lack of diligent prosecution. Anosike told the court that besides having suffered many adjournments, since the matter was transferred from another Abakaliki magistrate's court on December 4, 2001 till date, both the complainant and the prosecutor had shown no sincere signs that they were ready for the matter.

He further told the court that his clients had been regular in court since they took plea. He prayed the court to strike the case out, since the complainant was not ready for the matter.

The presiding magistrate, Mrs. Destina Ojo, while striking out the matter said the case was first called up in her court on December 4, 2001 and later adjourned to February 10, 2002.

She further stated that after another two adjournments on April 11, 2002 and June 6, 2002, the court did not receive any information about the complainant and his counsel. She noted that section 200 of the criminal proceedings law of Eastern Nigerian 1963 as applicable to Ebonyi State disapproves of absence of diligent prosecution.

406 Nigerian Journalists Benefit From BBC, EU Training

Four hundred and six Nigerian journalists have benefitted from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) training programmed initiated in 1999. The programme started in August, 2000, and ended this year. European Commission (EU), Brussel, sponsored it.

The programme Director, Christine K, said in Lagos at a ceremony to mark the end of the two-year programme that the exercise was based on demand from Nigerian journalists, "asking the BBC to bring more training courses to their country."

According to Christine K, "The BBC was asked to share its professional working knowledge in a democratic setting. After decades of military rule, many Nigerian journalists felt a lack of experience in reporting parliaments, elections, and holding an elected government accountable".

In a press statement, BBC said the courses offered were for radio, television and print media. "Specialised courses were run both for reporters and news managers/editors, so that they would help one another in serving their audience with relevant news. The emphasis of all workshops was to reinforce ethical journalism in Nigerian media", said the statement.

It added that whether it was a parliamentary reporting course or a workshop on human rights coverage or news management, "the training always enabled participants to produce accurate, balanced and impartial news relevant to the audience."

Assessing the impact of the project, Christine K said: "You cannot change the world in a day. There are still hurdles to take for many Nigerian journalists especially in the broadcast medium, which is largely state-controlled.

"Here, censorship is still rife and mainly government-friendly news are put on the air, often to the exclusion of balance and comprehensiveness. But I believe that the audience establish themselves as the masters who will play the final tune", the project director added.
She explained that although reporting government activities is "an essential part of the media's job", it would however be sad if reporting is restricted and stories about government critics, civil society, group or even ordinary people are censored or excluded.

ISPAN Accuses NITEL of Plans to Torpedo its Business, Promises Better Services

Officials of the Internet Service Providers Association of Nigeria (ISPAN) alerted Nigerians on June 30 that the nation's national (telecommunications) carrier and gateway to the information superhighway, the Nigeria Telecommunications Ltd (NITEL) had concluded plans to disconnect Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Nigeria from the highway.

The President of the ISPAN, Mr. Sunny A. Imudia in the alert said that: "NITEL has threatened to disconnect all ISPs' receive only lines and what this means is that all dialing customers will no longer be served."

ISPAN members accused NITEL of deliberately starving them of E1 capable lines in order to gain competitive advantage over them. The E1 lines are capable of taking over 50 calls at a time.

Mr. Imudia however did not disclose the reason why NITEL decided to take the action.

NITEL, however, dismissed ISPAN’s accusation saying it is as a continuation of the ISPs antics to explain their own incompetence and greed.

There are over 30 private ISPs in Nigeria, including NITEL that provides its services in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Meanwhile, the association has launched plans to put in place a new and uniform gateway for its members in the country in an effort to render better services.

The pioneer President of the newly inaugurated ISPAN, Mr. Sunny A. Imudia disclosed this in a statement he issued to announce the formation and inauguration of the body as well as inform the public of the programmes and actions of the body.

Mr. Imudia disclosed that they "have commenced discussions with satellite providers directly and with Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) licensed gateway providers besides NITEL for bulk lease of bandwidth” for their members. He explained that bulk purchase of bandwidth, either KU, C-band or Cable (sat 3) would mean a reduction in service delivery which will impact positively on end-users.

Mr. Imudia also revealed that ISPAN had commenced discussions and negotiations with relevant partners for the installation of a Nigerian Internet Exchange (NIX) point in Lagos to start with while other cities will follow later adding that it is one of the most important assignments his executive will pursue with all seriousness. The NIX, when operational will ensure a reduction of Internet Access service charge, as it will enable Internet service Providers to peer or interconnect their networks thereby keeping their local traffic within local network rather than routing traffic from one network through a foreign network in Europe or United States to another local network same way.

The benefits, according to Imudia, are enormous and include permission of ISPs peering, or interconnectivity with each other, keeping local traffic local and decongesting international bandwidth which will eventually reduce satellite bandwidth needs of ISPs. He disclosed further that bandwidth accounted for more than 70% of the ISP's cost and a successful reduction would create considerable savings for the industry.

The installation of the NIX along with peering network, according to Mr. Imudia, will enhance Internet accessibility: faster local web access, e-mails, upload and download of files as well as all electronic transactions currently catching up with Nigerians.

Some of ISPAN's demands to government are the privilege of enjoying government's concession in the reduction of import duties on telecomm products from 25% to 5% to make internet accessible and affordable to end users. They also urged government to compel the firms newly licensed to provide Fixed Wireless Access Spectrum to deploy their allocated band to both voice and data services; that Private Telecoms Operators should be allowed to share telephone traffic revenues generated by ISPs at a 50:50 ratio with NITEL. It also called for the inclusion of Internet funding in the Invisible service List of the Central Bank to enjoy special foreign exchange rate concessions (at official rates).
CBA Chief Advocates Freedom of Information Law

Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, the Secretary General of Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) has called for the permanent entrenchment of a culture of freedom of information in Africa to stem poverty and famine in the continent.

She made the call on July 20 at the 32nd General Assembly of the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON in Abuja. Mrs. Smith used the occasion to advocate for the repeal of obnoxious laws that encourage secrecy especially in government circles in order to expand the frontiers of information dissemination.

She maintained that: "There has never been famine in any country with a free flow of information."

Corroborating Section 22 of the 1999 Constitutional provision that mandates the press to hold government accountable to the people, the CBA chief stressed that a free media restrains a potential government's misconduct, miscarriages of justice and exploitation of the weak.

Mrs. Smith called on African countries to emulate developed countries' disposition to information dissemination system having realized its importance as a key element in a healthy society and so have encouraged it. She urged those in authority to support efforts geared towards engendering free flow of information through the enactment of the Access to Information Law. She referred to the freedom of information law as an indispensable tool to promote accountability and assisting the government's anti-corruption crusade.

Media Rights Agenda has championed efforts aimed at enacting a freedom of information law which it is still pursuing.

Miscellaneous Matters in the Nigerian Media - By Ray Ekpu

This meeting to discuss how practitioners "can help redefine journalism practice, enthrone self-regulation and wipe out unethical practice" is quite timely. Timely because our industry is suffering from a debilitating depression, our professional practice is being afflicted by the quick fix syndrome and our ethical values are gradually being eroded. We are practising within the framework of a new democracy with an economy that is in a tailspin, within a globalised system with fast-changing technological forms. We can hardly catch our breath. Now we are at the crossroads of history for never before has there been such a political uncertainty as now with the impeachment hammer hanging in the air like the Sword of Damocles. As one of those who fought to wrestle political power from the military and to establish a democratically elected government we must fight to ensure that our young democracy does not become a victim of infant mortality, an affliction of the earlier republics. What this means is that out responsibilities are awesome.

We can say without any fear of contradiction that we've had a large dose of press freedom during this republic. But we are not out of the woods yet. As they say, it is not yet uhuru. Out industry still has to contend with multiple taxation, which must be treated as a serious threat to press freedom. We still have to contend with jumbo court fines for civil defamation. One newspaper was recently fined one billion naira for libel. With such stratospheric fines, the press is in danger from an institution, the judiciary, that should, appropriately, be more of an ally than anything else.

Despite these limitations we must press on to expand the frontiers of press freedom for freedom for the press is freedom for all. As the United Nations General Assembly has pronounced "press freedom is the touchstone upon which all other democratic rights are measured because it leads to the search for, and discovery of, the truth." In this respect I'd like to draw our attention to the Freedom of Information Bill that is lying in the National Assembly. It is a bill which, if passed, will provide greater access to information by breaking the bureaucratic gridlock that has been, for a long time, the barrier to public access to information. I urge us to support the bill by working for its early enactment. Let me remind you of the enduring words of James Madison that "a popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or both."

One of the issues of the day is the ban placed on beat associations and similar bodies by the Nigerian Press Organization, comprising the NUJ, NGE and NPAN as well as the Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON). At the recent Media Laws Conference in Abuja, the matter was thoroughly discussed and the forum
came to the inescapable conclusion that these associations have done more harm than good to our profession through their corrupt activities, bogus awards and the enthronement of quack journalism. Journalism depends for its vibrancy on competition for exclusives and scoops and these associations have killed all that through their photocopy journalism." They treat news as mass therapy where every reporter reports the same story in the same way with the same language and we all know why this is so. Recently, some of them, especially SWAN and NAWOJ, have been thumping their chest and daring the NPO and BON. This is the equivalent of the tail trying to wag the dog. We shall not allow them to create journalism in their own image.

Some defenders of these associations and their sordid activities have offered the excuse that there is distress in the industry, that some media organizations do not pay their staff salaries when due and if they pay, the salaries can't take them home. These are all ad hominem arguments. In the first place, the despicable activities of these associations predate the distress in the industry. For them distress or no distress, it is a way of life. If you want to stretch the argument you can say if you are hungry you are free to steal; if you are angry, you are free to kill. While we urge our members to strive to meet their financial obligations to their staff, the excuses being offered as an alibi for corruption are simply untenable. We urge these associations and their cousins to close shop. We urge editors and employers not to provide oxygen to these associations. On our part we are convinced that this sanitisation process is a tonic for our industry. We assure you that at the end of the day we shall prevail.

We are happy to note that the NUJ is currently compiling a register of journalists and that it has decided on a first degree or HND as minimum entry qualification into the profession. This is the right step in the right direction for we are in an increasingly complex world and our job is to report this complex world in a manner that is intelligible to the ordinary person. And this demands of us a broad based education and a lot of mental perspicacity which high education can, all things being equal provide.

Furthermore, I believe that all those who wish to work in journalism must study it, must have formal training in it. Journalism has gone beyond "man-bites-dog." It has developed its own body of knowledge even if it is interdisciplinary in nature. The specialist: the economist, the environmentalist, the lawyer, the doctor, who wants to practice journalism must acquire its rudiments, must be trained. Can you be a doctor without training as one? You may prescribe Panadol for yourself when you have headache or Fansidar when malaria attacks you but that doesn't make you a doctor, does it? You can even hang a stethoscope on your neck but if you didn't train as a doctor and didn't subscribe to the Hippocratic oath, then you are not a doctor. Perhaps the era of the chartered journalist has come in Nigeria, when new entrants would be made to take a qualifying examination to practise, as done by several other professions. Then journalism will cease to be an all-comers affair where anyone whose one paragraph letter is published in newspaper announces himself as a journalist.

For those already in practice we must continue to update their knowledge through training and more training, seminars, refresher courses. In the last one year we have provided improved facilities for the Nigerian Institute of Journalism (NIJ). We have recruited high-calibre teaching staff and have generally upgraded every aspect of the Institute's academic life. A team from the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) had come over to the school for inspection of August 19, this year. We are hopeful that the Institute will receive an approval so that the certificates issued by the school will have full, not limited value. We will continue to support the school to grow into an Iroko tree. We must explore available facilities and fellowships around the world so that our journalists can benefit. The NPAN is currently compiling what will be a compendium of training facilities and fellowships and will make these available soon.

Another piece of good news is that the stakeholders have now hammered out an agreement on what should be the shape and colour of the Nigerian Press Council. It wasn't easy to get to this point but we all seem to agree that, all things considered, we need the Press Council. The Council, I believe, will help us to clean our noses, will nudge us gently into the straight and narrow path of professionalism and proper ethical product; it will help to improve our credibility which should, in the final analysis, earn us some respect from the public.

Improving our credibility depends, also, on how we report the news, whether we report it fairly, fully and factually, whether we place a high premium on our obligation to the truth. A redefinition of the news in today's world would mean that we pay more attention to the causes rather than just the effects of the events around us. In other words, we must see not just the spider struggling to free itself but also the web that holds it hostage. We must redefine it to include a robust identification with the public interest.
Let me give it to you the way Professor Eugene Goodwin of the United States who did an exhaustive survey of the status of journalism ethics saw it. He said: "what is needed is a set of principles based on a journalism that serves the public by aggressively seeking and reporting the closest possible truth about events and conditions of concern to people, journalism that collects and deals with information honestly and fairly and treats the people involved with compassions, a journalism that conscientiously interprets and explains the news so that it makes sense to people."

Fair enough, there may not be a universal agreement on ethical standards because of the diverse forms of the press, ownership structure, and the economic realities of the market place but such values as fairness, accuracy, comprehensiveness, compassion and the public good can be regarded as inevitable benchmarks.

Let me make a few suggestions on how we can strengthen our profession (a) The Code of Ethics of the NPO should be incorporated into the curriculum of Journalism schools in Nigeria (b) The Nigerian Universities offering Journalism or Mass Communication should help to advance a practice by publishing Journalism Review. The Columbia Journalism Review (Cir. 31,000) published by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and The Washington Journalism Review (Cir. 30,000) published by the University of Maryland College of Journalism have made significant contributions to the development of the American media.

Our profession has not been a much respected one in this country even though our political titans - Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Tony Enahoro, etc., emerged from the trenches of journalism. The impression has been that we never went to school because journalism didn't need school. You just picked up your pen and wrote. Things have been changing though slowly. Babatunde Jose, Daily Times chairman, started the revolution by recruiting graduates into Journalism. MKO Abiola, Concord Publishers improved upon it: He paid them decent wages. But the struggle for respect is a continuing one for, I believe, we must take our place as one of the respected and respectable professions in our country. At press conferences, when they need our help they would address us as "Gentlemen of the Press" but outside the press conference hall they describe us dismissively, derisively as "Press Boys."

Mr. Ekpu, President, Newspaper Proprietors' Association Of Nigeria (NPAN) Presented This Paper At A Media Stakeholders' Meeting Organised By The Nigerian Guild Of Editors (NGE) In Lagos, September 10, 20002.

CPU Gets New Executive Director, Postpones Conference

The Commonwealth Press Union now has a new Executive Director. She is Lindsay Ross. She replaces Mark Robinson, who has resigned due to prolonged illness within his family. Rose appointment takes effect from 1 August 2002.

Lindsay is the first woman to head the Commonwealth press body since it was founded 1908 as the Empire Press Union. Since 1997 she has been the Press Freedom Director of the Commonwealth Press Union. In this role, she raised the profile of the CPU through her enduring belief in the right to freedom of expression and a deep commitment to ethical and responsible journalism.

In a statement, CPU Chairman and Director of Corporate Affairs for Daily Mail & General Trust plc, Vyvyan Harmsworth LVO, expressed delight at the acceptance of Rose to serve in the capacity.

"I am delighted that Lindsay Ross has accepted the invitation to undertake the role of director of the Commonwealth Press Union," said Harmsworth.

"Her experience of living and working in Africa for many years has been an invaluable asset to us all and I have no doubt she will continue to enhance and promote the work of the Commonwealth Press Union for many years to come" the statement added.

As Press Freedom Director, she has recently coordinated a number of self-regulation seminars aiming to assist Commonwealth countries interested in establishing press councils and press complaints commissions. In addition to her new role, Lindsay will continue to have a hands-on involvement with press freedom issues.

"Press freedom was my life for five years," she said. "It is not something that you can just drop overnight."

During a 30-year career in the media she has been a journalist, freelance writer, in public relations and as a press officer and worked and traveled widely in developing countries. From 1989 she lived in East Africa where she worked as a freelance consultant in both the public and private sector. Before that she worked with
the International Herald Tribune as general manager for their London officer where she also developed a solid understanding of the management and marketing of newspapers.

Meanwhile, The Executive Committee of the CPU have taken the decision to postpone the planned October 2002 Conference & Editors' Forum until February 2003.

"This decision was not taken lightly," said Harmsworth, "but due to a series of circumstances - not the least of which is that both Pakistani and Kashmiri elections have been called for the week we originally planned in October - we decided to postpone the even until February 2003."

The new dates have met with support from the Sri Lanka newspaper industry, and the CPU is confident that the extra lead-time will only enhance what was already an interesting and diverse programme.

The Forum will open in Kandy on Sunday, 23 February and end at lunchtime on Tuesday 25 February. At that point, delegates will travel down to Colombo for the Official Opening Ceremony of the Conference which will take place in Colombo that evening.

The Conference opens on the morning of February 26 and ends with the Farewell Dinner on the evening of February 28, 2003.

Sierra Leonean Media Praised for Objective Reporting

For a country only recently emerging from years of brutal civil war, Sierra Leone's media have come a long way and still have a long way to go, according to a special report released last week by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The organisation visited the country in May to assess the state of relations between government and the media, and how the press covered the recent elections.

During the May general elections, media coverage was widely held to be fair, the report finds. Political parties had equal access to public media and all 10 presidential candidates were granted equal access to the airwaves "for the first time in the history of this country."

Since 1997, the number of newspapers has mushroomed from 12 to 50, and a surprising number of journalists are entering politics, "highlighting the Sierra Leonian media's search for a new purpose," the report says. During the elections, 12 former journalists ran for parliament. One of these journalists told CPJ that "having journalists in Parliament would be a better service to the struggle for freedom of expression than a thousand editorials deploring the lack of it."

However, others warned that this compromises the credibility of the local media, which has been criticised by many for being partisan and prone to corruption. Many newspapers are funded by political groups and journalists often take bribes, said the CPJ. In addition, despite the tremendous growth in newspapers, many new publications are run by people with "uncertain journalistic credentials."

Africa Alerts... Africa Alerts... Africa Alerts...

TOGO: Draft Bill Imposes Heavier Sentences On Journalists

The government of Togo has come under fire for proposing a new bill that would impose heavier fines and prison sentences for defaming or insulting the president and other state institutions.

If passed, the proposed bill would amend the Press Code to increase the penalty for "insulting the Head of State" to up to five years in jail without parole and up to US$7,400 in fines, say the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans frontiers, RSF) and the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC). The current penalty is a jail term of one to six months.

The bill also proposes introducing penalties of up to two years imprisonment for those who insult various government officials and institutions, and up to three years jail term for those who defame "courts, tribunals, armed forces, security forces, constituent bodies and the public administration."

In the past two years, there have been numerous cases of government officials jailing and harassing journalists, seizing newspaper print runs and closing down media outlets critical of the government making the country one of the most repressive climates for journalists in Africa.
BURKINA FASO: AFP, RSF Correspondent Arrested

Paris-based Reporters sans frontières (RSF), reported that Agence France-Presse (AFP) and RSF correspondent Christophe Koffi was arrested on the evening of August 7 by four men in civilian dress. The men searched his office and then his home, taking many documents as well as computers. He was taken to a police station in Ougadougou, where he was detained.

Without specifying any charge, reports said they questioned him in connection with the investigation into the August 1 murder of Balla Kéïta. Kéïta was a former government minister in Côte d'Ivoire who had joined the opposition. He had lived in Burkina Faso since March 2001, after being granted political asylum.

GABON: Two Private Newspapers Suspended for Three Months

On 6 September 2002, the weeklies Misamu and Gabaon were suspended for three months by order of the National Communication Council (Conseil national de la Communication, CNC). The regulatory body had accused the two newspapers of publishing news "that undermine confidence in the state and the dignity of those responsible for the republic's institutions".

In Gabon, as soon as a newspaper denounces the misappropriation of funds or criticises the state's highest-level officials, it risks being censured or suspended.

The weekly Misamu was suspended for reporting on the "disappearance of 3 billion CFA francs (approx. 4.5 million euros; SUS4.4 million) from the public treasury." The newspaper also announced the possibility of "non-payment of civil servants' wages during the month of September 2002."

Meanwhile, the newspaper Gabaon was punished for "violently" criticizing Senate President Georges Rawiri in its 9 August edition, according to a CNC communiqué. Two other publications, Le Nganga and La Lowé, were "given notice" for articles undermining the prime minister's dignity, according to the authority responsible for regulating the media.

In 2001, the newspaper La Griffe and its international version Le Gri Gri International were also suspended by the CNC. The regulating authority also prohibited the publication director and editor-in-chief from practising their profession as journalists.

MALAWI: Freelance Journalist Killed

Malawian freelance journalists, Don Kulapani, was killed on August 8 during a hold-up in a bar in the capital, Lilongwe. Four armed men burst into the bar and opened fire. Although the assailants stole cash, musical equipment and alcohol before fleeing, giving the impression that it was simply a case of armed robbery, many journalists have called on the government to investigate the incident to determine whether it was linked to his professional activities. This is because the assailants shot and stabbed Kulapani several times. The call was also promted in part by the upsurge in the attacks on journalists by officials of the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) party.

Kulapani, a freelance journalist, was previously employed by the newspaper, The Chronicle. Journalists working for the newspaper have often been the target of physical assaults in which youth members of the UDF (Young Democrats) are implicated. Last year, another local newspaper, Daily Times, claimed in an article that the UDF planned to recruit Young Democrats to seek out and assault four journalists from the Daily Times, Nation, and the BBC, a charge the UDF denied.

Vendors who sold copies of newspapers critical of the government were also frequently harassed and attacked.

SOUTH AFRICA: FXI, IFJ Fear Government Meddling In Public Broadcast

The Free Expression Institute (FXI) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) have expressed concern that the South African government's proposal to amend the Broadcasting Act could make the country's public broadcaster more vulnerable to political influence.

Under the proposed amendments, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) would be split into two entities: one would become a private Africa-wide satellite service while the other would provide public broadcasting for a national audience. A new board of directors appointed by the government to oversee the
public broadcasting division would be required to prepare a set of policies to the Minister. These policies would ensure that the broadcaster delivers "accurate, accountable and fair reporting which advances the national and public interest of the Republic".

FXI says for such policies to be subject to approval by the government is a "travesty" of the basic principles of public broadcasting that cannot be allowed, "These plans will no doubt result in a code that forces journalists to report in a manner that conforms to the government's own understanding of what constitutes the national and the public interest." The group fears that editorial content that does not conform to the government's line would be undermined.

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS IN AUGUST 2002

College Bars Trust from Reporting its Activities
The management of College of Education, Zuba, Abuja in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) has barred Daily Trust newspapers from covering its activities or face its wrath.

Dr. (Mrs.) Umman Abdulwahid gave the order in her office saying that Daily Trust had over reported its activities which has caused the FCT, owners of the institution a lot of worries.

Dr. Abdulwahid said hardly a week passes without a report of the institution in Daily Trust and each time she had been summoned to the Ministry of the FCT over them. She cited two stories: "Robbers in Police Uniform Attack COE Zuba" and "Students' Fate Uncertain Over Accreditation" for which she said she was summoned, queried and warned never to grant press interview on policy issues.

She therefore asked Daily Trust to: "leave College of Education Zubar alone," adding that she had written the editor of the paper to desist from reporting the institution. She queried the source of the correspondent's information on accreditation which she said was top secret in the institution. She asked the medium to stop reporting the school's activities so as not to destabilise it.

Broadcast Corporation Set Ablaze
Arsonists set ablaze parts of the Broadcasting Corporation of Abia State (BCA) complex in Umuahia, the State Capital on August 30 at about 11.00pm.

The attackers were alleged to have secretly gained access into premises of BCA to carry out their attack with two locally made bombs which they laid beside a high voltage electricity transformer. After spraying the transformer with premium motor spirit (Petrol), they blew it apart.

The blast blew off the roof of the structure housing the transformer into smithereens which were splashed on other apparatuses of the complex. No life was lost.

JOURNALISM / PRESS FREEDOM AWARDS

U.S. Fellowship For Nigerian Journalists
Freedom House is receiving applications for its 2003 Visiting Fellows Program. The program will enable 10 Nigerian journalists to work with their counterparts in the United States.

The six-week program includes a four-week assignment with a U.S. media organization, training in investigative journalism techniques and an overview of the U.S. government, media, and non-governmental sectors.

Freedom House provides all Visiting Fellows with housing, and with a small stipend to cover food and incidentals. It also arranges international and domestic travel. There are no application fees associated with this program.

Selected candidates will participate in program sessions beginning January 2003 or May 2003. Follow-on workshops to be held in Nigeria will draw on expertise from returned Visiting Fellows to provide training to additional journalists.
To apply or for additional information, visit the Freedom House Website: http://www.freedomhouse.org or contact Jennifer Whatley at whatley@freedomhouse.org. Limited copies of Fellowship application form are also available at: Media Rights Agenda, 44, Alhaja Kofoworola Crescent, Off Obafemi Awolowo Way, Ikeja, Lagos. Photocopies of application forms are accepted. Deadline for receipt of application is October 21, 2002

**IFJ Launches New Journalism Prize**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) will launch a new global journalism prize on September 11 at IFEX's 10th General Meeting in Dakar, Senegal. The IFJ Journalism for Tolerance Prize, funded by the European Union, will be awarded to journalists in five regions of the world - Latin America; Central and Western Africa; Eastern and Southern Africa; South Asia and South East Asia.

Three prizes will be awarded in each region for journalists working in print or online, radio and television. The IFJ Journalism for Tolerance Prize will celebrate tolerant reporting, especially in regions of the world where racism is rife.

The deadline for entries is 7 January 2003. They must include work published or broadcast during 2002. For more details, visit www.ifj.org/hrights/tolerance/prize.html.

**George Washington Williams Fellowship**

The George Washington Williams Fellowship program established by The Independent Press Association (IPA) is accepting applications. IPA funds stories written by journalists about issues such as the environment, global trade policy, healthcare, race, and education. Fellows receive access to some research support, consultants, advanced professional training, and a large network of journalists working in the public interest sector.

In addition, program staff work closely with fellows to publish their stories in major publications. Individuals may apply for financial and institutional support to write a single story, or they may seek an investigative or depth reporting fellowship of between three and twelve months to research a specific social issue.

The George Washington Williams Fellowship will pay success candidates national commercial rates for individual stories or $1500 per month plus expenses for in-depth reporting fellowships.

Non-white journalist with at least three years of solid professional reporting and writing experience and individuals with backgrounds in investigative or enterprise reporting may apply for the fellowship. Previous reporting or other experience in the chosen subject area is desirable.

The fellowship is open only to U.S. citizens and foreign journalists who have established relationships with U.S. publications. More information and application are available at the website http://www.indypress.org/programs/nvip.html

**DEADLINE:** November 16, 2002.

"This argument (compulsory licensing of journalists) is based on a distinction between professional journalism and the exercise of freedom of expression that the Court cannot accept."
This argument assumes that it is possible to distinguish freedom of expression from the professional practice of journalism, which is not possible. Moreover, it implies serious dangers if carried to its logical conclusion. The practice of professional journalism cannot be differentiated from freedom of expression. On the contrary, both are obviously intertwined, for the professional journalist is not, nor can he be, anything but someone who has decided to exercise freedom of expression in a continuous regular and paid manner."

Inter-American Court of Human Rights in The Schmidt Case (Advisory Opinion OC-5/85, delivered on November 13, 1985)