

The African Media Barometer (AMB)

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Southern African Media Project took the initiative together with the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) to start the African Media Barometer in April 2005, a self assessment exercise done by Africans themselves according to home-grown criteria. The project is the first in-depth and comprehensive description and measurement system for national media environments on the African continent.

The benchmarks are to a large extent taken from the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) ¹ "Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa", adopted in 2002. This declaration was largely inspired by the groundbreaking "Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press" (1991) and the "African Charter on Broadcasting" (2001).

By the end of 2008, 23 sub-Saharan countries will have been covered by the AMB. In 2007 those countries which started the exercise in 2005 were revisited providing for the first time comparable data to measure developments in a country over a two-year period.

Methodology: A panel of experts is formed in each country, including representatives of media and civil society at large in equal numbers. They are serving as panel members in their personal capacities, not as representatives of their respective organisations. The panel should consist of not more than ten members. In a process of self-assessment they will meet bi-annually for a two-day-retreat to go through the indicators in a qualitative discussion and determine (quantitative) scores for each indicator. The meetings will be chaired by an FES consultant to ensure comparable results. The resulting reports are made public.

¹ The ACHPR is the authoritative organ of the African Union (AU) mandated to interpret the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

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Scoring system: Panel members are asked to allocate their individual scores to the respective indicators after the qualitative discussion in an anonymous vote according to the following scale:

- 1 Country does not meet indicator.
- 2 Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator.
- 3 Country meets many aspects of indicator but progress may be too recent to judge.
- 4 Country meets most aspects of indicator.
- 5 Country meets all aspects of the indicator and has been doing so over time.

Scores for each sector are determined as follows: Members of the panel will, after a qualitative group discussion, attach their individual point-score (1 - 5) to each sub-indicator of a sector. The sum of all individual scores will be divided by the number of panel members. The result will then be considered the final score for the sub-indicator.

This qualitative report, including the scores, serves the purpose of measuring over time (based on bi-annual repetitions of the panel meetings) the progress or otherwise of developments in the media landscape.

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Sector 1: Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, are effectively protected and promoted.

1.1 Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is guaranteed in the constitution and protected by other pieces of legislation.

ANALYSIS:

Section 12 (1) of the Constitution of Mauritius states that

except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, that is to say, freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, and freedom from interference with his correspondence.

Following this general guarantee, subsection 2 of the same section introduces possible limitations:

Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the law in question makes provision -

- in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health;
- for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons or the private lives of persons concerned in legal proceedings, preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, maintaining the authority and independence of the courts, or regulating the technical administration of the technical operation of telephony, telegraphy, posts, wireless broadcasting, television, public exhibitions or public entertainments; or
- for the imposition of restrictions upon public officers,

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except so far as that provision or, as the case may be, the thing done under its authority is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.

So, while freedom of expression which includes freedom of the media is generally guaranteed under the Constitution of Mauritius, there are some worrying potential restrictions on the use of this right. Limitations are possible in the interest of “public morality” - a very vague concept, open to all sorts of interpretation. Other limitations are possible for civil servants - section 12 (2) (c) provides the constitutional basis for the Official Secrets Act which Mauritius adopted from Britain and which prohibits civil servants from giving information to the public or commenting freely on matters concerning their department. The Public Service Commission (PSC), the body responsible for making appointments to the civil service, also underlines in its Personal Management Manual that no information may be released to the public except after prior authorisation by a supervising officer.

Other legal provisions that limit freedom of expression are those which criminalise defamation: A person found guilty of such an offence is liable to a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding Rupees 5000 (about 165 US dollars). In addition, such person may be sued for damages.

Some laws restricting freedom of expression have been challenged in the courts. Up until the early 1990s private satellite dishes to receive television could not be imported into Mauritius without a licence. This clause in the Customs Regulations was scrapped by a court which argued that it contravened section 12 of the constitution and that everybody was free to receive information.

The judgement marked the beginning of a revolution in the country. In 2002 legislation was passed which established an Independent Broadcasting Authority. For the first time since independence in 1968 this body began to issue licences to private radio stations. Private television, however, is still not allowed.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,3,3,4,3,4,3,4,3,3

Average score: 3.4

1.2 *The right to freedom of expression is practiced and citizens, including journalists, are asserting their rights without fear.*

ANALYSIS:

Generally speaking, citizens as well as journalists in Mauritius have no fear of expressing themselves freely. But there are some situations that may be different.

The law on defamation in Mauritius is one of the toughest of its kind in any democratic country. The fear of being sued either civilly or criminally is always present when writing an article. Although no journalist has been imprisoned for such an offence yet, media practitioners take a maximum of precautions. The question they ask themselves is not “What should I write”, but “What can I write?” The fact that Mauritius is a very small island, where everybody knows everybody else, amplifies the fear of being sued.

The plaintiffs in the majority of defamation cases against journalists are politicians. There seems to be a kind of constant psychological warfare between journalists and politicians and the initiation of defamation cases is part of it.

In a small society with such a variety of cultures and religions there is always the need to strive for a balance of social harmony to “keep a lid on the pressure cooker”. Religion is closely interlinked with politics. Many Mauritians feel restricted in their personal freedom by the need to be cautious at all times not to infringe on the feelings of members of other cultures. The education system does not help in this regard as there is no encouragement “to think out of

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the box”.

Regardless of these restrictions - which sometimes may be a matter of perception rather than fact - citizens generally express themselves freely, for example through letters to newspapers or on private radio.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,3,4,3,3,4,3,3,3,3

Average score: 3.1

1.3 *There are no laws restricting freedom of expression such as excessive official secret or libel acts, or laws that unreasonably interfere with the responsibilities of the media.*

ANALYSIS:

Laws restricting freedom of expression do exist in Mauritius.

The Public Service Commission’s Personnel Management Manual makes it clear to all public servants that their freedom of expression is severely limited: All matters are private and confidential.

Journalists are continuously threatened by defamation legislation. The problem is that such cases are both time consuming and expensive. It often takes three to five years before they are decided by the respective courts in Mauritius and some journalists believe this is a deliberate strategy. The majority of cases are concluded by plaintiffs and defendants reaching a settlement, and damages paid vary from about 1500 US dollars to 6000 US dollars.

To avoid litigation, the daily L’Express has set up an internal Complaints Commission where people feeling aggrieved by reports published may ask for remedy without going the court route.

Another piece of legislation with the potential to restrict freedom of expression is the “Outrage Against Religious Morality” Act. This law allows anybody to go to the police and lay charges against any person/s they accuse of insulting their religious feelings. It is, however, very rarely used.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,3,2,1,3,2,2,2,2,2

Average score: 2.1

1.4 *Entry into and practice of the journalistic profession is legally unrestricted.*

ANALYSIS:

There is no restriction on entry into and practice of the journalistic profession.

Individual scores : 5,5,5,5,5,5,5,5,5,4]

Average score: 4.9

1.5 *Protection of confidential sources of information is guaranteed by law.*

ANALYSIS:

Mauritius has no legal protection for confidential sources of information or whistleblowers other than that spelt out in the Prevention of Corruption Act (PoCA).

In this law, provision is made for the protection of a whistleblower who reports a corruption or fraud case to the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). This public institution is mandated to fight fraud and corruption and can investigate such cases inde-

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pendently from the police.

No journalist has yet been forced to reveal her/his sources, including during police enquiries or before the courts.

Civil servants may be sacked or suffer a punitive transfer from one department to another for disclosing information in their possession.

Many people are reluctant to give information openly, as they suspect their phones being tapped by security services.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,1,1,2,3,1,1,2,2,3

Average score: 1.8

1.6 *Public information is easily accessible, guaranteed by law, to all citizens, including journalists.*

ANALYSIS:

There is no freedom of information legislation in Mauritius. The fact that civil servants from all departments within the administration are not allowed to disclose any information to citizens or the media obviously makes it very difficult for journalists to pursue and corroborate stories. However, some of their published reports are followed up by Members of Parliament in the National Assembly where they put questions in this regard to the respective ministers or even sometimes the Prime Minister.

The present government has promised to pass a Freedom of Information Act and the Prime Minister has said that it is still in the pipeline - "a very long one", given that he promised such legislation as far back as 1991.

There has been no concerted effort by civil society, however, for such an act indeed to become reality.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,3,2,2,2,1,3,1,2,1

Average score : 1.9

1.7 *Civil society in general and media lobby groups actively advance the cause of media freedom.*

ANALYSIS:

There are presently two organisations of journalists, both of them not very effective. They are the Association des Journalistes Mauriciens (AJM) and the Association des Gens de Presse (AGP).

The AJM has not been working properly for a number of months now, suffering from internal problems between individuals.

Both associations have not been seen to be pro-active.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,2,2,1,1,2,1,1,1,2

Average score: 1.4

Overall score for sector 1: 2.7

Sector 2: The media landscape is characterised by diversity, independence and sustainability.

2.1 A wide range of sources of information (print, broadcasting, internet) is available and affordable to citizens.

ANALYSIS:

Radio and television are by far the media with the widest reach in Mauritius.

Quite a number of print media are on offer. In addition to three dailies L'Express, Le Mauricien and Le Matinal, there are several weeklies: Samedi Plus, 5-Plus Dimanche, Le Defi-Media, Week-End, Le Dimanche, Impact, Star, Le Militant, La Voix Kreol, Le Reveil, La Vie Catholique, Week-End Scope, News on Sunday, Mauritius Times and Business Magazine.

Newspapers have their specific target audiences. Some are meant for opinion leaders, others for the general public, with the latter mostly concentrating on crime reports and social problems.

The copy price for dailies is between Rs 5 and Rs15, the cheapest being the price for one baguette (French bread).

The vast majority of newspapers are published in French with quotes in Creole, the language spoken by every Mauritian. About 70 per cent of the population are able to read and understand French. Some dailies and weeklies are increasingly using English language material and a few weeklies are English language publications.

The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) is the state broadcaster and offers both radio and television services.

The corporation has three analogue and twelve digital TV channels, accessible via decoder. In addition, the corporation offers five radio services.

Every Mauritian citizen who owns a television set is obliged to pay a monthly TV license fee of Rs 100 (2.8 US dollars). This fee is collected through the electricity bills.

Since 2002, three private radio stations have also come on air: Radio One, Radio Plus and Top FM. Radio France International and the British Broadcasting Corporation are accessible through FM or AM respectively. There are no local private TV stations but international television services such as Canal Plus or the subscription service DStV are available via satellite.

The internet is being used more and more as a source of information. The price of connection fees has been decreasing and presently stands at about Rs 800 per month (22.8 US dollars) for a 128K ADSL package.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,4,4,3,4,3,3,3,4,3

Average score: 3.5

2.2 Citizens' access to domestic and international media sources is not restricted by state authorities.

ANALYSIS:

There are no such restrictions. However, access to the internet website Facebook was cut off for one day because of a satire it carried lampooning the Prime Minister - until the offending piece was removed.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,4,5,5,5,4,5,5,4,4

Average score : 4.5

2.3 *Efforts are undertaken to increase the scope of circulation of the print media, particularly to rural communities.*

ANALYSIS:

As Mauritius is a small island, distribution of newspapers is easy and all the leading newspapers are available everywhere in the country even in the outlying island of Rodrigues.

L'Express and Le Mauricien have introduced weekly pages for each region (North, East, South, West, Rodrigues) to serve local communities better and to increase circulation.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,5,5,4,5,5,4,4,5,5

Average score: 4.6

2.4 *Broadcasting legislation has been passed and is implemented that provides for a conducive environment for public, commercial and community broadcasting.*

ANALYSIS:

The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation is governed by the MBC Act and the Independent Broadcasting Authority regulates private radios.

There is no specific provision for community broadcasting. The University would like to apply for a licence to go on air. However, the license fees payable are prohibitive: they range from Rs 250,000 (8,300 US dollars) to Rs 400,000 (13,300 US dollars) per annum for a private FM radio station.

The broadcasting regulator claims that there is a lack of frequencies and therefore refuses to issue any more licences.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,3,3,2,4,3,3,3,4,3

Average score: 2.9

2.5 *Community broadcasting enjoys special promotion given its potential to broaden access by poor and rural communities.*

ANALYSIS:

There is no community broadcasting in Mauritius and no demand for it. One reason may be the smallness of the island.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,2,2,1,1,1,1,1,2,1

Average score: 1.3

2.6 *The editorial independence of print media published by a public authority is protected adequately against undue political interference.*

ANALYSIS:

There are no print media published by a public authority in Mauritius.

Not applicable

2.7 Local or regional independent news agencies gather and distribute information for all media.

ANALYSIS:

There are no news agencies currently operating in Mauritius.

Not applicable

2.8 Media diversity is promoted through adequate competition regulation/legislation.

ANALYSIS:

There are two major media conglomerates in Mauritius that dominate the market:

La Sentinelle - owns newspapers L'Express, L'Express Dimanche and 5-Plus Dimanche as well a major part of Radio One through a sister company, Viva Voce .

Le Defi Media Group - owns newspapers le Defi-Plus and l'Hebdo as well as a major part of Radio Plus.

The fact that both these groups own major parts of radio stations contravenes the provision in the IBA Act that no owner of a newspaper can hold more than 25 % of shares in a radio station.

There is no limit on ownership of newspapers.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,2,2,2,2,2,2,3,3,2

Average score: 2.2

2.9 *Government promotes a political and economic environment which allows for a diverse media landscape.*

ANALYSIS:

The present government psychologically discourages the setting up of newspapers, with the Prime Minister threatening to impose a Media Commission to control the media and the relationship between the government and the media having soured over time due to police raids on a private radio and journalists being arrested for allegedly publishing false news.

In general, government does not do anything to promote a political and economic environment for a diverse media landscape to flourish. The opening up of the airwaves to private radio in 2002 was not a deliberate government policy but merely an unavoidable consequence of liberalisation.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,1,2,2,3,2,1,1,2,2

Average score: 1.8

2.10 *Private media outlets operate as efficient and professional businesses.*

ANALYSIS:

The group La Sentinelle with the flagship daily L'Express is run as a professional company. Its management is business-minded and regards newspapers as a "product". Le Mauricien, the oldest daily newspaper of Mauritius, has been a family-run and owned company for many decades. Samedi Plus, a new investigative weekly, claims that making a profit is not their primary goal.

Radio Plus seems to be the only profitable station while Radio One

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is losing money.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,3,4,4,4,3,3,4,3,3

Average score: 3.5

2.11 *State print media are not subsidised with taxpayers' money.*

ANALYSIS:

There are no state print media in Mauritius.

Not applicable

2.12 *Government does not use its power over the placement of advertisement as a means to interfere with media content.*

ANALYSIS:

There was unanimity on the fact that government does use its power over the placement of advertisements in a way that harms many vulnerable newspapers. There seems to be a strong link between the government of the day and some small newspapers which get more business from government than the leading dailies. L'Express and Le Quotidien have seen their government advertising reduced. L'Express claims to have lost more than Rs 2 Millions (66,600 US dollars) worth of government advertisements. Some newspapers even had to close down due to lack of funds from this source.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,1,1,1,1,1,2,1,1,2

Average score: 1.3

2.13 *The advertising market is large enough to maintain a diversity of media outlets.*

ANALYSIS:

Acquiring advertising in Mauritius is a real struggle. The bulk of ad-spend comes from a few holding companies with many subsidiaries. Attracting advertisements from these companies is a matter of maintaining good relations and contacts. Small outlets are at a disadvantage because these companies prefer bigger publications that appeal to larger audiences and greater numbers of potential consumers.

Some newspapers have decided not to rely on advertisements in the first place and to cover their expenses through the copy price. Others have made the experience that advertisers do try to influence content when they disapprove of certain articles.

By and large, however, the market has so far been large enough to maintain a diversity of media outlets.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,3,3,3,3,3,1,3,3,3

Average score: 2.9

Overall score for sector 2: 2.9

Sector 3: Broadcasting regulation is transparent and independent, the state broadcaster is transformed into a truly public broadcaster.

3.1 *Broadcasting is regulated by an independent body adequately protected against interference, particularly of a political and economic nature.*

ANALYSIS:

Broadcasting in Mauritius is regulated by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which is in charge of granting licences, and the Information Communication Technology Authority (ICTA), which deals with radio frequencies and licences for other technologies such as mobile phones. Aspirant broadcasters have to apply first to the IBA for a licence and then to the ICTA for a frequency.

The chairperson of the IBA board is appointed by the President of the Republic on the advice of the Prime Minister in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. Board members include a representative of the Ministry in charge of information, a representative of the Attorney-General's Office, a representative of the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the chairperson of the ICTA and no less than 3 or more than 5 persons who shall be appointed by the Minister responsible for information, having regard to their experience in the field of broadcasting policy and technology, media issues, frequency planning, entertainment, education or in any other related activities.

No person can be a member of the board if he/she is a member of the National Assembly, an office bearer of a political party or political organisation, or if he/she, his/her spouse or any of his/her children has a financial interest in broadcasting, advertising or audio-visual production.

The appointment procedure for the board of the ICTA is similar, with the chairperson also appointed by the President on the advice of the

PM in consultation with the opposition. Five members of the board are appointed by the Minister of Information Technology and another is the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Given these appointment procedures, these bodies are not independent from government. While the Chairperson of the IBA is not a politician but a lawyer he/she is always someone who is close to the government of the day. The consultation with the leader of the opposition is seen by many as a “fig leaf”, its main purpose being to make sure that the chairperson is not a controversial figure who could be attacked by the opposition. As soon as government changes, a new board is appointed.

As the majority of board members in both authorities are civil servants, the question of political interference does not really arise. Both bodies are in the hands of government anyway.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,2,3,1,2,1,2,2,2,2

Average score: 1.8

3.2 *The appointments procedure for members of the regulatory body is open and transparent and involves civil society.*

ANALYSIS:

Civil society is not involved in the appointment of members of the IBA and ICTA boards. There is no tender process and decisions are made behind closed doors.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,1,2,1,1,1,1,1,1,1

Average score: 1.1

3.3 *The body regulates broadcasting in the public interest and ensures fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing society at large.*

ANALYSIS:

When the IBA issued licences for radio stations in 2002, the fairness of its decisions was not put in question. There have been no further decisions in this regard since then.

The IBA has established a Complaints Committee which has been working efficiently so far. The number of complaints received is not very high. One reason might be that when a citizen feels aggrieved by a certain programme he/she has to opt for either taking the case up with the committee or going the court route. Once a case has been brought before the committee a complainant can no longer seek relief or sue for damages in court.

The Committee has so far been impartial. One example is a complaint made by the opposition Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM). The party felt aggrieved by the way MBC TV had reported one of its press conference. The IBA upheld the complaint and asked the MBC to take remedial measures for this not to happen again.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 3,3,3,3,4,3,3,3,3,2

Average score: 3.0

3.4 *The body's decisions on licensing in particular are informed by a broadcasting policy developed in a transparent and inclusive manner.*

ANALYSIS:

The objectives of the IBA are spelled out in the law. The authority

has to promote pluralism of cultures and local content, make sure that private broadcasting is not controlled by foreigners, that there is competition and that limitations are imposed on cross-media ownership.

Although there was no written broadcasting policy in place in 2002 when licences for private radio stations were issued, there was broad consensus in society that private radios should be introduced in the country.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,4,2,1,3,2,3,3,2,3

Average score: 2.4

3.5 *The public broadcaster is accountable to the public through a board representative of society at large and selected in an independent, open and transparent manner.*

ANALYSIS:

The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) is controlled by a Board which, according to the MBC Act, consists of

1. a chairperson, to be appointed by the Minister (in fact the Prime Minister's Office, because the Prime Minister always heads the Ministry of Information),
2. the supervising officer of the Ministry,
3. the Director of Information Services,
4. two persons with experience in administration and labour relations, to be appointed by the Minister and
5. one person with experience in economics and finance, to be appointed by the Minister.

Every ex officio member shall remain a member for as long as he/she holds the office by virtue of which he/she became a member,

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and every other member shall hold office for not more than two years but shall be eligible for reappointment.

The ethnic diversity of the Mauritian population has always been reflected on the board and successive governments have sought to maintain a sort of ethnic equilibrium between Hindus, Muslims, Chinese and others on this board.

The Director General of the MBC is appointed by the Prime Minister.

It is obvious from the above that MBC is a government-controlled broadcaster.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,2,2,1,2,2,3,2,2,2

Average score: 1.9

3.6 *Persons who have vested interests of a political or commercial nature are excluded from possible membership in the board, i.e. office bearers with state and political parties as well as those with a financial interest in the broadcasting industry.*

ANALYSIS:

A person who is not a citizen of the Republic of Mauritius, is an official member of a political party or a member of the National Assembly shall not be qualified to be a member of the MBC board.

Despite these exclusions, persons who are appointed to the board are always members or sympathisers of the ruling alliance.

There are some board members whose relatives have financial interests in the broadcasting industry, mainly in advertising.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,5,2,2,2,2,2,2,2

Average score: 2.3

3.7 The editorial independence of the public broadcaster from commercial pressure and political influence is guaranteed by law and practiced.

ANALYSIS:

The editorial independence of the MBC is far from being guaranteed. It is alleged that the board interferes directly in editorial decisions, right down to the selection of studio guests for talk shows. The Director General, appointed by the Prime Minister, also “knows what is expected from him”. And the Director of News, a journalist with close links to and sometimes a close relationship with the ruling party, is said to take orders “from above” before allowing sensitive stories to be reported.

The popular perception that the MBC is pro-government is accepted as something quite normal, even by the opposition. Each time government changes, leading journalists and news presenters who were known to have had close ties with the outgoing ruling parties are transferred or “promoted” and some are fired.

A previous government appointed a retired Chief Justice to compile and write a report on the MBC. He made several recommendations, including the proposal to turn the MBC into an independent body. The report has never been implemented or even considered.

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SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,1,2,1,1,1,2,2,1,1

Average score: 1.3

3.8 *The public broadcaster is adequately funded in a manner that protects it from arbitrary interference with its budget.*

ANALYSIS:

Three years ago, the MBC declared that it does not need subsidies from the state any more.

The corporation's funding comes mainly from the monthly license fee of Rs 100 paid by some 300,000 households.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,4,4,4,5,5,3,5,4,5

Average score: 4.3

3.9 *The public broadcaster is technically accessible in the entire country.*

ANALYSIS:

The MBC television channels as well as their radio services are accessible in every part of Mauritius, including the outlying island of Rodrigues.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 5,5,4,5,5,5,5,5,5,5

Average score: 4.9

3.10 *The public broadcaster offers diverse programming for all interests..*

ANALYSIS:

MBC has five radio channels:

Cool FM broadcasts European and local music and is described as “one of the best music stations in Mauritius”. It carries news in French, Creole and English.

Taal FM offers oriental music and entertainment; the station’s news are in Hindi and Mandarin.

World Hit radio serves every taste from European to oriental music. It broadcasts news in French, Hindi, Creole and English and carries foreign news from Radio France International. The service is regarded as an “elite programme”.

The two AM stations are Radio Maurice, which broadcasts French and Creole programmes, and Radio Mauritius with an oriental flavour.

All stations offer talk shows, but the topics tackled are less controversial than those on private radio stations.

More than 80 % of the population have to rely on the MBC for television services. Its three television channels cater for 13 languages, with news being broadcast in French, English, Creole and Hindi.

The second channel carries mainly live or recorded broadcasts of social events such as religious ceremonies or cultural festivals. The programme content is coordinated at a meeting of cultural organisations with MBC’s management to make sure that everyone is accommodated.

The other channels offer good entertainment but no talk shows.

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SCORES:

Individual scores: 3,4,3,3,4,3,5,3,4,3

Average score: 3.5

3.11 *The public broadcaster offers balanced and fair information reflecting the full spectrum of diverse views and opinions.*

ANALYSIS:

There is no fair and balanced information on MBC radio or TV. That is why the corporation is seen as pro-government and there are many reasons which justify this perception.

The MBC TV prime news bulletin, for example, regularly starts off with a story on the Prime Minister (a former chief editor of the MBC was sacked after he broadcast a news item on the Prime Minister in second position only). Following this lead story the sequence of news is determined by the political hierarchy. This ‘policy’ is not a written order, it is just understood to be the right thing to do.

SCORES:

Individual Scores: 1,2,1,1,1,1,3,2,2,1

Average score: 1.5

3.12 *The public broadcaster offers as much diverse and creative local content as economically achievable.*

ANALYSIS:

The MBC offers a diversity of entertainment programmes including lots of local music shows, local drama, films, documentaries and children’s programmes.

Programmes on political events and issues, however, are perceived as being one-sided and not diverse at all.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 3,4,3,3,3,2,4,4,3,2

Average score: 3.1

Overall score for sector 3: 2.6

Sector 4: The media practice high levels of professional standards.

4.1 The media follow voluntary codes of professional standards, which are enforced by self-regulatory bodies.

ANALYSIS:

There is no self-regulatory body for the media to oversee adherence to voluntary codes of professional standards. This is due to lack of cooperation and issues of pride and ego amongst journalists and groups of newspapers.

The La Sentinelle group, owner of L'Express among others, has been pushing for a self-regulatory media council after the Prime Minister announced two years ago that he would set up a statutory Media Commission to oversee the performance of the media (without tabling a draft bill or giving any detail). When the initiative failed, the group developed its own code of ethics and complaints procedure.

There seems to be no sense of urgency regarding the establishment of a self-regulatory body. The general feeling is that a Media Commission will not be set up before 2010, the year of the next elections.

The Penal Code and laws on broadcasting both provide for a right to reply.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 2,2,2,2,2,2,2,2,1,2

Average score: 1.9

4.2 *The standard of reporting follows the basic principles of accuracy and fairness.*

ANALYSIS:

Generally, reporting is fair and accurate. All stories are vetted by the editors-in-chief who are liable by law for all mistakes made by his/her reporters.

The virtual gagging order for civil servants which stops them from disclosing any information to the public makes it difficult to balance stories with official comments.

Sex and crime tabloids, however, pay little regard to professional standards, especially when it comes to stories on rape and homicide cases.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,4,3,3,3,4,3,3,3,3

Average score: 3.3

4.3 *The media cover the full spectrum of events, issues and cultures, including business/economics, cultural, local and investigative stories.*

ANALYSIS:

Taking all the media in Mauritius together - print in particular - people do get coverage of the full spectrum of events and issues, including investigative reporting. Well researched stories on social issues, however, are missing.

An exception is the MBC which only reports on events created by 'officialdom'. Activities of non-governmental organisations, for example, are hardly ever covered.

MAURITIUS

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,5,4,5,3,4,5,4,5,4

Average score: 4.3

4.4. *Gender mainstreaming is promoted in terms of equal participation of both sexes in the production process.*

ANALYSIS:

A lot of progress has been made in Mauritius over the last years in this regard. The ratio of sexes employed in the media is at least 50 - 50, if not more in favour of female media practitioners.

Women are also in top positions, for example at the La Sentinelle group (Director of Publications) or at Samedi Plus, Weekend and Radio One (editors).

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,4,4,5,4,4,5,5,4,5

Average score: 4.4

4.5 *Gender mainstreaming is reflected in the editorial content.*

ANALYSIS:

There is consensus amongst journalists in Mauritius - be they male or female - that it is the news value that comes first and not the sex of the source.

The fact that more male sources are used is a reflection of society. There are hardly any women in senior positions in both the public and private sectors. In the civil service women constitute a majority of employees - but civil servants are not allowed to talk to the

media.

In general, men tend to be more outspoken than women. In civil society organisations, however, women are more active - and therefore more often used as sources.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 3,3,3,4,3,4,4,4,4,3

Average score: 3.5

4.6 *Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.*

ANALYSIS:

Self-censorship does occur - although to varying degrees, depending on the publication that journalists work for.

Generally, newspapers refrain from covering conflicts between ethnic or religious groups. If a story is critical of a shareholder of that particular publication it is usually spiked. From time to time pressure from international embassies also leads to self-censorship.

Given the character of the MBC as a government-controlled broadcaster, self-censorship among journalists working for the corporation is widely spread as a means of survival.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 3,3,2,3,2,3,2,2,1,3

Average score: 2.4

4.7 *Owners of private media do not interfere with editorial independence.*

ANALYSIS:

The shareholders, represented on the Board of Directors of a newspaper or newspaper group, determine the broad guidelines for the political and social stance of their publication(s).

If business or political interests of a shareholder or the newspaper are involved or likely to suffer, the owner will interfere with editorial decisions by asking to see a story beforehand, by stopping its publication or by warning the editor “not to do it again”.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 3,2,2,4,2,2,3,1,2,3

Average score: 2.4

4.8 *Salary levels and general working conditions for journalists and other media practitioners are adequate to discourage corruption.*

ANALYSIS:

According to the National Remuneration Board the salary of a journalist should start at Rs 7000 (200 US dollars). The majority of journalists receive a little more than that, but this is still not a living wage: The Central Statistics Office in Mauritius states that the minimum amount for a Mauritian couple to live on is Rs 15,135 per month (432 US dollars). - Senior journalists earn between Rs 10.000 and Rs 50.000, depending on their “market value”.

No cases of serious bribery or corruption involving journalists are known. It would be almost impossible in a small country like Mauritius to try to engage in corrupting journalists without running the

risk of having the attempt made public immediately.

There are a few cases where journalists thank their sources or build “relationships” with gifts such as a bottle of whisky and the like.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,4,3,4,3,2,2,2,2,2

Average score: 2.8

4.9 Training facilities offer formal qualification programmes for journalists as well as opportunities to upgrade their skills.

ANALYSIS:

The University of Mauritius runs a BSc course in communication studies. It is available for part-time students primarily for those already in employment. One third of places is reserved for school leavers who finished their High School Certificate. The University of Technology also offers a course on media and communication.

University courses tend to be rather theoretical and graduates do not leave as fully operational journalists. Unfortunately these beginners are then left to their own devices as there are no on-the-job training efforts in the newsrooms. Universities would like to hire working journalists as part-time lecturers but this has proved difficult as editors do not allow their staff to engage in such activities.

The French Association of Professional Journalists offers in-house training.

At the MBC, much training is provided for staff. However, given the lack of impartiality in the treatment of news, it is felt that trainees have no chance of putting their newly acquired knowledge into practice.

MAURITIUS

SCORES:

Individual scores: 4,3,3,3,3,3,2,4,3,3

Average score: 3.1

4.10 Journalists and other media practitioners are organised in trade unions and/or other professional associations.

ANALYSIS:

There are two media associations, the Association des Journalistes Mauriciens (AJM) and the Association des Gens de Presse (AGP). Both are either dormant or ineffective.

At the MBC the entire staff is organised in trade unions - either for journalists or for administrators.

SCORES:

Individual scores: 1,1,1,1,2,1,2,3,1,2

Average score: 1.5

Overall score for sector 4: 3.0

OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE 2.8

The panel meeting took place at Tamarin Bay Hotel on 16 and 17 August 2008.

The Panel:

Ms. Deepa Bhookun, journalist
Ms. Usha Bhujan, trade unionist
Mr. Pradeo Buldee, trade unionist
Ms. Christina Chan-Meetoo, lecturer
Mr. Linley Couronne, human rights activist
Mr. Maneesh Gobin, lawyer
Mr. Sunil Gopal, journalist
Mr. Meeghan Ponnappa Naiken, journalist
Mr. Nicholas Rainer, journalist
Mr. Rudy Veeramundar, journalist

The Rapporteur:

Mr Leevy Frivet

The Facilitator:

Mr Hendrik Bussiek