



2021 SOUTH AFRICA

The African Media Barometer (AMB) is an in-depth and comprehensive homegrown description and measurement system for national media environments in Sub-Saharan Africa.



Access to information is guaranteed in Section 32(1) of the Constitution and protected under the Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000, allowing access to any information held by the state and private bodies that is required for the exercise and protection of any rights. Freedom of expression and media freedom are protected in Article 16 of the Constitution, with reasonable and justifiable limitations.

KEY MEDIA DEVELOPMENTS 2018 – 2021



Adoption of Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) on 1 July 2020.



Constitutional Court rules sections of RICA unconstitutional.



COVID-19 further accelerates the structural decline in print media, leading to reduced advertising revenue, job losses, pay cuts and closure of news outlets.



SABC board seems capable and committed.



Investigative journalism thrives across different media platforms.



Online expression expands but is hampered by digital inequality.

KEY OUTCOMES

Sector 1

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is effectively protected and promoted.

- There is firm constitutional support for freedom of expression (Section 16 of the Constitution), excluding statements that are harmful, hateful or incite violence.
- The newly adopted Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) has limited freedom of expression to some extent, as it requires permission from a source before quoting them.
- Journalists, especially women, are more vulnerable to bullying and intimidation on social media.
- The mental health and well-being of journalists have been negatively impacted during COVID-19.
- Lockdown restrictions made first-hand news gathering extremely difficult, with journalists requiring media cards and permits for travel to cover stories.
- The Protected Disclosures Act is in place and has provisions for witness protection; however, it is not adequate.
- Access to information legislation is in place, but obtaining information is often tedious and time-consuming.

Sector 2

The media landscape, including new media, is characterised by diversity, independence and sustainability.

- COVID-19 accelerated the structural decline in print media, with significant decreases in circulation and advertising.
- Lack of funding threatened the survival of 43 community radio stations in 2019, and other stations have had to collaborate to stay operational, leading to a diminished diversity of news sources.
- The wide range of reliable news sources has been narrowed because of affordability challenges.
- Transparency of news media ownership is not guaranteed by law because only companies listed on the JSE are legally required to reveal ownership.
- Not all media fairly represents the voices of all genders, specifically women and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Sector 3

Broadcasting regulation is transparent and independent; the State/Public broadcaster is transformed into a truly public broadcaster.

- Internal leadership battles and corruption allegations haunt the Media Development and Diversity Agency.
- During COVID-19 in 2021, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa announced the release of temporary radio frequencies. This decision was criticised as it did not go through the normal open auction process.
- ANC's influence on the public broadcaster has diminished, but there is still a line of control between the ANC and the SABC.
- The SABC carried out good, fair and balanced coverage of the 2021 Local Government Elections.
- There are strong commercial pressures on the SABC because it receives 77% of funding from advertising, and there is editorial influence from marketing and advertisers.
- Radio stations cover diverse topics in various languages, but their programming is still quite conservative in some areas.
- Budget cuts have adversely affected current affairs content and staffing at the SABC.

Sector 4

The media practise high levels of professional standards.

- Staff shortages and tight deadlines create an environment where false reporting thrives.
- Quality control in the newsroom has also deteriorated, a factor attributed to a reduction of sub-editors and fact-checkers.
- Working conditions for journalists and the precarity linked to the pandemic leads to young journalists leaving the profession for government and PR jobs, which pay better.
- The Copyright Amendment Bill and the Performers' Protection Amendment Bill seek to redress the unfair treatment of media workers. Both bills await signature from the President.
- Media professionals have access to opportunities to upgrade their skills and qualifications, but are constrained by high costs and time pressures associated with working in the newsroom.
- Journalists have no real security of tenure, depending entirely on their salaries. Self-censorship can find ground in such an insecure environment.
- Almost half of the editor positions are held by women. However, sexual harassment is rife in many workplaces.

THE WAY FORWARD

Given these findings, what can be done over the next three years to:

- Support community media?
- Protect journalists from abuse and harassment, which is often gendered?
- Encourage inclusivity and diversity of voices in the media, especially when it comes to the marginalised?
- Promote access to training opportunities for journalists and media workers?

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