

Dear Stakeholder,

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is very grateful for your unremitting support for our work. Your support has greatly motivated and sustained our effort at promoting freedom of expression and democracy in West Africa.

We gladly share with you the October 2014 edition of *The Gong-Gong*. This edition features major activities that were carried out in our free expression advocacy, media, democracy and development programme areas.

Specific highlights of *The Gong-Gong* for the month of October

- MFWA Executive Board Meeting and Resolution
- New Board Member welcomed
- Forum with Media Managers and Decision Makers
- Press Conference with Ghana Federation of the Disabled
- Publication of a Special Report on Ebola and Press Freedom

Second Annual Meeting of MFWA Executive Board

The Executive board of the MFWA held its second annual meeting from 17th to 18th October in Accra, Ghana. The two-day meeting was held to discuss and review a number of strategic issues in relation to the organisations' operation and the broader issues of freedom of expression in the West Africa sub-region. Key on the discussion table was the Ebola pandemic. The Board of Directors expressed serious concerns about the devastation the pandemic is causing to lives, the economy and the overall development of the sub-region. It therefore, made a clarion call to the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), the

African Union and other state and non-state actors to intensify efforts at curbing the disease.

Another major issue contained in the Board resolution was the slow pace of the digital migration process in West Africa, the low level of public awareness on migration, and the potentially massive implications of the digital migration process for freedom of expression and access to information.

The board also approved the nomination of Mrs. Sophie Ly Sow. She was welcomed to the board as its newest member. The board issued a resolution which elaborated on these key issues discussed.

New Board Member

The Executive Board of MFWA unanimously approved the nomination of Mrs. Sophie Ly Sow, as its newest member and welcomed her to the Board. Mrs. Sow, a Senegalese, has several years of experience leading and managing non-profits and media related projects.

Among many other experiences, Mrs. Sow opened and managed the West Africa office of Panos Institute in Dakar from 1992 to 1994.

She served as Secretary General of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) in Montreal, Canada, from 1995 to 2001.

From 2005 to 2007, Mrs. Sow was in charge of the Media Programme of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), and was in charge of Oxfam America's regional communication from 2007 to 2009. She currently serves as the Director of Dakar-based private Consulting firm, NEXUS Groupe.

Mrs. Sophie Ly Sow





Media Managers from Ghana in a group picture with MFWA Executive Director

Media, Democracy and Development

The MFWA recognises the important and critical role of the media in championing democracy and development. The organisation, therefore, continues to place the media at the heart of our activities that seek to make the media work more proficiently and professionally.

Subsequently, the MFWA organised a stakeholder forum that brought together media managers and other decision-makers from leading media houses in Ghana to share experiences and deliberate on how best to improve professionalism in the Ghanaian media. It was under the theme "Improving Professionalism in Media Practice - the Role of Media Managers".

It was identified at the forum that media owners and advertisers have an important role to play in ensuring professional standards since most of these ethical violations can be traced to their influences. Majority of the stakeholders spoke in unison that media managers have a responsibility to ensure that their employees abide by the ethical codes that guide the profession.

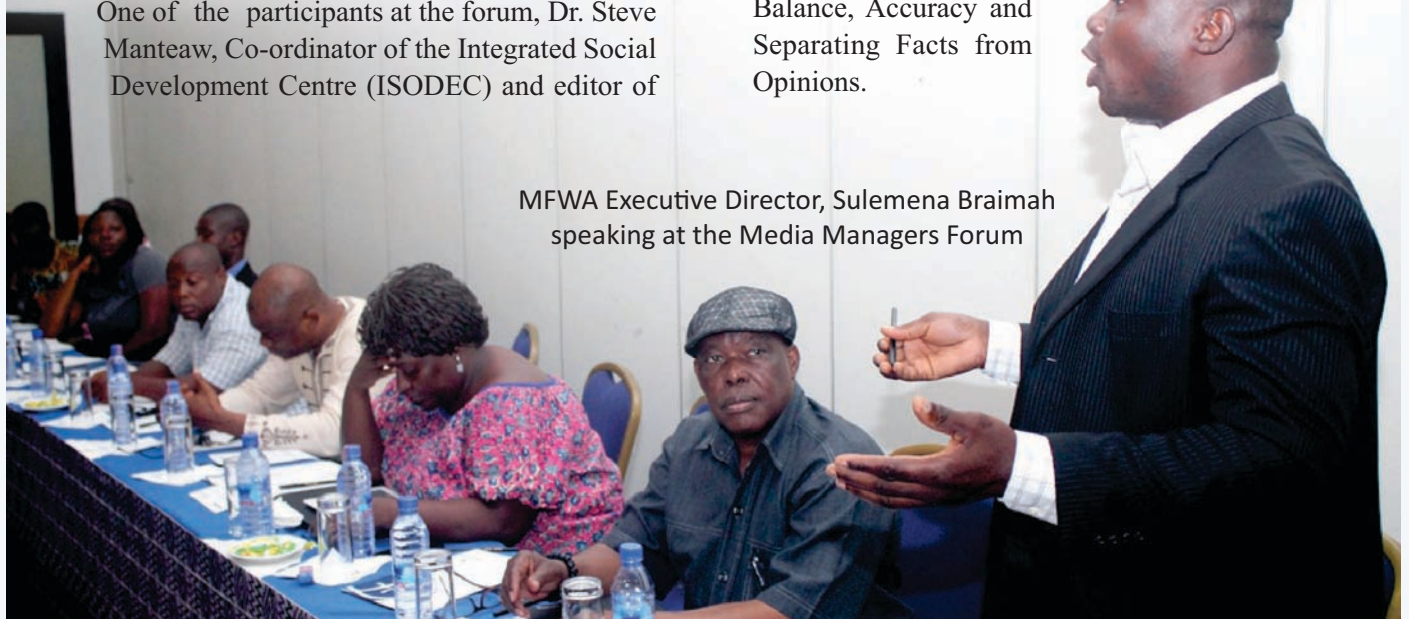
One of the participants at the forum, Dr. Steve Manteaw, Co-ordinator of the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) and editor of

Public Agenda newspaper reiterated the need for media houses to have editorial policies that fall in line with the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) Code of ethics. He added that the media has the mandate to shape the market of its listeners and not do the dictates of listeners but be guided by the code of ethics of their profession.

Madam Augustina Apik, Editor-in-chief of GBC Radio also said that the role of the media is to educate the public. She bemoaned the excuse given by some media houses that they do what their listeners like. She advised the media to persist in doing what is professional and right and the public will come to accept it.

The forum was organised with funding from STAR-Ghana on the backdrop of the findings of the MFWA Media Ethics Monitoring which showed that a total of 508 ethical violations were recorded from the 15,738 programmes that have been monitored from May 2014 to date. The ethical principles that were often violated were Decency in Language, Fairness, Balance, Accuracy and Separating Facts from Opinions.

MFWA Executive Director, Sulemena Braimah speaking at the Media Managers Forum





Ghana Federation of the Disabled Press Conference

The MFWA, in collaboration with the Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD), organised a press Conference on the Topic: *Promoting the rights of the marginalised: A case of the abuse of the Common Fund Allocation to Persons with Disability*.

The press conference was organised following several media reports on the gross misapplication of funds allocated to persons with disability in some districts in the country. These reports stem from revelations contained in the Auditor General's report, currently before the Public Accounts Committee and independent investigations in the area undertaken by some journalists.

The event highlighted challenges associated with the disbursement of the two percent (2%) District Assembly share of the Common Fund and recommended ways to address them.

Some of the challenges that were brought to the spotlight included the withholding of information about the funds to the disability fund management committees, the use of the fund without the knowledge of the Persons with Disability (PWD) organisations, the non-release of the statutory funds by the government, the mismanagement of the use of the funds by the assemblies and, to some extent, the mismanagement of the funds by some members of PWD organisations. Subsequently, a petition signed by the MFWA, GFD and other Civil Society organisations was sent to the Minister of Local Government and the Administrator of the Common Fund.

Mr Yaw Ofori Debrah, president of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled, expressed deep appreciation to the MFWA and the media for supporting their cause.

Research and Publications

In October, the MFWA published two major reports: one on Ebola and Free expression and the other on the Media Ethics monitoring project for the month of September.

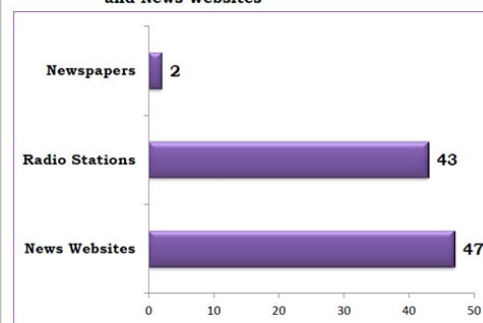
Media Ethics Report September

This is a report that is issued on a monthly basis to highlight incidents of ethical violations in the Ghanaian media and to recommend corrective measures. The report for September was released in the month of October.

The report shows that incidents of ethical violations have reduced consistently from July to September by 40 percent – from 152 violations in July, to 135 in August, and 92 in September 2014.

The reduction is reflected on all the three media platforms being monitored by the MFWA (radio, news websites and newspapers).

Figure 1: Ethical Violations Recorded from Radio Stations, Newspapers and News Websites



Special Report on Ebola

This report highlights incidents of Ebola-related freedom of expression violations, the challenges with respect to media freedom and professional reportage and the positive and negative contributions of the media—including social media and bloggers—towards efforts to prevent and contain the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

According to the report, in light of the Ebola outbreak, journalists in Liberia have been attacked, harassed, censored and restricted under a state of emergency, which has included curfews and restrictions on general human rights.

The report also highlights challenges in Guinea, where three journalists were brutally killed by a mob during a mission to provide information on Ebola, and the situation in Sierra Leone, where officials have adopted measures that have the potential of instilling fear in journalists and deterring independent and impartial reporting.

Work of Our Partners

Liberia:

Our partner in Liberia, the Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP), took its Freedom of Information Advocacy training to Bomi County. With support from the National Endowment for Democracy, CEMESP held a two-day Freedom of Information training which targeted Civil Society Organisations from Bomi County in Liberia.

At the training workshop, participants were exposed to their obligations under the law, exemption provisions, how to file proper Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and proactive disclosure, among other relevant provisions of the FOI legislation that is supposed to be seen as having a transformative potential.

According to CEMESP's Executive Director, Malcolm



Participants at the CEMESP Workshop

Joseph, the project was designed to raise the bar from awareness to action in the demand and supply of information as provided under the law.

CEMESP distributed amongst participants the FOI Act and other relevant literatures obtained from the Carter Center Access to Information Project.

Participants, especially community health

organisations, were encouraged to make good use of what they had learnt, especially during this Ebola crisis with a view to reaching more people in remote settings with adequate information.

In their evaluation, participants were unanimous in stating that the training had been beneficial and would help them to do things better.

Nigeria:

MRA Trains Rwandan CSOs on FOI Implementation

Our partner in Nigeria, Media Rights Agenda's (MRA), Deputy Executive Director, Jennifer Onyejekwe was in Kigali, Rwanda, to share Nigeria's civil society experiences in implementing the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2011 with Rwandan counterparts. ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa, in partnership with Rwanda Governance Board (RGB – Rwanda), organised a training workshop for civil society actors in Rwanda to support the processes of implementing Access to Information (ATI) laws in their country.

In her presentation, Ms. Onyejekwe shared the intense implementation activities that MRA and other civil society actors have carried out in ensuring the effective implementation of the FOI Act 2011. Such interventions, as she explained, encompass so many elements such as trainings, research, publications, monitoring, litigation and sensitisation. She also highlighted the importance of partnerships among civil society organisations (CSOs) and between CSOs and public bodies.

She explained that there is no 'one size fits all' intervention that will ensure the effectiveness of the Law but that it is necessary for all hands to be on deck to ensure that their ATI law is implemented in the manner that suits the citizens best. "Not carrying out an activity to ensure its implementation is to leave everything in the hands of government which will create a system that will favor it", she said.

The MRA Deputy Executive Director shared MRA experiences with the FOI mentoring pilot programme currently running in Nigeria as an innovative manner of expanding the scope of ATI experts across the country, in order to ensure a multiplier effect on implementation activities for different stakeholders.



MRA Deputy Executive Director,
Jennifer Onyejekwe

Free Expression Rights Monitoring and Campaign

The MFWA continued its monitoring of Freedom of Expression (FOE) violations across the region with support from our dedicated monitors in the 16 West African Countries. Findings from our monitoring show a further improvement in FoE situation in the region. Two cases of Freedom of expression violations were recorded in two out of the 16 countries – Togo and Liberia. The violations were in the forms of a ban and obstruction of duty.

While reporting on the violations, we were also following up on developments on the earlier FoE cases reported. After issuing Alerts and calling on the appropriate authorities to demand justice, Samuel Amète Sarr, a former Minister of Energy under the Abdoulaye Wade regime who is charged with libeling the Senegalese President Macky Sall and was detained, was granted bail on October 1, 2014.

Staff Profile >>>

Dora B. Mawutor is the Programme Officer in charge of Research and Communication at the MFWA. She has led some of the organisation's influential research activities including Language Monitoring on Radio during the 2012 General Elections and also during the Adjudication of the 2012 Elections Petition, Monitoring of Women's Participation in Public Discourse on Radio and Media Ethics Monitoring.

Before joining the MFWA, she worked with Strategic Communications Africa Limited (Stratcomm Africa) in Accra as a Senior Communications Officer; Seatec Telecoms Services Limited as a Project Coordinator and a Personal Assistant to the Managing Director and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) as a National Service Person.

Dora has a Master of Philosophy Degree in Communication Studies from the University of Ghana and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Information Studies and French, also from the University of Ghana



Dora Mawutor

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