



Media Foundation for West Africa

Introduction

The West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA), is an annual event by Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). The overall objective of WAMECA is to improve media professionalism and strengthen the media as allies for development in all sectors.

The Conference

The Conference seeks to discuss the challenges of the media industry and ways to improve the performance of the media across West Africa.

The Awards

The Awards are to reward and inspire journalism excellence in West Africa as well as honour West African journalists who have produced compelling works, which have had significant impact on society.

WAMECA 2017

On October 27-28, 2017, the MFWA held the inaugural edition of the West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA) at the Movenpick Ambassador Hotel in Accra, Ghana. The 2017 edition of WAMECA was supported by the Embassy of the United States in Ghana, Tullow Ghana Limited, The Chamber of Bulk Oil Distributers (CBOD), MTN-Ghana and Stanbic Bank, Ghana with more than twenty media partners across West Africa.

This report presents highlights of WAMECA 2017 - the participants, speakers, key issues discussed and recommendations made.

THE CONFERENCE

Opening Ceremony

The West Africa Media Excellence Conference was held on Friday, 27th October 2017. The event brought together more than 120 participants including leading freedom of expression and media development experts, activists, journalists and editors, academics, freedom of expression advocates and high profile personalities from across West Africa and beyond including all the national partner organisations of the MFWA. Also present were representatives from the High Commissions/Embassies, Civil Society Organisations and International organisations.

Some Key Participants at the Conference were:

- Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, Minister for Information, Ghana (Key Note Speaker)
- Hon. Demba Ali Jawo, Minister for Information and Communications Infrastructure, The Gambia (Special Guest)
- Prof. Kwame Karikari, Journalism Professor, Ghana
- Ms. Sophie Ly Sow, International Media Expert and Director of Nexus Groupe, Senegal
- Mr. Soule Issiaka, International Media Expert, Benin
- Dr. Daniel Blank, Country Representative - DW Akademie, Ghana
- Representatives from some embassies in Ghana
- Heads of national partner organisations of the MFWA in West Africa

The Executive Director of the MFWA, Sulemana Braimah, in his introductory remarks said the Conference seeks to contribute to strengthening good governance in the region by constituting an annual platform for identifying and discussing challenges, prospects and opportunities in the media industry in the region, and strategies for more effective advocacy.



Sulemana Braimah , Executive Director of MFWA, making brief remarks

In an official welcome statement, International Media Expert and MFWA's Board Member in Senegal, Ms. Sophie Ly Sow stressed the important role the media and journalists play in deepening democracy. She was happy that the media today has grown tremendously in many countries, with public service, commercial media, community media and globalized web based media co-existing to inform and educate citizens and called for more support for media development in West Africa.



Ms. Sophie Ly Sow, MFWA Board member, Senegal, giving the welcome statement

The Founder and former Executive Director of the MFWA, Professor Kwame Karikari, in his presentation on Promoting Press Freedom and Media Development in West Africa - 20years of the MFWA regretted that despite an increase in democratisation and improvement in the media environment in the region, there still exist some barriers to media work such as harassments, detentions and arrest, censorship, the enactment of repressive laws, interference from governments and the non-passage and

effective implementation of Right to Information Laws.

He said there still is the need to promote participatory governance; fight terrorist attacks and other forms of attacks on journalists and media houses through a more sustained and effective advocacy.



Professor Kwame Karikari, Founder of MFWA, speaking on 20 years of the MFWA

Solidarity Messages/ Remarks by Special Guest

Gambia's Minister for Information and Communication Infrastructure, Hon. Demba Ali Jawo, who was also the Special Guest said the media landscape is much free today due to the tireless advocacy work of organisations such as the MFWA. He said it is good for journalists to come together and share ideas on how they can improve their work and stressed the need for networking across borders to help build a free media environment.

The Public Affairs Officer who represented the Embassy of the United States of America in Ghana, Mr. Roberto Quiroz reiterated their support for press freedom and freedom of speech.

Mr. Quiroz called for more women in the media as well as the enabling environment for women, and investigative journalists to pursue their work knowing the challenges that they face in the discharge of their duties.

Mr. Quiroz added that journalists are builders of future prosperity of the nation "It all begins with you; with you telling the stories to the people; yes you can and America stands with you".



Hon. Demba Ali Jawo, Minister for Information and Communication Infrastructure - The Gambia



Mr. Roberto Quiroz, Public Affairs Officer, Embassy of the United States, Ghana

In a solidarity message, the General Secretary of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Mr. Kofi Yeboah urged the media to play its watchdog role by serving as a check on government, holding government accountable to citizens and upholding the rights of citizens as enshrined in the constitution.

He applauded the MFWA for its continued capacity building programmes for journalists over the years.

The Executive Secretary of the National Media Commission in Ghana, Mr. George Sarpong, acknowledged that the media in West Africa has indeed witnessed some real turbulent days in the past. He affirmed the Commission's support for journalists and the Foundation.



Mr. Kofi Yeboah, General Secretary, Ghana Journalists Association



Mr. George Sarpong, Executive Secretary of National Media Commission making brief remarks

Keynote Address and official opening of the Conference

Ghana's Information Minister, Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid in his keynote address commended the MFWA for its work over the years in championing press freedom.

He stressed the critical role journalists and the media play in the fight for democracy adding that the media's work should be to impact lives and hence not surprising that corruption crusaders are media persons and not people in the armed forces.

Hon. Hamid urged journalists to uphold the ethics of the profession; not forgetting that the pen is mightier than the sword.

He pledged the NPP government's commitment to ensuring that the RTI bill is on the table for the next parliamentary sitting for it to be debated upon and possibly have it passed.



Hon. Mustapha Abdul - Hamid, Minister for Information, Ghana, giving the keynote address

DISCUSSIONS & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference featured four panel discussion sessions:

Topic	Narration
a) Journalism in West Africa: the past, present and the future	This session discussed the overview of the media landscape, the challenges and the future of journalism with the emergence of social media.
b) Promoting Safety of Journalists and Countering Impunity for Crimes against Journalists	This session discussed challenges journalists face despite major developments in the media environment over the years.
c) Media, Democratic Transitions and Accountable Governance in West Africa	This session focused on the crucial role the media plays during political transitions. The issue of media polarization and the effect it has on the quality of work journalists produce was also highlighted. Concerns were raised about network disruption and shutdowns in some African countries and how they affect the work of journalists.
d) The Era of fake News and Challenges to Media Credibility	The session discussed how the media can maintain its credibility in the era of fake news. Discussants reiterated the responsibility of media practitioners to use social media to counter fake news and the need for traditional media to adapt the use of social media for their stories.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

In view of fake news and its challenges to media credibility, Journalists and Media practitioners should maintain a high level of professionalism, fact-check their stories and their sources and always identify the difference between facts and counter facts.

On the issue of promoting safety of journalists and countering impunity, there were calls for solidarity and collaboration among journalist as this will make them too powerful and too loud for state actors to ignore.

Regarding the media's role in democratic transitions and promoting accountable governance, there is the need for media reforms and for the passage of laws including the Right to information law. This would equip the media with needed information to work.

The National Partners Strategy Meeting

The National Partners Strategy session came off in the morning of Saturday, October 28, 2017. The objective was to enhance the capacity of MFWA and national partners in developing a common strategy for effective regional advocacy on the internet and free expression in West Africa and on countering Impunity.



Partners at the meeting

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

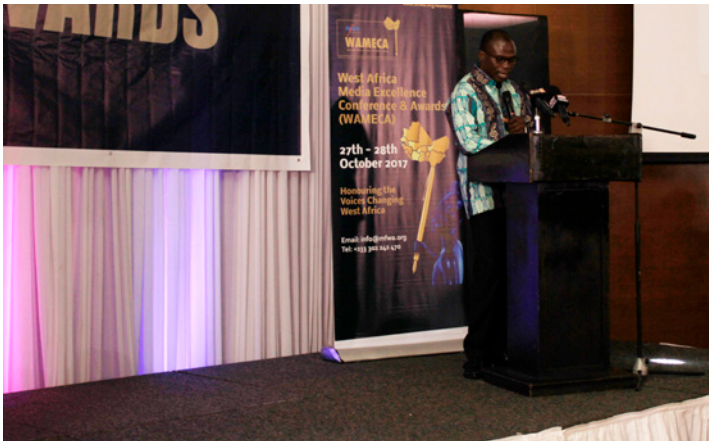
1. L'Institut des Médias pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (IM2DH)
2. Observatoire Nigerien Independent des Medias pour l'Ethique et la Deontologie (ONIMED)
3. L'Observatoire Déontologie et de l'Ethique dans les Medias (ODEM)
4. L'Observatoire de la Liberte de la Presse de l'Ethique et de la Déontologie (OLPED)
5. Centre National de Presse - Norbert Zongo (CNP-NZ)
6. Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP)
7. Media Reform Coordinating Group Sierra Leone (MRCSL)
8. Gambia Press Union (GPU)
9. Hewlett Foundation
10. La Convention des Jeunes Reporters du Senegal (CJRS)
11. International Press Center (IPC)
12. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)

THE AWARDS

The West Africa Media Excellence Awards was held on the evening of Saturday, October 28, 2017. The awards honoured excellence in print, online and broadcast journalism in West Africa. The ceremony brought together over 200 guests including media, editors, journalists, academia, CSOs and corporate organisations.

Some Key Participants at the Awards were:

- Deputy Minister of Information – Ghana, Mr. Perry Okudzeto,
- Hon. Demba Ali Jawo, Minister for Information and Communications Infrastructure of The Gambia.
- Ms. Akua Twumasi, External Communications Advisor, Tullow Oil Ghana,
- Afua Falconer – MTN – Ghana
- Ms. Myra Brown, Regional Public Engagement Specialist, US Embassy, Ghana
- Prof. Kwame Karikari, Journalism Professor, Ghana
- Ms. Sophie Ly Sow, International Media Expert and Director of Nexus Groupe, Senegal
- Mr. Soule Issiaka, International Media Expert, Benin
- Mr. Senyo Hosi, CEO, CBOD



Sulemana Braimah, Executive Director, MFWA giving his welcome address



Kafui Dey and Selikem Acolatse - Apaloo MC's for the event

Seven journalists including the overall best journalist were honoured. Seth Kwame Boateng of Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana emerged the overall best West African Journalist for 2017. The winners took home a plaque, a certificate and cash prizes.

The winners for the various categories were:

- a) Femi Asu, Punch Newspaper, Nigeria, - Oil and Gas Reporting Category,
- b) Seth Kwame Boateng, Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana, - Human Rights Reporting Category,
- c) Foussemi Saibou, Radio Kanal FM, Togo - Health Reporting Category,
- d) Jesusegun Alagbe, Punch Newspaper, Nigeria -Anti-Corruption Reporting Category,
- e) Manasseh Azure Awuni, Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana, - Investigative Reporting Category,
- f) Sheila Williams, Business Day Ghana Ltd Newspaper, Ghana, - ECOWAS and Regional Integration Reporting Category,
- g) Seth Kwame Boateng, Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana, - Overall Best Journalist



Ms. Akua Twumasi (L), External Communications Advisor, Tullow Oil Ghana, presenting the award for Oil and Gas Reporting to Femi Asu (R), Punch Newspaper, Nigeria



Kwame Karikari (L), Journalism Professor, Ghana, presenting the award for Human Rights Reporting to Seth Kwame Boateng (R), Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana



Ghana's Deputy Information Minister, Mr. Perry Okudzeto (L), presenting the award for Health Reporting to Foussemi Saibou (R), Radio Kanal FM, Togo



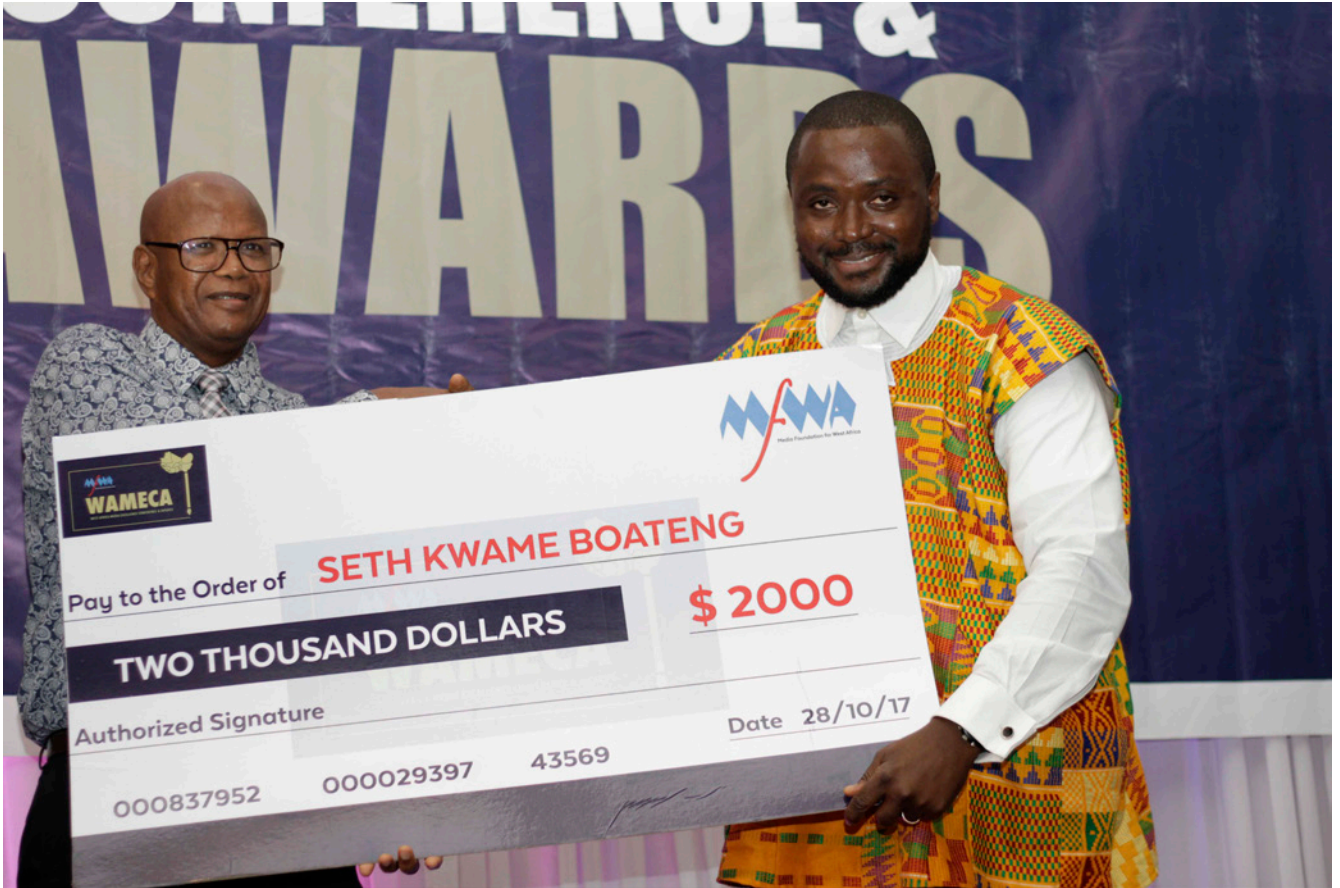
Ms. Myra Brown (L), Regional Public Engagement Specialist, US Embassy in Ghana, presenting the award for Anti-corruption Reporting to Alagbe Jesusegun (R), Punch Newspaper, Nigeria



Dr. Eugene Owusu (L), President's advisor on SDGs, presenting the Investigative Reporting award to Manasseh Azure Awuni (R), Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana



Ms. Vivian K. Asempapa (L), Director of Information and Public Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ghana presenting the ECOWAS Reporting award to Sheila Williams (R), Business Day Newspaper, Ghana.



Hon. Demba Ali Jawo (L), Minister for Information and Communications Infrastructure, The Gambia, presenting the Overall Best Journalist Award to Seth Kwame Boateng (R), Multimedia Broadcasting Limited, Ghana.

WAMECA 2017 IN PICTURES

CONFERENCE



Some of our Conference Speakers: L-R: Mr. Soule Issiaka, Benin; Prof. Kwame Karikari, Ghana; Hon. Demba Ali Jawo, The Gambia; Ms. Sophie Ly-Sow, Senegal; Hon. Mustapha Hamid, Ghana



Hon. Mustapha Abdul - Hamid, Minister for Information, Ghana, opening the Conference



Hon. Demba Ali Jawo, Minister for Information and Communication Infrastructure, The Gambia, making a statement



Ms. Shamima Muslim, Broadcaster, moderating a session



Prof. Kwame Karikari, Founder of MFWA, making a statement



Mr. Roberto Quiroz, Public Affairs Officer, Embassy of the United States, Ghana, making a statement



Mr. Daniel Blank, Country Representative, DW Akademie, speaking at a session



Mr. Malcom Joseph, Executive Director, CEMESP, Liberia, moderating a session



Mr. Emil Toure, President of the Gambia Press Union, making a statement



Mr. Fernand Dede, Vice President, OLPED, Cote d'Ivoire, responding to a question



Mr. Arukaino Umukoro, journalist, Punch Nigeria Limited, Nigeria, speaking at a session



Ms. Kinna Likimani, Blogging Ghana, speaking at a session



Mr. Lanre Arogundade, IPC Nigeria, asking a question



Mr. Muheeb Saeed, Programme Officer MFWA, speaking at a session



A conference participant asking a question



Mr. Ibrahima Balde, CJRS, Senegal, contributing to a discussion



Mr. Franck Assah, journalist, Togo, moderating a session



Ms. Queeneth Tawo, Regional Coordinator, Communications and Capacity Building, WANEP, asking a question



Mr. Abdoulai Diallo, CNP-NZ, Burkina Faso speaking at a session

WAMECA 2017 IN PICTURES

AWARDS



Set Up for WAMECA 2017 Awards Night



Ms. Elizabeth Ohene, WAMECA 2017 Judge



Ms. Sophie Ly-Sow, Director, Nexus Groupe, Senegal, WAMECA 2017 judge



Mr. Senyo Hosi, CEO, CBOD



Dr. Rose Mensah - Kutin, E.D, ABANTU for Development



A cross section of Guests



Mr. Louis Kuupen, Assistant Country Director UNDP Ghana, making a statement



Ms. Ajoa Yeboah Afari, Chairperson, Editors Forum, Ghana



Mr. Sulemana Braimah, E.D, MFWA, in an interview with Joy News



The Lipstic band in action



Staff of MFWA



Dr. Doris Dartey, Member, National Media Commission (NMC)



A cross section of guests

