



REPORT 2019

WEST AFRICA MEDIA EXCELLENCE CONFERENCE & AWARDS (WAMECA) 2019

Impacting Lives through Media Excellence



West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA) 2019

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 seek to reward and inspire media excellence in West Africa as well as honour West African journalists who have produced works that are impacting lives and societies.

WAMECA 2019

From October 17-19, 2019, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) held the third edition of the West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA) at the Swiss Spirit Alisa Hotel in Accra, Ghana.

The Conference was held on Thursday and Friday, October 17-18. The Awards event followed on the Saturday, October 19, 2019.

The 2019 edition of WAMECA was supported by the Facebook, MTN-Ghana, the US Embassy in Ghana, Access Now, DW Akademie, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Stanbic Bank and Swiss Spirit Alisa Hotel, with over fifty media partners across West Africa.

This report presents highlights of WAMECA 2019 – the conference, speakers, panelists, the participants, award winners, key issues discussed and recommendations made.

THE CONFERENCE

The Conference was held on the theme: **Fake News, Social Media and Elections in Africa** and hosted over 150 participants including media professionals, human rights and freedom of expression advocates, journalists, academia and heads of civil society organisations (CSOs). There were also representatives from media development organisations as well as research institutes.

Some key personalities at WAMECA 2019 were:

- Advocate Pansy Tlakula – Chairperson, Information Regulator of South Africa and immediate past Chair of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights
- Roberto Quiroz – Counselor for Public Affairs, United States Embassy in Ghana
- Jean Mensa – Chairperson of Electoral Commission of Ghana
- Ahmed Newton Barry – Chairperson of Electoral Commission of Burkina Faso
- Hon. George Andah – Deputy Minister of Communication, Ghana and Member of Parliament
- Akua Gyekye – Public Policy Manager, Africa and MENA Elections at Facebook
- Sophie Ly Sow – Board Chairperson, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
- ACP David Eklū – Director General, Public Affairs Directorate, Ghana Police Service

- Supt. Gassimou Soumah – Deputy PRO, Guinea National Police
- Queeneth Tawo – Regional Coordinator, Women, Peace and Security – West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
- Kenneth Ashigbey – Chief Executive Officer, Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications
- Edward Pittman, program Officer Open Society Foundations
- Edetaen Ojo – Executive Director, Media Rights Agenda, Nigeria
- Hawa Ba – Senegal Country Officer, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)
- Nana Kwesi Gyan-Apenteng – Former Chairman, National Media Commission, Ghana
- Rodney Sieh – Publisher and Editor, Frontpage Africa, Liberia
- Dapo Olorunyomi – Publisher/CEO, Premium Times, Nigeria
- George Sarpong – Executive Secretary of the National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana
- Shuaibu Usman Leman – Executive Secretary, Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigeria
- Samba Badji – Deputy Editor, Africa-Check, Senegal
- Heads of national partner organisations of the MFWA in West Africa
- Fatoumata Yansane Balde – Board Member, MFWA

- Prof. Kwame Karikari –Board Member, MFWA
- Soulé Issiaka – Former Board Member, MFWA
- Georgina Fiagbenu – Corporate Communications Executive, MTN-Ghana
- Kojo Akoi-Larbi – Communications Manager, Stanbic Bank Ghana
- Susanne Fuchs-Mwakideu – Country Representative, DW Akademie
- Lacerda Lipangue – Project Coordinator, ActionAid Denmark

DAY ONE

Opening Remarks, Solidarity Messages and Keynote Address

The Executive Director of the MFWA, Sulemana Braimah, delivered the opening remarks reiterating the need for a concerted effort at addressing issues of Fake News, Social Media and Elections. He invited participants to a dispassionate conversation on these issues in order to come up with key recommendations on the way forward.

The Former Board Chairman of the MFWA, Edetaen Ojo, delivered the welcome address in which he underlined the relevance of the theme for the conference to the current political dynamics of West Africa, where elections are scheduled in a number of countries in 2020 with social media set play a key disruptive or constructive role depending on how it is handled.



Hon. George Andah, Deputy Minister of Communications, Ghana

There were also messages from the Minister of Information, Kojo Opong Nkrumah, the Deputy Minister of Communications, Hon. George Andah and Counselor for Public Affairs Officer, US Embassy in Ghana, Roberto Quiroz, all of them congratulating the MFWA on the successful organisation of WAMECA and reaffirming their commitment to consensus building in securing the social media space. Hon. George Andah gave a firm assurance that Ghana will not shut down social media platforms at any time, including during the 2020 general elections.

Keynote Address

Advocate Pansy Tlakula, Chair of the Information Regulator of South Africa and immediate past chair of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, delivered the keynote Address. She observed that while technology has become an important tool in our daily lives, it is also negatively affecting people's privacy and online safety.

She explained that during elections, people's personal information get into the hands of third parties who use it to try to influence the electoral processes. She raised red flags on political parties unlawfully obtaining personal information and data of voters to send unwelcome messages to citizens.

Advocate Pansy cautioned the authorities in Africa who shut down the internet under pretext of protecting national security to desist from the practice which costs so much economically and socially.



Guest of Honour for WAMECA 2019

Advocate Pansy Tlakula, Chair of the Information Regulator of South Africa and immediate past chair of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights

Remarks by Special Guest

In his opening remarks, Mr. Roberto Quiroz, the Counselor for Public Affairs Officer of the United States Embassy in Ghana, commended journalists for their contribution in sustaining democracy, freedom of the press and nation building across Africa.

He further emphasized the role of the media as vanguards of transparency and good governance.

“An independent media committed to responsible, fact-based journalism is essential to promote democratic governance, transparency and a well-informed, and active citizenry engage in holding governments and all sectors accountable to the book,” he said.

Referring to the theme of the conference, he explained that freedom of communication is a right and not a privilege and lifting the voices of citizens and providing facts and real information is the way to enhance communication.

Mr. Quiroz bemoaned the censorship, abuse and persecution journalists are facing and stressed the importance of media freedom across the world.



*Roberto Quiroz, Counselor for Public Affairs,
United States Embassy in Ghana*

Plenary Sessions

A. Presentations and Panel Discussions

Akua K. Gyekye, Public Policy Manager, Africa and MENA Elections at Facebook, spoke on the topic: *Protecting Election Integrity on Facebook*. She explained Facebook's policies on data protection and outlined mechanisms that have put in place to ensure that users of its platforms are safe.



*Akua K. Gyekye, Public Policy Manager,
Africa and MENA Elections, Facebook*

Ms. Gyekye said her outfit has adopted a three-fold approach to tackling false information on its platform.

Facebook, *Removes* contents that violate community standards, *Reduces* the spread of problematic content that undermines the authenticity of the platform, *Inform* the public with additional context to enable them choose what to click, read or share, especially during critical times like elections

She further noted that Facebook has also created partnerships with Fact-checking Organisations to help fact-check information put out,

especially during electioneering periods. Currently, Facebook is partnering Dubawa, Africa Check and other similar initiatives in Africa to fact-check news posted on the platform.

I. Panel Discussion - When it's Fake it is not News and when its News, it is not Fake. Is Fake News Real or a Misnomer?

The session was moderated by George Sarpong, Executive Secretary of the National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana, with the following as panelists:

1. Rodney Sieh, Editor, Frontpage Africa, Liberia
2. Ismail Akwei, Editor-In-Chief, GhanaWeb
3. Shuaibu Usman Leman, Executive Secretary, Nigerian Union of Journalists, Nigeria
4. Sandister Tei, Deputy Programmes Manager, Citi FM/TV, Ghana

Action Points/Recommendations

- i. There should be increased sensitisation of citizens on the phenomenon of fake news and the harm it can cause.
- ii. The media and government must make efforts at training citizens on how to spot fake news.
- iii. Stakeholders must work together to promote and demand responsible use of the internet to share news.

- iv. Individuals should demand better services from the network providers and organisations rendering such services.
- v. Stakeholders who are information providers should help in fighting fake news.
- vi. The capacity of media regulators to detect and flag fake news must be enhanced.



Sandister Tei making a submission during the session



Rodney Sie making a submission during the session

II. Panel Discussion – Spotting and Stopping the Fake from going Viral

The session was moderated by Sulemana Braimah, Executive Director of the MFWA, with the following as panelists:

1. Samba Badji, Africa-Check, Senegal
2. Dapo Olorunyomi, Publisher/CEO, Premium Times, Nigeria
3. Kinna Likimani, Odekro, Ghana
4. Nesmon De Laure, Blogger, Cote d'Ivoire



Dapo Olorunyomi making a submission during the session



Kinna Likimani making a point during the session



Panelists for the session on "Spotting and Stopping the Fake from going viral"

DAY TWO

The second day of the event focused on three main panel discussions:

- Managing Elections in Africa – How can Social Media Help or Hurt Elections Management;
- Fake News and Elections Security; and
- A presentation on Co-ordinated Media Response to Tackling Fake News during Elections – The Nigeria Example.

III. Panel discussion: Managing Elections in Africa – How can Social Media Help or Hurt Elections Management?

The session was moderated by Advocate Pansy Tlakula, Chairperson of the Information Regulator, South Africa, with the following as panelists:

The panelists were:

- Madam Jean Mensa - Chairperson of Electoral Commission of Ghana
- Ahmed Newton Barry - Chairperson of Electoral Commission of Burkina Faso



Panelists for the session on “Managing elections in Africa-- How can Social Media Help or Hurt Elections Management?”

Action Points/Recommendation

- i. There is the need to build a solid team to educate the public and provide timely information ahead of the spread of fake news.
- ii. All journalists and citizens must receive social media education and, more importantly, journalists must know the dangers involved.
- iii. There is the need to use local languages to disseminate information to the public.
- iv. Election management bodies must build the capacity of their staff to engage citizens at the local levels.
- v. To ensure effective communication, community radios should be used to disseminate information to local people.
- vi. Create platforms that can help people express themselves and participate in the decision-making process.
- vii. Electoral Management bodies must institute effective information systems that will enable them stop fake news from spreading.
- viii. In collaboration with political parties, election management bodies must issue guidance and regulations on the use of voters' information and this was done.

IV. Panel discussion – Fake News and Elections Security

The session was moderated by Ms. Sophie Ly Sow, MFWA Board Member, with the following as panelists:

- ACP David Eklou - Director General, Public Affairs Directorate, Ghana Police Service
- Supt Gassimou Soumah, Dep. PRO, Guinea National Police
- Queeneth Tawo, Regional Coordinator, Women, Peace and Security - WANEP.



Sophie Ly Sow making a point



ACP David Eklou making a point during the session



Supt Gassimou Soumah making a statement during the session

Action Points/Recommendations

- i. Citizens must be educated to understand the dynamics of fake news and how to manage it so people will not act on the information to trigger violence.
- ii. Security institutions, election management bodies and the media must identify early warning signs and quickly verify information to stall the spread of fake news.

- iii. The Police Services must build capacities of police officers in the use of the technology to address issues of fake news.
- iv. Election management bodies and the security services must monitor the internet and social media platforms to follow up on information or fake news that are circulating.
- v. The government and the media must build the capacity of citizens and relevant authorities to detect fake news.
- vi. Individuals must make conscious efforts towards stopping the circulation and spreading fake news.
- vii. Strategies in debunking fake news should be deployed at all levels particularly government institutions because after fake news is spread, it is difficult to debunk it.

B. Presentation Co-ordinated Media Response to Tackling Fake News during Elections – The Nigeria Example

The presentation was made by Dapo Olorunyomi, Publisher/CEO Premium Times, Nigeria

Action Points/Recommendations

- i. There is the need for good policy making to be able to build democracy in communities.
- ii. Building the capacity of people to become internet literate and news literate is crucial.
- iii. Trend analysis is necessary to help media monitoring and reviewing approaches to ensure the right information is received.

V. Panel Discussion - Keeping the Net On: Combating Network Shutdowns during Elections, the Experience so Far

The session was moderated by Kenneth Ashigbey, CEO, Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, with the following as panelists:

1. Emmanuel Vitus, Paradigm Initiative, Nigeria
2. Salim Azim Assani, Cofounder & Head of Communication WenakLabs, Chad
3. Simone Tiofack Toussi, Researcher on Digital Rights, Cameroon
4. Felicia Anthonio, Co-ordinator, Africa Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX)



Panelists for the session on “Combating Network Shutdowns during Elections, the Experience so Far”

Action Points/Recommendation

The following actions and recommendations were proposed.

- i. There is the need to use infographic diagrams and videos, and other communication materials to educate the public on internet shutdown so they can assess their right.
- ii. Countries across West Africa should leverage on the bill that protect internet users rights online in Africa. The document can be accessed on the Paradigm Initiative page—<https://paradigmhq.org/>.

- iii. There is the need to support Academia to present research as a way of evidence to address the impact of internet shutdown.
- iv. Media and Internet Rights organisations must share progress report of countries that have shut down the internet.
- v. There is the need for the legislature to address the issues of internet shutdowns in countries.
- vi. There is the need to have multi-stakeholder approach to address internet shutdown.

C. Presentation – Countering the Pushback on Digital Rights; Leveraging on the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms

This was presented by Edetaen Ojo, Former Board Chairman of the MFWA and the Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda.

Key points:

- i. African governments must work consciously to acquire the technical capacity to legislate digital rights effectively.
- ii. Many African countries have adopted regulations on digital content from mostly repressive countries outside the continent and these regulations must be thoroughly revised to reflect local contexts.
- iii. Citizens must be encouraged to participate in legislative processes based on established human rights principles, decisions of international courts and the opinions of experts.

THE AWARDS

The third edition of the West Africa Media Excellence Awards was held on the evening of Saturday, October 19, 2019. The Awards ceremony honoured journalists across West Africa whose works are impacting society.

The ceremony brought together over 300 guests including editors, journalists, academics, activists, heads of civil society organisations (CSOs) and corporate organisations.

Guest of Honour at the Awards:

Advocate Pansy Tlakula – Chairperson of the Information Regulator of South Africa and former Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

Eight awards including the overall best journalist were presented. Sama Tounwendsida Hugues Richard of L'Observateur Paalga, Burkina Faso was adjudged the overall best West African Journalist for 2019. The winners took home a plaque, a certificate and cash prizes.

The winners for the various categories were:



Sama Tounwendsida Hugues Richard (L), Burkina Faso, Winner Health Reporting Category & Overall Best Journalist for WAMECA 2019, receiving his award from Advocate Pansy Tlakula(R)



Nabil Ahmed Rufai (L), Nigeria – Winner SDGs Reporting Category, receiving his award from Soulé Issiaka (R)



Tunde Ajaja, PUNCH (L), Nigeria – Winner Business and SMEs Reporting Category, receiving his award from Kojo Akoi-Larbi (R)



Seriba Kone (L), Cote D'Ivoire – Winner Anti-Corruption Reporting Category, receiving his award from Nana Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng (R)



Kunle Adebajo (L), Nigeria – Winner Telecommunications and ICTs Reporting Category, receiving his award from Georgina Fiagbenu (R)



Cletus Umoh Ukpong (L), Nigeria – Winner Investigative Reporting Category, receiving his award from Hawa Ba (R)



Tobore Ovuorie (L), Nigeria – Winner Human Rights Reporting Category, receiving his award from Roberto Quiroz (R)

PHOTOS FROM WAMECA 2019



Advocate Pansy Tlakula, Chair of the Information Regulator of South Africa speaking at the Conference



Roberto Quiroz, Counselor for Public Affairs, United States Embassy in Ghana, speaking at the Conference



Hawa Ba, Senegal Country Officer, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), speaking at the Conference



Afia Servaah Boateng, Communications Advisor (Media Relations), MTN Ghana, making a remark



Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director, Media Rights Agenda, Nigeria, making a presentation at the conference



Edward Pittman, Program Officer Open Society Foundations

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A cross-section of participants at the conference



Fatoumata Yansane Balde, Board Member, MFWA



*Dapo Olorunyomi, Publisher/CEO,
Premium Times, Nigeria*



Some key Stakeholders at the Conference supporting WAMECA 2019 publicity



A Cross-section of participants at the conference



Soule Issiaka, President, Association pour la Promotion des media, Benin



Susanne Fuchs-Mwakiden – Country Representative, DW Akademie



Nana Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng – Former Chairman, National Media Commission, Ghana



Some finalists at the Awards ceremony



Advocate Pansy Tlakula & Prof. Kwame Karikari at the Awards



The Sensational Wulomei band performing to entertain audience at the Awards ceremony

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