

the GONGGONG



Issue 8 | NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2015

Dear stakeholder,

We are delighted to bring you yet another edition of our newsletter, the Gongong. This month, the Media Foundation for West Africa has been involved in a number of activities and events within and outside the West African sub-region. These activities include initiatives and meetings on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting good governance through citizen participation, Freedom of Expression through advocacy on Digital rights and safety of journalists. Please have a splendid time as you read through.

Media Development & Democracy

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The MFWA has become a member of a Small Coordinating Group for institutionalising Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Platforms on SDGs in Ghana. The platform counts more than 60 member organisations, and will contribute to more coordinated efforts and improved partnerships for more

effective implementation of the SDGs in Ghana. Other members of the Small Coordinating Group include Care International Ghana, Abantu for Development, Christian Aid, World University Service of Canada, Christian Council and Institute of Green Growth Solutions.

Ebola

Promoting Public Education on Ebola through Media

Journalists from 60 radio stations were trained in Effective Ebola Reporting on November 24, 2015 by the MFWA. The training was a follow up on a similar training organised by the MFWA in 2014. “We did the follow up training because Ebola remains a threat in the region. We cannot prevent the disease from entering countries, but we can help prevent a spread through public awareness on preventive measures”, said Rikke Sig Hansen, Project Coordinator in charge of MFWA's Media and Ebola project.

The 60 journalists were trained in effective use of key messages in development reporting by

experienced journalist and former minister of state Ms. Elizabeth Ohene, and Dr. Gilbert Tietaah from the School of Communication, University of Ghana.

The training forms part of the UNESCO funded project “Promoting Public Education on Ebola through Media” which aims at building the capacity of media to support public education and social mobilization efforts to have Ghanaians well informed about the Ebola Virus Disease and preventive practices.

After the training, 20 selected local stations will receive support for the production of Ebola key messages. Furthermore, a cartoon on Ebola prevention has been produced to be distributed by the National Youth Authority.



Participants at the Training on Effective Ebola Reporting

Six Districts in Northern Ghana Commit To Increased Citizens' Engagement in Local Governance

Citizens in six districts in the Northern and Upper West regions of Ghana will enjoy access to more platforms that enable them to engage their local authorities on pertinent governance and development issues. Through consistent radio programming and community governance dialogues, the citizens will more importantly have increased opportunity to interact frequently, hear more about local developments, ask questions and highlight their concerns for appropriate actions and responses from their local government authorities.

Leaders of the six Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) committed to improve information disclosure and accountability to citizens when the Media Foundation for West Africa facilitated and brokered collaborations between the MMDAs, local-based radio stations and Community Based Organisations under the Media for Participatory and Accountable Local Governance Project.

The MMDAs are Tamale Metropolitan, Savelugu-Nanton District and West Mamprusi District in the Northern region; Sissala-East District, Nandom

District and Wa Municipal in the Upper West region.

The MFWA's Programme Officer for Media, Democracy and Development, Abigail Larbi-Odei said "citizens' participation is central to good governance and development and for proper development to take place, citizens must be consulted and adequately engaged in the governance of their daily lives, a process radio provides a significant impetus". She added that "when leaders commit to and actually disclose information to citizens; it helps to build trust in leaders and reduce the agitations and apathy on the part of citizens towards local development". Hence this initiative to bridge the communication gap between citizens and their local government leaders.

The MFWA's "Radio for Participatory and Accountable local governance project" has been implemented in more than 20 districts across the country in different phases. Feedback from the earlier phases of the project showed demonstrable listener satisfaction, improved service delivery and demand-driven development.



Consultation Meeting with Nandom District Assembly Radio FREED & PRUDA CBO



Consultative Meeting with Wa Municipal Assembly with Radio Progress and Partner CBO



Cyber security, Digital Trust Critical for Freedom of Expression Online

Typical of the annual meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the 10th IGF which was held in João Pessoa, Brazil, was packed with several sessions.

Across the different sessions however, certain issues recurred and dominated the discussions. These included discussions on cyber security, privacy, freedom of expression online, WSIS+10 Review and Zero rating.

Discussions concerning the relationships between cyber security, digital trust, privacy and freedom of expression in particular were quite revealing and critical.

The internet continues to dramatically improve real-time communication, knowledge creation, information sharing and innovation. Because of the immense benefits the internet offers for human development, connecting the next billion to the network of networks has become a global concern.

Cybersecurity and trust in the digital environment is an imperative for the full realisation of development aspirations, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, trust in the digital environment is eroding with increasing cybersecurity incidents – whether it is by error, malware or crime.

Incidents of surveillance, blocking and filtering in particular threatens an individual's rights to privacy and freedom of expression online. It breeds self-censorship, nurtures fear and culminates in the criminalisation of speech. It is quite paradoxical that the same platform that has

transformed communications around the world and given a voice to people, including otherwise disenfranchised populations, is gradually becoming a platform for surveillance and 'witch-hunting.'

For the continuous development and evolution of the internet, and for the internet to fully become the driver of growth and development, human rights, including the right to freedom of expression online, must be respected.

It is in respect of this that the UN General Assembly affirmed that the rights people have offline must also be protected online.

It is expected that these discussions at the global IGF will be continued at national and regional levels to ensure that the security of the internet is guaranteed to drive personal, national and global development.

The IGF is a unique platform where all stakeholders in the internet ecosystem across the world converge every year to share information and experiences and proffer solutions to key internet issues.

The 2015 IGF in Joao Pessoa was under the theme, "Evolution of Internet Governance: Empowering Sustainable Development." It was attended by about 2,137 people including the Coordinator of the Media Foundation for West Africa's (MFWA's) Internet Freedom Programme, Dora B. Mawutor. In all, about 112 countries worldwide were represented at the 2015 IGF.

The MFWA at IGF 2015

The 10th Global Internet Forum (IGF) was held in João Pessoa, Brazil, from 10th to 13th November, 2015 under the theme, Empowering Sustainable Development".

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) was one of the 2,137 onsite participants from about 112 countries representing all stakeholder groups and regions. The organisation was represented by the Coordinator of the MFWA's Internet Freedom Programme, Dora B. Mawutor. The organisation's participation in IGF 2015 was necessary to help it network with other like-

minded organisations, build on its knowledge in Internet Governance (IG) Issues and be abreast with trending issues in IG.

"Participating in this year's IGF has been another capacity building platform for me. Considering the various issues discussed, from digital trust to WSIS+10 Review and zero rating discussions, one can only agree that the internet is still evolving and one must constantly be abreast with immerging issues for effective advocacy work," Ms Mawutor noted.

MFWA Hosts Mandela Washington Fellows from 4 Countries

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is hosting four fellows from the 2015 cohort of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, the flagship programme of President Obama's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI).

The Fellows, who will be hosted by the MFWA for six months, are Ms. Mirabel Nfihkela Ngong from Cameroon, Mr. Omotola Samuel Oni from Nigeria, Mr. Emile Essan Ako from Cote D'Ivoire, and Mr. Felix Dela Klutse from Ghana. These Fellows have experiences from diverse tracks spanning youth and girls empowerment, community mobilisation, Media and Citizens' participation in governance, gender empowerment, business and entrepreneurship.

"We are pleased to be one of the few organisations on the continent to have the opportunity of hosting and working with these exceptional young Africans who have demonstrated excellence in their different fields of endeavor," said Sulemana Braimah, Executive Director of the MFWA.

"As a regional organisation, it is great to host and work with people from different countries and backgrounds. We are hopeful that they will contribute to promote freedom of expression and good governance in the West Africa region, and leave with enhanced knowledge and skills for their future endeavours."



Mr. Felix Dela Klutse



Ms. Mirabel Nfihkela Ngong



Mr. Omotola Samuel Oni



Mr. Emile Essan Ako



Freedom of Expression Rights Monitoring and Campaigns

Freedom of Expression Violations

In the month of November, six freedom of expression violations were reported. The violations which were in the form of suspensions, fines, detention and threats were recorded in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger and Ghana. Even though the reported violations were only five, they affected more than 5 journalists/media organisations.

On November 4, the Beninois media regulatory body, Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC) suspended a private daily, *Le Matinal* for publishing articles described by the Commission's president as "abusive."

On November 4, two journalists were arrested and questioned by police in Niger. Roufai Dan Doua, Editor in Chief of the 90 Minutes newspaper and Zabeirou Souley, the Editor in Chief of the private weekly, *Le Nouveau Républicain* were arrested over a publication on alleged embezzlement of funds by the president of Niger football Federation.

On November 9, the Ivorian media regulatory body, Conseil National de la Presse (CNP) suspended *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan* and *Aujourd'hui* newspapers together with a journalist, following publications that the regulator deemed unprofessional. A statement issued on November 9, 2015 by the CNP said the two papers have been banned for three editions, while the journalist, Alafe Wakili, was suspended for 30 days with his professional ID card withdrawn during the period.

On November 14, Police in Niger arrested and detained four journalists from two private television stations for three days without charge. The journalists' cameras, microphones and mobile phones were also seized after their arrest.

The journalists Sidikou Harouna and Luc Oga; Alou Aboubacar and Abdoulaye Moussa were from privately-owned television stations Bonferey TV and Niger 24 respectively.

On November 18, Nii Kpakpo Addo a lawyer representing a group of judges implicated in a recent corruption scandal in Ghana threatened that his clients will sue media organisations which published an investigative documentary video. The video, which shows about 34 judges allegedly taking bribes to influence cases they were handling, was put together by Ghana's investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who subsequently petitioned the president to sack the judges and judicial staff involved.

On November 23, a Magistrate's Court in Cotonou suspended the *Palmares* newspaper for three months and ordered the paper, its director of publication, and editor to pay a total of 3 million FCFA (4,860 US dollars) in fines and damages over a publication judged to be defamatory of a minister of state.

We condemn these incidents and urge regulatory bodies in Cote d'Ivoire and Benin to find other means of punishing journalists and media organisations perceived to be unprofessional. While we recommend to the respective regulatory bodies to institute sustained professional development interventions for the media, we also urge journalists to be guided by the ethics of the profession.

The MFWA also calls on the authorities and individuals in Niger and Ghana to recognise the very important role of free expression in development and democracy, and, therefore to respect the rights of journalists and individuals to freely express themselves.

Safety of Journalists and Anti-Impunity

- On November 2, the MFWA joined the world to mark the International Day to End Impunity and the Safety of Journalists. As part of the celebration, we released the second part of a creative letter known as Letter from the Grave. The letter highlighted the many impunity cases in The Gambia and called on the African Union, ECOWAS, UN and world leaders to call on President Yahya Jammeh to respect human rights and freedom of expression and end impunity in The Gambia.
- Also on November 2, the MFWA issued a statement to highlight the importance of journalists' safety and the issue of impunity in West Africa. The MFWA urged countries in West Africa to renew their commitment to protecting journalists and media organisations by ensuring that violators of journalists' rights are punished.
- As part of the anti-impunity campaign, we petitioned The Chair of the ECOWAS, President Macky Sall of Senegal. The petition letter which was supported by 34 civil society organisations from eight ECOWAS Countries touched on the gross and systematic human rights violations against journalists, human rights activists and citizens. These violations included killings, enforced disappearances, tortures, arbitrary arrests and detentions. The MFWA noted that by these actions, The Gambia has breached its commitment to respect journalists' rights and safety under Article 66 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty. The Gambia has also failed to comply with three judgements of the ECOWAS Court. The MFWA and the 34 CSOs appealed to ECOWAS to sanction The Gambia by suspending the country from participating in ECOWAS activities.



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