



Welcome Note

Welcome to this edition of the Gong Gong, our quarterly newsletter that captures developments, activities and projects in the fight for free expression and advancing the agenda of media, development and good governance in West Africa.

This issue is the first for the year 2016.

Our Media and Development team have been busy on the ground with activities for our campaign language monitoring project dubbed, "Issues NOT Insults",

towards Ghana's 2016 elections. This is a landmark project which was widely acclaimed to have contributed towards a peaceful political atmosphere and reduced tensions during Ghana's last elections in 2012.

The success of the previous project motivated us to expand the coverage with regards to total number of radio stations to be monitored and consequently the number of monitors to be recruited. We are poised for an effective exercise scheduled to begin in April, running till the end of the year with reports issued every two weeks.

We were glad to also host a first-ever regional conference, the West Africa Conference for Media and Participatory Governance under the theme:

Promoting Professional Journalism for Good Governance in West Africa.

We were honoured to have the President of Burkina Faso's Transitional Parliament, Hon. Cheriff Sy as keynote speaker, for our event.

The organisation continued activities for its Internet Freedom Programme with participation in an Internet Freedom Forum in Abuja, Nigeria.

Our Freedom of Expression team followed up on a rather worrying development in The Gambia and called for the immediate release of journalist Abdoulaye Cessay who has been in custody since June 2015.

We believe you will find the stories in this edition very informative and interesting. Do give us feedback via suggestions and comments through e-mail or on our social media pages.

Thank you for reading.



Insults, False Claims Dominated Political Discourse in Ghana's 2012 Elections.

Will 2016 Be Different?



By. Abigail Larbi Odei
(Programme Manager, Media Development & Democracy)

As a country, we pride ourselves in having successfully gone through six competitive presidential and parliamentary elections without violence. What is evident, however, is that these elections have always been associated with potential election crises, which have had to be managed in order to avoid full-blown election-related conflicts.

As Ghana prepares for its seventh consecutive elections in November, political tensions are already building up. It is the 2nd quarter of the year and already insults and propaganda messages have become common in political debates, discussions in the media and other public platforms.

Elections constitute one of the first steps in any democracy; ordinarily meant to afford citizens the freedom to choose their leaders in a peaceful manner. Unfortunately, in Africa, elections exceed just the competition of ideas and how best those ideas are communicated to convince the electorate in one's favour. Clearly, underlying the kenkey and fish concerns or bread and butter issues (depending on your class)

which politicians promise to deal with are the lofty capitalist ideals of winning power, forming a government and controlling state resources. In many cases these have led to personal aggrandisement rather than actual development and improvement in the lives of the electorate.

The partisan nature of elections no doubt divides society along such lines and in the effort to win over the electorate, politicians go all length, foul or fair, in their campaigning. Political discourse during electioneering periods gets heated such that the closer the Election Day, the hotter the political discourse gets.

As a result of the agenda setting capability of the media, they become the most influential platform for reaching the masses. Political parties, their assigns, serial callers and communicators more vigorously than ever use the media, especially radio, to reach the masses. Unfortunately, this is sometime done in ways that suggest that any expression can be used on radio without regard for the basic ethos of cultural and social values regarding public communication.

Indeed, the dangers inherent in mass communication cannot be overlooked and in a media pluralistic environment such as the one we enjoy in Ghana it will be naïve for us to think that all media are set up based on the much-coveted ideals informing, educating and entertain-

ing towards the ultimate of ensuring social justice, peace and development.

Clearly, ownership wishes and political party interests become glaring in such times making the ideals of truth, fact-checking and objectivity casualties in the process. Simply put, they are sacrificed on the altar of jarring penchant for intemperate, indecent, unethical language expressions and personal vendetta. The result is the resort to character assassination insult of persons, lying unsubstantiated allegations, unwarranted outburst of fury, provocation and inciting violence.

Perhaps Rwanda and Kenya have become a cliché in Africa such that they no longer invoke the caution it used to. But should Ghana become the next synonym for electoral violence on the continent? Certainly not!

In the 2012 elections, insulting/offensive comments, unsubstantiated allegations and provocative remarks were the three most frequently used types of indecent expressions against political opponents of a list of 10 of such expressions. There was an average of four (4) indecent expressions recorded on daily basis by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) between April and to December.

For the nine month monitoring period, 2,850 programmes were monitored on the 31 radio stations. A total of 509 indecent expressions were coded on those programmes with as much as 404 indecent expressions by political party affiliates.

As the elections draw closer and political parties intensify their campaigning, Will these change in 2016? Will media discussions be focused on issues rather than insults? Do politicians and media institu-

tions care enough about the brands and reputation so as to be measured and guarded in their remarks? Already, there is on daily basis one allegation or the other; can the media help by doing some more fact-checking and separating facts from opinions, can the media also wear their gate keeping caps tightly so as to control such elements on the airwaves.

As remarked by a friend recently, "even in America, elections are characterised by these kinds of expressions and particularly for their 2016 electioneering process there is a certain Donald Trump rocking the boat". This may be rightly so but how do we compare apples and oranges, contrasting social and cultural values of the two countries. We live in a country where culturally words such as "sebe" and "taflatse" are the expressions used when a communicator thinks his or her language will be deemed insulting. Our cultural modes of address simply frown on abusive language in public communication.

Again, some media practitioners ask "how do you expect our programmes be hot if we should only empanel people who will appear like saints; our programmes will lose their popularity and that will cut our advertising incomes drastically". While this may also be a legitimate question, what is also important to remember is that ample evidence suggests that people can discuss issues passionately without insults or descending into the gutters. This is where owners and operators of media bear a greater responsibility of professionalism.

During the 2012 elections campaign language monitoring exercise, several

>>>Cont. on Pg. 3

MFWA, National Partners Strategise for Effective Advocacy Efforts



Stakeholders at the West Africa Conference for Media and Participatory Governance

On March 16 and 17, 2016, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and national partners from 13 countries in West Africa met in Accra to strategise for more effective regional and national advocacy on safety of journalists, access to information and internet freedom at the National Partners Strategy and Capacity Building Meeting.

Strategy sessions at the meeting were combined with hands-on workshops on advocacy for

the passage and implementation of RTI legislation; improving media professionalism, press freedom and free expression online and offline in the West Africa region.

The two-day National Partners Meeting followed the maiden West Africa Conference on Media and Participatory Governance, which was organised by MFWA and held on March 15, 2015.

The Conference brought together leading freedom of expression and media development organisations from 15 countries in West Africa, ECOWAS,

WACSOF, UN agencies, the diplomatic corps in Accra and other civil society stakeholders. The aim was to identify key challenges in the areas of freedom of expression and the role of the media to promote good governance, regional integration and peace in West Africa.

Hon. Cheriff Moumina Sy, a renowned journalist and President of Burkina Faso's erstwhile Transitional Parliament delivered the keynote speech. In his speech he emphasized that media must be information channels and that journalists must also contribute towards forming critical-

minded citizens, capable of participating in building a more just and supportive society.

A representative from Ghana's Ministry of Communications officially opened the Conference, which also featured speeches and panel discussions with representation by UNESCO, the ECOWAS Commission, MFWA national partners and IFEX.

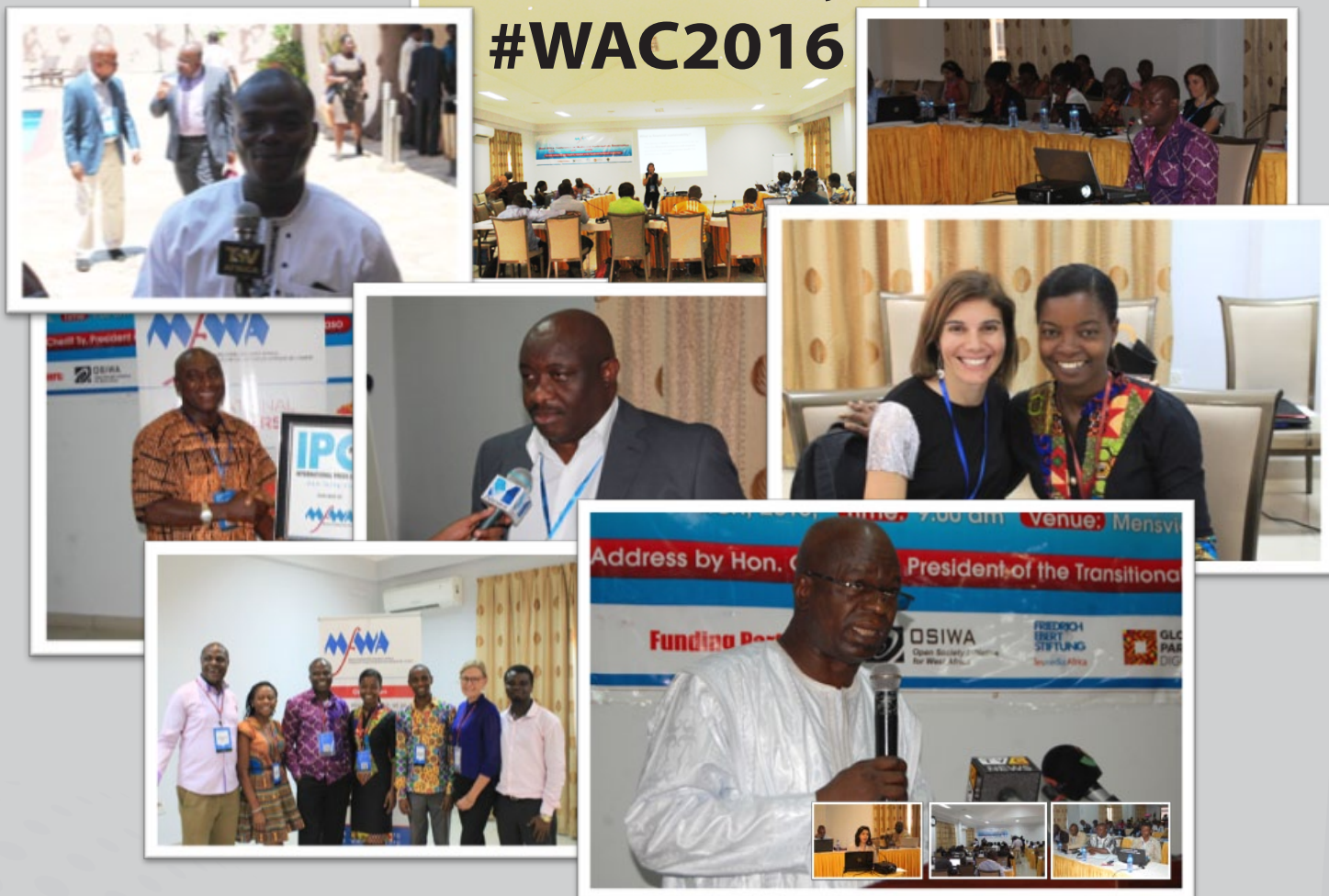
Concluding on the Conference participants called on governments in West Africa to prioritise safety of journalists and access to information; and deplored the continuous attacks on journalists and impunity for which such crimes are committed. Participants also noted with concern that many more countries in the region are yet to pass Right to Information laws to guarantee access to information for citizens.

The National Partners Meeting and the Conference was organised with funding support from OSIWA, fesmedia Africa, the Embassy of the United States in Ghana and Global Partners Digital.



West Africa Conference on Media and Participatory Governance

#WAC2016



West Africa: 142 Free Expression Violations Recorded in 2015

A total of 142 incidents of free expression violations were recorded across West Africa in 2015. Almost 90 percent of the incidents were violations against journalists and media organisations, a development that further highlights the important issue of safety of journalists in the region. The press freedom violations were predominantly in the form of arrests, attacks, threats, suspensions and censorship among others.

The Executive Director of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Sulemana Braimah made the figures known when he made a presentation on safety of journalists in West Africa at the Legon Centre for International Affairs (LECIAD).

Mr. Braimah was speaking at a two-day training workshop for 18 journalists selected from seven West Africa countries on March 30 and 31. The training workshop which was organized jointly by the School of Information and Communication Studies and LECIAD was focused on training journalists

in conflict reporting and peace journalism.

“The situation in many countries either remained the same or got worse than the previous year. The violations recorded in 2015 represent a 40% increase over the previous year, 2014,” he explained. “This is the trend and this is why the issue of safety of journalists remains very important”.

The worst perpetrators of violations were security officials, state agencies and organized groups. The countries with the highest incidents of violations were Nigeria (34); Niger (16); and The Gambia (15). Both Guinea and Senegal recorded 11 incidents. Ghana, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire each recorded 10 violations. The rest were Benin (7), Sierra Leone (6), Togo (4), Mali (3), Guinea-Bissau (2), Liberia (2) and Mauritania (1). No incident was recorded in Cape Verde.

The figures represented only the incidents that were reported and therefore the situation in the region could be worse than presented.

Mr. Braimah urged the journalists to be interested in supporting advocacy around journalists' safety. He also challenged them to advocate for their media organisations in the region to develop and implement safety policies for their workers.

At a recent meeting of the leading press freedom organisations in West Africa, the issue of safety of journalists was highlighted as a major concern affected press freedom and media development in the region. The organisations from the 16 countries of West Africa, issued a joint communiqué urging governments in the region to prioritise safety of journalists in all countries.

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individuals called the MFWA to challenge the findings put out. They however did not come back after they had received audio recordings of their voices and some of the unprintable remarks they had made on air. Of course, in the haste to outdo opponents politicians are often unmindful of what they are saying, how they are saying it and how what they are saying affects listeners.

The radio campaign language monitoring exercise defines indecent expression as any statement or insinuation that seeks to attack or damage the reputation of an individual, political party or ethnic group; or that could provoke the target of the expression to react in an unpleasant or offensive manner or that could offend the sensibilities of members of the public. These include insults, prejudice or bigotry, inflammatory expressions, hate speech, tribal slurs and stereotyping, provocative remarks unsubstantiated allegations and gender specific insults.

So here we are in 2016; the MFWA expects to monitor about 70 radio stations across the country with the first report released in April. The reports to be issued fortnightly will help us know whether we have improved as a people or gone from bad to worse.

No matter what we as a collective bear a responsibility to ensure our country Ghana is in one piece.

I sincerely wish all Ghanaians peaceful elections 2016.



HOT PICK: MFWA, 36 Others Petition African Commission for Release of Detained Gambian Journalist



The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and 36 other freedom of expression organisations in Africa and across the globe have petitioned the African Commission on Human and People's Rights to prevail on Gambian President Yahya Jammeh to release a journalist who has been in detention for seven months.

Alhagie Abdoulie Cessay, Manager of Taranga FM in Banjul, was first arrested on July 2, 2015, briefly released and re-arrested. After a two-week detention in which Cessay was held incommunicado with no access to a lawyer or his family, he was brought before a Magistrates Court on August 4, 2015 and charged with a single count of sedition. The prosecution accused him of distributing photos of Gam-

bian President Yahya Jammeh with a gun pointed at him.

On 18 November, while the case was still ongoing at the Magistrates Court, the state pressed a fresh seven-count charge against the journalist. These charges were a mere duplication of the first charge at the Magistrates court, except for that of "publication of false news." The initial single count charge was later dropped.

According to MFWA's sources, Cessay has suffered from torture and maltreatment and is in deteriorating health. Despite his ill-health and eligibility for bail under Gambian law, and the landmark ruling of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the High Court Judge has denied Cessay clemency three times.

The MFWA together with the 36 African and global freedom of

expression organisations, on March 2, 2016, urged the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to prevail on The Gambia to release Cessay.

"By this letter, we implore you to apply pressure on President Yahya Jammeh to ensure the release of journalist Alhagie Abdoulie Cessay in consideration of his long period of detention and failing health, and to end the persistent crack-down on free expression," the petitioners said. "In the words of Abdoulie's brother, 'It's about time the world start acting or else we fear for the future of the family and the country's most reputable media house Taranga FM.'"

A copy of the petition was also sent to the U.N Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye.



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS

Ghana questioned by the UNHRC over Human Rights concerns

The government of Ghana has been asked by the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), to provide information on key human rights concerns in the country.

In a report published on December 4, 2015, the UNHRC requested Ghana to respond to a total of 26 human rights concerns, which relate to Ghana's obligations under the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Ghana ratified in 2000.

Notable among the concerns are issues related to privacy breaches, the status of the Right to Information (RTI) legislation and matters relating to press freedom violations.

MFWA Participates in Internet Freedom Forum 2016, Abuja



Dora B. Mawutor,
Programme Manager for Freedom of Expression

In the first week of March 2016, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) participated in the 2016 edition of the Internet Freedom Forum which was organised in Abuja by Paradigm Initiative Nigeria.

The Forum brought together internet freedom advocates,

policy makers, people from academia, civil society, media and other stakeholders across the African continent.

Speaking on the internet freedom situation in Ghana at the event, the MFWA's Programme Manager for Freedom of Expression, Ms Dora B. Mawutor, indicated that even though Ghana's internet environment is

generally free with no known restrictions, the country had recorded incidents of online violations.

She noted that offline intimidation, harassment, arrests, charges and other violations that seek to repress offline expression are increasingly manifesting themselves online as well. She cited two recent examples to explain the situation - the suspension of a lead news anchor, Nana Aba Anamoah, by TV3 Network, an Accra-based television station, for altering and posting some photos of some friends as her own on twitter; and a Member of Parliament (Mr Kennedy Agyapong) who threatened to assault (beat, slap and deal with) a senior journalist working with an Accra-based privately owned radio station (Joy FM), Ato Kwamena

Dadzie, for writing unpleasant things about him on Facebook.

In addition to these cases of individual harassments resulting from online expression, the Programme Manager also mentioned that the government of Ghana has been introducing rather worrying regulations and bills that have the tendency to repress freedom of expression online. She cited the National Media Commission (Content Standards) Regulations, 2015, (Legislative Instrument 2224) and the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunication Messages Bill, 2015 as examples.

The MFWA also joined other civil society organisations, government and business stakeholders to launch the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms at the Abuja event.

AFEX Kick Starts 2016 with Digital Rights Advocacy Workshop

The African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) started the year with a two day capacity building workshop on Digital Rights Issues for leading freedom of expression organisations in Africa.

The workshop organised on January 23-24, 2016, in Accra, Ghana brought together participants from 15 countries across the continent.

Under the theme, Empowering Freedom of Expression Organisations in Africa for Effective Digital Rights

Advocacy, the training aimed at enhancing the capacity of participants for effective digital rights advocacy.

Using the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms as reference material, the workshop introduced participants to the principles and appropriate strategies needed to address identified digital rights issues. It also focused on how to use the Declaration to engage stakeholders in the internet ecosystem to ensure that the rights that people enjoy offline are also protected online across the continent.

As part of the training, participants were guided to develop short- to medium-term strategies for advocacy around different digital rights issues guided by the principles of the African Declaration. They also developed advocacy strategies for the adoption of the Declaration in their respective countries of operation. The African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms is a Pan-African initiative by civil society organisations across Africa that is aimed at creating a positive rights-based internet environment that can best meet Africa's social and economic development needs and goals. The training workshop on digital rights advocacy was

supported by International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) with additional support from the UK-based Global Partners Digital.

Other activities organised by AFEX in the first quarter of 2016 have included, a capacity building training on the AFEX network for staff of the MFWA during the MFWA's staff retreat in Koforidua. AFEX also issued statements on the deteriorating human rights situation in Uganda ahead of the country's elections in February 2016. An online campaign was also launched urging the Ugandan government to unblock social media platforms which were blocked during the elections.

More on Internet Freedom

Over the last three months, a number of activities have been undertaken under the Media Foundation for West Africa's (MFWA) Internet Freedom Project. Activities generally focused on building the capacity of leading civil society groups on internet freedom advocacy and raising awareness about developments that have potential to repress free expression online.



In January 2016, the MFWA, with support from Global Partners Digital, supported four freedom of expression (FoE) organisations from West African countries to take part in a Digital Rights Advocacy training workshop organised by the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) in Accra Ghana.

The training helped participants to gain a better understanding of internet freedom issues and how to integrate such issues in their FoE work. Some participants later

reported that they are initiating awareness creation activities about internet freedom and others are developing funding proposals to undertake internet freedom advocacy in their respective countries of operation.

A similar capacity building workshop was organised in March 2016. The workshop which was organised during a special session with MFWA's partners from across West Africa focused on effective

digital rights advocacy strategies. All-together, about 20 individuals representing 15 organisations were trained.

In both training events, the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms was presented as an advocacy tool to demand human-rights based policies across the region to ensure that people's rights are respected online. About 50 copies of the Declaration were distributed among participants at the training workshops.

The MFWA also published findings of its monitoring of internet freedom situation across the West Africa region in the last quarter of 2015. The report made a number of recommendations to different stakeholders including governments and civil society organisations. The report was also used to encourage netizens across the region to resist attempts by governments to limit free expression online.

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