

Media Foundation for West Africa
2021 Annual Report

Photo Credit: Global Investigative Journalism Network

CONTENT

- 1** Remarks by Executive Director

- 4** Who we are

- 5** Our Commitment to make Society Better

- 5** Resetting the standard for journalism in Ghana and the rest of West Africa

- 6** The Fourth Estate

- 9** The Next Generation Investigative Journalism Fellowship

- 10** Expanding Civic Spaces and Enhancing Participatory Governance

- 11** Improving the Public's Access to Quality Information Across Africa

- 12** Separating Facts from Falsehood – Fighting COVID-related Mis/Disinformation

- 13** Media Development Support

- 14** WAMECA 2021

- 15** The 'Crime' of Serving the Public with News

- 20** Promoting Women's Rights Online

- 21** Improving our Engagements across West Africa and Beyond

- 22** Resources

- 23** Acknowledgement



Sulemana Braimah

Executive Director

Remarks by the Executive Director

Dear Reader,

I want to, on behalf of the board, management and staff of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), express my appreciation for your continued support of, and engagement with our work.

2021 was an eventful year in West Africa. The region witnessed some major democratic drawbacks that made working in the region more difficult and precarious, especially for media workers. The progress made towards democratic consolidation in the last two decades saw a retrogressive dive as the region witnessed two coups in Guinea and Mali, in addition to unresolved

insurgent attacks, particularly in the Sahelian area.

The political tension in the region was exacerbated by economic hardships and the COVID-19 pandemic. Just about the time it was perceived that COVID-19 cases were going down for life to return to normalcy in 2021, the second, third and fourth waves of the pandemic hit some of the countries in the region.

As always, journalists braved the odds to report on all happenings in the region. Unfortunately, their efforts at serving the

public with the news was not often greeted with applause, but hostilities, usually in the form of physical attacks, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and in some cases death. Some protesters also met their untimely death while demonstrating to express opposing views about issues. Some activists and some members of the general public were also attacked for expressing themselves – both offline and online.

Against this context, the MFWA worked with its national partner organisations to provide support to journalists and media organisations whose rights were violated. We monitored, documented and published about 90 statements and reports about violations against journalists, media organisations, protesters, activists and members of the public who were attacked for doing their legitimate duties or expressing their views. We also made specific calls to governments, regulatory authorities, media groups and associations, and other relevant stakeholders on effective redress actions and mechanisms.

Through campaigns, the MFWA contributed to the release of [Ibrahima Sadio Bah](#) and [Amadou Diouldé Diallo](#) who were serving prison sentences for comments made on Facebook and radio respectively. We also supported a journalist and media organisation (both from Nigeria) financially to seek legal defense.

We mobilised 642 people [to petition Ghana's Parliament](#) and the National Security Minister of Ghana to address increasing attacks on journalists and the media in the country. About three months later, Ghana's Minister for National Security responded to

the petition and subsequently [engaged](#) the MFWA and other stakeholders who signed the petition. He affirmed his personal commitment to ensuring redress, especially for violations perpetrated by National Security operatives.

The MFWA also set up a non-profit newsroom, The Fourth Estate, a public interest and accountability journalism project to hold duty-bearers to account and enhance transparency in the public sector across West Africa – starting from Ghana. We also initiated the Next Generation Investigative Journalism Fellowship to groom young talented journalists in investigative journalism. Under the Fellowship, early-career journalists and student journalists are selected through a competitive process and given a 5-month intensive training with The Fourth Estate.

We introduced these interventions as a way of contributing to addressing some of the major underlining factors contributing to insecurity, political tensions and economic hardships in the region. Some of these factors include the lack of transparency and accountability; high levels of corruption; and general mismanagement and inequitable distribution of natural resources. Even though 12 out of the 16 countries in the region have passed Right to Information (RTI) or Access to Information (ATI) laws, governments in the region remain largely unwilling to grant citizens their right to access public information on how their resources are utilised.

The new projects introduced were, thus, intended to help in holding governments and other duty-bearers accountable to the

people in the region while contributing to shaping public policies. Already, some of the works of The Fourth Estate have resulted in the investigation of some of the issues raised while some individuals are being prosecuted.

We also implemented RTI/ATI projects in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Niger to enhance public sector accountability. Also, through governance platforms such as town hall meetings and selected radio discussion programmes, we worked with local-based radio stations to expand civic participation in governance processes at selected local assemblies; improve responsiveness on the part of local assembly officials; and transparency and accountability in general.

This report summarises some of the major milestones achieved in 2021 to promote and protect freedom of expression and media development across West Africa.

We remain committed to working with our partners and other stakeholders to improve the freedom of expression (offline & online) environment in West Africa, so the media, human rights defenders and members of the public can meaningfully participate in national discourse and governance processes while holding duty-bearers accountable.

Special thanks to our funding and institutional partners for their continued support to our work. We remain resolute in our commitment towards improving the freedom of expression and media landscape in West Africa so all persons can contribute meaningfully to governance and development in the region.



Who we are

The MFWA is a regional independent non-governmental organisation with [national partner organisations](#) in all 16 countries of the region. It is the biggest and most influential indigenous media development and freedom of expression advocacy organisation in West Africa with UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) Consultative Status and Observer Status with the African Commission of Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR). The MFWA also has Equivalency Determination Certification with [NGOSource](#) that certifies the organisation as being the equivalent of a public charity in the United States.

The MFWA is the Secretariat of the continental Network of the most prominent Free Expression and Media Development Organisations in Africa, known as the Africa Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX). It also works in partnership with other regional and international organisations through different networks such as IFEX, AFEX, the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) and the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI). The organisation also works

closely with the regional inter-governmental body, ECOWAS. It also engages frequently with mechanisms of the African Union (AU) and the UN.

In line with our Vision and Mission, we have, together with our partners, been resilient in our efforts at advancing freedom of expression rights (online and offline), improving media professionalism, and championing media-led advocacy for transparent, participatory and accountable governance across West Africa.

VISION

A West Africa in which all persons enjoy the right to freedom of expression without fear or threat by any actors.

MISSION

To promote and defend the right to freedom of expression of all persons particularly the media and human rights defenders in West Africa.

Our commitment to make society better

Working with, for, and through the media to develop West Africa and improve its governance remains the rationale behind our work at the Media Foundation for West Africa. Our goal is to see a region where all people are able to openly, freely and safely express themselves and participate in public discourse whether online or offline, question leaders, and take interest in the overall wellbeing of society.

Inspired by this goal, the organisation, each year, recommits itself to promoting, protecting and defending the right to freedom of expression and media freedom. Our work spans three broad thematic areas: freedom of expression, media and good governance and institutional development. We believe that an open, free and safe society fosters participation of the citizenry in governance processes, elicits responsiveness from duty-bearers, and ensures the equitable distribution of resources for the benefit of all. We are convinced that through the dedicated service of our youthful and dynamic staff, we make incredible progress each year.

As in previous years, the hard work of the organisation in 2021 resulted in significant milestones in freedom of expression and media development in West Africa. This includes the setting up of a model non-profit newsroom that is making a huge difference in journalism practice; the

release of some jailed journalists, the production of a number of advocacy materials and engagements with relevant stakeholders, towards improving the FOE and media landscape in the region. Additional details are provided below.

Resetting the standard for journalism in Ghana and the rest of West Africa

The media landscape in West Africa is often characterised by a number of challenges, chief among them being falling standards in professionalism and critical journalism that holds duty bearers to account. As an organisation passionate about professional media practice that facilitates participatory and accountable governance, the MFWA has been rolling out different interventions to equip the media to be professional and perform their watchdog role creditably.

In 2021, the organisation introduced a non-profit newsroom, to serve as a model for journalism practice in Ghana, and across West Africa. Called the [The Fourth Estate](#), the newsroom was launched in March 2021 as an independent, public interest and accountability journalism project. It is aimed at holding the powerful to account, enhancing public sector transparency, and amplifying the voices and needs of the marginalised.



In less than a year of its existence, [The Fourth Estate](#) has already established itself as one of Ghana's most trusted news sources. So far, it has succeeded in proving that journalism, when well done without undue interferences, can truly hold the powerful accountable and serve the interest of the public.

With a core team of eight fairly young journalists led by award-winning investigative journalist, Manasseh Azure Awuni, several critical and impactful stories have been produced. The stories cover corruption, human rights, environment, health and a few other generic topics of relevance.

On health and corruption, for example, a [comprehensive story on fraudulent activities in some COVID-19 test labs](#), revealed how staff at some testing laboratories were engaged in the issuance of fake COVID-19 test certificates. The facilities named as complicit in the practice included the clinic at Ghana's Presidency, the Jubilee House clinic. The story prompted the [Presidency to order investigations](#) into the issue.

Other COVID-19-related investigations revealed [wasteful expenditure of public resources](#) by the Ghanaian government in the fight against the pandemic, and how the [lack of proper care resulted in COVID-related deaths](#).

On corruption, an investigative story titled "[Bongo Scandal](#)" revealed fraudulent activities at a community bank in Bongo, a town in Northern Ghana. The story prompted an investigation into activities of the bank by the regulator for rural and community banks in Ghana, the ARB Apex Bank.

On human rights, a great story on [police and military brutalities in Ghana](#) presented a detailed account of over two dozen incidents of police and military killings and other forms of brutalities by the security agencies since 2017.

There was also a compelling story of how personnel from national [security raided a casino in Asankragua](#), a town in the Western region of Ghana. With exclusive video footages, the story detailed how hooded security officials in mufti, brandished weapons, terrified and manhandled some staff of the facility before their eventual action of breaking into rooms and dismantling security cameras.

Still on human rights, an investigative piece titled: "[The licensed sex predator](#)" revealed how a number of women were sexually assaulted by a self-styled physiotherapist, Jonathan Ohene Nkunim. The story resulted in the arrest of Jonathan who is currently facing prosecution. The Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), has named the story among the [top 10 investigative stories from Sub-Saharan Africa in 2021](#).

There have also been great environmental stories such as one drawing attention to [how sea erosion is literally obliterating some coastal communities in Ghana](#). Other environmental stories looked into [illegal export of banned timber](#) species and an

[awaiting disaster](#) from unregulated and precarious siting of houses at Aburi in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

And there is even more. Within the short period of its existence, [The Fourth Estate](#) has also proven just how journalism can help advance public sector transparency and accountability, through the utilisation of Right to Information (RTI) or Access to Information (ATI) legislation. The Fourth Estate, has been a major driver in putting Ghana's 2019 RTI law to the test.

In the first five months of its operation (March to July, 2021), The Fourth Estate team filed 36 RTI requests to 33 public institutions. The institutions to whom the requests were filed include the Parliament of Ghana, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Public Procurement Authority, Minerals Commission (the regulator of Ghana's expansive mining sector), Ministry of Roads, among several other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MMDAs) of state. By the end of 2021, more than 50 RTI requests had been filed.

Many of the institutions failed or refused to comply with their obligations to provide requested information as mandated by Ghana's RTI law (Act 989). In an article, The Fourth Estate presented [the 33 public institutions that passed or failed its RTI test](#).

After the stipulated 14 days within which institutions are required to make a decision and respond to requesters of information under the RTI law, 52% of institutions failed to acknowledge or respond to requests filed by The Fourth Estate. Per the RTI law, non-response within the stipulated period

constitutes a refusal to grant requested information on the part of information-holding institutions.

But the quest to receive requested information doesn't end when institutions fail to respond to requests or refuse to grant requests. In fact, what follows next is where the victories and great stories emerge.

Petitions are then filed with the RTI Commission requesting the Commission to adjudicate and compel information-holding institutions that are in default to release requested information. Other cases filed at the RTI Commission were to challenge what is considered illegal fees imposed by institutions as a condition for the grant of requested information.

By the end of 2021, The Fourth Estate had [filed 11 petitions before the RTI Commission](#). These were against state institutions that had refused or failed to grant requested information, and those that were demanding fees deemed too high or illegitimate.

Indeed, the very first decision by the RTI Commission on an RTI request was on a case filed by The Fourth Estate. In that case, The Fourth Estate had requested information from the Minerals Commission of Ghana on mining licenses that had been issued by the Commission. The Minerals Commission responded that The Fourth Estate needed to pay [the equivalent of US\\$1,000 in local currency as fees](#) (about GHC6,000 then), in order to be granted the requested information.

The Fourth Estate then filed a complaint with the RTI Commission in June 2021, arguing that the amount being charged by the Mineral Commission was astronomical and at variance with the provisions of the RTI Law. In a decision on July 19, 2021, the RTI Commission directed the Minerals Commission to release the requested information to The Fourth Estate via email (as was requested) and at a cost not more than US\$0.3 or GHC2. The Minerals Commission has since filed a suit at the High Court to challenge the decision of the RTI Commission.

Another ground-breaking decision by the RTI Commission in relation to cases filed by The Fourth Estate was when the Commission ordered the state Scholarship

Secretariat, [to release the list of all scholarship beneficiaries for 2019 and 2020 to The Fourth Estate](#), as had been requested. The Scholarship Secretariat had argued that it could not grant the requested information due to concerns of data protection. The RTI Commission, however, determined that the excuse of data protection was not tenable and not supported by the exemptions' provisions of the RTI Law.

It does appear that more of these kinds of journalism projects may be what will help revitalise quality and watchdog journalism in Africa to inspire hope and trust in the media; and to reinforce the indispensable role of the media in the democratic development of African countries.



Photo Credit: Freepik



MFWA's Next Generation Investigative Journalism Fellowship

NGIJ

Beyond setting up The Fourth Estate to play an exemplary role in journalism practice, the MFWA also initiated the Next Generation Investigative Journalism Fellowship in the last quarter of 2021. The initiative is aimed at equipping young and enterprising next generation journalists with the skills to undertake fact-based, in-depth and enterprise reporting that makes a difference in society.

The maiden edition of the fellowship enrolled 10 early-career journalists and student journalists for a 5-month fellowship

under The Fourth Estate. They received intensive practical training on story development, data journalism, fact-checking and visualization, investigative journalism and basic multi-media and mobile journalism. They were also taken through how to use the RTI law to access important datasets that can serve as the basis for ground-breaking journalism.

The five-month fellowship afford participants the opportunity to learn from the experiences of some of the finest in investigative journalism in West Africa.

Expanding civic spaces and enhancing participatory governance

The interest of the MFWA in promoting, protecting and defending freedom of expression is borne out of the fact that participatory, transparent and accountable governance can only be possible if people as well as the media have the guarantees to express themselves without fear or favour. So while pursuing FOE, the MFWA also works to ensure that the media are facilitating dialogue and serving as platforms for national discourse around governance and development.

Bringing governance to the doorsteps of people, and ensuring that the people actually participate in that governance, requires strategies and interventions suitably adapted to their respective peculiar local contexts.

Platforms such as radio discussions and town hall meetings are used to facilitate citizens-authorities dialogues. The MMDAs play essential roles by availing themselves for such public engagements while local-based radio stations broadcast the meetings live to the wider population. These platforms empower citizens to demand from their local leaders reports on the state of infrastructure development and delivery of social services in their area, while at the same time, giving them feedback on other governance issues. In 2021, for instance, live broadcast governance forums in the form of 'State of the District' Broadcast and Town Hall meetings were organised to facilitate dialogue between local government officials and local community members.

State of the district radio broadcasts

The '[State of the District](#)' radio broadcast is a radio programme facilitated by the MFWA for selected radio stations to host their local government officials, especially the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Chief Executive, live on air. The officials present brief statements on the state of affairs (including infrastructural development, internally generated funds, etc.) in the locality under their jurisdiction to the community members. After the presentation from the official, journalists hosting the programmes opens up the conversation for community members to engage the officials directly by asking questions or commenting on the statement delivered.



Live broadcast town hall meetings

Three live broadcast [town hall meetings](#) were organised in 2021, and each was carried live on the radio stations for those who could not participate physically to still benefit. Overall, close to a million community

citizens were granted the opportunity to engage their local leaders directly and get responses to their issues. The town hall meetings also provided the local community members the opportunity to make to how they should be governed at the local level.

These platforms afforded community members the opportunity to get status reports directly from their local governance authorities, ask them direct questions and get instant responses. It also gave the local government officials the opportunity to explain issues and take feedback on governance processes.

Improving the public's access to quality information

Across Africa, countries in West Africa are seen to be more progressive when it comes to granting access to public information. Out of the 16 countries in the region, about 11 countries have passed access to information (ATI) or right to information (RTI) laws. These are Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Togo. Unfortunately, for many of the 12 countries, the ATI laws remain in books, on shelves/ computers and other electronic devices to check that the countries have indeed passed the laws, but little can be said about the [implementation of the laws](#).

When Ghana passed its RTI law in 2019, the MFWA committed itself to work and push for the law to become relevant and functional so it can serve as a reference/ an

example to others in the region. The same approach was used to activate conversations around the implementation of ATI laws in Côte d'Ivoire and Niger. A number of activities were, thus, pursued.

For 2021, the MFWA enhanced the knowledge of 45 investigative journalists and 30 journalists of local-based radio stations on the Ghanaian RTI law. The journalists were also equipped with skills on how to use the RTI law to access information to develop their stories. The MFWA also formed and trained citizens' groups in three districts in Ghana on how to use the law to demand accountability. MFWA's public interest accountability journalism newsroom was also trained on the RTI law and how to make requests. To complement the trainings, a [Guidebook for Journalists](#) on the RTI law was also published & disseminated to over 200 journalists and media organisations in Ghana. Guidebooks for journalists on the ATI laws from [Côte d'Ivoire](#) and [Niger](#) were also produced and widely publicised in the two countries respectively.



The results? More than 60 RTI requests were made to different public institutions to test their responsiveness in the context of the RTI law. The requests received varied responses. For those that were denied, appeals were sent to the RTI Commission as detailed earlier. Almost all the rulings compelled the institutions concerned to provide the information requested. A few others were resolved among the parties involved.

These interventions have indeed put the implementers of Ghana's RTI law – the Ministry of Information (through the ATI Unit) and the RTI Commission – on their toes just 24 months after the law became operational in January 2020.

Similar interventions were also rolled out in Côte d'Ivoire and Niger where a total of 30 [journalists were trained](#) on their respective ATI laws and how to use them to make requests. Manual for Journalists on Access to Information in Côte d'Ivoire and Niger were also produced and disseminated widely in the respective countries. Journalists from these countries were also supported (financially) to produce stories using information they had sought from public institutions using their respective ATI laws.

In all the three countries, the capacity building activities were complemented with national [forums on the ATI laws](#) and accountable governance. [Key recommendations from the forums](#) were teased out and shared with government and key actors towards improving the ATI ecosystem in their respective countries.

Separating facts from falsehood – fighting COVID-related mis/disinformation

Beyond pushing for access to information, the MFWA also concerned itself with ensuring that the public has access to credible/quality information. So, as a contribution to the continued fight against disinformation around COVID-19, the organisation undertook a number of activities to demystify myths and disinformation. The organisation also provided fact-checked reports on some claims and statements made by some key political figures.

From late 2020 to early 2021, a number of concerns were raised about COVID-19 vaccination. In line with the organisation's commitment to providing quality and credible information to the public, and as a continuation of the countering fake news around COVID-19 project, several fact-checking activities were undertaken to help clear confusion and myths about the vaccines and other COVID-19-related issues. Over 15 million people were reached with fact-checked information on COVID-19 and other governance issues through radio, TV, and online (website and social media).

Specifically, 24 journalists/fact-checkers were trained in research, data analysis & fact-checking. The MFWA also partnered 7 national-level and local-level radio stations in Ghana to help with counternarratives against the myths and fake news about the vaccines and other issues. In all, 45

fact-checked reports and explainers were published (including local language broadcast of the reports). Also, 120 weekly public education radio programmes were produced and aired by partner local-based radio stations to clarify and demystify issues. The national-level radio station produced 5 [documentaries](#) and 4 investigative [reports on COVID-19](#) which were widely publicised.

Apart from working to counter the COVID-19-related mis/disinformation, the MFWA also produced a number of counter-narratives about some political and social claims on its fact-checking project website, www.fact-checkghana.com.

Media development support

The MFWA in 2021 also commenced a comprehensive media development project in one of West Africa's Lusophone countries - Guinea Bissau. The three-year intervention on Promoting Media Freedom and Access to Quality Information in Guinea Bissau seeks to strengthen the capacity of media actors in the country, monitor and document freedom of expression violations for advocacy purposes, and improve media professionalism and adherence to ethical standards.





Misinformation, digital media regulation and journalism in Africa

The fifth edition of the West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA) was dedicated to the important issue of Misinformation, Digital Media

Regulation and Journalism in Africa. With expert participants from 14 West Africa countries and others from other parts of the continent and beyond, the deliberations were diverse and rich, with calls to relevant stakeholders, especially journalists, to work towards being the best in the delivery of high quality factual content instead of being the first to share information that will turn out to be false.

The Awards component honoured well-deserving journalists who produced outstanding and impactful journalistic reports. The event was graced by high-profile personalities such as Lawyer Femi Falana (Senior Advocate of Nigeria); H.E. Stephanie S. Sullivan (US Ambassador to Ghana); H.E. Kati Csaba (Canadian High Commissioner to Ghana); HE Abdourahamane Diallo (Representative of UNESCO in Ghana); Dapo Olorunyomi (Co-Founder, CEO & Publisher, Premium Times of Nigeria); Samba Badji Dialimpa (Editor, Africa Check, Senegal); Dr. Francis Sowa, (Convener, Media Reform Co-ordinating Group, Sierra Leone), among others.

The 'crime' of serving the public with news

Across the world, journalists are assaulted by some of the very same people they seek to inform – state and non-state actors. These are people who work around the clock and endanger their lives and that of their families to serve the public with news from the street corners near you to news from the remotest part of the world. On a daily basis, journalists and media workers, activists, human rights defenders and ordinary citizens are abused for doing their work or expressing themselves (offline & online).

The situation was no different across West Africa in 2021. As journalists, media workers and news organisations worked to serve the public with information, some of them were met with hostility and assault in their line of work.

For example, On Wednesday, June 2, 2021, Buba Gagigo, a journalist with the independent online news platform, Kerr Fatou in The Gambia, was physically assaulted by Modou E. Njie, photographer of the Gambian President, while covering President Barrow's registration for a voter's card in Banjul – to inform the general public about the President's registration.

The assault happened in the presence of the Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission, the police, and other security officers at the McCarthy Square in Banjul where voter's cards were being issued. Gagigo said the State House staffer assaulted him after accusing him of obstructing him from taking photos of President Barrow.

As we were interviewing the President [Adama Barrow], Njie was behind me taking photos of the President while I put our microphone to the President. He later came to me saying I intentionally stood in front of him while he was taking pictures. I told him I wouldn't know what happens behind me while I was concentrating on the interview with the President. And there were many other people...

From the President's interview, I continued to interview the IEC chairman and immediately after that interview, the guy [Njie] attacked me, knocking me to the ground. He was hitting me continuously until the police and some other journalists on the ground intervened.

- Gagigo reported

In another incident, three journalists, Charles Kponwadan of the news website Horizon, Anani Vidzraku of Radio Victoire and Romuald Lansou of the Togoinfos web TV were arrested on February 3, 2021 and taken to the premises of the Golfe District Office by gendarmes for interviewing a very critical chief "without authorization."

They were interviewing Togbui Dagban-Ay-

von IV, head of the Adakpamé district (south-east of Lomé), who had just emerged from a hearing with the Head of the Golfe District, Komlan Agbotsè. Togbui Dagban-Ayivon IV, very regular on private radio stations to denounce the excesses of the government, had just left the hearing after being summoned by the district head.

Komlan Agbotsè called in a gendarme on duty inside the district office, who questioned the journalists before leading them to the waiting room. The bodyguard of Komlan Agbotsè then seized the working materials of the three journalists as well as their cell phones. Their recordings were also deleted.

The district head later called the territorial gendarmerie, a few meters from the office, whose agents came to pick up the journalists and took them to Lomé. The journalists were taken to the Territorial Brigade of the National Gendarmerie in the capital, Lomé, where they underwent three hours of interrogation before being released.

Through the MFWA's daily monitoring and reporting, crimes that are perpetrated against journalists, such as the two cited above, are brought to light. In all, 118 freedom of expression (FOE) violations were reported in 2021 by the MFWA with calls on authorities to take preventive and reparative actions. Close to 90 alerts, statements and reports were produced covering the 118 violations and widely publicised to highlight the challenges journalists and other media workers/ organisations go through to bring news to the public. Some of the reports also highlighted the ordeal some protesters went through just to have their voices heard. Some of the results

(redress actions taken) from these publications, recommendations and other campaign efforts are presented below under "Results."

The MFWA also supported its partner organisations to produce 16 State of Freedom of Expression (2020) Country Reports on all the 16 countries in West Africa. Each report provides in-depth analyses of the respective country's FOE and press freedom landscape. All the FOE reports, as well as most of the publications produced contained specific recommendations to government, state security agencies and other relevant national and international stakeholders to improve the FOE environment for safe practice of journalism and free speech as a whole. Joint events, were for example, organised in Nigeria and Sierra Leone to launch the reports findings and recommendations.

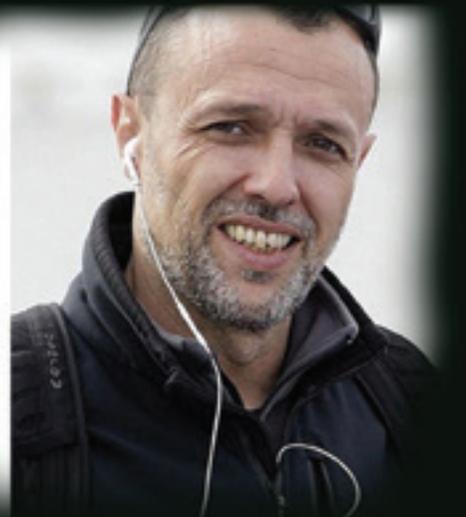
The MFWA also committed itself to producing special reports to highlight the implications of the activities of insurgents in the Sahelian zone of West Africa on the work of journalists, and other developments in the region. One such publication titled "[Media and terrorism in Mali: how can journalists adapt?](#)" highlighted the news blockade imposed by both the rebels and government forces in the war-ravaged regions of Mali. In this piece, Malian journalists shared their experiences reporting in one of the most dangerous areas. The state of insecurity in Mali was underlined by the abduction by militants of French freelance journalist Olivier Dubois. The MFWA [reported](#) the incident and called on the Malian authorities to ensure the journalist's release.



Titus Badejo, Nigeria
Murdered by unknown gunmen



David Berian & Roberto Fraile, Burkina Faso
Killed by unidentified armed group



Luka Binniyat, Nigeria
Imprisoned/attacked/killed



Olivier Dubois, Mali
Abducted by terrorist group



Nyantee Togba, Liberia
Arrested and detained by police



Caleb Kudah, Ghana
Arrested and abused by national security agents



Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson, Ghana
Arrested by police

We also reported a [crackdown](#) on journalists reporting on protests to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the #EndSars protests. In the midst of the denunciations of the atrocities, President Muhammadu Buhari addressed the country and called for reconciliation.

Ahead of Gambia's elections, the MFWA in two articles highlighted the [impressive strides](#) the country has made in improving its freedom of expression record as well as the critical role the media, particularly [social media](#), was playing in the electoral campaign.

Results

The MFWA continues to make meaningful contributions towards improving the landscape for the practice of journalism and free expression through these reports and other publications. Specifically, MFWA's FOE reports and statements continually serve as evidence-based database of incidents of abuses against journalists to guide and shape advocacy on FOE issues generally and safety of journalists in particular. The publications are also referenced and cited in several advocacy and policy deliberations by governments, media regulatory bodies, journalists, and other key stakeholders both national and international.

Also, the MFWA pursued a number of advocacy interventions to get redress for victims. In addition to recommendations made in the various publications, the organisation also engaged in direct petitions and face-to-face meetings with government officials such as ministers and parliamentarians.

For example, the MFWA, on June 19, 2021, mobilised 642 people, most of them journalists, alongside some supporters of press freedom to [petition Parliament](#) and the National Security Minister to address the increasing attacks on journalists and the media in Ghana. The petition followed a Member of Parliament's (Kennedy Agyapong) verbal assault against, and [incitement of the public](#) to attack Erastus Asare Donkor, a journalist who covered events surrounding the death of Mohammed Ibrahim Anyass, a critical social media activist who had been allegedly [beaten to death](#) by suspected political party thugs.



On September 17, 2021, Ghana's Minister for National Security responded to the petition and subsequently [engaged](#) the MFWA and other stakeholders who signed the petition. At the meeting, he indicated that government was equally concerned about attacks on journalists and affirmed his personal commitment to ensuring redress, especially for violations perpetrated by National Security operatives. He also proposed a joint programme to educate and sensitise national security operatives about the work of journalists and the need for cooperation between the them and the media.



MFWA & victim journalists meet Ghana's national security Ministry

Another petition was also sent to Guinea. As part of activities marking the 2021 World Press Freedom Day, the MFWA and its national partner organisation in Guinea, the independent editors' guild (AGEPI), [petitioned](#) the Minister of National Unity and Citizenship of the Republic of Guinea to intercede with President Alpha Conde to release two journalists detained in connection with their work. Ibrahima Sadio Bah was serving a six (6) month sentence from February 2021 over a Facebook article critical of the President of Guinea's Football Federation. Amadou Diouldé Diallo was detained for inciting "tribal division" and "insulting the President" of the Republic in a radio discus-

sion. The petition was delivered to the office and also emailed to the Honorable Mamadou Taran Diallo, Minister of National Unity and Citizenship, who acknowledged receipt.

Following numerous actions by press associations and press freedom organisations within and beyond Guinea, including the petition from the MFWA and its partner, the two journalists [regained their freedom](#) few days after the petition



Journalists Ibrahima Sadio Bah & Amadou Diouldé Diallo regained their freedom after a flurry of advocacy

Ibrahima Sadio Bah was released by the Appeal Court on May 11, eight days after the petitioned and Amadou Diouldé Diallo was also released on May 19 2021 by the High court of Conakry.

In a development that demonstrates a new era of conciliation and responsiveness from state authorities, media stakeholders in Sierra Leone and all the security agencies in the country [signed of an MOU](#) to enhance cooperation and mutual understanding in order to promote the safety of journalists. The MOU was signed on November 3, 2021, after a frank and friendly

dialogue between representatives from the media and the security services made up of the Police, the Military, the Fire Force, the Sierra Leone Correctional Services, and the Office of National security.

While the MFWA was not directly involved on this healthy development, we take pride

in the fact that it responds to concerns we raised in our [Submission to the 2016 UPR](#) on Sierra Leone. Among the MFWA's recommendation was a call to "sensitise police and security forces on protecting freedom of expression and on the role of journalists in promoting human rights, democracy, and development."



Promoting women's rights online

In a number of West African countries, gender inequality in access and use of the internet is quite alarming. In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso for example, less than 10 per cent of women have regular internet access, according to an [Afrobarometer report](#). The situation is most likely the same in other least developed countries in the region. Indeed, other studies, including a [2020 report on women's rights online](#), note

that gains that have been made in reducing gender inequality in Africa, have mainly been offline. On the digital side, not much has been achieved in reducing gender inequality.

Even where there appears to be a glimmer of hope as indicated in a 2019 [Mobile Gender Gap report](#) by GSMA, which highlights an increasing trend in mobile phone ownership and mobile internet usage among women, there remain a persistent gender gap. The gender inequality within

the digital realm, as explained by the GSMA report, does not only mirror existing offline gender inequities, but also has the potential to compound existing offline gender disparities.

As noted by numerous studies, including an assessment of [women's rights online in Ghana](#), a number of factors such as affordability, literacy and digital skills, safety and security concerns, contribute to the inequitable access and use of the internet, mobile phones and other digital technologies by women and girls.

In the year under review, MFWA continued its work on promoting internet freedom, digital rights, and women's rights online in particular to respond to the above-mentioned challenges. As a first step, the organisation decoupled digital rights from its freedom of expression programme to make digital rights a full programme. While the newly created digital rights programme focuses on the digital rights of all, there is a significant focus on Gender Digital Equity and Equality aimed at empowering women to assert their rights online.

As a start, the MFWA in collaboration with a number of partners, rolled out a project aimed at dealing with what has been revealed as one of the main causes of the digital gender gap in the region – dearth of digital skills and digital literacy for women.

The MFWA rolled out training workshops for female journalists, bloggers and activists in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone to improve their digital skills and literacy, and to serve as fulcra on women's digital rights advocacy in their respective countries. Over 150 female journalists, bloggers and

activists have been trained in the three countries.

The efforts also involved research and stakeholder engagement to advocate for policy interventions that advance digital equity and equality. In Ghana, for instance, an analysis of ICT policy documents was done to identify gaps that need to be addressed or filled in order to improve digital rights of women in the country. Recommendations from the exercise have been used to engage government and other stakeholders to better shape Ghana's online rights policies to be gender inclusive and friendly. Public forums have also been held in Liberia and Sierra Leone to discuss and make recommendations for improving women's access and use of the internet.

The MFWA also produced women's rights online advocacy papers in each of the three countries to highlight some of the challenging issues confronting women in accessing and using the internet.

Improving our engagements across West Africa and beyond

The MFWA has consistently made efforts to improve its engagements across anglophone, francophone and lusophone stakeholders without leaving anyone behind. Each year, interventions are put in place to ensure that significant milestones are achieved in that direction. For 2021, MFWA expanded its team to include a francophone staff from Benin and two lusophone staff from Guinea Bissau to further enhance its engagements in French and Portuguese.

The organisation has also revamped its website and backend support systems to improve user experience. It has also improved its communication efforts (through videos and infographics) which have helped in reaching more people and getting more social media followers/engagements.

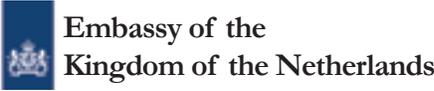
As part of its commitment to give back to society and invest in the training of upcoming journalists and other media works, the MFWA donated over 1000 publications to media & communication training institutions in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Niger and The Gambia.

Some resources:

- [Freedom of the Press in the Face of Political and Social Crises in West Africa](#)
- [Guide Book on Ghana's Right to Information Law \(Act 989\)](#)
- [Mainstreaming the role of the media in ECOWAS: Policies and practices](#)
- [Limited Knowledge, Awareness derail effective implementation of RTI law in Ghana](#)
- [Gauging local authorities' responsiveness to Right to Information requests – experiences from three districts in Ghana](#)
- [State of Internet Freedom in Liberia 2021](#)
- [State of Internet Freedom in Ghana – 2021](#)
- [State of Press Freedom in Nigeria \(2020\)](#)
- [Monitoring of media ethics in Ghana: findings from June 2020 – May 2021](#)
- [The State of Media Freedom in Sierra Leone \(March 2018 – December 2020\)](#)
- [Impact of the shrinking space on the media and citizens: key trends and actions required](#)
- [Report on Safety of Journalists Policies and Practices in Media Houses in Liberia – 2020](#)
- [Seven journalists killed, 100s abused while impunity reigns: the sordid press freedom record of Nigeria's Buhari](#)

Acknowledgement

The MFWA is grateful to our funding partners (listed below) for supporting the work of the organisation through thick and thin. We also appreciate the contributions of all our national partner organisations for collaborating with the MFWA to promote and defend freedom of expression and media development in the region.



Media Foundation for West Africa
32 Otele Avenue, East Legon,
Telephone: +233 (0) 302 555 327

Twitter: @TheMFWA

Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa

info@mfwawest.org

www.mfwawest.org



[@themfwa](https://twitter.com/themfwa)



www.mfwawest.org



[themfwa](https://www.facebook.com/themfwa)