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# **A Matter of Principles**

Self-regulation, working conditions and  
corruption in African journalism

*By David Lush  
with Mareike Le Pelley and Kerstin Funck*



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# PREFACE

Journalists throughout the continent are critical of their conduct and speak openly about the ubiquity of *brown envelope* journalism and other types of corruption in the media sector. Too often suggested solutions only focus on demands for more training in ethics and limiting access to the profession to those deemed properly qualified. Neither approach has so far met with much success.

The wide spread of the phenomenon and associated problems warrant a closer look. This paper does so by analysing the deliberations of three indicators within the country reports of the *African Media Barometer (AMB)*, a country-based media self-assessment tool<sup>1</sup>. The Brief looks at correlations between the indicators, examines if and how they could have an impact on the occurrence of corruption, interprets the AMB discussions and adds context to them. In the end the Brief rejects simple and one-dimensional causalities, concluding that measures to help build integrity in the media need to start not only with the media themselves but need to address a number of issues on various levels, starting from the individual media house to society at large.

A Matter of Principles only touches on questions of whether there is a common understanding of media ethics at all; an understanding which has come about as the result of an inclusive and comprehensive public debate. Although this line of thought is not developed further in this Brief as it goes beyond the scope of the AMB discussions, it might need further exploring. In discussions in various forums journalists point out that corruption in the media only mirrors the widespread acceptance of the practice in society in general. And while the media, some might argue, ought to lead the way toward greater integrity, they may not be able to go the way by themselves. A general debate about favouritism and nepotism, and concepts like loyalty and community allegiance, about the essence of culture and political office, about cultural realities and what culture and what sort of governance a society wants might be helpful.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) as a non-profit, non-governmental political foundation promotes democratisation as it believes that its core values of human rights, social justice and participation in governance are best realized and protected in democratic systems. Democracies not only enshrine human rights and public participation but also systems of checks and balances. Democratic

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<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction and Appendix for details about the AMB panel methodology and the methodology used for this AMB Brief.

governments are accountable to the people as they are elected by the people and use public resources. The FES firmly believes that the media are one crucial element in a working system of checks and balances and that corruption within media compromises the proper fulfilment of the watchdog role of the media. Corruption distorts the output of media as what is broadcast or published is not decided by what is newsworthy and in the public interest but by who has paid what to make it into the news or stay out of them and away from public scrutiny.

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# Introduction

A series of scandals have exposed the rot that has gone to the core of professional journalism in established liberal democracies that were once the gold standard for media in Africa and the world over. The scandals, ranging from fabrication to phone hacking, have prompted extensive soul searching as to how the integrity of journalism can be restored. This paper endeavours to fuel a similar debate within the African media where, the findings of our study suggest, the integrity of African media is also at a low ebb.

It has only been during the last two decades that most African journalists have been able to practice the kind of journalism taken for granted in “the West”. Prior to that, most had little choice but to peddle government propaganda, such was the absolute control most post-independence states had over their media.

This changed within a couple of years following the abrupt end of the Cold War. Countries throughout Africa adopted political systems modelled on the liberal democracies of Europe and North America. A free press was an integral part of that system, and Africa witnessed a mushrooming of privately owned publications and, then more gradually, the emergence of non-state broadcasters. With little time to adapt, media systems throughout the continent first adopted the laws of their new liberal democratic role models, and then their methods of media regulation, including their codes of journalism ethics.

This was possible because the right to free expression exercised by journalists is a universal right, based on international treaties and protocols applicable the world over. During the past two decades, African governments, media professionals and civil society advocates have debated and developed Africa’s own standards for free expression and media freedom, which build on the international treaties and protocols that preceded them. At the same time, national laws governing media and communication have been reformed, although not always in line with these standards.

The focus of the discussions and negotiations that accompanied these changes has largely been on the laws, policies and regulations that govern the media industry, and less on the codes of conduct that guide the journalists who produce Africa’s media. Media freedom itself has tended to be measured more by laws governing media houses rather than the quality of their content. But as African journalists have gone about their work during the past two decades, so the culture of African

journalism has evolved; a culture by which the integrity of journalists and the media they work for are judged today by the public they serve.

Since 2005, the African Media Barometer (AMB)- an initiative by the media project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Africa, *fesmedia Africa*, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) – has sought to systematically assess the media environment, the quality of media produced within this environment, and the integrity of the journalists who produce this media. The 45 indicators the AMB applies are derived from the African standards and protocols mentioned earlier and are assessed every few years by national peer review panels comprising members of the media and representatives of other sectors of civil society. Panellists assess media integrity primarily in terms of the levels of corruption within the media (indicator 4.7). They look at the extent to which media follow voluntary codes of conduct and how these are enforced by self-regulatory complaints bodies (indicator 4.1), and assess how “adequate” journalists’ pay and working conditions are (indicator 4.8). This is within the context of “professional standards” practiced by the media (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Wording of AMB indicators on self-regulation, corruption/integrity, and pay/working conditions:**

4.1 The media follow voluntary codes of professional standards, which are enforced by self-regulatory bodies that deal with complaints from the public.

4.7 Journalists and media houses have integrity and are not corrupt.

4.8 Salary levels and general working conditions for journalists and other media practitioners are adequate.

The discussions of the 45 indicators are compiled in a report and hence reflect the opinions and perceptions of individual media and civil society representatives and their exchanges with their fellow panellists.

This paper presents and analyses findings gleaned from the discussions of the three indicators mentioned about contained in the reports of 69 AMB panel discussions that took place in 27 countries between 2005 and 2011 in an attempt to examine the relationship between media integrity and:

- a) the ethical codes and self-regulatory bodies that are supposed to shape the professional conduct of African journalists,
- b) the pay and conditions these journalists work under.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for details about the AMB panel methodology and the methodology used for this AMB Brief.

In theory, both media self-regulation and journalists' pay and working conditions should have an impact on the integrity and professionalism of the media. One might expect media to have more integrity (i.e. the media is less corrupt) in countries where the public can hold the media to account via self-regulatory complaints mechanisms. Not least because these mechanisms are supposed to enforce ethical codes of conduct that should forbid corrupt practices and provide journalists with clear moral and professional guidelines. At the same time, there is an expectation that media integrity will be higher in countries where journalists are better paid and enjoy good working conditions, as journalists should be less tempted to take bribes and other kinds of inducements from those looking to unduly influence the media's coverage.

But before looking in greater detail at these hypotheses, let us take a broader look at what benchmarks are used to measure media professionalism and ethics.

## Courts of honour, or bastions of neo-liberalism?

This study picks up from where two previous *fesmedia Africa* publications, both published in 2009, left off.

In *Africa's Media - Between Professional Ethics and Cultural Belonging*<sup>3</sup>, Professor Francis Nyamnjoh<sup>4</sup> describes the “Jekyll and Hyde personality” of African journalists torn between competing and conflicting understandings of democracy: one the liberal-democratic notion of media freedom and the ethical responsibilities demanded of journalists in exercising this freedom; the other journalists’ instinctive loyalty to their cultural and ethnic communities. As a result, Nyamnjoh argues, many journalists have become little more than public relations (PR) agents of a ruling elite (...). While sympathetic to the fact that “African journalism is like swimming upstream most of the time, given all the hurdles journalists and the media face”, Nyamnjoh believes the African media have so far missed an opportunity to enrich and domesticate liberal democracy by making it more relevant to the African reality.

Meanwhile, Professor Franz Krüger<sup>5</sup> roots media self-regulation and the ethical codes espoused by journalists worldwide in the very liberal democratic tradition that Nyamnjoh believes the African media have adopted so uncritically. Krüger’s *Media Courts of Honour – Self-regulatory Councils in Southern Africa and Elsewhere*<sup>6</sup> examines self-regulatory media councils in five southern African countries to “develop an understanding of the concrete shapes taken by institutions of this kind under different circumstances”. Krüger takes the line that “self-regulation is the only method that can provide media accountability without infringing free speech”. He comes across “relatively new (self-regulatory) institutions struggling to find their place in a changing, difficult media and political terrain”. Krüger concludes that most of these voluntary media councils can be “reasonably proud” of their ability to resolve disputes between media houses and those who feel they have been represented unfairly in their coverage. However, when assessing its effectiveness, most critics prefer to measure self-regulation “against the actual behaviour of the media”. And while it is wrong to blame self-regulatory bodies

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3 <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/07366.pdf>

4 <http://www.nyamnjoh.com/>

5 <http://wits.academia.edu/FranzKruger>

6 <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/07368.pdf>

for every instance of reckless and unethical journalism, Krüger recognises that voluntary media councils “must, surely, justify themselves by being able to show improved standards of professionalism”.

The AMB reports give us a sense of how far national media have gone in developing a culture of professionalism that is compatible with their African contexts. Our analysis of these reports tries to assess the extent to which media professionalism and integrity can be built through self-regulation, and what part journalists’ pay and working conditions have in supporting – or hindering – this process throughout Africa.

We do so in the context of a 2011 study by the Centre for International Media Ethics (CIME)<sup>7</sup> that found that 60 per cent of African media houses have codes of ethics – more than media in all the other five continents surveyed (Asia, Australasia, Europe, North America and Latin America). Only ten per cent of African journalists and media academics surveyed reported having difficulties in abiding by these ethical codes – far fewer than their colleagues in Asia (43 per cent), Europe (21 per cent), North America (21 per cent) and Latin America (43 per cent). Meanwhile, almost 70 per cent of African respondents felt that at least half the journalists in their countries comply with ethical regulations, with many believing that most journalists work ethically.

The AMB reports paint a rather different picture.

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<sup>7</sup> Media Ethics Survey 2011 by the Center for International Media Ethics (CIME), sourced from [www.cimethics.org](http://www.cimethics.org)

# *Corruption is the norm(?) - As are poor working conditions*

The AMB reports portray a media industry riddled with unethical practices, in which many journalists are, in the words of one panellist, little more than “labourers”, and regulators – both those established by the media as well as those mandated by the state – struggle to assert the ethical standards that are the bedrock of journalism.

The average of scores given by all AMB panels continent-wide for the integrity indicator is 2.2 out of a possible 5 (see Table 2 for scoring system). In only 10 of the 69 AMB reports between 2005-2011 (15 per cent of reports) did panels think media met many of the expected standards of integrity and gave this indicator a score of three or more. Panellists view the working conditions of Africa’s journalists in a similarly poor light: From 2009 – 2011, the average of scores given by AMB panels continent-wide for the pay and working conditions indicator is 2.1. Only four countries received scores of three or more for this indicator.

**Table 2: AMB scoring system**

- 1 = Country does not meet indicator
- 2 = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicators
- 3 = Country meets many aspects of indicator but progress may be too recent to judge
- 4 = Country meets most aspects of the indicator
- 5 = Country meets all aspects of the indicator and has been doing so over time

AMB panels judge media self-regulation slightly more favourably: The average for scores for this indicator in all 69 AMB reports between 2005-2011<sup>8</sup> is 2.6. This is still below standard, but panels gave ten countries (37 per cent, 10/27) scores of three or more for media accountability.

However, this is an overly simplistic view that, even in the relatively short time span of the AMB process to date, hides genuine efforts by the media to improve the

standards of their journalism, often under very difficult circumstances. Our analysis of the discussions AMB panels had on these issues suggests that media in many countries consider ethical journalism integral to building a more professional and

<sup>8</sup> Prior to 2009, media integrity and pay/working conditions of journalists were dealt with in the same AMB indicator (“Salary levels and general working conditions for journalists and other media practitioners are adequate to discourage corruption”).

sustainable media industry. Our findings point to the enhanced role independent regulators could have in supporting this process, and the additional impact improved pay and working conditions could have.

Generally, AMB panellists consider media to have more integrity in countries where working conditions are relatively good, and self-regulation reasonably effective. A handful of countries showed encouraging improvements on both accounts in their more recent AMB reports. The opposite also appears to be true in a much greater number of countries: corrupt media and unethical journalism seem to thrive where journalists endure consistently poor working conditions and regulation is ineffective. The latter is often as a result of self-regulatory and statutory bodies competing with each other, further polarising a fragile and fractious media industry in the process.

A second trend emerges from our analysis. In most countries covered by the AMB to date, strides have been made to enhance self-regulation. But journalists' pay / working conditions and the overall integrity of the media continue to lag behind. It is here that the reforming potential of media regulators will be tested in the coming years. Similarly, a creeping decline in both self-regulation and journalists' working conditions may threaten the relatively good reputation media have in a few countries hitherto ranked among the continent's role models in terms of media freedom.

Two types of corruption appear prevalent within the African media. There is hard-core corruption: journalists use their power to blackmail people about whom they have sensitive information; or journalists take payment, sometimes on a regular basis, from influential sources in order to either kill or put a positive spin on stories. This type of corruption seems to have less to do with levels of pay and more to do with abuse of power and a lack of ethics. A number of AMB panels believe some editors are in the pay of politicians and business people.

The second type of corruption is usually referred to by panellists as "brown envelope journalism", or a similar colloquial term such as "felaka" in Madagascar or "gombo" in Cameroon and Ivory Coast. Often this is considered part of the news production process. "Brown envelope" corruption ranges from bribes or gifts in return for favourable coverage of specific issues or events, to journalists receiving transport, food and accommodation allowances from the organisers of events they cover. The latter are often non-governmental organisations that consider paying allowances to journalists essential for ensuring media coverage, and the organisations include these payments in their official budgets. The maxim "no pay, no story" seems to apply in many parts of the continent. Some journalists are so poorly paid or not paid at all that they depend on these allowances to

survive. Often media houses, even in relatively well-off countries such as South Africa, do not have funds to cover events, and will only send a reporter if their expenses are paid.

Let us look at these trends in more detail by way of examples arising from the AMB reports.

## *From bad to worse or turning the corner?*

Integrity 

Self-regulation 

Working conditions 

Senegal and Ghana both appear to have turned the corner in terms of combatting corruption as part of a concerted effort to build a credible and professional media industry, which might reflect the economic and political development of the countries as a whole. In early AMB reports for both countries, corruption, poor working conditions and weak regulation went hand-in-hand, with neither voluntary nor statutory regulators commanding much respect from the media.

More recently, corruption remained within the media in both countries, but appeared to be far less prevalent:

“Corruption is certainly a reality within the Senegalese media, but that does not mean all press organs are corrupt...The phenomenon is marginal in the press. Journalists are not very corrupt... Journalists are a rare category of professionals, who look at themselves in the mirror on the subject of corruption” Senegal AMB 2010.

“Looking at society in Ghana as a whole, journalists are not too bad”. Ghana AMB 2011.

According to the 2011 AMB report for Ghana, media houses have begun to enforce policies that forbid journalists from accepting money from sources. In some cases, this ban extends to allowances from event organisers, although some panellists felt this was a legitimate practice. A number of media houses had introduced in-house codes of ethics and practice and the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) was busy reviewing its industry-wide code. Meanwhile, the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) had introduced its own code in collaboration with the GJA:

“In cases of serious breaches of these codes, the offending radio stations can be expelled from the association – quite a severe sanction as GIBA offers a range of business opportunities which are vital for its members” Ghana AMB 2011.

The media's newfound enthusiasm for ethical standards may partly be a reaction to an attempt by government in 2009 to bring media regulation under the authority of the information minister by amending the constitution; a move resisted by both the voluntary and statutory media councils. The 2011 AMB panel felt "self-regulatory mechanisms – with all their flaws – are working more efficiently than the statutory body because they serve as 'courts of honour', and their 'name-and-shame' sanctions seem to be the strongest weapon against unethical practices".

In Senegal, the journalists union and the country's main media training school took the initiative to make the media more accountable. After two years' of consultations, a self-regulatory body was established in 2009. However, the AMB panel that met the following year reported that plans were underway to give the voluntary regulator "legal status" in order to afford it more power to discipline journalists that contravened the code of ethics. This move appears to be a result of media houses ignoring the voluntary regulator's first attempts at discipline, which were limited to public statements highlighting malpractice.

The pay and working conditions for journalists in both Senegal and Ghana remain relatively poor, but also seem to have improved gradually since the AMB process began. In 2010, AMB panellists in Senegal said the information and communication professionals' union had launched a campaign "to address the precarious working conditions within the media".

In South Africa and Namibia, both renowned for their free media, panellists have begun to question the integrity of their journalists. This, it would seem, is a result of commercial pressures on the media. In early reports, both countries topped the AMB charts in terms of integrity, working conditions and, in the case of South Africa, self-regulation. More recently, panellists have become concerned about the influence corporate public relations is having on media coverage:

"You are taken in. They give you a lot of presents, which is not really corruption, but it affects your coverage. As a result you hardly ever see stories critical of (the television show) Big Brother or big companies."  
Namibia AMB 2011

In South Africa, panellists were more worried by the emergence of the "allowance" culture as newsroom budgets for covering stories are cut:

"In order to travel and cover stories, financial help for accommodation and transport has to be accepted... This is a serious threat to journalistic independence as journalists feel indebted to their sponsors and under pressure not to be too critical." South Africa AMB 2006.

By 2010, AMB panellists in South Africa reported, “there are some journalists who will not only take gifts but will actually seek them out”:

“Unfortunately many journalists do not have a sense of where to draw the line on freebies.” South Africa AMB 2010.

This is not for want of regulation: both the press and broadcasters in South Africa have voluntary regulators, while there is also a statutory body to handle complaints from the public about broadcasters. With all bases covered, and regulators seemingly in agreement about the ethical standards they are applying, it is perhaps not surprising that there is zero tolerance for corruption:

“Editors deal harshly with journalists who get caught taking kickbacks.” South Africa AMB 2008.

The attitude of Namibian media executives appears to be more ambivalent, perhaps because the self-regulatory media ombudsman only recently started hearing complaints about media coverage, and awareness of new, industry-wide ethical standards is still evolving. According to the 2011 AMB report for Namibia, a journalist at one media house was not punished when discovered asking for money in return for coverage. When a similar case was uncovered at the national broadcaster, the journalist in question was fired.

Namibian editors finally managed to establish the media ombudsman after government threatened to impose a statutory body if the industry did not put its own house in order. The South African print media is under a similar threat, and may opt for an independent statutory regulator in face of fierce criticism from the ruling African National Congress, which believes the voluntary press council is not effective enough in enforcing ethical standards.

As with media integrity, early AMB panels in both South Africa and Namibia considered journalists’ pay and conditions to be relatively good. But this has changed as, it appears, there is less money available for journalists on a full-time basis. In 2008, South Africa’s AMB panel reported that media houses were increasingly hiring reporters and sub-editors on short-term contracts. By 2010:

“Working conditions are deteriorating all the time because of constant staff cuts. Fewer people are doing more and end up working long, unsociable shifts.” South Africa AMB 2010.

Journalists working for Namibia’s private media appear worse off than their colleagues in the state-funded media, a reversal of the situation reported by AMB panellists in 2005 and 2007. The threat of organised action by the public sector workers union appears to have helped the cause of journalists working for state

media. Journalists working in the private media are not unionised. In 2011, AMB panellists felt the working conditions in Namibia's commercial radio sector were particularly poor.

Integrity 

Self-regulation 

Working conditions 

Media in both Botswana and Mozambique have, in the eyes of successive AMB panels, retained their integrity in spite of poor regulation, as well as relatively poor pay and working conditions for journalists.

"Journalists have a very high standard of moral integrity.... Considering how poorly paid they are, journalists' integrity is quite incredible." Botswana AMB 2011.

"Media outlets have their own integrity and do everything to defend it, and have at times gotten rid of journalists involved in corrupt practices." Mozambique AMB 2009.

Nonetheless, in 2007, AMB panellists in Mozambique said levels of pay were not enough to discourage corruption. In 2011, the situation had slightly improved, although panellists said journalists' pay and working conditions were still "inadequate" given the risks and responsibilities of the profession.

A few years prior to this, the labour ministry in Mozambique had investigated the working conditions at media houses, a move considered by some at the time to be an attempt by the authorities to silence critical media. The ministry said it was simply trying to protect journalists from exploitation.

A similar investigation in Botswana highlighted how poorly paid journalists were paid, and how urgently they needed to organise themselves into a trade union:

"It was quite sad... We realised we were being abused and our salaries were some of the worst in the country." Botswana AMB 2011.

Until then, successive AMB panels had thought salaries in the media were relatively competitive, with pay buoyed by the fact that well-qualified graduates were entering the industry, although holding on to them was providing difficult.

Botswana's recent history of press regulation is similarly chequered. A voluntary press council was established in 2004 resulting, the AMB panel reported in 2005, in a decline in the number of court cases against the media. At first the body regulated the conduct of both private and state-owned media. But in 2008, government passed a new law, the Media Practitioners Act, which paved the way for a statutory media council, and state-owned media withdrew from the press council. While the voluntary body's main sanction is the publication of adjudications and requiring offending media to apologise for unethical practice, the statutory body – once established – will “have more teeth” insofar as it will be able to levy fines and even deregister offending journalists.

“The (self-regulatory) Press Council is an under-resourced voluntary organisation that is battling with administrative issues, such as ensuring that the members have paid their annual fees... The introduction of the Media Practitioners Act is a threat to the Press Council... The members need to determine how it can survive and be sustainable... The more people see the (statutory) Media Council as a controlling measure, the more they will support a self-regulatory body.” Botswana AMB 2009

Mozambique's media appears to operate in an even larger ethical vacuum. The state controlled Higher Social Communication Council, established under the country's 1994 constitution, is supposed to safeguard media ethics. But a law has yet to be enacted to enable the council to do this.

In the absence of tangible ethical guidelines, the local chapter of the MISA and the country's journalists union facilitated the media's adoption of a voluntary code of conduct for the coverage of the last two elections.

“This self-regulation exercise proved especially beneficial as it brought together editors of the various media on a voluntary basis around an ethical commitment to balanced coverage of elections.” Mozambique AMB 2011.

Having said this, the journalists union's ethics committee “is dysfunctional”, and has failed to respond to unethical practices in the media:

“This has resulted in unfavourable public comments about the professionalism of the media.” Mozambique AMB 2011.

It remains to be seen for how long the integrity of the media in both Mozambique and Botswana will remain intact if self-regulation does not become more effective, and journalists continue to lose out in terms of their pay and working conditions.

Integrity 

Self-regulation 

Working conditions 

Media in a number of countries appear to be mired in corruption, ineffective regulation and often-appalling working conditions. While media in countries like Senegal and Ghana seem to have broken out of this vicious cycle, others remain trapped by a culture of corruption that continues to be a norm in not just the media, but societies as a whole.

“The media environment has been unable to escape corruption which is a widespread phenomenon in Malagasy society. Low salaries are not the only factor to explain ‘les felaka’ (bribes) and the ‘rackets’ being run in the (media) profession. Numerous factors – sociological, cultural and economic - feature in this context. The environment, characterised by the destruction of value systems, encourages and reinforces corruption, which becomes a source of social and financial success.” Madagascar AMB 2006.

Such societal norms appear to underpin hard-core corruption within the media, which is usually deep-rooted:

“For some media outfits, the annual excellence awards are viewed simply as money-making schemes. An increasing number of reporters and publishers in Cameroon practice ‘investigative blackmail’”, Cameroon AMB 2011.

“The issue of corruption and blackmail in the media is not new. At the onset of the ‘media springtime’ and even during the one-party rule, journalists and media outlets did not hesitate to resort to blackmail. For instance, certain newspapers announced headline news regarding alleged scandals and then sold their silence to the presumed culprit under the threat of publishing the article in its subsequent editions.” Côte d’Ivoire AMB 2009.

Under such circumstances, media regulators – voluntary or statutory – are hard-pressed to turn the situation around. Cameroon’s statutory media council, for example, appears impotent, despite its armoury of “very harsh laws”:

“Cameroon is replete with newspapers that are unwilling to respect basic ethical principles. Some newspapers refuse outright to run rejoinders when members of the public complain about their reporting. ‘For some journalists, correcting wrong information seems like the worst humiliation they can ever be subjected to,’ said one panellist.” Cameroon AMB 2011.

In Côte d'Ivoire, both the voluntary and state media councils, together with the journalists' union, began to enforce a code of ethics, with the statutory body going as far as banning publications. But then political turmoil and civil war intervened.

The media in Madagascar has no regulatory body and no active code of ethics, although some media houses have their own in-house codes. The information ministry drafted a code of conduct but this has yet to be implemented. An earlier effort by media professionals to develop an industry-wide code fell apart because it tried to outlaw "*les faleka*" (bribes):

"The absence of a common code or a self-regulatory body is the result of the divergence of views within the media itself. It seems that such self-regulation is not a priority among journalists. The panel observed that some reporters place little emphasis on ethical behaviour: the concept seems to differ from one journalist to the other." Madagascar AMB 2010.

Tackling "brown envelope journalism" may be more straightforward, as this type of corruption seems to stem more from the financial volatility of, and underinvestment in the media. And the poor pay and working conditions of journalists that is a result:

"Some media owners simply don't pay at all, and encourage their reporters to live on 'transport money' from news sources and event organisers." Cameroon AMB 2011.

In Lesotho, one of the main attractions of working for the private media is the opportunity to supplement meagre salaries by "freelancing and moonlighting":

"Private media rely heavily on volunteers and freelancers, and only a few established private media houses pay regular salaries to their staff." Lesotho AMB 2010.

Under such conditions, civil society organisations who pay allowances to journalists to attend their events "are the main briber", said one member of the 2009 AMB panel in Côte d'Ivoire. In a bid to reduce the need for "allowances" and brown envelopes", both the Ivorian voluntary media council and the country's journalists union encouraged media houses to increase newsroom budgets so that journalists had funds to go and cover stories without relying on news sources for food, transport and accommodation.

The arrival of the privately-owned *Lesotho Times*, which was backed by foreign investors who paid their journalists more than the paltry salaries offered by its more established rivals, forced other private media in Lesotho to raise salaries and improve working conditions in an attempt to hold on to their best reporters.

All this said, ethical journalists exist even in countries where corruption is the norm, pay and working conditions poor, and media accountability limited. But these ethical journalists pay a price for their integrity:

“The few journalists who make an effort to respect professional norms do make enormous financial sacrifices because they have to among other things, pay for their transportation to the scene of events.” Cameroon AMB 2008.

Integrity  Self-regulation  Working conditions 

A similar story emerges from roughly half the countries that have regularly taken part in the AMB process to date, but with one important exception: Here, efforts to promote effective self-regulation appear more advanced.

Most of these attempts at self-regulation are relatively new, and it is too early to say what impact, if any, they will have on rolling back corruption within their respective media industries. Furthermore, if not tackled at the same time, lousy pay and working conditions may continue to hamper attempts to build media integrity.

In Benin, AMB panellists in 2011 said that corruption “was most endemic at the level of media owners”. In which case, one wonders how effective the voluntary media council – appointed, presumably, by those very same proprietors - will be in tackling corruption. Nonetheless, AMB panellists over the years seemed to think Benin’s self-regulatory media council carried weight. Evidence of this, the 2011 panel said, was the fact that the statutory media council, which also operates in the country, established an “ethics and conduct commission to handle the growing power” of the self-regulator.

Meanwhile, Benin’s employers have resisted attempts to implement a collective bargaining agreement guaranteeing minimum salary levels within the media industry because the practice of brown envelope journalism saves them considerable amounts of money:

“Since the late 80s, there is a practice in Benin, which consists of distributing a certain sum of money, referred to as per diem, to journalists covering an event. The per diem... is paid to the journalist by the event organiser. Testimonies indicate that for a long period of time, even the state media used journalists without paying them salaries. The latter only lived on per diems received during events and potential allowances for certain assignments.” Benin AMB 2009.

Unable to pay salaries, some Nigerian media owners “encourage journalists to extort money from news sources”, said the country’s AMB panel in 2011. The Editors Guild and Newspaper Proprietors Association appointed a media ombudsman in 2009: “a major step in improving the quality, ethics and standards of journalism in the country”. But don’t hold your breath. The panellists also said this:

“In spite of efforts spearheaded by both the government and the industry to uphold professional standards, the response from the vast majority of media owners and journalists has not been strong. Poor and irregular wages have made compliance with existing ethical codes difficult. Some media owners believe the professional card is a pass for reporters to raise money through tips and bribes.” Nigeria AMB 2011.

AMB reports from Angola paint a similar picture. Media bodies have developed codes of conduct, and were in the process of establishing a “media authority” which, it seems, will have a mountain to climb:

“In a country where everybody uses their professional position to their own financial gain, corruption covers almost all sectors of society.... It was said that journalists in Angola have no moral authority to denounce corruption and that there is no moral entity capable of putting an end to corrupt practices in the country.” Angola AMB 2010.

A collective bargaining agreement on journalists’ pay was reached in 2005, but implementation has been hampered by “an obvious policy – especially in the state media – of favouring staff members connected to the ruling elite by providing them with goods beyond the financial possibilities of media workers, and there are cases where remuneration is made outside these standards (set in the agreement)”. *A luta continua!*

In 2006, Malawi’s AMB panel reported that, in return for money, journalists “offer politicians to ‘kill’ a story which could be damaging”. By 2010, the media houses had begun to “strive to promote integrity and guard against dishonesty and bribery”. But there was a tendency to “cover up cases of corruption (involving media workers) when they do occur”. And event organisers continued to pay

journalists allowances, while corporate PR was influencing media coverage through freebies such as pay TV and cell phone subscriptions.

The Malawian media revived its voluntary media council in 2007, and this seemed to be held in high regard with “95 per cent of cases solved amicably, with parties complying with the council’s decisions” (Malawi AMB 2010). An independent journalists union was formed in 2008 and, along with the more established information and communications workers union, was looking to improve “poor” salaries and working conditions in the media industry:

“Malawian journalists worked for a long time under a patronage system. In the absence of a union, journalists were easily divided to respective loyalties of their employers and they would switch allegiances by moving into different camps that thrived on patronage.” Malawi AMB 2008.

In 2005, Kenya’s AMB panel said that some journalists were seen as “‘reporters for hire’” and “‘hunters for fortune’”, as they would not cover a story until they were “paid or otherwise induced to report”. This might not be surprising given that, according to the AMB panel in 2009, poorly paid freelancers made up around 70 per cent of the editorial workforce in Kenyan newsrooms.

“Media houses are staffed by a small team of professional staff. The rest of the editorial input comes from correspondents and stringers who are paid per length of their story. This group is not provided with other facilities like transport, telephone and e-mail.” Kenya AMB 2007.

Relying so heavily on freelancers, especially those who are paid very little money must make it very difficult for editors to monitor the ethical conduct of those producing the bulk of their media’s content. And it provides little opportunity to nurture an ethical newsroom culture.

A great deal of effort has gone into creating such a culture within the Kenyan media industry. The media set up the voluntary Media Council of Kenya (MCK) in 2004 following a thwarted attempt by government to establish a statutory regulator. In 2005, a government task force again recommended the creation of a statutory regulator. In the same year, AMB panellists reported that the MCK was handling around 45 cases a month, most of which were resolved without having to involve the MCK’s complaints committee, the majority of whose members represented the general public. In 2007, the AMB panel reported that the MCK’s “code of professional standards” was widely used by both the mainstream media and training institutions. Some media houses also had their own in-house codes of conduct.

However, in 2007 parliament passed the Media Act, which converted the MCK into an independent but statutory body. This was because media houses had tended to ignore the decisions of the voluntary body. Irked by the MCK's decisions, some media houses even withheld their subscriptions to the MCK, and the body struggled to sustain itself. While the new, statutory media council could not levy fines and the like, the new law gave it powers similar to those of a court of law, stating in Article 33 that decisions of the complaints commission and council should be "enforced as an order of Court".

Then the country's new constitution, passed in 2010, mandated parliament to pass another law to establish yet another body to "set media standards and regulate and monitor compliance with those standards" (Article 34.5). Such a body should, in terms of the constitution, "be independent of control by government, political interests or commercial interests". A new Media Bill was tabled in 2011 but critics said the composition of the new council, as per the bill, would compromise its independence.

Neighbouring Tanzania has one of the longest serving self-regulatory media council's on the continent. Established in 1995, the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) is considered something of a role model, and appears to be relatively effective: 95 per cent of cases were resolved amicably (AMB 2010) and media houses complied with almost all its decisions (AMB 2008). Some media houses also have "very strict" in-house codes of conduct.

And yet corruption within the media persists:

"Panellists concurred that some journalists in the country involve themselves in corruption. A panellist gave the example of a story about a mining company that was dumping its waste into a nearby river, thereby affecting the health of local residents. Journalists were invited by the company to observe and write about the 'safety measures' put in place by the mine, and following that visit, the said journalists all wrote PR stories. Panellists noted that such cases are several among media circles." Tanzania AMB 2010.

More media houses needed to institute style books, codes of conduct and other "in-house peer mechanisms of professional ethical conduct", the AMB panel said in 2008, while the media council itself needed to be "more proactive and comment on ethical transgressions as they happen instead of waiting for people to come and complain". Like media councils elsewhere, the MCT struggled financially:

“The biggest snag is that the council depends almost completely on (foreign) donors to run its business.” Tanzania AMB 2006.

In 2008, AMB panellists also noted that salaries and working conditions for Tanzanian journalists remained poor, and journalists lacked “upward mobility, training opportunities and retirement benefits”. Around 70 per cent of newsroom staff was freelancers paid retainers:

“This in actual fact means that they are working as labourers.” Tanzania AMB 2008.

## What is “integrity”?

The AMB’s integrity indicator and, thus, the panels’ discussions assess “integrity” largely in terms of levels of corruption within the media. Our analysis identifies two main types of corruption prevalent in the African media: hard-core corruption, whereby journalists abuse their position to extort money from news sources or receive payments to promote the interests of influential people through the media; and “brown-envelope journalism”, which involves journalists receiving bribes, gifts or allowances for reporting on specific issues or events.

But very little attention – in the discussions of this particular indicator, at least - is given to the positive behaviour that gives journalists integrity. For example: the way in which journalists strive to present information that is balanced, accurate and fair; how media differentiate between fact and opinion; or how they work in the public interest while also respecting privacy. Where AMB panels think the media has integrity, their judgement is usually based on the perceived lack of corruption. Or else panellists simply say: “Journalists have integrity”, and leave it at that.

Positive behaviour forms the basis of most media codes of ethics, or should do. Corruption is the antithesis of most of the ethical behaviour expected of journalists. In which case, worryingly few people involved in the African media - from proprietors and policy makers to trainee reporters and journalism students - appear to have taken this ethical behaviour to heart. And not enough is being done to hold journalists accountable to their codes of conduct. Because too few people, both within and outside the media, are aware of what these codes say in the first place, perhaps?

The self-regulatory media councils and complaints mechanisms that panels also assess during the AMB process are charged with enforcing the ethical codes that are the cornerstone of journalism practice. Few, if any AMB panels make a direct reference to self-regulatory bodies as a means of curbing corruption within the media. This could be down to the way the AMB discussions are structured: the self-regulation indicator (Indicator 4.1) is discussed before the media integrity indicator (Indicator 4.7). All the same, there appears to be a disconnect in the minds of AMB panels between self-regulation and the impact this could have on promoting integrity within the media to the extent that AMB panellists in a number of countries can, year after year, laud their system of self-regulation and, an hour-or-so later in the discussion, bitterly complain how corrupt the media is.

Why so many panellists do not seem to see any contradiction between scoring high for their systems of self-regulation and simultaneously agreeing that the media in their country are highly corrupt may have another explanation altogether. The primary mandate of most media councils is the settlement of complaints from people who feel they have been wronged by the media. In the practice of “brown envelope” journalism, you lack – in most cases – a damaged party and a complainant. After all, “brown envelope” journalism is a type of win-win business deal - even if an unethical one - in which in most cases both parties stand to gain from it. Everyone involved and in the know is content, while those that might object will not be in the know and not be able to do anything about. Thus, these cases may never reach any media councils. Ironically, quite often it is when journalists actually do their job - i.e. report on corrupt practices among the political and economic elites - that they get into trouble and are accused of defamation or worse.

To investigate further, let us look at what African documents - upon which the AMB indicators are based - say about media regulation and at what the AMB reports say about the impact of regulatory bodies and codes of ethics on the integrity of media workers.

## *The impact of self-regulation*

The 2002 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) says the following about media regulation and complaint mechanisms:

- 1. A public complaints system for print or broadcasting should be available in accordance with the following principles:*
  - Complaints shall be determined in accordance with established rules and codes of conduct agreed between all stakeholders; and*
  - The complaints system shall be widely accessible.*
- 2. Any regulatory body established to hear complaints about media content, including media councils, shall be protected against political, economic or any other undue interference. Its powers shall be administrative in nature and it shall not seek to usurp the role of the courts.*
- 3. Effective self-regulation is the best system for promoting high standards in the media.*

The ACHPR considers self-regulation to be “the best” but not necessarily the only way of holding media accountable to their codes of conduct. Protection from interference – including interference from those with a vested interest in the media, presumably – is essential for an effective media complaints mechanism, according to the Declaration.

But do complaint mechanisms play a crucial role in safeguarding the integrity of African media?

Glimpses of how codes of ethics and the bodies that enforce them can promote media integrity are found in the AMB reports from 2005 - 2011. Some media houses have rules for how journalists handle gifts they receive from PR people and other news sources. Examples are given of journalists who have lost their jobs for taking bribes or trying to extort money from news sources. This is a result of editors, managers and proprietors acting with integrity, often by applying the in-house policies and ethical codes they have put in place. An effective regulator can develop and apply ethical standards across the media, thereby creating a shared culture of integrity, setting standards to which the industry can be held account. The AMB discussions suggest that, if based on similar ethical principles, in-house

and industry wide codes and complaints mechanisms help to re-enforce each other.

As it is, integrity within the African media – and there remains plenty, according to AMB panels – exists against all odds. “Considering how poorly paid journalists are, their integrity is quite incredible,” said one AMB panellist in Botswana. Even more reason for media owners, editors, and regulatory bodies to provide journalists with moral reference points to guide them and to provide enough incentives as well as sanctions to make journalists think twice about acting unethically. A standard practice in some parts of the world is to make a code of ethics part of a journalist’s employment contract. But for this to work, journalists need a contract in the first place. Employment contracts are a luxury in many countries covered by the AMB.

The media does not operate in a vacuum, and the media tended to have more integrity in countries where a culture of corruption is less prevalent. AMB panellists in Zambia noted that cases of “serious corruption” within the media declined following a campaign to stamp out corruption in the country as a whole.

Table 3 on page 32 lists factors distilled from AMB reports that seem to determine whether or not

- a) media have integrity and
- b) media regulators act effectively.

When these factors are listed side by side, the impact effective regulation could have on media integrity becomes more apparent. Factors affecting media integrity, over which regulators could have some control, are highlighted in bold.

Frustrated by what they consider to be the media’s non-compliance with professional standards, a number of governments have established, or tried to establish, statutory media councils. Our findings suggest such initiatives have done little to improve the integrity of the media, and usually end-up further fragmenting the industry. This in turn makes the development of and adherence to ethical codes even more difficult; and professionalism suffers. Not surprisingly, there is little support for state-run media councils amongst AMB panellists. But they also consider unethical and unaccountable journalism unacceptable.

Given the “lack of teeth” many African media councils have, journalists and others involved with the media in a few countries are looking to re-enforce self-regulatory complaints bodies with legislation. The concept of independent, statutory regulation of the print media is being considered in at least three countries covered by the AMB: Kenya, where an independent media council is provided for in the constitution and underpinned by an existing law, with new legislation in the pipeline; Senegal, where a draft law designed to strengthen the existing self-regulatory body so far has been rejected by MPs; and South Africa, where the Press Freedom Commission – an initiative of editors and publishers headed by

the country's former chief justice - has proposed a system of "independent co-regulation between the public and the press", in which government will have "no role at all", to replace the existing self-regulatory system<sup>9</sup>.

Guaranteeing the independence of statutory complaints bodies – and thus their compliance with the African Commission's Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression – depends a great deal on who is appointed to these bodies, in terms of the law, and how they are appointed. South Africa has precedents for the appointment of boards of independent public bodies. These include public nominations of candidates and interview procedures that are open to the public. Furthermore, once appointed, boards are accountable to parliament rather than to a government ministry. But even here, the bodies such as South Africa's broadcasting regulator and the board of the national broadcaster have not avoided political interference. Elsewhere on the continent, such precedents are less common. Which makes many people nervous about legislating for media complaints mechanisms for fear that these laws, even if well-intended, could end up restricting rather than enhancing free expression by making these bodies a means for attacking and controlling the media rather than holding journalists accountable for breaches of professional ethics.

The work of building a culture of integrity starts with individual journalists and media houses, and should not be dependent upon the establishment of a body or the passing of a law. Quite the contrary, the AMB reports suggest that ethical codes and regulatory bodies work best when they are initiated and sustained by the media itself, and if they build on in-house measures introduced by individual media houses in an attempt to become more ethical, professional, credible and, who knows, profitable too. A number of AMB panels also cite the importance of training to the inculcation of new recruits to journalism with the ethics of the profession.

A watershed moment in the Swazi media regaining some integrity in the eyes of the AMB panel came when The Times of Swaziland publicly exposed a priest who tried to bribe one of the newspaper's journalists. This was in a country with no media council and complaints mechanism. But when it comes to corruption, the media appears reluctant to shine the same light on itself as it shines on others, as one of Kenya's AMB panellists pointed out in 2007:

"In criticising the vices in society, journalism assumes the higher moral pedestal with little internal soul-searching." Kenya AMB 2007.

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9 South Africa: Commission recommends 'independent co-regulation', article by Gill Moodie dated April 25, 2012, sourced from <http://fesmedia.org/african-media-news/detail/datum/2012/04/26/south-africa-commission-recommends-independent-co-regulation/>

**Table 3: Integrity and effective self-regulation matrix**

<b>Factors that contribute to integrity</b> (Factors over which regulators have some control in blue)	<b>Factors that contribute to effective self-regulation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing culture of integrity, both within the media and society as a whole.</li> <li>• Journalists are well paid and able to do their work without relying on newsmakers for transport, accommodation etc.</li> <li>• Contracted staff have job security, institutional support, feel part of newsroom culture, and have opportunities for mentoring and peer support.</li> <li>• Critical mass of full-time journalists</li> <li>• <b>Clear rules about gifts and “freebies” exist in in-house and/or industry-wide codes of conduct.</b></li> <li>• <b>Enforcement of both in-house and industry-wide codes and policies</b></li> <li>• <b>Editors and media owners lead by example.</b></li> <li>• <b>Media are seen to be taking a stand against corrupt practice within the industry.</b></li> <li>• <b>Training of journalists (which includes ethics).</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media take the lead in establishing and funding regulator.</li> <li>• Independence of regulator from political, economic and vested interests.</li> <li>• Buy-in from across the media – Self-regulation is seen to be in the interests of all sectors of the media.</li> <li>• Clear ethical guidelines/codes of conduct.</li> <li>• Regulator/complaints body is adequately resourced.</li> <li>• Unity of purpose and shared ethical principles, even when there is more than one regulator.</li> <li>• Seen to work and to be effective – credibility.</li> <li>• Media and public at large are aware of regulator’s role and the codes of ethics.</li> <li>• Industry-wide mechanisms are backed up by in-house mechanisms.</li> <li>• Regulator has teeth, i.e. it is able to impose sanctions that media take seriously (this doesn’t have to be monetary - naming and shaming is also effective in some places).</li> <li>• Media abide by decisions of regulator.</li> <li>• Proactive regulation – taking up issues in the public interest rather than just waiting for complaints to come in.</li> </ul>
<b>Factors that contribute to a lack of integrity</b> (Factors over which regulators have some control in blue)	<b>Factors that contribute to ineffective self-regulation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Media hypocrisy/disregard for ethical principles.</b></li> <li>• Poor pay and conditions.</li> <li>• Lack of job security – over-reliance on freelancers.</li> <li>• Society as a whole tolerates/encourages corruption.</li> <li>• Cultural practices/beliefs that can compromise journalists’ integrity (e.g. gifts and hospitality).</li> <li>• <b>Corrupt editors and media owners.</b></li> <li>• <b>Tolerance within the media of corrupt practices, and/or ambiguity about how to deal with corrupt practices.</b></li> <li>• <b>Lack of awareness among media workers of ethical codes and practice.</b></li> <li>• <b>Lack of training and mentoring.</b></li> <li>• <b>Cut-throat competition where labour rights, anti-trust laws etc. are ignored.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of respect for regulators.</li> <li>• Lack of independence.</li> <li>• Lack of media buy-in.</li> <li>• Codes and structures that are imposed with little consultation with and consensus among all stakeholders, not just media workers.</li> <li>• Confusing or conflicting ethical guidelines.</li> <li>• Self-regulatory and statutory bodies working against each other rather than in harmony.</li> <li>• Regulatory bodies lack teeth.</li> <li>• Reactive regulation only.</li> <li>• Divided media/divided regulators.</li> <li>• Donor dependency.</li> <li>• Lack of awareness about regulator and codes of ethics.</li> <li>• Media do not abide by decisions.</li> </ul>

## *The impact of pay and working conditions*

It is overly simplistic to say that poor pay and working conditions cause corruption within the media. Media integrity exists where journalists' pay and conditions are wretched. A number of AMB panels argue that media lacks integrity for reasons other than money or the lack of it or in addition to that:

“Salary levels are not a guarantee for ensuring freedom from corruption when it comes to journalism. There are so many external forces that impact on the journalist.” Tanzania AMB 2006.

“Low salaries are not necessarily linked to levels of corruption. The consensus was that corruption exists ‘no matter how much you pay a person’”. Swaziland AMB 2007.

However, there does appear to be a clear link between poor pay and working conditions and “brown-envelope journalism”. And this in turn seemed to be linked to serious structural problems within the media industry, such as:

- Large discrepancies in pay and conditions between media houses, and even within media houses.
- A lack of organisation and unionisation among media workers.
- A conflict between the practice of ethical journalism and media owners' commercial or political interests and the need for journalists to make a living.
- The payment of allowances and *per diems* to journalists covering events.
- Media houses' over reliance on freelance journalists.

The payment of allowances to journalists covering events has become part-and-parcel of the media production process in a fair number of African countries. So much so that it is the only source of income for quite a number of journalists. Those paying the allowances are often development organisations – including those involved in developing the media – that feel these payments are the only way they can guarantee coverage in the media. To eradicate the practice, all media houses will have to pay for the transport, accommodation and meals of their journalists covering events. And development organisations will have to be convinced of better ways to ensure they receive the media coverage they need to promote and justify their work.

The allowances systems become even more of an issue because of some media houses' dependency upon freelance journalists to produce their content. These freelancers also tend to be paid a pittance and therefore have little choice but to make extra money by seeking out allowances and freebies, even if this means producing stories to please their benefactors. Freelancers might save media owners some money, but reliance on too many freelancers makes it difficult for editors to keep a check on ethical standards, and the credibility of the media in question suffers as a result. Freelancers also tend to be less accountable to the rules and culture of the newsroom, and thus the ethics at the heart of that culture. Several AMB reports give the ratio of permanent staff to freelancers in their respective countries and, from these figures, 50:50 appears to be a rough tipping point.

Proprietors are likely to plead poverty when it comes to investing more in their newsrooms. But if media owners cannot afford to pay for their journalists travel allowances to cover stories, let alone a minimum wage, then perhaps they should not be in business in the first place. By routinely compromising the impartiality of their content, and thus the integrity of their medium and their industry, what value are they bringing to free expression and media diversity? AMB panellists told of a number of media houses which, when push came to shove, managed to increase their newsroom budgets. The entry into Lesotho's media market of a newspaper paying its journalists more realistic salaries, forcing competitors to follow suit, appears to have done more good than harm.

It should be in the interests of the media industry as a whole that journalists enjoy a set of minimum working conditions that are commensurate with their role and responsibility, and which encourage rather than undermine integrity. After all, integrity is – or should be – the main selling point for the kind of media envisaged by the African standards on which the AMB is based. However, viable media businesses practicing professional journalism are few and far between across Africa.

## *Integrity starts but does not end within the media*

There is a crisis of confidence in the integrity of the African media, if the perceptions of the civil society representatives and media workers who make up AMB panels up and down the continent are anything to go by. Having said this, perceptions of integrity are likely to take years, if not decades to change, as integrity is a reflection of the culture and behaviour of journalists, proprietors and others involved in the media. Perceptions of the other AMB indicators with which we have compared media integrity are more fluid, as these relate to tangible outcomes. A panel's assessment of self-regulation could change from year to year following, for example, the adoption of a policy or the setting-up of a complaints mechanism, as happened in Namibia. Panellists' perception of journalists' pay and conditions could change overnight following, for example, a salary survey, as happened in Botswana. But panellists' perceptions of media integrity could have been formed before the AMB process began, and may even date back to the era when almost all media were state propaganda tools. When discussing corruption in the Ivorian media, an AMB panellist referred back to the period of one-party rule that preceded the "media springtime".

With this in mind, our gloomy findings have a silver lining. Most countries covered by the AMB have in place bodies that strive, ostensibly at least, to hold media accountable to the public. And at least some journalists in almost all the countries concerned have adopted codes of conduct. Meanwhile, there have been some attempts to improve journalists' pay and working conditions that have begun to bear fruit. Therefore progress has been made already towards addressing the deficit in media integrity perceived by AMB panels in the majority of countries covered by this study.

Journalists respond to the environment in which they work, in particular the culture of the newsroom and the values that newsroom culture embraces and for which media owners and media managers are largely responsible. As an AMB panellist from Namibia put it:

"When you believe in the principles of journalism, you won't be so challenged by external influences." Namibia AMB 2011.

How journalists behave is only partly determined by the financial reward they

receive. Of perhaps equal or even greater significance is the moral compass that guides journalists in their work. This compass is set by the codes of conduct and editorial policies that every media house is supposed to put in place and to abide by. Although many such codes and policies exist, it would appear that many journalists and media houses have yet to internalise them, largely because the enforcement of these codes lacks weight and resources and, thus, credibility.<sup>10</sup>

Our findings suggest the following measures may help to build the integrity of the African media:

- *Strengthening the enforcement of both in-house and industry-wide ethical codes and editorial policies* - Particularly if corruption is widespread in the society within which media operate, there is a need for a strong framework to guide journalists and to help create an ethical counter culture. Collaboration with anti-corruption commissions and other anti-corruption initiatives might be another approach to address hard-core corruption within the media.
- *Training and mentoring* – Journalists who undergo systematic training tend to be more au fait with the ethics of their chosen profession. However, this training goes to waste if the senior journalists trainees learn from in the newsroom do not practice what the codes of ethics and editorial policies preach.
- *Appropriate pay and working conditions* – Employers need to pay their journalists adequately, and to give them the means to cover stories without making journalists reliant on news makers for food, transport and accommodation. The media industry throughout Africa seems to be crying out for minimum conditions of employment. These should be in the interests of not just employees but also of employers who have the slightest concern for the integrity of their industry. Greater collaboration with trade unions and national labour commissions might be a way to encourage the development of and adherence to industry-wide salary scales and minimum working conditions.
- *Clear rules for media ownership and competition* - These discourage the concentration of the media's undoubted power in the hands of too few owners and might help reduce the abuse of the media by those wishing to peddle political or commercial influence.

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10 The African Media Initiative (AMI), a Pan-African grouping of private media owners and media managers, in November 2011 endorsed *Leadership and Guiding Principles for African Media Owners and Managers* containing many clauses on ethical, social and labour related responsibilities of media owners and media managers. It remains to be seen whether this initiative will have a positive impact on media ethics and working conditions in the media on the continent.

- *Promoting public debates on ethics in their respective contexts within the media sector and society at large* – Media, civil society organisations, government institutions and the general public need to discuss how ethics in general and the ethics of journalism in particular apply within their respective African contexts. Through such debates a shared understanding of ethics and integrity can be reached and awareness of media ethics and general ethical standards can be generated enabling the public to hold media (and their governments!) accountable.
- *Supporting anti-corruption campaigns in general* - Media mirror the societies they operate in. In societies where corruption is common place, it is also common place in the media sector. Campaigns that address general corruption will also assist in tackling corruption in the media and media will become increasingly accountable to the public they serve.

For measures such as these to succeed, our findings suggest, the initiative must come from the media themselves. The first strides towards building integrity tend to be made by individual editors and proprietors who introduce in-house codes and policies, or by individual journalists who choose to ignore – or even expose – those who try to tempt them with “brown envelopes”.

Ultimately the media have to put aside their differences and focus on issues of common interest. The media have to take responsibility for ensuring their regulatory bodies function effectively. They also have to realise the value of investing in fair and appropriate salaries and working conditions for their journalists, in training and newsgathering. All this should become more feasible as the media industry matures, and African economies continue to grow.

And, who knows? The African media may become the gold standard that others follow as journalism strives to re-invent itself in the years ahead.

# APPENDIX

## Our method

AMB panels deliberate one by one on 45 indicators during a one-and-a-half day retreat held every few years in the country concerned. AMB panels are national peer review panels comprising five to six media representatives and five to six members of other sectors of civil society. Efforts are made to change a certain percentage of panellists from time to time while also maintaining continuity. The discussions are moderated and then compiled and summarised in a report that is endorsed by each member of the panel before being published.

The 45 AMB indicators are derived from African protocols and standards for free expression, media freedom and access to information. By regularly assessing these indicators, the AMB process serves as “an analytical exercise to measure the media situation in a given country” and, at the same time, provides “a practical lobbying tool for media reform”.<sup>11</sup>

After discussing each indicator, each panellist gives their country a score based on how they think the country fares against the indicator concerned. Scores are on a scale of 1 – 5 as follows:

- 1 = Country does not meet indicator
- 2 = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator
- 3 = Country meets many aspects of indicator but progress may be too recent to judge
- 4 = Country meets most aspects of the indicator
- 5 = Country meets all aspects of the indicator and has been doing so over time

The average of individual scores given by each panellist is taken as the final score for the indicator.

To get to the findings presented in this paper, first we compared the final scores panels gave for each of the three indicators on media integrity (indicator 4.7), journalists’ pay and working conditions (indicator 4.8.), and media self-regulation (indicator 4.1) in every AMB discussion conducted between 2005 and 2011 to

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<sup>11</sup> Description of AMB process on *fesmedia Africa* website: <http://www.fesmedia-africa.org/home/what-we-do/africa-media-barometer-amb/>

get an overall sense of how AMB panels across the continent perceive the issues addressed by the indicators concerned.<sup>12</sup>

However, this provided little insight to how the panellists arrived at their score. This is why we turned to the text of the AMB reports to gain a deeper understanding of the panellists' thinking, and the issues they took into account before scoring. Our content analysis was based on the questions the moderators ask in guiding the panel's discussion of each indicator.

We organised these guiding questions into key issues or "sub-indicators" and then arranged the text of the report of each panel's discussion from year to year according to these "sub-indicators". Next, we gave our own score to each of these sub-indicators applying the same scale used by the panels to score each of the main indicators (see example that follows).

This approach allowed for a more detailed examination of the relationship between the three main indicators. The content analysis enabled us to cluster countries according to emerging trends, and to compare what AMB panels said. We used the qualitative text from the reports to unpack the trends emerging from our brief initial quantitative analysis.

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<sup>12</sup> Please note that prior to 2009, media integrity and pay/working conditions of journalists were dealt with in the same AMB indicator ("Salary levels and general working conditions for journalists and other media practitioners are adequate to discourage corruption").

## Example of AMB report analyses

Country: Zambia

Year: 2009		4.7 Journalists and media houses have integrity and are not corrupt.			
Panellists' score for overall indicator	2.5	Marked differences in panellists' opinion <sup>13</sup> ?			
Sub indicators	<p><b>Examples of corruption</b></p> <p>1 = corruption is widespread, and concrete examples of this to show that media has no integrity</p> <p>3 = Some examples but only applies to some sections of the media</p> <p>5 = no corruption, media has lots of integrity</p>	<p><b>The environment discourages corruption</b></p> <p>1 = Corruption widely accepted</p> <p>3 = Some tolerance of corruption but also efforts to change this</p> <p>5 = Corruption a taboo and is not accepted</p>	<p><b>Efforts to combat corruption and promote integrity</b></p> <p>1 = Nothing being done</p> <p>3 = Some people are trying, others are not.</p> <p>5 = Industry as a whole combats corruption and promotes integrity.</p>	<p><b>The media has a good reputation</b></p> <p>1 = Media reputation is very bad (no public trust).</p> <p>3 = Some sections of the media have a good reputation, others do not.</p> <p>5 = Media reputation very good (lots of public trust).</p>	
What AMB says in relation to sub-indicators	<p>Generally despite low salaries (see indicator 4.8), Zambian reporters are considered to have integrity and not to be susceptible to 'brown envelope syndrome', although they are often under pressure from people seeking favourable coverage. There are, however, rumours that some reporters from the state media refuse to go on assignment if they do not get some money from the news host.</p> <p>The practice by mobile phone company, ZAIN, of offering journalists free airtime is questionable, as the company, also a prime sponsor of radio and television news broadcasts, does not receive negative coverage in the mainstream media.</p>	<p>Generally, despite low salaries (see indicator 4.8), Zambian reporters are considered to have integrity and not to be susceptible to 'brown envelope syndrome', although they are often under pressure from people seeking favourable coverage.</p> <p><i>The Times of Zambia</i> discourages such practices and the paper's editorial policy states that staff found to have accepted monetary bribes will be summarily dismissed. The newspaper's journalists are also discouraged from receiving any type of gift or 'freebie' from news sources.</p> <p><i>The Post's</i> editorial policy similarly states that reporters will be instantly dismissed for accepting money in return for writing stories, but this has not happened yet.</p> <p>"To avoid this and in an attempt to maintain the newspaper's independence, <i>The Post</i> ensures that reporters travelling with an organisation or even a political party are given allowances for that period."</p>	<p><i>The Times of Zambia</i> discourages such practices and the paper's editorial policy states that staff found to have accepted monetary bribes will be summarily dismissed. The newspaper's journalists are also discouraged from receiving any type of gift or 'freebie' from news sources.</p> <p><i>The Post's</i> editorial policy similarly states that reporters will be instantly dismissed for accepting money in return for writing stories, but this has not happened yet.</p> <p>"To avoid this and in an attempt to maintain the newspaper's independence, <i>The Post</i> ensures that reporters travelling with an organisation or even a political party are given allowances for that period."</p>	<p>Generally, despite low salaries (see indicator 4.8), Zambian reporters are considered to have integrity and not to be susceptible to 'brown envelope syndrome', although they are often under pressure from people seeking favourable coverage.</p>	
Our score for sub-indicators	3	2	3	4	

<sup>13</sup> Is there a noticeable split in the scores of individual panelists, suggesting that a significant number (50:50 - 60:40 split) of panelists feel the indicator is met, while a significant number feel it is not met, or vice-versa?

Year: 2009		4.8 Salary levels and general working conditions for journalists and other media practitioners are adequate.	
Panelists' score for overall indicator	2.2	Marked differences in panellists' opinion <sup>14</sup> ?	No
Sub indicators	<p><b>Salary levels</b></p> <p>1 = Media workers paid very badly.  3 = Pay for media workers is average, or some sections of the media paid well but others are not.  5 = Media workers paid very well.</p>	<p><b>Contracts / benefits</b></p> <p>1 = Lots of media workers do not have full-time contracts and no benefits.  3 = Some sections of the media are on contracts with benefits; others are not OR most people on contracts but no benefits.  5 = Media are on full-time contracts with good benefits (eg. Medical insurance, pension, housing etc.) built into contracts.</p>	<p><b>Working hours / other conditions</b></p> <p>1 = Journalists overworked and not represented.  3 = Some sections of media overworked, others not OR some efforts to improve working conditions, but not widespread yet.  5 = Good working hours, effective unions, happy workers.</p>
What AMB says in relation to sub-indicators	<p>Although media salaries in Zambia have improved in the past two years, they are still relatively low and not considered adequate. Salaries for journalists can range from as little as K500,000 (US\$100) a month after tax for community radio station staff to an average of K2 million (US\$400) to K2.5 million (US\$500), with benefits such as a housing allowance, for a state newspaper reporter. State-owned newspaper line editors can earn in the region of K6 million (US\$1,200) to K7 million (US\$1,400) a month. Staff working on privately owned newspapers tend to earn more than their colleagues in the state media, such that a reporter could earn K4 million (US\$800) a month. ZNBC staff, however, do not on average earn as much as those working for state-owned publications. Employees in the private broadcastings sector tend to earn more than those working for the public broadcaster. The cost of a basic food basket for a family of six for the month of May 2009 was estimated to be K815,850 (US\$160). (Cost of food records substantial increases', Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, accessed on <a href="http://zedians.ucoz.com/news/2009-06-10-129">http://zedians.ucoz.com/news/2009-06-10-129</a>)</p>	<p>Salaries for journalists can range from as little as K500,000 (US\$100) a month after tax for community radio station staff to an average of K2 million (US\$400) to K2.5 million (US\$500), with benefits such as a housing allowance, for a state newspaper reporter.</p>	<p>"Because some journalists do not belong to unions, they cannot negotiate better salaries."   The working conditions within the media are also not considered "ideal", although staff tend to work a normal eight-hour day.</p>
Our score for sub-indicators	2	3	2

<sup>14</sup> Is there a noticeable split in the scores of individual panelists, suggesting that a significant number (50:50 - 60:40 split) of panelists feel the indicator is met, while a significant number feel it is not met, or vice-versa?

Year: 2009	4.1 The media follow voluntary codes of professional standards, which are enforced by self-regulatory bodies that deal with complaints from the public.			
Panelists' score for overall indicator	2.3	Marked differences in panellists' opinion <sup>15?</sup>	No	
<b>Sub indicators</b>	<b>Voluntary ethical code: Yes / No?</b> 1 = No voluntary codes in place. 3 = Some sections of the media have voluntary codes, others do not OR Exists but inactive. 5 = Voluntary codes – both industry-wide and individual - in place and active.	<b>Self-reg. body: Yes / No?</b> 1 = No self-regulatory body. 3 = Some sections of the media governed by self-regulatory body, others are not. OR Exists but inactive. 5 = Self-regulatory body in place and active.	<b>Statutory body: Yes / No?</b> 1 = Statutory body in place and active. 3 = Some sections of the media governed by / respect statutory-regulatory body, others are not. OR Exists but inactive. 5 = No statutory body.	<b>Impact / effectiveness of voluntary code(s) / body(ies)</b> 1 = Voluntary codes / bodies very ineffective and disregarded by all media. 3 = Voluntary codes / bodies fairly effective OR some sections of the media respect voluntary codes / bodies, other do not OR There is either an effective code or a effective body but not both. 5 = Voluntary codes / bodies very effective and adhered to by all the media.
<b>What AMB says in relation to sub-indicators</b>	All major media houses, except <i>The Post</i> , are members of the self-regulatory, voluntary body, the Media Council of Zambia (MECOZ), which has a code of ethics and conduct for the print and broadcasting media to which all members must adhere. The majority of members – both individual and institutional – do abide by this code.  <i>The Post</i> has its own code of professional standards and journalists are instilled with the belief that self-regulation begins in the newsroom. <i>The Post</i> management continues to resist belonging to a particular regulatory body, as they feel that this is a way for government to impose control upon the newspaper, which has a generally antagonistic relationship with the ruling party and the government.	All major media houses, except <i>The Post</i> , are members of the self-regulatory, voluntary body, the Media Council of Zambia (MECOZ), which has a code of ethics and conduct for the print and broadcasting media to which all members must adhere. The majority of members – both individual and institutional – do abide by this code.  With the largest circulating newspaper in the country refusing to become a member of MECOZ, the media as a whole is put in an awkward position as the government is threatening to impose statutory regulations if the media cannot regulate itself.	"Government has talked about 'making MECOZ stronger through legislation', but this will make it virtually a statutory regulatory body. The president has been pushing for all media houses to belong to MECOZ, but it is a voluntary organisation!"	With the largest circulating newspaper in the country refusing to become a member of MECOZ, the media as a whole is put in an awkward position as the government is threatening to impose statutory regulations if the media cannot regulate itself.  MECOZ is seen to be a weak body for various reasons. Many members of the public prefer to take their complaints to the courts in an attempt to get financial compensation. If MECOZ finds a media house to be in the wrong, the most it can demand of the guilty party is to offer a public apology.

		<p><i>The Post</i> has its own code of professional standards and journalists are instilled with the belief that self-regulation begins in the newsroom. <i>The Post</i> management continues to resist belonging to a particular regulatory body, as they feel that this is a way for government to impose control upon the newspaper, which has a generally antagonistic relationship with the ruling party and the government.</p> <p>“Government has talked about ‘making MECOZ stronger through legislation’, but this will make it virtually a statutory regulatory body. The president has been pushing for all media houses to belong to MECOZ, but it is a voluntary organisation!”</p>	5	<p>MECOZ has handled only a very few complaints in its history, and it can arbitrate on matters involving non-member media houses if they are deemed in the public interest. MECOZ members also appear to lack respect for the council and the majority of its members are reluctant to pay membership fees. Initially the body was funded by German donor, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, but this has come to an end and if the council is to survive it will have to find alternative sources of income.</p> <p>In addition, complaints abound from within the media that the MECOZ board has lost direction and moved away from its original intention. It was set up by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zambian chapter and the Press Association of Zambia (PAZA) to counteract threats by the state to establish a statutory body.</p> <p>“Currently, the board appears to be manipulated by government. The members are behaving like politicians and they have even made statements criticising PAZA.”</p>
<b>Our score for sub-indicators</b>	5	4	5	2

15 Is there a noticeable split in the scores of individual panelists, suggesting that a significant number (50:50 - 60:40 split) of panelists feel the indicator is met, while a significant number feel it is not met, or vice-versa?



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