

AFRICAN MEDIA BAROMETER

The first home grown analysis of the
media landscape in Africa



MAURITIUS 2010

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MAGAZINES DEGREE DOCUMENTS DEGREE DOCU- REPORT

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The African Media Barometer (AMB)

The African Media Barometer (AMB) is an in-depth and comprehensive description and measurement system for national media environments on the African continent. Unlike other press surveys or media indices the AMB is a self-assessment exercise based on homegrown criteria derived from African Protocols and Declarations like the “*Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa*” (2002) by the “African Commission for Human and Peoples’ Rights”. The instrument was jointly developed by *fesmedia Africa*, the Media Project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Africa, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) in 2004.

The African Media Barometer is an analytical exercise to measure the media situation in a given country which at the same time serves as a practical lobbying tool for media reform. Its results are presented to the public of the respective country to push for an improvement of the media situation using the AU-Declaration and other African standards as benchmarks. The recommendations of the AMB-reports are then integrated into the work of the 19 country offices of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) in sub-Sahara Africa and into the advocacy efforts of other local media organizations like the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

Methodology and Scoring System

Every two to three years a panel of 10-12 experts, consisting of at least five media practitioners and five representatives from civil society, meets to assess the media situation in their own country. For 1 1/2 days they discuss the national media environment according to 45 predetermined indicators. The discussion and scoring is moderated by an independent consultant who also edits the AMB- report. After the discussion of one indicator panel members allocate their individual scores to that respective indicator in an anonymous vote according to the following scale:

1	Country does not meet indicator	
2	Country meets only a few aspects of indicator	
3	Country meets some aspects of indicator	
4	Country meets most aspects of indicator	
5	Country meets all aspects of the indicator	

The sum of all individual indicator scores will be divided by the number of panel members to determine the average score for each indicator. These average indicator scores are added up to form average sector scores which then make up the overall country score.

Outcome

The final, qualitative report summarizes the general content of the discussion and provides the average score for each indicator plus sector scores and overall country score. In the report panellists are not quoted by name to protect them from possible repercussions. Over time the biennial or tri-annual reports are measuring the media development in that particular country and should form the basis for a political discussion on media reform.

In countries where English is not the official language the report is published in a bilingual edition.

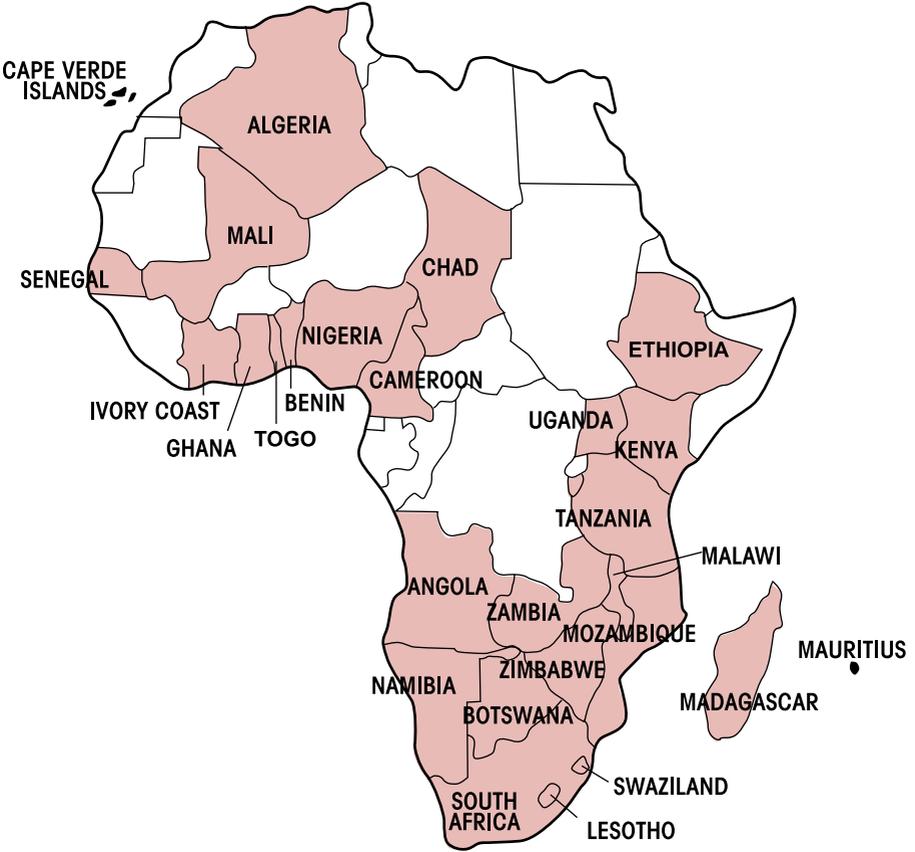
Implementing the African Media Barometer the offices of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) and - in SADC countries the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) - only serve as a convener of the panel and as guarantor of the methodology. The content of the discussion and the report is owned by the panel of local experts and does not represent or reflect the view of FES or MISA.

At the end of 2008 the indicators were reviewed, amended and some new ones were added to address the rapid developments in Information Communication Technology.

By the end of 2010 the African Media Barometer had been held in 27 African countries, in some of them already for the third time.

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See above 25 AMB Countries (2005-2010)

AFRICAN MEDIA BAROMETER MAURITIUS 2010

Executive Summary

Since independence in 1968, Mauritius has developed from a low-income, agriculturally based economy to a middle-income diversified economy with growing industrial, financial, and tourist sectors. The annual growth of this tropical paradise has been steady at the rate of 5 to 6 percent per annum. This remarkable achievement is reflected by more equitable income distribution, increased life expectancy, lowered infant mortality, and a much-improved infrastructure.

The economy is dependent on sugar production, tourism, textile manufacturing, clothing, and in recent years on financial services. Sugarcane is grown on about 90% of the cultivated land area and accounts for 15% of export earnings. The country is expanding into fish processing, information and communications technology, and hospitality and property development

The government's development strategy centres on creating vertical and horizontal clusters of development in these sectors. Mauritius has attracted more than 32,000 offshore entities - many aimed at commerce in India, South Africa, and China. Investment in the banking sector alone has reached over \$1 billion. Mauritius, with its strong textile sector, has been well poised to take advantage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

In line with the flourishing economy, the media industry has also grown in size and diversity over the last decade and is accessible and affordable throughout the country.

In all three sectors – print, electronic and broadcasting - there are a wide variety of media products to choose from.

The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation has one television station and 6 radio stations - *MBC Radio Maurice*, *MBC Radio Mauritius*, *MBC Kool FM*, *MBC Taal FM*, *MBC Best FM* (recently launched) and *MBC World Hit Radio*. *MBCTV* runs the following television channels: *MBC 1*, *MBC 2*, *MBC 3*, *the Knowledge Channel* and *MBC Movies Channel*. In October 2010, Prime Minister Dr Navin Ramgoolam launched the *Mandarin Channel*, *Marathi Channel*, *Tamil Channel*, *Telugu Channel*, *Urdu Channel* and the *Tourism and Culture Channel*. It is very likely that a *Bhojपुरi channel* will soon be launched.

The three private commercial radio stations operating in Mauritius are *Radio Plus*, *Radio One* and *Top FM*. There are no community radio stations in Mauritius.

In all there are six dailies in Mauritius - *L'Express*, *Le Matinal*, *Le Défi Quotidien* and *Le Socialiste* which are predominantly French with a few pieces in English. *The Independent* is the only paper published entirely in English. *Le Mauricien* – another French daily – goes out onto the streets every afternoon.

Business Magazine, *Scope Capital* and *Mauritius Times* are weekly magazines that hit the streets every Wednesday. *News on Sunday*, *Impact* and *The Observer* appear on Fridays. There are 8 weekend papers namely - *Le Défi Plus*, *Samedi Plus*, *Le Journal du Samedi*, *Week-end*, *5 Plus Dimanche*, *Le Dimanche*, *STAR* and *l'Express Dimanche*.

British American Investment – a new player in the country's media market – has bought three existing titles: *Le Dimanche*, *STAR* and *Impact News*, through its sister company Yukondale Company Limited. *Impact News*, formerly a tabloid targeting the Muslim community, has been revamped as *Impact Magazine*, with the corporate sector as its main readership. In July 2009, Yukondale launched an entirely English online daily, and is planning to launch a new French language daily too.

Radio is the most popular media product in Mauritius, followed closely by specific television programmes.

Expansion in the media sector has provided journalists the opportunity to improve their bargaining power and their positions within organisations. Salaries have risen and working conditions at some of the media are getting even better. Financial remuneration in the media industry is largely dependent on profile, branding and the negotiation skills of journalists.

Mauritius went through a decade during which it operated on a patronage system. All sectors thrived on this mode of operation, where people were promoted or got jobs based on who they were linked to. Although this started changing about two years ago, it is common for Mauritians to ingratiate themselves with people in authority in the hope that they will benefit in some way. Loyalty to the ruling party and those in power is still rewarded with a good job or government contracts.

Freedom of expression has always been guaranteed under Section 12 of the Constitution of Mauritius. Within the same section, limitations are possible in the “interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health.” All of these are rather broad terms that are open for interpretation.

Mauritians tend to be rather subdued for a variety of reasons. Public sector workers were instructed through a memo generated in the Prime Minister's office to refrain from speaking to the media or the public without official authorisation.

It is equally difficult for ordinary citizens to speak out without bearing possible consequences, as Mauritius is a small island where people are familiar with each other. Government does not resort to physical threats or violence to subdue citizens. On the contrary, the State uses financial pressure to keep people in tow. People risk the possibility of suspension, losing their jobs, facing interdicts or having government contracts withdrawn if they step out of line.

Furthermore, Mauritians do not have a culture of contesting the state. If confrontation takes place, it is usually in situations where there is no possibility of conflict. People speak out during talk shows on private radio stations and other forums where they are able to hide behind the cloak of anonymity.

The State has skilfully used the main news bulletin of the day to reinforce its position of power. During the last election, there was careful editing and a great deal of manipulation of imagery to portray the Prime Minister in the best way possible. He was always portrayed in a positive light – kissing babies and children, attending religious festivals, praying and engaging in intellectual debate. His main rival – Paul Berenger – on the other hand, was always shown in the worst possible light, saying innocuous things at the same event, or being abusive.

The ruling party also uses state television or radio to start discussions around certain issues and steers people to think in a certain way. If the State wants to effectively communicate with the citizenry it will broadcast its message on the 7:30pm news on television, as 70 percent of Mauritians tune in to the main news bulletin of the day.



SECTOR 1:

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is effectively protected and promoted.

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is effectively protected and promoted.

1.1 Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is guaranteed in the constitution and supported by other pieces of legislation.

Freedom of expression has always been guaranteed in the constitution of Mauritius.

Section 12(1) of the Constitution of Mauritius states that:

“except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, that is to say, freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, and freedom from interference with his correspondence.”

Within Section 12 there is a subsection that limits this right:

Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the law in question makes provision:

“in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons or the private lives of persons concerned in legal proceedings, preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, maintaining the authority and independence of the courts, or regulating the technical administration of the technical operation of telephony, telegraphy, posts, wireless broadcasting, television, public exhibitions or public entertainments; or for the imposition of restrictions upon public officers, except so far as that provision or, as the case may be, the thing done under its authority is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.”

So, while freedom of expression which includes freedom of the media is generally guaranteed under the Constitution of Mauritius, there are some worrying potential restrictions on the use of this right. For example, limitations to the right to freedom of expression are possible in the interest of “public morality”. This is a very vague concept, open to all sorts of interpretation.

The head of a consumer protection NGO has always been vocal on a variety of issues, taking particular issue with the price-fixing behaviour of Government in setting the price of fuel every month. The reaction by Government to this criticism was to withdraw funding to the organisation, resulting in the crippling of the NGO. Funding was only resumed when the State was put under pressure by other organisations and members of the public.

Some time ago, the Prime Minister himself publicly told organisations that Amnesty International could criticise government because it relied on donor funding, whereas many other organisations (i.e. those to whom he was directing his speech), were being subsidised by the State (implying that they therefore had no right to criticise Government).

The government does not resort to physical threats or violence but tends to react to criticism by suspending officials working in the public sector, withdrawing funds and contracts from those in the private sector, or issuing interdicts. Indirectly, the consequences of speaking out are thereby inflicted on the individual and sometimes on his or her family members.

Threats against citizens are not always immediate, and they often come in the form of subtle threats or intimations. Many young activists involved in political organisations have to consider their actions, as they face the threat of not securing a job in the future. They are kept under surveillance by the intelligence arm of the police, and their activities are recorded. When they eventually enter the labour market, their job prospects could be hampered by previous “anti-government” activities in which they may have engaged.

The art of remaining silent has become institutionalised. This can be attributed to a memo originating in the Prime Minister’s office, directing all officials in ministries and parastatal bodies not to speak to the media or the public without official authorisation. Maintaining their job security has forced officials at these institutions to comply with this directive.

Academics at the University of Mauritius who were issued with the same directive reacted differently. Acting on his own accord, the then Vice Chancellor of the university - known for his allegiance to the Prime Minister - circulated the memo to his academic staff. Outraged by the infringement on their academic freedom, members of the University of Mauritius Academic Staff Association (UMASA) put pressure on the authorities and the circular had to be withdrawn.

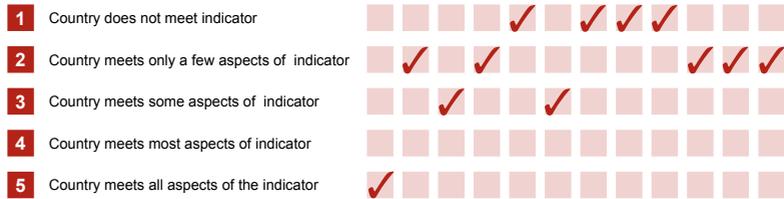
It should be noted that like the Vice Chancellor noted above, many Mauritians will act in this ingratiating manner and undertake actions of their own accord, because they feel that such “acts” will undoubtedly please the Prime Minister and the Government at large.

The Editor of the weekly *Samedi Plus* was arrested in April 2010 when he wrote an article speculating potential replacements for the position of the Commissioner of Police. The Editor was arrested for dissemination of false news, and eventually released on bail. A few months later the case was thrown out of court.

Two Radio Plus journalists working on an investigative report on the controversial acquisition of land by the Prime Minister were arrested. The acquisition of the land is being disputed on religious and legal grounds. Both journalists are still awaiting trial.

Scores:

Individual scores:



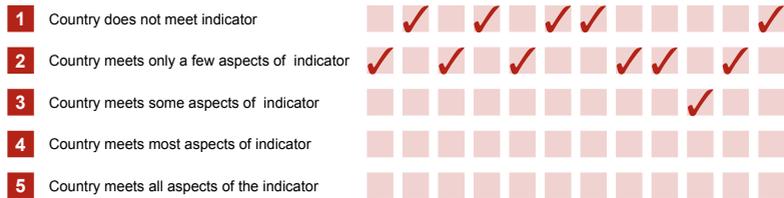
Average score: 2.1 (2008 = 1.7)

1.4 Government makes every effort to honour regional and international instruments on freedom of expression and the media.

Mauritius has signed several conventions to honour regional and international instruments on freedom of expression and the media. However, few of them have been ratified and none of these instruments have been domesticated.

Scores:

Individual scores:



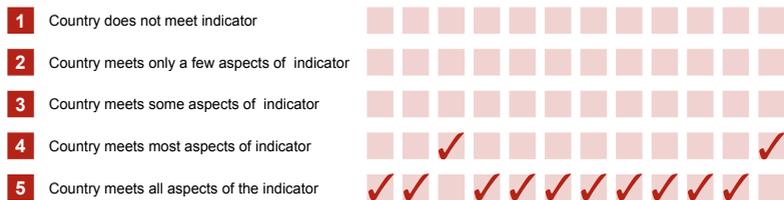
Average score: 1.6 (2008 = n/a)

1.5 Print publications are not required to obtain permission to publish from state authorities.

Launching a newspaper in Mauritius is a simple procedure that only requires the filing of an application form and a once off payment of Rs200 (approximately US\$7). This is submitted to the Accountant General.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 4.8 (2008 = n/a)

1.6 Entry into and practice of the journalistic profession is legally unrestricted.

There are no formal or legal processes restricting citizens from becoming journalists. Anyone can become a journalist. The Government Information Services is the sole authority that distributes press cards to journalists, but many media practitioners practice without this card. However, it is an open secret that

people wanted information, they should follow the news coverage of his visits. The Prime Minister is one of the few Mauritian officials to hold regular briefings with the press before he embarks on a trip.

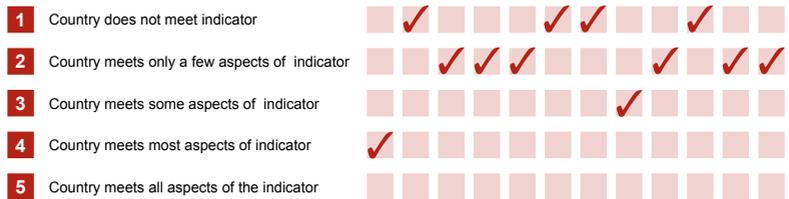
Several Commissions of Inquiry and fact finding committees have been established through Parliament, but their reports hardly ever make their way to parliament or into the public domain. For example, the Minister of Finance once promised that the report on the Central Bank would be presented to Parliament upon completion. He later denied having made this promise.

The numerous new scandals that are uncovered in Mauritius often diverts attention away from the practice of following up on report findings. As such, it often happens that when they are eventually followed up on, the personnel appointed to produce these reports inform journalists that that the Minister implemented actions in direct contradiction to the recommendations in the report.

Aside from the factors highlighted above, the Annual Audit Report and the Central Statistics Report, which provides data on the economy and other social indicators, are easily accessible by journalists and Mauritian citizens. This information is both credible and of critical importance and is always readily available.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.9 (2008 = 1.9)

1.9 Websites and blogs are not required to register with or obtain permission from state authorities.

Numerous blogs are being written by journalists and commentators, and all mainstream media have websites set up. Mainstream media have initiated interactive engagements with their readers by inviting them to comment on stories they carry. These comments are then published on their websites.

Registration is not compulsory and permission is not required to set up websites or blogs.

Scores:

Individual scores:

1	Country does not meet indicator	
2	Country meets only a few aspects of indicator	
3	Country meets some aspects of indicator	
4	Country meets most aspects of indicator	
5	Country meets all aspects of the indicator	

Average score:

4.8 (2008 = n/a)

1.10 The state does not seek to block or filter Internet content unless laws provide for restrictions that serve a legitimate interest and are necessary in a democratic society.

Panellists recalled an incident when Facebook was blocked for a day soon after a fake profile of the Prime Minister was created. There was disagreement amongst the panellists with regards to the ability and technical capacity of the State to block material or eavesdrop on cellphone conversations. There was eventual agreement that the State has both the technical and financial resources to block specific websites

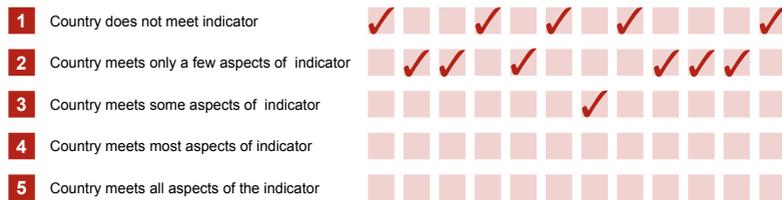
Internet is being successfully used as an alternative form of disseminating information, especially in cases where the government prohibits the distribution of material.

When Jameel Peerally produced *Paradis Andey*, a documentary on drug abuse in Mauritius, the government was able to prevent the screening of the film on the pretext that authorisation had not been obtained from the Board of Censors. When addressing Parliament, the Minister claimed in his response to questions regarding the screening of *Paradis Andey* that there was no censorship in Mauritius. Instead, he referred to the classification of films.

Peerally and his colleagues circumvented the attempt to thwart the screening of his documentary film by distributing it through internet websites. The controversy around his documentary created a great deal of media hype, resulting in the

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.4 (2008 = 2.7)

1.12 Media legislation evolves from meaningful consultations among state institutions, citizens and interest groups.

Although Mauritius has not enacted any media laws in the last decade, it is apparent that there is no significant consultation with the public around any legislation that has been passed. The State tends to inform citizens about new legislation rather than engaging them in a collaborative way.

The private sector is sometimes consulted before the enactment of legislation that may impact on them, because they are considered a powerful lobby group.

Since 2005, the Prime Minister has noted his desire to introduce a Media Commission Bill. In more recent years, he engaged his advisor, Geoffrey Robertson (Queens Counsel), to look into the drafting of new legislation in this regard. Robertson met with stakeholders from various sectors, including the media, and submitted a report to the PM replete with recommendations.

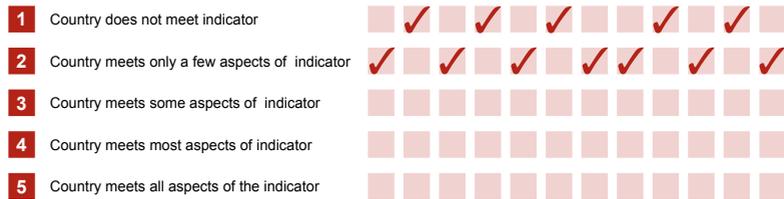
Robertson is an activist and human rights lawyer who is very progressive in his thinking on media freedom issues, so some panellists believed that it is very unlikely that the State will publicise the report. They also felt that involving principled and prominent individuals to undertake these tasks gives the State legitimacy in that it creates the impression that there has been a consultative and credible process involving citizens.

In many instances, Parliament has appointed a Select Committee to look into critical issues. The Select Committee has the authority to interview people and invite proposals around these issues, and the information is used to compile

reports that are then submitted to the Prime Minister. Some of these committees produce excellent reports that become the basis for sound policy, such as in the case of the Select Committee on Anti-Corruption, which can be credited with the setting up of the Anti-Corruption Agency. In recent years, however, the setting up of Select Committees has been seen as a delay tactic by government to prolong action on crucial matters.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.5 (2008 = n/a)

Average score for sector 1: 2.9 (2008 = 2.7)¹

¹ For 2009 the indicators were reviewed, amended and some new indicators such as those addressing Information Communication Technology (ICT) were added. Consequently, the comparison of some indicators of the 2005 and 2007 report is not applicable (n/a) in some instances in which the indicator is new or has been amended. Evidently, this has to be taken into account too, when the overall sector scores are compared.

SECTOR 2:

The media landscape, including new media, is characterised by diversity, independence and sustainability.

The media landscape, including new media, is characterised by diversity, independence and sustainability.

2.1 A wide range of sources of information (print, broadcasting, internet) is available and affordable to citizens.

Print

Mauritius has a large variety of print media which is affordable, accessible and available throughout the island. Most of the daily newspapers cost US\$0.50 which is the equivalent of two baguettes – the daily supplement of most Mauritians.

There are six main daily papers – *Le Matinal*, *Le Mauricien*, *L'Express*, *Le Socialiste*, *The Independent* and *Le Defi Quotidien*. *Le Mauricien* is the only daily that goes out in the afternoon, while the others are distributed in the morning. *Le Matinal* is the cheapest of the papers and is widely distributed throughout the island. However, most of the content is pro-Government, specifically regarding the Prime Minister.

With the exception of *L'Express* – which is regarded by the establishment as an anti-government newspaper – all newspapers are available in public libraries throughout the country. The unofficial ban on *L'Express* has been extended to numerous state controlled institutions including parastatals, and the paper is no longer available on Air Mauritius. The reason provided by the airline has been that it is too weighty to carry on flights. *L'Express* is probably the widest read newspaper – especially by professionals and the middle class. It is estimated that 14 percent of the general population that reads a daily paper will purchase *L'Express*.

In Mauritius, newspaper sales do not fully reflect the exact readership, as it is common practice that one paper will be passed around to several people.

If the State wants to effectively communicate with the citizenry, it will broadcast its message on the 7:30pm news on television – since 70 percent of Mauritians tune in to the main news bulletin of the day.

More and more youth and Mauritians in the diaspora are connecting to the internet to access their news through online publications.

Radio

Radio is the most affordable and most popular medium in Mauritius, primarily because it is accessible in a wide variety of languages.

The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation runs six radio stations - *MBC Kool FM*, *MBC Taal FM*, *MBC World Hit Radio*, *MBC Best FM* (recently launched), *MBC Radio Maurice*, and *MBC Radio Mauritius* on AM. There are three private commercial radio stations: *Radio One*, *Radio Plus* and *Top FM*. No community radio stations exist in Mauritius.

The private radio sector in Mauritius can still be considered to be in its infancy. *Radio One* initially started operating as phone-in service, wherein people would call a number and listen to broadcasts from the station. It had been ready to broadcast and was prepared to do so for some time, but was not granted a licence until eight years ago when two other private radio stations were also granted licences to operate. Radio France International and the British Broadcasting Corporation are accessible through FM or AM respectively.

This resistance by the State to new players in the broadcasting industry was probably due to the realisation that the advent of private radio stations would transform the media landscape. Private radio stations provide an alternative and easily accessible medium through which the general population may express itself and retain anonymity. Opinions that cannot be expressed on state radio can be heard on private radio stations. It also changed the way the print media operate and report, by challenging print media to stretch itself beyond just providing hard news, and providing content with substance, analysis, commentary and more in-depth content.

Currently, each radio station has 3 radio frequencies – one for the south, one for the north and one for the central part of the island. Considering there are 6 radio stations each with 3 frequencies, it is clear that the bandwidth may easily become congested. This fact has presented itself as a convenient excuse for inhibiting new players from entering the broadcast sector, with new applicants being told that there are no more frequencies to allocate.

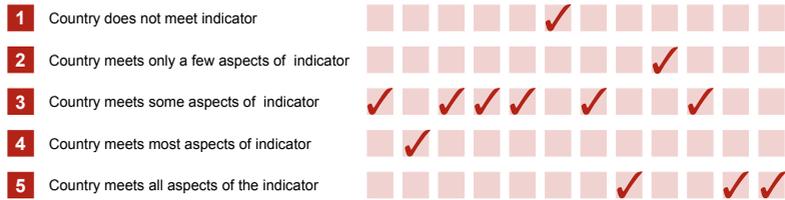
Television

The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation runs the following television channels: *MBC 1*, *MBC 2*, *MBC 3*, *the Knowledge Channel* and *MBC Movies Channel*. In October 2010, Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam launched the *Mandarin Channel*, *Marathi Channel*, *Tamil Channel*, *Telugu Channel*, *Urdu Channel* and the *Tourism and Culture Channel*. It is very likely that a *Bhojpuri channel* will soon be launched.

Every Mauritian citizen who owns a television set is obliged to pay a monthly TV license fee of Rs 100 (US\$2.8). This fee is collected through the electricity billing

Scores:

Individual scores:



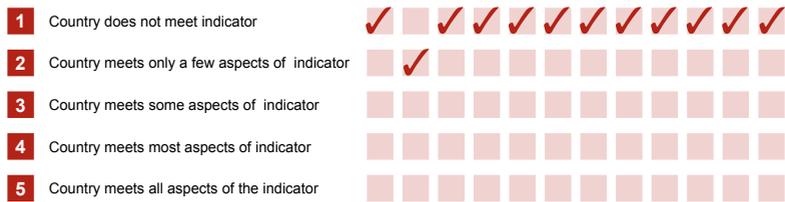
Average score: 3.3 (2008 = 4.6)

2.4 The editorial independence of print media published by a public authority is protected adequately against undue political interference.

There are no print media published by a public authority in Mauritius.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.0 (2008 = n/a)

2.5 Adequate competition legislation/regulation seeks to prevent media concentration and monopolies.

Mauritius does not have any regulations to prevent media concentration, but it has recently set up a Competition Commission (CC) whose role is to protect consumers and oversee price fixing. The Commissioners are appointed by government. The CC relies on the public or private sector players bringing their

complaints forward to the Commission. It is not involved in independently going out to investigate cases.

Currently there are two major print media companies - *La Sentinelle* and *Le Defi* - that publish numerous titles between them. In 2004, the two companies fought a battle for an independent Sunday weekly called *Le Dieu*. *La Sentinelle* came out tops, buying the title for 12 million rupees. In addition to their print media holdings, the two companies also each have a share in different radio stations (Mauritian law allows print media companies to own a maximum of 20 percent shares in a private radio station).

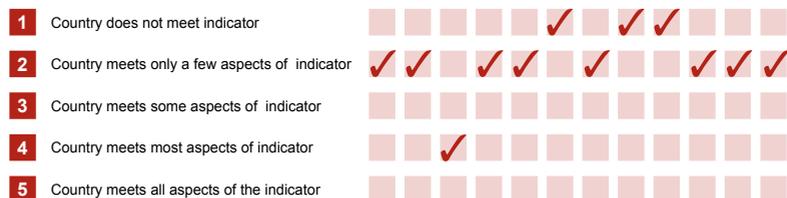
In the last two years there, a new big player has entered the media landscape. The well resourced British American Insurance has already bought three existing titles, and recently launched an internet based newspaper called *NewsNow*. Two of the publications have remained the same in look and content, but Impact has evolved into a Mauritian version of *Newsweek*, dealing with national issues. British American Insurance also plans on launching a new daily.

The tug of war between the three conglomerates is indicative of their growth through the acquisition of small independent publications. One panellist pointed out that “There is a lot going on in Mauritius – there is construction, investment and many other things. Whoever is in control of information is in control of these many things.”

This can be viewed as a potential threat to freedom of expression because in the next five to ten years, if this trend continues, most publications will not be able to write against the private sector even if their business ventures have a detrimental impact on the general public. The concentration of media products in the hands of a few could sound the death knell for independent journalism.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score:

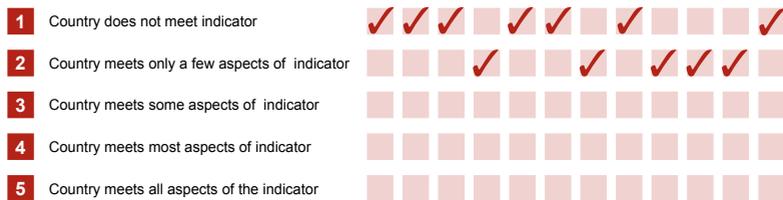
1.9 (2008 = 2.2)

2.6 Government promotes a diverse media landscape with economically viable and independent media outlets.

Government does not provide any concessions that specifically target the media industry. It also does not have any policy to promote the development of small scale independent media organisations. Government will, however, support smaller publications whose content does not reflect negatively on it through the placement of government advertising. Among those that receive such advertising are *Le Matinal* and *Le Socialiste*, which probably get the bulk of government advertising.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.4 (2008 =n/a)

2.7 All media fairly reflect the voices of both women and men.

Opinion on this indicator was divided, with one group of panellists feeling that women are unfairly treated, and are only seen but not really heard. They agreed that women were always in the headlines as victims of rape and domestic violence, or as a depiction of a social problem, but that they were very rarely used as sources of news. Celebrities or high-profile women in positions of power may be given space or airtime, but their voices are usually only heard on fashion, lifestyle or soft social issues. Their comment is very rarely sought on policy issues, and never sought on economic issues. It was highlighted that society in Mauritius is patriarchal and men are a strong majority in the media throughout the different structures.

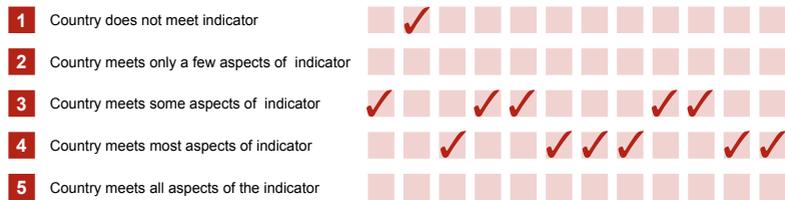
Other panellists, however, pointed out that the latest report by Media Watch indicated that there has been improvement, and that women are being portrayed more fairly. The example provided was that an employee at the MBC had recently been in the media limelight for several days, talking about what she saw as her

There are a variety of media products that cater specifically to the diverse population of the country, but it is difficult to sustain a media product purely on linguistic grounds. A weekly news magazine that was being published in Hindi went under because it did not have a large enough consumer base. There are, however, publications that are specific to the diverse ethnic and religious groupings in Mauritius. Mainstream media make a concerted effort to include different ethnic populations as news sources, especially when it is visible that voices of certain groupings are missing.

Newsrooms receive a stream of invitations from all the diverse groupings in Mauritius, and they make their editorial decisions based on the newsworthiness of a story, as this is their priority – particularly for privately owned media. State radio and television is bound by the MBC Act to ensure fair representation of all the ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in Mauritius. Ensuring compliance with the Act can, however, cause problems because an event has to be covered even when is not considered newsworthy.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 3.3 (2008 =n/a ; 2006 = n/a)

2.9 The country has a coherent ICT policy, which aims to meet the information needs of all citizens, including marginalised communities.

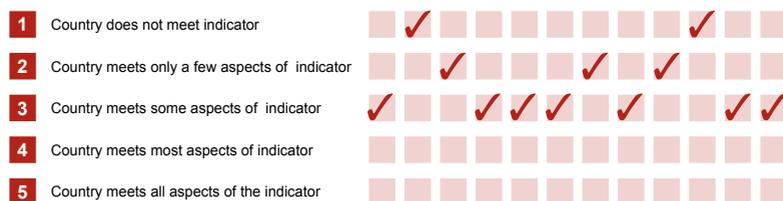
Mauritius does not have an ICT policy. Instead, it has an ICT Action plan to promote broader access and use of internet by its citizens. The Plan was developed with various stakeholders, and is being implemented by the National Computer Board (NCB).

According to a survey carried out by the NCB, 60 percent of Mauritians do not consider it important to access or use internet. This finding goes against the desire of the Mauritian government to become a cyber island.

The government intends to introduce computers at post offices for people to access and use easily. There are internet cafes in major towns and cities, but not in rural areas.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 2.4 (2008 =n/a)

2.10 Government does not use its power over the placement of advertisements as a means to interfere with editorial content.

Government adspend is used as a weapon or reward, depending on the position of the media organisation in relation to the government of the day.

The funding for government advertising is released through the Government Information Service - a department which operates directly under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office.

There are media that survive solely on government advertising, and numerous media organisations have gone out of business simply because of a change of government or withdrawal of advertising. Media houses are continuously threatened by government to dismiss journalists and editors whose writing is regarded as anti-government. Advertising is withdrawn if the suggestion is not complied with.

The Editor-in-Chief of *Le Matinal* is regarded as a man close to the Prime Minister and he has used this belief to maintain a firm grip on his position. It is

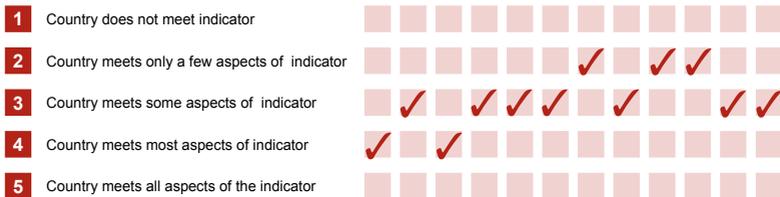
2.11 The advertising market is large enough to support a diversity of media outlets.

The diversity of media in Mauritius illustrates the size of the advertising market. It is estimated that R100 million is available for adspend in the media annually, allowing for a variety of media products to exist rather successfully. However, as noted earlier, this adspend does not find its way into media that are more critical of government.

Those that are closely aligned to the government in power or malleable by the State are awarded the largest amount of advertising.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 2.9 (2008 = 2.9)

Average score for sector 2: 2.6 (2008 = 2.9)

SECTOR 3:

Broadcasting regulation is transparent and independent; the state broadcaster is transformed into a truly public broadcaster.

3.2 Broadcasting is regulated by an independent body adequately protected by law against interference whose board is appointed – in an open way – involving civil society and not dominated by any particular political party.

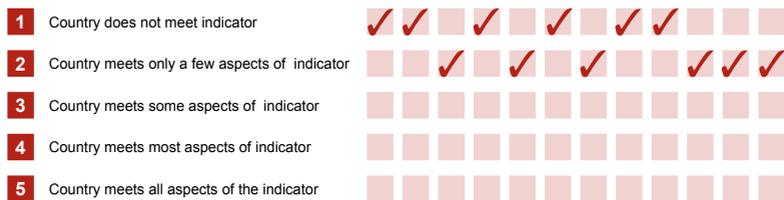
There is no public involvement in the selection or nomination of board members to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). The chairman and members of the Authority are appointed by the Prime Minister, in consultation with the President of the Republic and the leader of the Opposition. The President declined one of the Prime Minister's nominations on the basis that the appointee was a member of the PM's political party.

The board consists of eight to ten members and meets once a month to discuss policy issues. Appointments to a public sector board are considered highly prestigious, and it is the norm for potential candidates to lobby for the post well before an election campaign starts. Being appointed is a reward for supporting the party that takes on power. Board members are very well aware of the role they play on these boards, i.e. to endorse government policies and processes. So while the legislation paves the way for an independent authority, actual practice does not allow for neutrality and independence from political interference.

The chairman and the board of the Information Communication Technology Authority (ICTA) are appointed in the same manner as the IBA. The ICTA is responsible for issuing radio licences for boats and other wireless radios.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score:

1.5 (2008 = n/a)

3.3 The body regulates broadcasting services and licences in the public interest and ensures fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing society at large.

The legislation governing the IBA provides for a code of conduct which insists on fairness and transparency. However, the process of granting licences is not considered transparent. Board decisions are not necessarily made public, and since each radio station has been awarded three frequencies, it is easy for the IBA to claim that there are not enough frequencies to allocate to new players in the broadcasting industry.

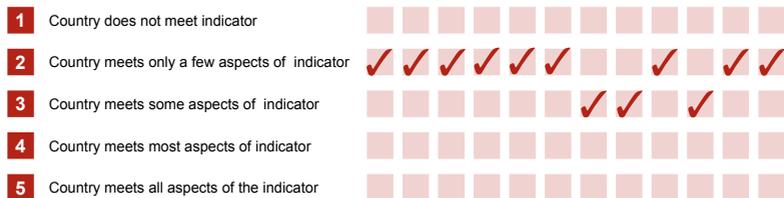
There are no private television stations because the legislation is restrictive and the minimum funding required is prohibitive for most organisations in Mauritius. La Sentinelle - which has the financial resources at hand - is ready to start a new television station, but has not been granted a licence. The media group has not been provided with an explanation.

The IBA has a Complaints Committee, which is a mediating body dealing with grievances regarding content, from members of the public. It is usually political parties who approach the IBA, while the general public very rarely take up issues with the body.

Members of the public can approach the IBA Complaints Committee on issues of libel, but this prevents them from then taking up the matter in court. The CC is a mediation body and does not have the mandate to award financial compensation for defamation. Panellists pointed out that the current chairperson of the Complaints Committee of the IBA (at the time of the AMB report) is regarded by the media fraternity as independent and credible.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 2.2 (2008 = 3.0)

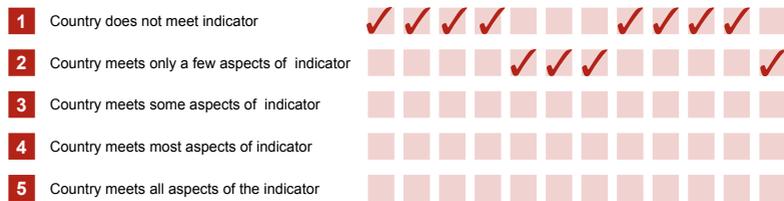
3.4 The state/public broadcaster is accountable to the public through a board representative of society at large and selected in an independent, open and transparent manner.

The board of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation is made up of seven members, including a chairman. The board and chairman of the MBC are appointed solely by the Prime Minister, without any additional external consultation. Two of the board members are ministry officials and the remaining 5 board members should have experience in certain sectors such as education, culture, economics, labour, science or broadcasting. Practically it could be anyone. At the time of this report, the MBC's chairperson was from the tourism sector.

The Director General (DG) of the MBC is also appointed solely by the Prime Minister and so reports directly to him and not to the Board. The current DG served as the Director of Communications before being appointed to his current position. The process of selection creates friction between the DG and the chairman of the MBC board, as both appointees consider themselves equally privileged in terms of position, and directly accountable to the Prime Minister. This belief results in a constant tug of war as they vie for power. Panellists felt the PM strategically appointed people who would always have a conflict with each other, so that he would ultimately have complete control.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score:

1.3 (2008 = 1.9)

3.5 Office bearers with the state and political parties, as well as those with a financial interest in the broadcasting industry, are excluded from possible membership on the board of the state/public broadcaster.

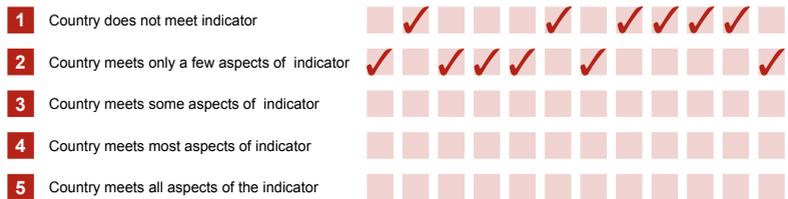
Office bearers in state and political parties, as well as those with financial interests in the industry are not barred from being board members of the MBC. The previous chairman of the MBC owned his own advertising agency, presenting a clear conflict of interest. His agency was awarded numerous advertising contracts by the MBC.

At one point, MBC staff would use the organisations’ equipment to develop productions, and would then sell these to the MBC as independent local productions. This practice was discovered and staff members were suspended.

Conflict of interest is disregarded during the appointment of board members or organisational heads.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.5 (2008 = 2.3)

3.6 The editorial independence of the state/public broadcaster from political influence is guaranteed by law and practised.

The MBC Act guarantees editorial independence. In practice, however, the news is heavily influenced by the government in power. Since key appointments are determined by the PM, the people selected to these positions are clearly aware of where their loyalties have to lie and what their obligations are.

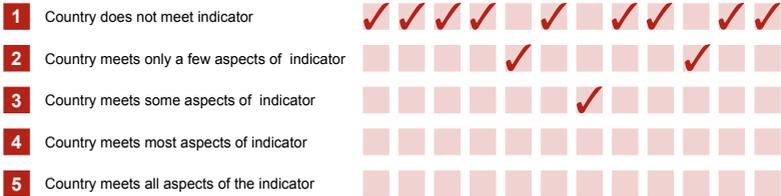
Although the MBC has a news director, the editorial stance is decided upon by the DG. Material for the main news bulletin is edited and vetted by 3 key people – the director of news, the chief editor and the DG. In some cases, the DG will intervene and request changes to the script or the footage. Special attention is paid to stories that feature the Prime Minister. The 7:30pm evening news bulletin on television is watched by approximately 70 to 80 percent of the population.

During his speech at an Eid (religious Muslim festival) function, the PM pointed out that there were at least five people in the room who were potential candidates for his position. At that moment, the cameraman panned to a specific individual in the room, and it was obvious that this instruction had been provided by a higher authority. The cameraman could not and would not have made the choice of his own volition. That kind of direction was meant to convey the message that this is a future candidate that people should consider.

Another example: during a broadcast on a book launch, the author was narrating historical events in a biased manner that portrayed the ruling party heroically, and as the only liberators of the country. Ironically, a few seconds later, the PM appeared on television warning against historians who distort facts. Clearly, the use of media to distort factual and historical information seems to be acceptable only as long as news content reflects government in a positive way at all times.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.3 (2008 = n/a)

3.7 The state/public broadcaster is adequately funded in a manner that protects it from arbitrary interference through its budget and from commercial pressure.

Over a decade ago, the state broadcaster relied heavily on government grants and advertising revenue to sustain itself. The funding derived from licence fees was inadequate as the majority of television owners would not pay the required monthly fee of Rs25.

This changed with the enactment of the MBC Collection of Licence Fees Act, which makes it compulsory for every household in Mauritius to pay a levy of Rs100 (US\$3) every month towards television fees. This fee is added directly to electricity bills, and it is estimated that an average of 300,000 households pay this amount each month. This translates into Rs30 million every month.

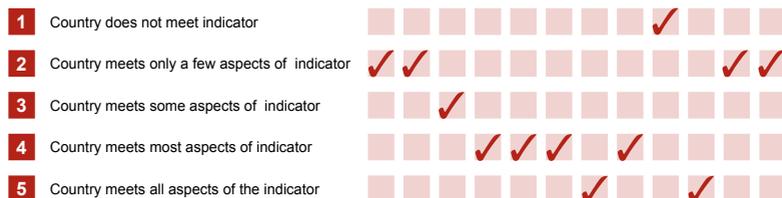
The only way for households to get out of this financial obligation is to prove that they do not own a television set. A letter has to be written to the MBC informing them of this fact, and they will then pay a visit to that household to substantiate this claim.

This obligatory licence has allowed MBC to decline grants that were being provided by the government.

The MBC is uniquely placed to charge high advertising rates because it is the only local television broadcaster in the country. The MBC does not succumb to commercial pressure despite huge contracts from advertisers. For example, a contractual obligation between the very popular Lotto and the MBC states that the lotto draw will be aired live every Saturday at 8:20pm. This contractual obligation has been set aside several times because the MBC will often air the Prime Minister's speech in full at this particular time. The Lotto draw often only takes place 10 to 15 minutes later. It is very unlikely that the lottery franchise holders will protest because they received their licence from Government and would not want to risk having it revoked.

Scores:

Individual scores:



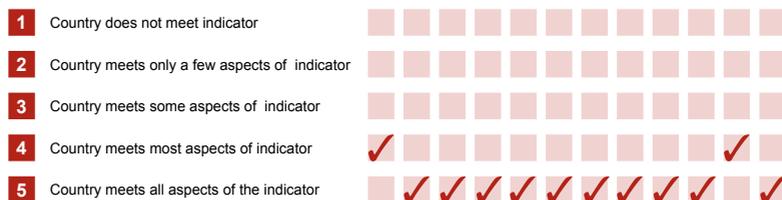
Average score: 3.1 (2008 = n/a)

3.8 The state/public broadcaster is technically accessible in the entire country.

The public broadcaster is technically accessible throughout Mauritius via analogue, while 80 percent of the country is covered by digital signal. Mauritius is likely to meet the benchmark for African countries of attaining digital migration long before the agreed date of 2015.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 4.8 (2008 = 4.9)

The MBC Act demands fairness and balance, but the coverage of politics and news items by the Corporation is far from balanced, and does not cover the full spectrum of political events taking place in the country. Prioritisation of news is skewed, with newsworthy items often being dropped for pieces that portray government in a positive light. The time allocated to the PM is consistently disproportionate to the coverage of actual news events.

During the 1999 riots in Mauritius, for example, the lead item on the news bulletin would be the official opening of a new building. It did not feature the riots as a major news story, but rather as a brief. There was no mention of what was happening on the streets, and footage of any of the events was noticeably missing. For this reason, people resorted to getting news on events in their country on international television channels. In their defence, the MBC claimed that they did not want to fuel an already aggravated situation.

Another example of biased broadcast time allocation could be seen during the elections, when the Prime Minister always received double the amount of airtime that his counterpart is allocated. The PM was seen at different events engaging in intellectual discussions, while MBC would choose clips that portrayed his rival as inarticulate, clumsy and abusive.

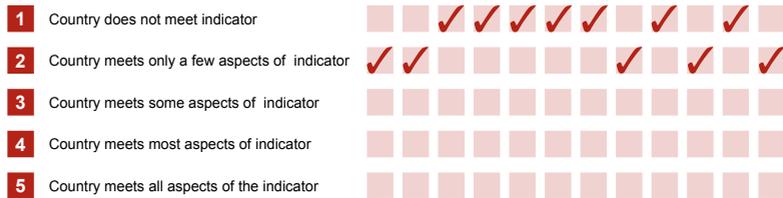
Panellists agreed that the MBC could easily choose to be professional in their work. They pointed out that coverage by the MBC on the floods that affected Mauritius several years ago was exceptional. This illustrated that the technical resources and the professional skill is available at the MBC.

There is often a news blackout on incidents that portray government in a negative light. However, when a positive solution to that problem is found, this news will be aired. This often leaves viewers lacking context to media stories that they see/hear. For example, coverage on the Attorney General's resignation did not make it to the news agenda, but when he reconsidered his decision after negotiations with the government, the topic made headlines. Audiences had no idea that he had even contemplated resigning or the reasons for his decision.

In addition to situations like those described above, the DG is able to refuse coverage at will. For example, the Minister of Labour once invited the MBC to cover a press conference dealing with the suspension of a staff member of the MBC. The Director General refused the invitation on behalf of the MBC, and instead held a press conference to justify his refusal. As a political nominee, the DG is able to act arrogantly and even defy a Minister.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.4 (2008 = 1.5)

3.11 The state/public broadcaster offers as much diverse and creative local content as economically achievable.

One of the main objectives of the MBC is to promote local productions. MBC itself produces programmes which focus on local communities and chart their successes in projects and activities. It carries a weekly programme highlighting women from all walks of life. The MBC is in a position to pay for independently produced material, and offers a variety of locally produced soap operas which are very popular with Mauritians.

But the MBC also tends to fall prisoner to social cultural organisations and to its commitment to diversity. There is intense pressure from socio-cultural groups, who will demand the removal of a DG if they are unhappy with the programming on MBC. Every year, there is a meeting with the management of the MBC and a representative of the socio-cultural organisation, in which the two parties will negotiate the number of hours allocated to religious and cultural events.

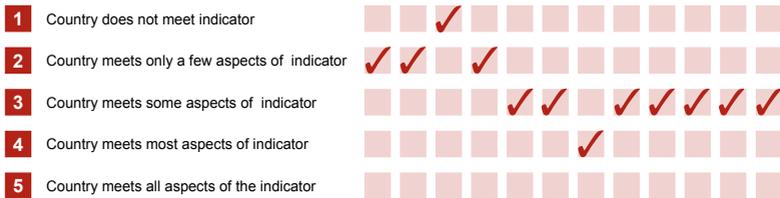
The MBC has also had success with local competition shows, but when it first held a singing competition in Hindi, it was pressured to offer the same programme and competition in Urdu, Tamil, Sega, French and English. It took a year to broadcast.

There are large corporations that assist in the promotion of local productions by sponsoring programmes and shows. However, these funds have been mismanaged on occasion. During a parliamentary Question and Answer session, for example, a question was raised around *Pepsi Hungama* – a Hindi singing competition. News then broke out that funds could not be accounted for, so a high ranking MBC employee and the Director General at the time were fired.

Panellists felt local productions could be more creative.

Scores:

Individual scores:



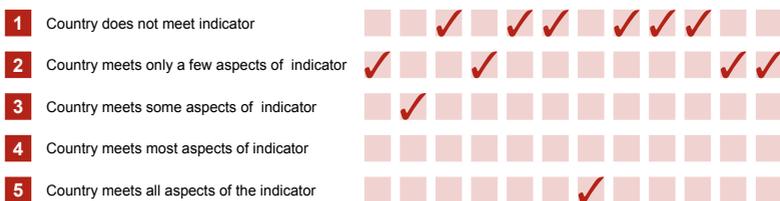
Average score: 2.6 (2008 = 3.1)

3.12 Community broadcasting enjoys special promotion given its potential to broaden access by communities to the airwaves.

There is no provision for community broadcasting in Mauritius and it is not defined in the Act. There are no community radio or television stations in Mauritius.

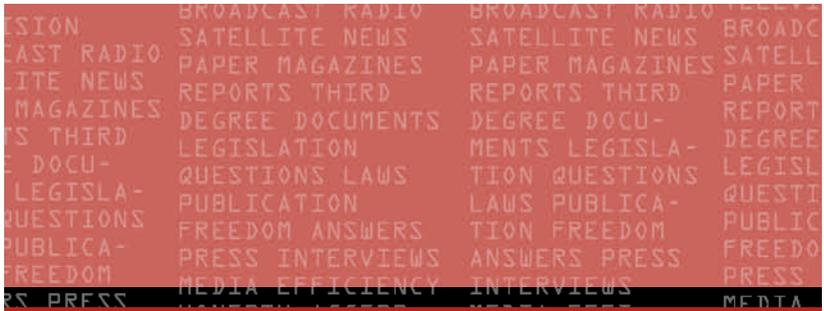
Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.8 (2008 = 3.1)

Average score for sector 3: 1.8 (2008 = 2.6)



SECTOR 4:

The media practise high levels of professional standards.



The media practice high levels of professional standards.

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

The media in Mauritius do not have a voluntary or a statutory code of conduct by which they abide.

The National Editors and Proprietors Association (NEPA) has managed to put together a draft code of conduct, which has been distributed amongst media practitioners for final approval. NEPA will also have to engage in a process to ensure consensus, so that media houses implement this voluntary code of conduct.

The drafting of the code was a long and laborious process because it has been difficult to get consensus amongst the editors. Clashing egos and temperamental personalities have impeded progress. Individuals will pull out when things are not going their way, so NEPA is not functioning as effectively as it should. This lack of cooperation also extends to journalists and their media organisations.

There is a group of editors that prefers to embrace a voluntary code of conduct only after the elimination of criminal defamation. These editors feel that it would be contradictory to develop a code of conduct while journalists have an impending Media Commission Bill hanging over their heads, and still face the possibility of being criminally sued for defamation.

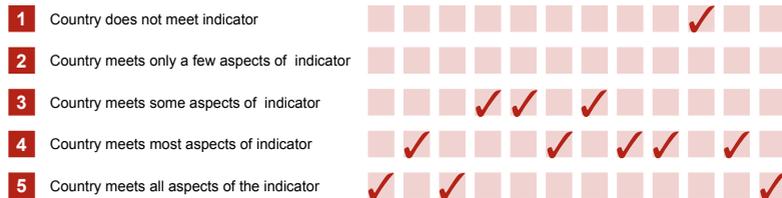
Other than NEPA, there are no professional media organisations in Mauritius. As such, processes are stalled by the lack of professional and formal structures to take them forward.

La Sentinelle is the only media house that has a formal code of conduct that has been widely publicised. It has also set up a Complaints Committee that is independent of the media house, and the findings of this Committee are published in the media. To date it has only heard 12 cases and these are mostly brought to the Committee by people in prominent positions. Politicians very rarely take up the matter with the Committee, and prefer taking the matter to the courts instead.

Mauritians do not have a culture of complaining, which is probably why ordinary citizens have never taken up an issue with the Complaints Committee at *La Sentinelle*. Being a small island, it is common practice in Mauritius to call the

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 3.7 (2008 = 4.3)

4.4. Equal opportunities regardless of race, social group, gender/sex, religion, disabilities and age are promoted in media houses.

There is a strong sectarian connotation to the media in Mauritius which is often referred to as “presse Creole”. A journalist’s climb up the promotional ladder can be restricted in certain media houses if his or her profile is not ‘politically correct’.

A major event in the media fraternity was the first ever appointment of a Hindu editor at *L’Express* in 2005. Subsequently, all the other staff above and below him were expected to be Creole.

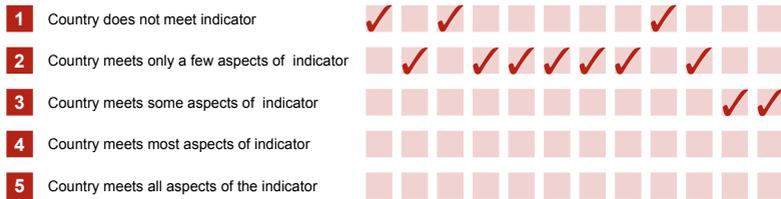
All sectors in Mauritius promote a particular profile. In the private sector, the chances of getting promoted are much higher if you are white, while in the public sector it is believed that people will go further up the ladder if they are Vaish.

The caste system also prevails within organisations, and appointments are often made based on the sect of the person in question. Even friendships and relationships are based on these sectarian grounds. The new generation of journalists entering the newsrooms are also encouraged to be partisan in their dealings with colleagues. Many of the younger, less experienced personnel will not take orders from their senior and more experienced colleagues because they consider them to be of a lower caste.

It was related that during a conversation with a journalist working at a weekend paper, the editor of the paper made an objectionable comment about how the Vaish (a sect) smell dung. The journalist’s retort was that: “these people who smell dung are leading the country, so let’s show some respect.” With that remark he walked out.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 1.9 (2008 = 2.4)

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

“In a country that is as corrupt as Mauritius, the media can be considered to be exemplary in their conduct. There are only a few journalists who are corrupt and yet the majority of them work under difficult conditions with low pay,” stated one of the panellists.

One panellist related that a Member of Parliament had told him/her that she had been asked by a journalist for Rs 25 000 to carry out an interview. She refused to pay. There are many such incidents where reporters will ask for payment to write features on individuals or companies who want to be profiled in the media.

Organisations will try to influence the press with gifts and other contributions which journalists will willingly take, but there is no guarantee that the story will be in their favour.

Different media houses have different rules on gifts. One media house has clearly instructed its journalists not to accept any gifts, large or small. Another media organisation insists that their staff should inform the editor of gifts that exceed the value of Rs1000. The coverage of the story involving the benefactor will also be tracked to ensure that the journalist is not writing the story in a biased manner as a result of the gift.

4.10 Journalists and other media practitioners are organised in trade unions and/or professional associations.

The Newspaper Editors and Publishers Association is the only professional media organisations in Mauritius.

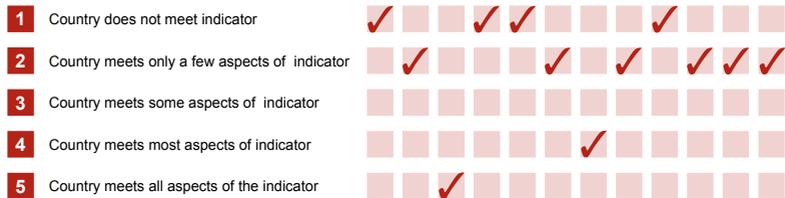
There have been attempts to set up different organisations, but these have collapsed for a variety of reasons such as personality clashes, rivalry between different media houses and differing agendas.

The announcement by the Prime Minister regarding his intention to introduce a Media Commission Bill has pushed journalists to form a partnership which operates on an adhoc and informal basis.

Journalists rally together when one of their colleagues is arrested, but this is done on an informal level. They tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

Scores:

Individual scores:



Average score: 2.0 (2008 = 1.5)

Average score for sector 4: 2.6 (2008 = 3.0)

OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE: 2.5 (2008 = 2.8)

Developments since 2008

Positive developments in the media environment:

- The launching of new media houses has transformed the media landscape and journalists now have more bargaining power.
- There is better flow of information.
- Ethical standards have improved.
- There is an increased awareness of media freedom and freedom of information issues among journalists and citizens.
- State pressure and continuous threats have resulted in journalists coming together in informal ways.
- NEPA has drafted a code of conduct for media practitioners.
- There is an increased use of new media technology.

Negative developments in the media environment:

- Government has continued to use advertising as a weapon to punish or reward media houses.
- Relations between certain sectors of the media and Government have deteriorated.
- There has been an increase in arrests of journalists.
- Journalists have been attacked by activists loyal to the ruling party.
- The labelling of media as sectarian by socio-cultural organisations.

Activities needed over the next few years:

- There is an urgent need to set up a variety of professional media organizations and associations – e.g. union for journalists, a media lobby group, a publishers forum or an editors forum.
- A credible figure who commands respect in the media should be sought to bring journalists together to look at approving a final draft of a professional code of conduct.
- A voluntary media council has to be set up to implement the code of conduct. This media council should also be responsible for setting up a complaints committee.
- There is also a strong need to set up a welfare fund for media people.

The Panel:

Mr Sunil Gopal
Ms Deepa Bhookun
Mr Meeghan Naiken
Mr Maneesh Gobin
Mr Rama Krishna Veeramundar
Mr Nicholas Rainer
Mr Pradeo Buldee
Ms Isthiba Meeajane
Ms Céline Momple
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