# MAPPING COALITIONS

## Mapping out coalitions, collaborations, partnerships and networks for media and civil society in sub-Saharan Africa

**Prepared by Haron Mwangi, PhD**

A Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development (CHARM) Africa report

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# ABOUT CHARM

The Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development (CHARM) in Sub-Saharan Africa aims to protect and expand the civic space for civil society organisations and human rights defenders, as well as nurture and enhance the effectiveness of independent media and journalism in the region. To do so, it facilitates collective action both within and across countries, bolster existing coalitions and campaigns, and where necessary, supports the creation of new ones. CHARM is currently in its pilot phase set to run from October 2019 to June 2022, and the consortium intends on continuing the project after this period.

Due to increasing restrictions to the exercise of fundamental freedoms (association, assembly, and expression), the project works with a range of stakeholders across the spectrum of Sub-Saharan African civil society and media actors with a special emphasis on frontline actors working on issues related to gender, labour, LGBTQI+, and environmental and indigenous rights, as these groups are most likely to bear the brunt of closing civic space.

The project is designed and implemented by a consortium of six regional partners: CIVICUS, Civil Rights Defenders, Defend Defenders, Fojo Media Institute, Hub Afrique, and Wits Journalism who work closely with multiple broader networks, leveraging on regional and international human rights mechanisms to engage target stakeholders and collaboratively develop solutions to these complex challenges.

Haron K. Mwangi, PhD        Martha Njiiri, PhD

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr Haron Mwangi is an accomplished media and communication practitioner with expertise and extensive experience in media freedom and reforms, policy and regulation, ICT, information access, media innovation and sustainability.**

He is the immediate former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), a self-regulatory body for the Kenyan media industry and has closely worked with media regulators across continents. He has also consulted widely on access to information, open governance in both private and public sector and as well as researched extensively on media economics, media and governance, policy and regulation,  access to information,  and media and civil society coalitions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Some of his strengths are his leadership in media law and policy reforms, legislative processes, and building consensus between the media, civil society and the governments on regulation systems.

He is currently an independent researcher and consultant and a visiting scholar of media and communication, University of Rwanda, Kigali.  He holds a PhD and MA in Media and Communications of the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

**Martha Njiiri is a communication and media studies researcher with a special interest in development communication in Africa. She holds a PhD in Mass Communication and a Master's degree in Communication Studies.**

# SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

1. **There are no frameworks, standards or rules for how coalitions, collaborations and even partnerships between the media, civil society and human rights defenders are formed.** Some are spontaneous and informal, while others are formal and well structured. However, coalitions that are deliberate and characterised by structured engagement and planning were generally found to be more effective.

2. **Most collaborations are ad hoc, often arising from the need to address a specific issue(s).** This is common in 'passing issues' that require quick responses. The more familiar the media and the civil society are with each other, the easier it is to gel and align their goals.

3. **Most collaborations are built around 'information source' 'publicity needs' relationships,** with civil society treating the media as a tool for publicity, and the media on the other hand treating civil society as a good source of information. The more efficiently partners meet each other's expectations, the more effective the collaboration becomes, regardless of the form it takes.

4. **Smaller, locally founded organisations, which are often less structured, are more flexible than larger organisations**, particularly when it comes to swift response to 'moving issues'. For example, they can print fliers and banners more quickly, and stage protests faster and with ease. They gain quick legitimacy and establish local constituents more easily than larger, more 'programmatic' collaborations.

5. **Collaborations where media and civil society have a common philosophy and orientation, and share the view that they have a normative and moral obligation to change the circumstances of their societies, are relatively long lasting and sustainable**, regardless of the length of time it may take to realise the envisioned change. This is common in countries that have highly 'closed' societies and struggle with the idea of competitive politics and regime change.

6. **Most structured and formal collaborations have a component of capacity building** of journalists, to improve their skills and knowledge for reporting on technical subjects and for investigative reporting. There was a feeling across the board that assumptions regarding the media's ability to grasp and authoritatively interpret and report on issues are often misplaced.

7. **Structured and formal collaborations are associated more with better media and civil society space**, while informal spontaneous, and sustained collaborations are more associated with constrained civic space. The impetus and motivation to sustain campaigns often comes from financial, strategic or other support from their close-knit networks, including diasporas, international development support groups and like-minded organisations.

8. **There has emerged a professional and career-based civil society with structures akin to the private sector.** This has been instrumental in motivating the shifts of collaborations, from more informal and spontaneous to more structured and formal engagements.

9. **Ping-pong media/civil society collaborations are common, and often prompted and triggered by civil society more than the media**, with media reaching out to civil society more often. This is common when media freedom and freedom of expression or safety and security of journalists are threatened; civil society, on the other hand, reaches out to the media when they feel they should publicise their activities.

10. **Emerging new patterns and forms of collaboration in countries classified as closed and obstructed.** These are more structured collaborations between the media, individuals and organisations who provide legal, referral and protection services to human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in more constrained media/civil society spaces.

11. **'Moving in' and 'incorporation' of HRDs, civil society leaders and media personalities into government has affected the sustainability of coalitions.** Governments may genuinely want to tap into the policies and technical expertise of civil society leaders; but sometimes they co-opt them in order to silence civil society, particularly in the wake of political reforms.

12. **There are more formal and long-term collaborations between community media, local media associations and community-based movements at grassroots level**, particularly when the desired change is initiated and led by community groups and local human rights defenders. There is more ownership than when change is driven from outside.

13. **There is evidence that some locally founded CSOs and HRDs, particularly in countries going through political and constitutional reforms, have political ambition**, and some of them transform into political parties. Collaborations across sub-Saharan Africa have fizzled out because of this.

14. **Most media and civil society collaborations lack the vision to effect lasting societal change.** They are driven by short-term activities, largely funded by donors, that rarely provide for sustained transformative plans and activities. Thus, most coalitions have failed to see themselves as agents of enduring change. Funding from international support groups is tied to specific activities aimed at changing specific situations, in isolation from related and pressing circumstances. We fail to see sustained effort to realise comprehensive change in sub-Saharan Africa.

15. **There is more reliance on data and modern technology to drive collaborations and coalitions.** This was more evident in Uganda, particularly in the recent general elections, where lobbying on electoral standards and reporting was strongly informed by data. This was more apparent where the independent media was committed to managing disinformation and misinformation in their work, relying more on CSOs for facts and figures. CSOs and individuals who provide protection services to HRDs and journalists have worked very closely with the media, providing well-researched information on incidents of human rights violations and poor governance.

16. **New technology, creative art, data and content creation distributed on social media and attendant platforms is driving coalition movements** between the media and civil society, particularly among youthful civil society leaders who also happen to be tech savvy. Though not widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, they network with like-minded youth groups. Thus their ability to reach critical numbers of people through digital technology exerts influence among the youth.

17. **In West Africa, collaborations are extremely informal, but their regional and international networks are well knit.** They are generally weak because of an underdeveloped private media market, the cost of information access due to high internet tariffs, and narrowing civil and freedom-of-expression space. There is more online media collaboration with civil society, as opposed to the dominantly state-owned traditional media. Central Africa, on the other hand, has had more individual HRD coalitions working closely with online media; there are only a handful of CSOs. In the Southern African region, there are interesting collaborations between humanitarian organizations such as Oxfam and ActionAid, and the media.

18. **East Africa, particularly Kenya, has a tradition of establishing formal and deliberate engagement between the media and civil society,** since the agitation for democracy and clamour for constitutional change between the mid-1980s and early 2000s. But it has some of the most unstable civil societies, because once-leading activists have been incorporated into the mainstream government.

19. **The current 'programmatic' funding model by donors – where funds are earmarked for specific purposes and activities, with no room for adjustment or variation to respond to emerging challenges and realities outside the programme – is a deterrent to building coalitions and collaborations.** CSOs unable to immediately respond to emerging challenges often lack local constituency; which is one reason the media shy away from collaboration, opting to hold them to account on their work and financial prudence.

20. **There is overwhelming duplication of effort and competition among CSOs and media organisations.** This is compounded by the fact that some donor agencies also compete for relevance and recognition and rarely speak to each other, for example to set up basket funds from which coalitions can draw their funding. Such funding models are only common during general elections, and emergencies such as famine or natural disasters such as floods. Just as there are donor-driven, siloed approaches to change by civil society, it is possible to establish collaborations and networks that are donor-driven but dictated by local realities.

21. **Collaboration and coalitions between national-level media outlets, media development and professional associations and civil society tackling national issues tend to exclude smaller grassroots community movements.** It is important to review collaboration driven by 'size- and resource-efficient syndrome', which is often symbolic, as opposed to tackling real issues.

22. **Deliberate rather than chance collaboration has produced better results.** This is evident in Kenya and Gambia: in collaborations based on open conversation, deliberate initiatives and formal engagement, where media and civil society have made a policy and strategic decision to collaborate, agendas have been discussed and agreed and results have been realised faster.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Build capacity of parties in informal coalitions to engage, rather than insist on formal coalitions.** Because informal coalitions characterised by formal and structured engagement have worked successfully in Africa, even in the most difficult of circumstances, the focus should be in building the capacity of both the media and civil society to form coalitions based on the mechanism of developing a joint path and structured engagement; such as spelling out the roles and obligations of each party, as opposed to 'formal and difficult-to-disengage coalitions.' In such arrangements, the identity and autonomy of each party to play its independent role in society is guaranteed, without either feeling obliged to remain in the coalition when the situation demands otherwise.

- **Formulate and motivate for the formation of coalitions around broad but specific key themes.** Given that most of the collaborations and coalitions in the region are thematic, it is important to identify broad themes and motivate for the formation of collaborations, coalitions and networks around key issues such as media freedom and governance, elections and peace building, to allow for the formulation of well-informed engagement strategies that are driven by experiential knowledge and skills across the region. The vision across sub-regions such as EAC, ECOWAS and SADC can be based on a number of declarations and protocols, while competencies can be further enhanced through links with universities, research bodies and think tanks. This will also contribute to building resilience based on the desire to create long-term social and political transformation, as opposed to the current piecemeal and sporadic approach.

- **Prioritise training based on case studies and best practice to diffuse skills and knowledge on collaboration and coalitions.** Skills on how to build collaborations, whether formal or informal, based on successful cases, will help blend knowledge that has been tested and proven to work. Siloed (as opposed to knowledge transfer-based) collaboration leads to duplication, and a trial and error approach to coalitions. The model proposed in this study could be a good start.

- **Donors and development partners should motivate collaborations. International support groups and partners should encourage the formation of collaborations and networks, and prioritise funding to such collaborations.** The Kenya Media Sector Working Group (KMSWG) bringing civil society and media together has demonstrated that informal coalitions that have structured engagement and joint planning can deliver on their agendas. Media development agencies are supporting activities jointly executed by KMSWG members.

- **Make a sustained effort to create and defend civic spaces conducive to the formation of media and civil society coalitions.** Nascent collaborations should be supported externally as a prerequisite for more expanded collaboration. Optimal legal and policy frameworks, including civic space and freedom of expression, are difficult to secure without initial external support.

- **Support should go beyond the more elite-driven coalitions** often prevalent in urban areas, and extend to more community-driven movements and collaborations with local and community media at grassroots level.

- **Build the capacity of civil society and media coalitions to envision the ideal and desired change beyond the 'here and now'.** This calls for the support of civil society and media coalitions in their efforts to envisage and effect long-term change. This will enable participants to reorganise organically to respond to emerging challenges as they pursue an agenda to deliver lasting change. It might be argued that donor funds are dwindling; but we argue that fundraising in local communities sharing a desire for change is practicable.

- **Build coalitions on mutual trust, open engagement and shared vision, and where results are measurable.** It is imperative that there are forums for media and civil society engagement to build these values.

- **Information and data have become increasingly important tools for building coalitions in the digital era.** Developing the skills of civil society and media to manage disinformation and misinformation will give impetus to the formation of coalitions based on facts and data. These are salient tools of engagement and negotiation. If results are visible, there is more motivation to remain in the coalition.

- **Given the increasing politicisation of traditional media, as well as financial constraints and sustainability challenges, more support should be given to the networks increasingly using digital technology and communication.** However, aspects of editorial independence (both online and offline), self-governance and regulation are imperative in cultivating media confidence among civil society actors.

- **There is a thin line between journalism's normative role and the work of civil society organisations. Coalitions should focus on their similarities, rather than their philosophical and operational differences.** Thus, though there is divergence between the mission of journalism and that of the civil society – where civil society's focus is on matters of human and civil rights – investigative journalism aimed at uncovering the truth about human rights violations is no different from civil society agitating for policy change on the same issue.

- **Donors must coordinate regionally to avoid duplication of effort and competition between civil society and media organisations.** As with donor-driven, siloed approaches to change by civil society, it is vital to establish collaborations and networks that are donor-financed, but dictated by local realities.

# [1] INTRODUCTION

Despite their centrality in societies where civic space and freedom of expression are increasingly narrowing, the few civil organisations and independent media groups in sub-Saharan Africa work in silos, where their effort and energy are not harnessed to focus on pressing issues, and they often find themselves duplicating efforts and resources. They are therefore unable to address critical issues of human rights abuses, or contribute to guarding and expanding the freedom of expression necessary for democracy and social progress. Further, most of these organisations lack the capacity, skills and knowledge to focus on their agenda, because they have no space or forum to interact with similar organisations in the region and beyond who would inspire them to persevere. They lack space and a forum to exchange the knowledge and information necessary to tackle human rights issues and media development.

Often, media and civil organisations do not collaborate and leverage their strengths. Some media and CSOs are informal, and lack the structure and framework to engage with state bureaucracy and other forces. Formalising their existence through an acceptable framework and empowering them to engage would contribute to amplifying the voices of civil society and the networks in the region and beyond. One of the critical challenges for such coalitions is finding financial resources to support their operation and engagements. It is easier to mobilise resources where coalitions are well organised, priorities have been set and leadership has been formally determined. The more civic freedoms and human rights are annihilated, the more democracy cedes the higher ground, the more and the stronger are the forces of coalition required to defend these spaces.

This study focuses on *Mapping out coalitions, collaborations, partnerships and networks for media and civil society in sub-Saharan Africa*. All of these could be short-, medium- or long-term, or even consist of just a few days' engagement for a specific course. This study aims to engender a deeper understanding of the architecture, relevance and needs of media organisations and CSOs, their institutional capacity and their level of influence, and their powers and limitations. The study covers independent media, civil society organisations and other actors involved in civic freedoms and media development, operating at both country and regional level, and taking into account the specific nuances of each context. The study focuses on 17 sub-Saharan African countries identified by Civicus Monitor[1] as 'obstructed.'

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1. https://monitor.civicus.org/country/list/?country_or_region=region__1&status_category=3&submit=Search

## Specifically, the study:

1. **Maps out multi-stakeholder coalitions** bringing together media, civil society and other relevant actors in human rights, civil freedoms and media development.

2. Maps out the network of such coalitions at **country and regional level**, and linkages at the **international level**.

3. Provides information on the **gaps, shortcomings and strengths** of such coalitions, and their organisational structures, resources support and modes of operation.

4. Provides **recommendations for the ideal framework of collaboration** and networking between media and civil society actors at county, regional and international level.

5. **Analyses skills and knowledge gaps** and institutional capacity requirements.

## The study answers the following questions:

1. Under what **circumstances** do media and civil society coalitions arise?

2. What are the various **categories** of media and civil society coalitions and networks in various countries in the sub-Saharan region, and what are their areas of focus?

3. What is the **mode of collaboration** between civil society and media actors?

4. What are the institutional, networking, capacity and collaboration **needs** of media and civil society actors?

5. To what extent do political, legal, economic, regulatory/legal, technological and societal **issues** affect the effectiveness of such coalitions in the region? What would be the priority ranking for interventions?

6. What are the main financial and organisational **vulnerabilities**, challenges and opportunities facing media and civil society coalitions, including censorship, state interference, sustainability and viability?

7. What **frameworks and modes** of collaboration between media actors and civil society exist in various countries and the region?

8. What is the **ideal model** that media and civil society coalitions could take?

9. What would be the **ideal framework** for building such coalitions, and what would be the process?

# 2 METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 Study design and methods

This study adopted an exploratory design and utilised a qualitative research approach, which enabled a deep understanding of how media and civil society coalitions and networks operate in sub-Saharan Africa. Qualitative data collection approaches were used to collect both primary and secondary data. The specific methods employed to gather data were; (a) secondary data review/desktop research, (b) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and (c) case studies.

The desk research qualitative method complemented the KIIs and case studies. A network of specific individuals in civil society and media was used to clarify issues arising from desk research, so as to get more and deeper insight into the mosaic of civil society and media coalitions and networks in specific countries and regions.

## 2.2 Study population

The population of the study was 48 countries[2] geographically located in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Civicus Monitor, countries in sub-Saharan Africa can be categorised as closed, repressed, obstructed, narrowed or open[3]. This study targeted the obstructed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. However, because countries migrate from one classification to another depending on their changing circumstances, we also reviewed a few cases of repressed countries to inform the conversation.

## 2.3 Sample and sampling techniques

A total of 17 obstructed countries in sub-Saharan Africa were included in the final sample. These countries were then classified in regions: Eastern, Western and Southern Africa (see Table 1 below). Civicus rates the civic space in all Central African countries as closed.

Two repressed countries, Uganda and Zimbabwe, were chosen for their unique characteristics. In Uganda, the media has a very strong relationship with civil society groups and individuals who provide legal, referral and protection services to human rights defenders (HRDs), not to mention that recently the country enacted a very progressive human rights law, the Human Rights (Enforcement) Act 2019[4]; in addition it has a long history of an active private press, although it has operated in a very constrained environment in the last 34 years. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, has a unique characteristic of extensive use of online and digital media by civil society, as well as the emerging use of creative art and popular culture among youth-led civil society.

Table 1: Obstructed Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020

| REGION | COUNTRY |
|---|---|
| **Eastern Africa** | Kenya |
| | Comoros |
| **Western Africa** | Benin |
| | Burkina Faso |
| | Côte d'Ivoire |
| | Republic of the Gambia |
| | Guinea Bissau |
| | Liberia |
| | Mali |
| | Niger |
| | Senegal |
| | Sierra Leone |
| | Togo |
| **Southern Africa** | Lesotho |
| | Mozambique |
| | Malawi |
| | Zambia |

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2. The World Bank lists 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. See: https://data.worldbank.org/region/sub-saharan-africa?view=chart

3. https://monitor.civicus.org/country/list/?country_or_region=region__1&status_category=3&submit=Search

4. The Human Rights (Enforcement) Act 2019: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/109637/136055/F566689625/UGA109637.pdf

In the course of doing the study, three obstructed countries in West Africa, namely Niger, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, dropped in classification from obstructed to repressed[5]; thus the total number of repressed countries included in this study was five.

Twenty-five key informants took part in the study. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were utilised to settle on the key informants. The initial subjects purposively selected other referred respondents until a sufficient number of interviewees was obtained covering most of the obstructed countries. The informants included the members of CHARM.

Five purposively selected case studies were analysed, as they exhibited successful media/civil society coalition and network models that could be replicated in other sub-Saharan African countries to push for human rights, civil freedoms and media development. The case studies selected represented Eastern, Western, Southern and Central African regions in sub-Saharan Africa. From cross-analysis of these case studies, including their architecture and observation of their trends and mosaics of collaborations, recommendations were made for the ideal model for media/civil society coalitions.

# 2.4 Data collection methods

Desk research, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)/In-depth interviews and case studies were the data collection methods utilised in this research study.

## 2.4.1 Desk research

Desk research was used to review existing literature relevant to media and civil society coalitions and networks at country and regional level, as well as linkages with similar organisations at the global level. Website/online sources, various country-specific reports, and reports published by reputable regional and international 'watch' organisations in media, freedom of expression and human rights were examined. Key websites and links were visited.

## 2.4.2 Key Informant Interviews and In-depth interviews

These targeted a host of media and civil society actors and coalitions and were conducted after the desk analysis, to allow the researcher to (a) triangulate the data and (b) go behind the quantitative data to find explanations of and meanings for the initial findings. The KII interview guides were developed after the desk research, to clarify issues and gain insight.

## 2.4.3 Case studies

Case studies from Eastern, Western, Southern and Central Africa were also used, to build on and to enrich the data collected through interviews and desk research. Examples of successful coalitions in Kenya and the ongoing effort to establish such coalitions and networks in Uganda were useful in understanding the dynamics, challenges and prospects of building coalitions that bring civil society and media actors together. It was also important to understand how collaborations between media and civil society work in highly constrained countries; the Gambia is an excellent example of how collaborations between digital media and diaspora and local activists can successfully push for regime change. Sudan is also referred to, as it is the most recent country in Africa to go through regime change successfully. Equatorial Guinea was picked to represent Central Africa in an attempt to understand how civil society works with the media in closed civic spaces. All these cases analysed informed our recommendations for the ideal model and framework for building coalitions.

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5.  Country rating changes: https://findings2020.monitor.civicus.org/africa.html

# 3

# FINDINGS

## 3.1 Why Coalitions and Networks in Sub-Saharan Africa?

The formation of coalitions and networks in the sub-Saharan Africa region has largely been intended to address human rights abuses, including attacks; unwarranted arrests; the murder of protesters, human rights defenders and media practitioners; restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information; and encourage a shift from the single/monolithic party system to multiparty democracy.

In Togo, civil society groups formed a coalition in September 2017 called 'Front Citoyen Togo Debout' ('Togo Citizens Stand Up'), to push for political change in the country[6]. The formation of this coalition was in response to violence meted out to protesters who were pushing for constitutional reforms.

In October 2017 in the Gambia, victims of human rights injustices joined forces with national and international human rights organisations to form the coalition 'Jammeh2Justice', with the goal of bringing former president Yahya Jammeh and his accomplices to account for the human rights violations perpetrated during his 22-year regime.

In Mali, civil society organisations with support from the ABA Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI) launched the Transitional Justice Coalition in November 2013, which sought to address human rights violations committed in the March 2012 coup d'état, so as to give remedy to the victims and foster national reconciliation.[7]

In Kenya, media and civil society collaborated in the clamour for multiparty democracy and constitutional change between 1985 and 2002. More recent has been collaboration on issues such as extrajudicial killings, media freedom and freedom of expression, and the ongoing Linda Katiba Initiative leading discourses against the proposed Build Bridges Initiative (BBI), meant to amend the Kenyan 2010 Constitution.

While most collaborations have been thematic, some have been generalistic, embracing almost every issue from the environment to human rights and the opening up of space for civil liberty.

## 3.2 Forms of Collaboration in Sub-Saharan Africa

The research study sought to establish the forms of collaboration that exist between media and CSOs in sub-Saharan Africa. All the countries reviewed had at least one coalition, or were in a network advocating for human and civil rights which manifested as either intra-coalitions and networks, inter-coalitions and networks, or inter-human coalitions.

Intra-coalitions and networks are groupings of either civil societies or the media. Inter-coalitions and networks are groupings of the media and civil societies, while inter-human coalitions are groupings of individual human rights activists. The study research revealed that intra-coalitions and networks were more common than inter-coalitions and networks. Among the intra-coalitions and networks identified, the civil society-only coalitions and networks were more common than the media-only coalitions and networks.

It is also worth noting that collaborations manifesting as intra-coalitions were more likely to be formal than informal, while the inter-coalitions were mostly informal. A communications expert interviewed noted that most inter-groupings are on specific themes, formed around common interests, spontaneous, unstructured, and often fizzle out when they accomplish their agenda, or when it takes too long to effect change.

A civic space expert observed that there are few partnerships bringing together civil society and the media, and emphasised the need for these different actors to come together formally. Though informal collaborations are able to accomplish short-term goals more quickly than formal collaborations, they are short-lived, dissolving as soon as they accomplish their goals. Formal collaborations can stay relevant for longer and are able to continue engagements with governments and other actors, as they have formidable and resilient structures that ensure their continuity.

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6.  https://www.africanews.com/2017/09/28/togolese-civil-society-coalition-joins-opposition-calls-as-citizens-flee//

7.  https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule_of_law/where_we_work/africa/mali/news/news_mali_civil_society_form_transitional_justice_coalition_1213/

There are exceptions to this general observation. In Kenya, the Kenya Media Sector Working Group, bringing together professional bodies, associations and civil society organisations and media development partners, has been in existence for over seven years now. It is informal but structured in terms of the roles and responsibility of partners. It has defended media freedom and freedom of expression, petitioned courts and government decisions on civic space and on laws antithetical to media freedom, and harnessed the voices and reforms strategy of the media industry in Kenya

An expert on coalition-building running a network of defenders of media freedom and freedom of expression argues that collaboration and partnership is the ideal form of coalition, if the entities remain independent to pursue their own goals but collaborate to pursue a common agenda. Such collaboration should grow gradually to maturity though openness and mutual trust, which is reflected in more solid partnership. Coalitions are perceived as the more solid form of collaboration on a continuum of partnership, from the most basic form of encounter with publicity/news sources type of relationship to a more lasting and organised engagement.

In more repressive situations, broader multi-stakeholder coalitions seem to be more effective at changing circumstances in their societies. According to a key respondent from Sudan, effective regime change in Sudan was made possible by multi-stakeholder coalitions of media, civil society, civil activists and HRDs, labour unions and attendant networks at regional and international level, which provided a viable strategy for building resilience and a sustained campaign for change.

In Kenya, it emerges, just such a sustained campaign was driven by lawyers, media professional bodies, HRDs and civil society. In 2013/13, it petitioned the supreme court on provisions seen as inimical to media freedom in the Media Council Act 2013 and the Kenya Information and Communication Amendment Act 2013, overcoming formidable resistance by the government led by the Ministry of Information and Communication. This helped create the ideal media ecosystem for journalism, and civic space for HRDs. It helped to amend the sections in these laws that criminalised journalism, defending and promoting independent journalism to become a true agency for empowering citizens through information and analysis of issues confronting society.

## 3.2.1 Intra-Coalitions and Networks: Civil Society-Only Groupings

All the countries sampled in this research study had civil society-only collaborations, which we categorise as intra-coalition set-ups. These bring together several CSOs and HRDs to pursue specific aims. Most civil society-only coalitions were in a network based at local, regional or international level. In Southern Africa, the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN) comprises HRD representatives from 10 countries[8] in the southern region of Africa. Two coalitions are part of this network: Human Rights Defenders Coalition (Malawi), and National Network of Human Rights Defenders (Mozambique). In Central Africa, there is the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale, or REDHAC), which comprises HRDs from eight countries[9] in Central Africa. The coalition Alliance des Défenseurs des droits humains et de l'environnement au Tchad (ADHET) is part of this network.

In Western Africa, the West African Human Right Defenders Network, or Le Réseau Ouest Africain des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (WAHRDN/ROADDH), comprises national coalitions based in West Africa, including: Coalition Burkinabè des Défenseurs des droits humains (CBDDH), Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CI-DDH), Coalition Malienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (COMADDH), Coalition Sénégalaise des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (COSEDDH), and Human Rights Defenders Network – Sierra Leone (HRDNSL).

In Eastern Africa, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network comprises national human rights coalitions including: National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Burundi (CBDDH), National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders – Kenya (NCHRD-K), National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Somalia and Somaliland (NCHRD-S), National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Uganda (NCHRD-U), South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN), Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), and Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Coalition (EHRDC).

Within the East African Community, there is the East African Civil Society Organisation Forum (EACSOF), with a chapter in each of its member countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Sudan and Burundi.

## 3.2.2 Intra-Coalitions and Networks: Media-Only Groupings

Media-only coalitions and networks bring together media associations, professional bodies and journalists; what we call intra-media coalitions. These are not common among the sub-Saharan African countries. In Southern Africa, there is the

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8. The Southern Africa countries represented in SAHRDN are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and eSwatini.

9. The Central Africa countries represented in REDHAC are Cameroun, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the focus of which is to push for media freedom and freedom of expression in the Southern African region. Its work is to create awareness on the links between media freedom, freedom of expression, human rights and democracy. It has 11 member countries[10], with each running a local chapter and collaborating with civil society movements focusing on these broad issues.

In Western Africa, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) seeks to promote rights to freedom of expression and participatory governance, and is a formally established regional NGO with a network of national partner media organisations[11] in all 16 countries in West Africa.

In Uganda, there is the Human Rights Network of Journalists, bringing together journalists across the country aiming to defend themselves from attack by publicising such incidents and referring such cases to individuals and CSOs that offer legal and defence services to HRDs.

Overall, media sector-specific coalitions are rare; and where they exist, they are loosely interconnected, dominated by a few larger players and lacking in solidarity and support for decisions made. Some are very informal, and meet only to address specific urgent issues such as legislation inimical to media freedom, threats to journalism, or policy decisions that are likely to constrain journalism space. Their network is national, with minimal linkage at regional level. The East African Press Councils Association (EAPCA) formed recently[12], and an offshoot of the World Association of Press Councils (WAPC) brings together the press councils of Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania.

## 3.2.3 Inter-Coalitions: Media-Civil Society

While collaborations between civil society and the media in sub-Saharan Africa are not widespread, the few that are in place have been able to record remarkable achievements in democratisation processes, human rights, and the legislation of media- and civil society-friendly laws, despite having an informal set-up. The Kenya Media Sector Working Group, formed in 2014 through the support of UNESCO, brings together 14 professional media bodies and associations and civil society, including Article 19. The aim was to defend media freedom, and to harness and consolidate various disjointed media development initiatives. The coalition is not registered, and is therefore informal; it operates on the principles of mutual respect, dialogue and consensus to push for media reform. In 2013 and 2014, for example, it took the government to court over some provisions in media laws that were inimical to media freedom and freedom of expression. Additionally, the Kenya Editors Guild has been convening regional forums with editors in Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and South Sudan, with the aim of building capacity to form a regional Editors Guild, and the Media Sector Working Groups bring the media and civil society together.

In Niger they have created branches at local level branded as citizen watch committees, which comprise media and civil society representatives. These informal and dynamic collaborations have been vital in fighting corruption and advancing democracy, as they provide information quickly.

## 3.2.4 Inter-Human Coalitions

These are collaborations between HRDs. The inter-human or inter-individual coalition identified in this study is the Democratic Union of Gambian Activists (DUGA), which is a coalition of individual activists. DUGA was formed in response to the execution of human rights and democratic reform crusaders in the Gambia during former president Jammeh's rule. It was set up by Gambian activists based outside the country, and aimed to unite Gambians based in North America (United States and Canada), Europe and Africa.

In the Gambia we also have the Network of Human Rights Journalists, a formally registered group which comprises print, online and electronic media journalists reporting on human rights issues. However, an interview with a journalist based in the Gambia revealed that it the network is currently dormant, but had been functional during Yahya Jammeh's rule. This is a perfect example of the rise and decline of civil society, which is common in the region.

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10. MISA has national chapters in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, eSwatini, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwwe.

11. MFWA national partners include l'Association Guinéenne des Éditeurs de la Presse Indépendante (AGEPI); Regroupement de la Presse Mauritanienne (RPM); Gambia Press Union (GPU); International Press Centre (IPC); l'Observatoire de la Déontologie et de l'Ethique dans les Medias (ODEM); Media Reform Co-ordinating Group – Sierra Leone; l'Observatoire de la Liberté de la Presse, de l'Ethique et de la Déontologie (OLPED); Sindicato de Jornalistas e Tecnicos de Comunicacao Social – Guinea Bissau (SINJOTECS); Union des Journalistes Indépendants du Togo (UJIT); National de Presse Norbert Zongo (CNP-NZ); Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP); Maison de la Presse du Mali (MP); Observatoire Nigérien Indépendant des Medias (ONIMED)

12. https://www.ippmedia.com/en/news/eac-media-regulation-overall-body-unveiled

**Table 2: Mapped Coalitions in Obstructed Sub-Saharan Africa Countries**

| REGION | COUNTRY | COALITION/NETWORK |
|---|---|---|
| **Eastern Africa** | Kenya | ▪ Defenders Coalition<br>▪ Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO)<br>▪ Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMNET)<br>▪ The Kenya Media Sector Working Group<br>▪ The Ufungamano initiative<br>▪ The East African Civil Society Organisations' Forum (EACSOF) |
| | Comoros | ▪ Maison des Organisations de la Société Civile (MOSC) in Comoros |
| **Western Africa** | Benin | ▪ Maison de la Société Civile, Bénin |
| | Burkina Faso | ▪ Burkinabe Coalition of Human Rights Defenders |
| | Côte d'Ivoire | ▪ Ivorian Coalition for Human Rights Defenders/ The Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (ICHRD/CIDDH) |
| | The Gambia | ▪ The Gambian Civil Society Coalition on Freedom of Information<br>▪ The Jammeh2Justice coalition<br>▪ Network of Human Rights Journalists – The Gambia<br>▪ Democratic Union of Gambian Activists (DUGA) |
| | Guinea Bissau | ▪ Network of Human Rights Defenders of Guinea Bissau |
| | Liberia | ▪ Liberian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders<br>▪ CSO Coalition on Internet Freedom in Liberia |
| | Mali | ▪ Malian Coalition of Human Rights/Coalition Malienne des défenseurs des Droits Humains (COMADDH)<br>▪ Malian Forum of Media and CSOs<br>▪ Transitional Justice Coalition<br>▪ Journalists for Human Rights, Mali |
| | Niger | ▪ Collective of Organisations for the defence of Human Rights and Promotion of Democracy/Collectif des Organisations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie (CODDHD)<br>▪ The Save Niger civil society coalition (Sauvons le Niger)<br>▪ ROTAB |
| | Senegal | ▪ Platform for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights |
| | Sierra Leone | ▪ Human Rights Defenders Network – Sierra Leone |
| | Togo | ▪ Human Rights Defenders Togolese Coalition<br>▪ Le CACIT, Togo<br>▪ Let's Save Togo Collective (CST)<br>▪ Togo Citizens Stand Up Coalition (Front Citoyen Togo Debout) |
| **Southern Africa** | Lesotho | ▪ Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations |
| | Mozambique | ▪ The National Network of Human Rights Defenders<br>▪ The Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC) |
| | Malawi | ▪ Malawi Human Rights Defenders Coalition |
| | Zambia | ▪ Zambia Human Rights Defenders |

## 3.2.5 Informal Coalitions in Sub-Saharan Africa

The longevity of most informal coalitions in Sub-Saharan Africa is determined by how long it takes them to achieve their set goals. Once these are achieved, the research study showed, most disband or morph into political parties or other entities. Few can evolve to survive intact in the changed reality. Informal coalitions – whose lack of structure mitigates against succession planning – also fizzle out, because leaders die, become incapacitated, or take advantage of newly available career opportunities; appointments to mainstream government account for many such cases.

*3.2.5.1 Informal Coalitions in the 1990s and 2000s*

Civil society in the 1990s was characterised by spontaneity, was less programmatic, and lacked long-term planning. Civil society groups were not regarded as institutions where individuals could build careers, especially those locally founded. Most lacked structure, institutional management and accountability systems. More often than not the donors recognised their leaders more than the institutions themselves, and developed personal relationships channelling funds directly to them. Thus, the exit of their leaders spelt death to most of them.

In Kenya, for example, NGOs such as Release Political Prisoners and People Against Torture – both prominent in agitation for the release of political prisoners and against the torture of those campaigning for reforms – gradually faded away, even though they would still be relevant today. Others were enfeebled by the loss of key figures. The Kenya Human Rights Commission, for instance, was fatally weakened by the exit of its chair, Dr. Willy Mutunga, who moved to the Ford Foundation and was subsequently appointed President of the Supreme Court of Kenya. Formally established institutions have fared better: Transparency International, for instance, continues in its mission in spite of the harassment and exit of its leaders, such as Mwalimu Mati and Gladwell Otieno, and the appointment of John Githongo to the Public Secretary position in early 2003.

In Zimbabwe, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), which was key in pushing for a referendum for a new constitution in 2013, was re-established as a political party (National Constitutional Assembly) once it accomplished its initial mission. In the Gambia, the Jammeh2Justice coalition (formed to bring former President Jammeh to account for human rights atrocities perpetrated during his 22-year rule) has become dormant, following the shift of the founder and some key leaders to the opposition party, the United Democratic Party.

*3.2.5.2 What Coalitions Worked?*

The most successful coalitions in sub-Saharan Africa – looking back to the early 1990s onwards, when agitating for political reforms and multi-partyism was at its peak – have been informal, but characterised by structured engagement and well-defined obligations for each party. Structured coalitions that tie parties together through memorandums of understanding and rules and regulations have not occurred in the region. Developing joint paths in areas of convergence and common interest between civil society and the media, touching for example on democracy, protection of human rights and freedom of expression, has been common.

Most of the respondents felt that informal coalitions work best because parties are able to maintain their identity and disengage when they need to play independent roles, without feeling obliged to stay in the coalition. They felt that engaging and disengaging is easier in a fluid and soft relationship than in solid and hard relationships. Thus, focusing on what works stimulates horizontal and vertical linkages at local, national and regional level, and stimulates networks at the global level.

Respondents from West and East Africa argued that journalists can help in the messaging of information, from networks of NGOs and civil society and HRDs; but at the editorial level they often feel used, as opposed to being part of the change effort. On the other hand, some of the best journalists come from civil society, but feel like intruders in journalism. Open dialogue between the media and civil society is imperative to manage disquietude.

Though spontaneity and organic growth patterns cross-cut the architecture of most coalitions studied, their agility and flexibility in responding to social political challenges is one strength from which the structured and programmatic coalitions could learn. This is a challenge to the formal coalitions whose funding is tied to specific activities (often determined by donors), limiting flexibility in responding to issues that may require quick intervention. CSOs that are able to respond quickly and in good time to the plight of the society are also able to quickly establish their constituency and legitimacy, at grassroots level in particular.

# 3.3 Successful, Deliberate and Affirmative Decision by Media to Collaborate with Civil Society

Though most of the successful coalitions between the media and civil society are informal, the more structured and planned the engagements, the more effective they are in accomplishing their goals. There have been isolated instances, for example, in which the media have deliberately engaged with civil society to push for democracy and good governance.

## CASE STUDY
# KENYA

From his experience as a former editor-in-chief of the leading daily in Kenya, the *Daily Nation*, and having led the newspaper during the most difficult period in Kenyan political history, Wangethi Mwangi opines that the media can officially and openly support the work of civil society, and can be part and parcel of a team that defines the change agenda.

In the early 1990s the *Daily Nation* took an editorial decision to support the civil movement in the clamour for multiparty democracy, opening up a space for freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The movement brought together civil society, church-based organisations and the media, under the umbrella of the Ufungamano initiative, to harness their voices and direct their energies to a specific reform agenda and strategy.

The *Daily Nation* supported civil society by giving prominence to statements, actions and protests by civil society leaders. News pages and editorials were often deliberately set aside to expound, explain and highlight the civil society agenda and actions. The leading human rights activists and civil society leaders – the late Bishop Alexander Muge and Rev. Timothy Njoya, among others – had a direct telephone line to the editor-in-chief, and would brief him on the activities and statements they planned. This was important, occurring at the height of protest, amid state harassment and the imprisonment of activists without trial.

The media was thus part of civil society in planning activities and strategies, and would provide comprehensive coverage. It became part of the civil society 'noise.' It was directly sympathetic to their voice, and identified itself with the clamour for change. It gave prominence to the voices that supported the work of civil society, and in particular the diplomatic corps. The *Daily Nation* dedicated its independent columns to civil and human rights activists and leaders of civil society: Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, Paul Muite and Rev. Timothy Njoya, for example. These and others led the otherwise disengaged and scattered civil society voices into an umbrella formal gathering called the Ufungamano initiative, from where intervention would be planned.

The mainstream press collaborated closely with the alternative media, which at that time was a powerful vehicle for marshalling activists, presenting and disseminating public opinion on national issues, performing the role of underground pamphleteers and being a mouthpiece for crusaders for change. In fact, they encouraged the mainstream press to defy the government. The mainstream press passed extremely sensitive and critical political stories that they could not publish to the alternative publications, such as the *Beyond*, *Society*, *The Nairobi Law Monthly*, *Finance*, *Financial Review* and *The Development Agenda*.

Despite being temperate in its editorial, the *Daily Nation* – a mainstream publication – was outright sympathetic to reform crusaders, and indeed their work could be described as '***activism journalism***.' They would hold meetings with civil society to assess the state of affairs, and jointly decide on the next course of action. Indeed, by giving prominence to civil society activities, and publishing screaming headlines – some of which were openly biased against the state – the media stood out as a distinguished voice for reformists. According to Wangethi Mwangi, activism in journalism is transitional, and is predominantly associated with authoritarian regimes characterised by human rights abuses and dictatorship. It seems that in a freer society, the media retreats and becomes more temperate.

In Kenya, soon after the first multiparty democracy saw the exit of President Moi in 2002, civil society went mute, after the co-option of key multiparty and human rights crusaders – some of whom had actively occupied the centre of the changing of the Moi regime (1978-2002) – into the mainstream government. The voice of civil society went to sleep; those left out felt a deep sense of betrayal, particularly when those co-opted surrendered their beliefs to the whims of the state. However, it is not fair to generalise that all those appointed to serve the new government were co-opted for the purpose of silencing them; this has occurred in a number of sub-Saharan African countries, such as Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Gambia. Civil society is also a depository of highly skilled people in matters of governance and human rights, and some were co-opted to serve purely on the basis of their competencies. In Kenya these included prominent civil society activists such as John Githongo, who was appointed Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics from his director position at Transparency International.

Today, the Kenyan media is still screaming, but for a different reason. Not for democratic reforms, but as a watchdog for society. It investigates and uncovers issues of corruption, and the attendant gaps in governance. It is unlikely that the independent media would sit on the fence to watch poor governance without raising the alarm – particularly where institutions of governance are weak, and unable to hold other institutions and leaders to account for their actions.

## 3.3.1 Activism in Journalism, and the Implications for Coalitions

Activism in journalism is as old as journalism itself; particularly because at its onset, the media was purely a political rather than an economic institution; it played a more political than a social economic role. In 17th-century Europe, and particularly in Sweden and Denmark, the media was a political institution predominantly owned by politicians rather than business people. Across sub-Saharan Africa, the media has continued to play an active role in socio-political transformation.

In a more restrictive environment, the line between media framing of news and activism is narrow. According to a key respondent, in the situation where institutions of governance are less developed or weak, the media should step in to play the watchdog role. In sub-Saharan Africa, where the framing of news often relates to corruption, human and civil rights must take

the form not only of informing citizens of their rights, but tacitly calling for action. They should adopt constructive journalism – journalism that is not only investigative and interpretative, but which also focuses on providing solutions to the problems facing society. Audiences have become extremely cynical about 'obvious and usual journalism.'

It seems that the media and civil society find convergence in constructive journalism. They both become solution-based, by engaging with and encouraging people to talk about challenges and injustices. Secondly, the media becomes more historical and contextualised, as opposed to 'traditional short-memory media.' This has the effect of demonstrating progress and helping people to avoid feeling a sense of helplessness, as well as motivating them to push for change. Further, it helps to avoid confirming bias, which more often than not tends to polarise society as opposed to building solidarity for change.

For example, the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya demonstrated a clear binary relationship between the independent media and civil society, with the media clearly playing a role in confirming and reinforcing the bias and stereotypes that triggered violence between different communities. This can easily be avoided through constructive and solution-based journalism; a convergence between media and civil society that is characterised by research, fact-checking and debunking which would bring people together easily and encourage dialogue. For example, there was a marked collaboration between the media and civil society to provide solutions in the highly contested 2012/2013 general elections, which helped to avoid a repeat of the 2007/2008 post-election violence.

An over-emphasis on constructive journalism by the media and on solution-based journalism by civil society has created a binary relationship between the two, affecting collaboration. But some pieces seen in the media are dedicated to constructive formats and providing solutions:

> *"I think that constructive and solution-based journalism is one of the ways that can help to address this problem that we have in society right now."*

Civil society accuses the media of being a mirror to society, as opposed to playing a more active role in shaping society by providing solutions through more constructive content that is more engaging, particularly among the younger audience and civil society. One respondent referred to it as constructive activism, urging the media to reject the traditional model of who said what, when and how, and providing more hope and optimism through solutions-focused content, in addition to regular news. However, engagement by the media through transformative content is expensive, and requires resources. In this context, the support of investigative pieces by civil society could be imperative. In line with this view, the Fojo Media Institute has supported Transparency International Kenya (TIK) in training investigative journalists on specific subjects to do with health and education, and running the stories on both traditional and online platforms.

### 3.3.2 Blurred Distinctions between Civil Society and the Media: Implications for Coalitions

Depending on where one stands, the conception and operationalisation of the term 'civil society is contested. In some situations, the line between civil society and media is blurred, and often thin. At some point, and especially where institutions of governance are weak, the media will overtly engage in activism in the presentation and framing of news, shying away from calling for mass action but providing fodder for it. In the 1990s in Kenya, *Daily Nation* management made editorial policy decisions earmarking space in their newspaper for opinion pieces to activists and advocates of multiparty democracy. These editorial pieces were characteristically extremely opinionated and temperamental, while headlines outright amplified the challenges that civil society was facing in the struggle. In essence, collaboration went beyond simple synergy and supportiveness to a fusion of vision and perspective.

One respondent argued that it is not possible to have a 'gentleman' or 'fence-sitter' media in a country with weak institutions of governance, and in a country pressing for democratic change. This approach was replicated in the Gambia, Zambia, South Africa and Sudan. Of course there is a contention that such an approach compromises the editorial independence of the media, which civil society should also strive to help the media defend. On the other hand it is argued that the media should be functional; it should live and resonate with public aspirations, which often cannot be done under the guise of objectivity and independence. The important aspect, according to our respondent, is that neither of the two should be captured by political or economic interests or antidemocratic forces.

## 3.4 Mainstream Media and Civil Society

The research revealed an inconsistent relationship between civil society and the media, in which they only engaged meaningfully on a 'needs arise' basis, such as when there was an issue that affected them directly, e.g. restrictive laws. As a result, informal collaborations were often forged between civil society and the media, only to be discarded once the pursued goals and objectives had been realised. In the Gambia, civil society and the media recently formed an Access to Information

coalition. This informal coalition initiated by the Gambian media seeks to popularise and push for the adoption of the Access to Information Bill in the Gambian parliament. In Sierra Leone, though the media and civil society did not form a coalition, they worked closely together to push for the repeal of Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965 on defamation and seditious libel; after a long struggle, it was decriminalised in July 2020.

The majority of HRDs indicated that the mainstream media did not see themselves as part of civil society or as doing advocacy work for human rights, but rather as deliverers of information or news to the public. The only instances in which the media acted otherwise were when the journalistic profession was threatened through harassment, arrests or attacks while in line of duty; they then saw the need to work closely with civil society to protect their freedoms. This media independence was viewed as a contributory factor to the lack of formidable collaborations between the media and civil society, as captured in these remarks from a key informant:

> *"The media have seen themselves as not part of the wider civil society or part of the human rights defenders family, given that they have been classified as the fourth estate. Their focus many times is centred towards hyping what affects them, or what they as a media house are aligning themselves to – either a political party or an institution that they will derive benefits from, or they think they share a common value. That is why we don't have a coalition."*

On the other hand, the media has also been perceived by civil society representatives as a publicity tool rather than as a co-partner. For instance, where civil society had advocacy programmes and wanted to mount campaigns or have a press conference, they saw a need to actively engage with the media so that they could publicise their work. It is true to say that the media then was viewed as a dissemination platform for information, a factor that has partially contributed to the few formal coalitions between media and civil society in sub-Saharan Africa. A respondent had the following to say about this approach by civil society:

> *"A lot of civil society groups take a traditional approach with the media – issue press releases, call for press conferences, make press statements, announce new reports or research, invite journalists to a workshop for coverage... I think that this is a very traditional approach, where civil society sees they should only give information to the media for publicity purposes."*

The media respondents opined that for there to be feasible collaboration between the media and civil society, civil society representatives should understand the role of the media in a democratic society, and not expect the media to be a vehicle for promoting their agenda. Thus, collaboration should be based on mutual support, and not a means of 'sucking in' or compromising the independence of either party.

Both civil society and the media felt that it was the role of the other to actively engage with them to effect collaboration; civil society felt that the media should engage with them, to know what they were doing, and vice versa. This non-committal approach by the media and civil society could partially explain their reluctance to collaborate actively in advancing human rights issues. If formal coalitions are to be forged between the media and civil society, then each must appreciate the role they play and the significance of the other. The quote below from a key informant captures civil society perceptions of the media:

> *"We don't see a scenario where even the media community are engaging the civil society to know what they are doing, and how they can also portray the activities of the civil society to the wider society, for the people to know the relevance of the civil society or the human rights defenders in the country."*

Further analysis revealed that this non-committal approach by the media and civil society to engaging with the other was to some extent influenced by the fact that they did not understand each other well; for instance, in the selection and construction of news, what was valuable to the media was not what civil society considered valuable – a situation that caused tension between the two. This sentiment from a key informant illustrates this challenge:

> *"There are times when civil society/human rights activists have [a] focus on projecting a human rights concern, but the media have their own aspect of looking at issues. There may be this particular information you want disseminated effectively to the target audiences, but the media sees it differently. Sometimes, after designing a press statement, if the heading is not captivating they will not take it."*

## 3.5 Community Media and the Civil Society

Community media in sub-Saharan Africa commands a faithful following; and though it is largely perceived as a local alternative to mainstream media, it is a powerful tool that hA contributed to the development process at grassroots level. To reach local communities, it is imperative for civil society to consider how to collaborate with community media.

A civic space expert noted that the needs of communities are based in the rural areas, and thus there is a need for civil society to move into communities to engage with them, so as to understand the realities of some of the challenges they

face. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that the structure of formal collaborations limited interaction with communities; as opposed to spontaneous and less formal groups, which are driven by community needs.

> *"…but then the needs of the communities are based in the rural areas… There's a need to move into the community to speak to people, to engage with them, to see the realities of some of the challenges that they face. The structure of many formal groups, though not all, makes it exclusive in a way and limits interaction with communities, as opposed to spontaneous and less formal groups that are driven by the needs of the communities."*

The study revealed that there were community media networks at regional and national level in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the Eastern Africa Community Media Network (EACOMNET) is driven by media networks in the Eastern African region, including the Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMNET), the Community Media Network of Tanzania (COMNETA) and the Community Media Network of Uganda (COMNETU), among others in the sub-region. Community radio networks in Cameroon, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo have formed the West and Central African Community Media Network. Conversations must be stirred up to explore how CSOs can strategically collaborate with such community media networks – at local, regional and national level – to advance civic freedoms and human rights.

In Kenya for example, collaboration between local media in Mombasa and the Centre for Justice, Governance and Environment Action (CJGEA), founded by grassroots activist Phyllis Omindo, brought to attention the government's failure to adequately regulate the lead smelter adjacent to Owino Uhuru settlement, which polluted water and air, resulting in lead poisoning. In July 2020, as a result of collaboration with the media and support from Human Rights Watch and UN bodies, the court awarded the residents USD 13 million for damages related to the pollution.

This highlights the importance of narrowing collaboration to the local level, and expels the preconceived notion that collaborations require massive human and financial resources.

Social movements across sub-Saharan Africa have been documented as successfully engaging with communities to push for social change. These informal collaborations provide valuable information that formal collaborations could learn from regarding how to engage successfully with local communities. A civic space expert said:

> *"…there are many lessons that formal collaborations have to learn from social movements because they are closer to communities than we would ever be. So, there is that gap between formal and informal structures."*

Also arising from the study is that independently, well-organised and professionally-run CSOs such as the Kenyan Human Right Commission, Legal Resources Foundation, Release Political Prisoners (of the 1990s) and Amnesty Kenya helped set up local chapters to address local issues, becoming a coalition of local networks of community-driven human rights movements. These attracted significant local media attention. They therefore triggered both national and local-level media collaborations to tackle issues, both from the top, at national level, and from the bottom, at community level. Well-established CSOs have a responsibility to trigger, motivate and grow national movements that would create media support and collaborations.

# 3.6 Digital Media and Civil Society

Digital media has transformed the operations of civil society groups across sub-Saharan Africa in advancing civic space. Though civil society in both the repressed and the obstructed countries utilised digital media, those in the repressed countries were twice as likely to depend on them to push human rights issues. The digital media utilised included online audio platforms, online newspapers and social media platforms. In the repressed countries, the mainstream media is controlled by the ruling government; thus, the digital space is the only effective platform available to reach out to the public. The following statement is from a civil rights activist based in a repressed country.

> *"I'm in a country where there is only one TV station, that is controlled by the state; and all radio stations are run either by the state or [by] proxies of the ruling party. The internet is the freest space available in the country. That is why we rely on digital media."*

In the Gambia, digital media was particularly key to pushing for democratic reforms and opening up civic space, which saw the country migrate from a repressed to an obstructed state.

Interviews with HRDs from the Gambia indicate that digital media were instrumental in getting the word out, both in the diaspora and on the ground in the Gambia, and provided the momentum to push for change. Digital media, including the Freedom online newspaper, Gainako online radio and newspaper, Fatou Network and others, were utilised by civil society groups to pass information in and out of the Gambia that would not have been broadcast or published in the mainstream media. A civil society activist based in the Gambia buttresses the importance of digital media in pushing for change in repressed countries as follows:

*"I advocate for collaboration with online media, especially in repressive countries. Online media was very integral in the fight against Jammeh regime in the Gambia... it was the vehicle that the human rights activists rode on, as there was no other available outlet."*

In more authoritarian regimes, there is tighter collaboration between online media and civil society, each borrowing the strategy of the other, and at the same time relying on each other to achieve their goals. In the Gambia, for example, there was more solidarity and supportive relationships between the Democratic Union of Gambia Activists (DUGA) and online media – both in the Gambia and in the diaspora – than with traditional media. A key reason for this solid collaboration was to push for freedom of expression and association, which were harshly suppressed by then-President Yahya Jammeh.

In addition, digital media based in the diaspora, where the oppressive regime had less or minimal control of its independent editorial content, worked as dissident media. Also, digital media was less restrained and often more directly involved with civil society, particularly in framing content.

In repressed countries, CSOs were in a more strategic position to collaborate with digital media to advance civil rights. In some instances, the CSOs and individual civil rights activists utilised their own digital media platforms in addition to other digital media. Magamba Network, which uses creative forms of youth activism to push for opening up civic space in Zimbabwe, runs Magamba TV through the media-sharing platform YouTube, and shares links through its social media pages on Facebook and Twitter.

Digital media platforms are particularly key in linking activists from the repressed countries in the diaspora with people in their native countries. Some of the key informants from repressed countries who took part in the study had sought refuge in foreign countries, but utilised digital media to push for civic freedoms and human rights in their own countries. A human rights activist from a repressed country based in the diaspora had an online radio and online newspaper platforms which were used to disseminate information to the native country, as it was impossible for those on the ground to distribute such sensitive information. Information was forwarded through text messages or WhatsApp audio, edited and organised, then put up on the digital media platforms for distribution.

It's important to note that across sub-Saharan Africa, the media more or less engaged in activism, eschewing the normative edict of independent journalism, which becomes less significant in news of social political reforms. Nevertheless, traditional media had more reach than digital media, whose coverage was limited by affordability and lack of internet penetration.

## CASE STUDY
# ZIMBABWE

A characteristic of the civic space in Zimbabwe as a repressed country is that all the legacy media outlets are either state-controlled or owned by politicians or proxies of the ruling party, thwarting meaningful media/civil society collaboration. The majority of civil society therefore rely on digital media to gather and disseminate information to the masses. Magamba Network, which utilises creative activism, art and culture to open up democratic space, has been very successful in utilising online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to disseminate its messages and has a massive youthful following. Magamba utilises varied tools, including digital media, satire and creative hubs, to open up democratic space; all the while building a more radical participative democracy, and amplifying young voices on the continent.

Magamba collaborates with various civil society groups at local and national level. Locally, it is part of Citizen Manifesto, which brings together various civil society groups fighting for a better Zimbabwe, as well as Content Creators of Zimbabwe, which brings together digital media start-ups, community media organisations and civil society organisations committed to promoting freedom of expression and social justice. Regionally, it collaborates with the Africa Satire Network, which brings together civil society groups and individuals using political satire for activism; and it is also part of Creative South Network, which unites innovative and creative hubs based in Southern Africa.

In collaboration with citizen journalists, Magamba Network has also founded the Open Parly project, which is focused on aggregating parliamentary data and disseminating it to citizens through social media platforms, so they can engage with elected officials. Open Parly has also been set up in Somalia and in Zambia, with hopes of getting others in the continent on board. Additionally, Magamba is collaborating with the Building Workers Trade Union, based in South Africa, for which it produces awareness-raising content. In Kenya, it provides technical support and advice to Transparency International as it sets up a Media Tech Hub, which is similar to its Motor Republic Hub set up in 2015. Magamba is also part of the Follow the Money Movement, which is tracking how Covid-19 resources are being spent in different sub-Saharan African countries.

Magamba is therefore an example of civil society that is using journalism to investigate and write stories on corruption, governance and democracy. Content is disseminated via various forms and platforms, including podcasts, tweets and live streams on its online platform, and on Facebook, which is not easy to censor. It offers an example of coalitions driven by digital media, content production and data. Magamba has been key in replicating and transferring skills and knowledge to other needy civil society groups, forming a knit network of civil society led by youthful activists on the continent.

## 3.7 From Formal to Informal Coalitions

There were instances when informal coalitions were necessary to quickly address sensitive issues on the ground. Interviews with top leadership in formal coalitions pushing for human rights in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that due to the bureaucratic system that characterises the formal coalitions, it was necessary in special cases to collaborate informally with other organisations so as to successfully tackle challenges facing HRDs, such as illegal arrests and the attendant human rights violations. An HRD leading one of the HRD networks in West Africa described a case in which they had to instantly form an informal coalition with five civil society groups so that they could pool financial and legal resources quickly to secure the release of 19 HRDs who had been arrested and charged in a court of law. Though a formal coalition would have achieved the same results, it would have taken longer; thus, in this case, an informal coalition was preferable.

The structure of most formal coalitions makes them exclusive, in a way, and limits interaction with communities, as opposed to spontaneous and less formal groups that are driven by the needs of communities. A key respondent notes that formal groups are less connected to the people on the ground, a situation arising because of donor requirements that project activities must be tied to a budget, limiting their ability to respond to issues requiring a swift response.

## 3.8 Relationship between External Networks, Locally Founded Civil Society and the Media in Regime Change

A major characteristic of reform movements across Africa, and in particular where countries are pushing for regime change, is the strength of organised coalitions. This was evident in Kenya, where the Ufungamano initiative of the 1990s pushed for a change in constitution, the ousting of Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia in 2017 after 23 years in power, and more recently in Khartoum, Sudan, where regime change was driven by Forces of Freedom and Change, a coalition of CSOs that formed the Transitional Legislative Council with the Transitional Military Council immediately after the fall of Omar al-Bashir's government. These included forces from both locally-founded civil society and those in the diaspora; including dissident media such as Sudan Bukra TV (meaning Sudan Tomorrow), which was run by a civil society group and became the voice of the crusaders for reforms and regime change thereafter. Nowhere else in Africa were trade unions as strong in regime change as in Khartoum. The vibrancy of the civil movement in Sudan declined after regime change, when some of the lead civil activists became part of the transition council.

Respondents, particularly from sub-Saharan African countries that have undergone difficult regime change, say the strength of coalitions and collaborations should be built on the competencies of the parties. While civil society, for example, is a depository for policy knowledge and is well-placed through research and global networks to provide information on democracy and democratic reforms, the media becomes a strategic partner and ally because of its competence in analysing, interpreting and packaging this information for dissemination to the citizens. It also provides access and platforms for citizen engagement and dialogue. A human rights activist based in the diaspora indicated that while pushing for regime change in the Gambia, they would send information to bloggers and the online media in the Gambia for verification before disseminating it to a network of activists and citizens.

In countries that have gone through extended periods of authoritarianism characterised by crackdowns on dissenting voices and civil society activists, it becomes difficult to openly organise civil society and media coalitions. For example, the 30 years of Omar al-Bashir's reign in Sudan, the 24 years of the Moi regime in Kenya, the 23 years of Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia, and the 34 years of Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, called for underground organisation of resistance before the eventual eruption of formidable mass movements To form coalitions in such countries, the support of the foreign mission and the diaspora is required. This worked for Kenya, which was supported by European nations and America. The Gambia was supported by a network of Gambians in the diaspora; as was Sudan, by the Sudanese diaspora community. Regime change may be home-grown, but it must be invigorated, motivated, and technically and financially supported.

# THE GAMBIA

In its previous repressed state, during the rule of former president Yahya Jammeh, collaboration between civil society and the mainstream media was non-existent. Regime change and the metamorphosis from repressed to obstructed civic space was realised as a result of synergy between local civil society groups and activists and diaspora activists, coupled with the creative use of digital media to disseminate information to the masses on the ground. The win in Gambia is indicative of the importance of collaboration between civil society and digital media in pushing for change in other repressed sub-Saharan African countries.

For example, there was more solidarity and supportive relationships between the Democratic Union of Gambia Activists (DUGA) and online media, both in the Gambia and in the diaspora, than with the traditional media, as the latter were highly suppressed by the government. Digital media, including the Freedom online newspaper, Gainako online radio and newspaper, and Fatou Network, among others, were utilised by civil society groups to pass information in and out of the Gambia that would not have been broadcast or published in the mainstream media.

The unique lesson about activism in Gambia is the overwhelming support that local online platforms received from the network of human right activists in the diaspora. And as much as DUGA was a leading civil society group that agitated and pushed for democratisation of the Gambia, culminating in regime change, unfortunately it lacked strong local constituents thereafter. It has an extremely weak presence in the Gambia now, and its offices are inactive. Again, this supports our findings that coalitions are informal and lack long-term transformative agendas, often going through long periods of slumber and resurgence.

## 3.9 Interdependence between Media and Civil Society in a Coalition

Although the media was viewed as part of civil society, it was agreed that the success of any project that civil society undertook was pegged at the level to which they involved the media. The media enabled mobilisation of the public, got governments to act, and helped in advocacy through publicising events. Civil society groups confirmed that by closely collaborating with the media, they managed to push for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms such as those of expression and assembly in their countries. The publicity role of the media was generally hailed by CSOs, as it gave them visibility:

"Collaboration between civil society and media is fundamental, and very important. All our successes in fighting corruption and promoting good governance in our country have been realised by working closely with the media."

The constitution of the Republic of Benin, for instance, requires that the state disseminates all texts and instruments relating to human rights. For this to be realised, collaboration between media and civil society is necessary. The HRDs and civil society actors in Benin are therefore invited on to various radio and television shows and programmes from time to time, to enlighten the population on laws and instruments that relate to human rights.

The media and civil society complement each other, and joint planning and execution of activities helps to achieve goals faster; and at the same time, brings more like-minded forces together. Pursuing civil rights and defending media space as independent entities or forces takes a long time to achieve results.

While civil society has a better understanding of freedom of expression and association, conducting research and advocacy, advice about action on human right issues, strategies for pushing governments, policymakers and individual human rights abusers to denounce abuse and to respect human rights, the media has better skills in organising information and reaching the masses. Statements and protests from civil society are well-documented and widely circulated by the media. Change requires a critical mass of support.

Defending civil and media space from authoritarian attacks requires solidarity and coordinated intervention. Kenya and Uganda offer good examples of coordination between the media and civil society. In Uganda, the Uganda Media Sector Working Group has brought together HRDs, journalist associations and professional media bodies. It now defines the ideal media system for Uganda, and engages the government and attendant regulators on reforms.

Further, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have been working closely with the media in Uganda, particularly in coordinating projects and publicising atrocities and killings meted out against citizens by the police and other state actors in the just-concluded general elections.

# 3.10 Opportunities for Media and Civil Society to Collaborate

Some civil societies have been conducting research on the state of affairs of various aspects of civic space, and producing periodic reports. These have been used for lobbying by other civil societies and actors, and have provided authoritative content for the media. In Zambia, for example, MISA has been conducting research on the state of media freedom and freedom of expression, including the safety and security of journalists providing authoritative information and grounds for engaging government authorities on these issues. This is similar to Kenya, where the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), a quasi-government media regulator, produces annual reports on the status of the media in Kenya, specifically to inform the government on policy matters regarding the media and for use to advance the cause of media freedom. The report is used by civil society and media professional groups and associations to lobby on issues of safety and security for journalists. Collaboration is easier in situations where there is vibrant private and commercial media than where the media environment is state-dominated, or where it is owned by close associates or acolytes of the state.

**CASE STUDY**

## EQUATORIAL GUINEA

As with all the countries in Central Africa, Equatorial Guinea has a closed civic space, including constrained freedom of expression and of the media – a situation that makes mutual collaboration between civil society and the media impossible. Furthermore, all traditional media houses are state-owned, making it difficult to have meaningful collaborations with civil society. There is extensive reliance on digital media by civil society and human rights activists to push for human rights, democracy and governance conversations, as this is the only space available for disseminating information. A human rights activist interviewed indicated that they used social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter to collect information on the ground, edit it and distribute it. This collaboration with digital media has proven effective as it has minimised unwarranted arrests, attacks and murders meted out against HRDs.

One unique characteristic of civil society in Equatorial Guinea is that there are individual activists set on helping civil society groups build a framework for engagement, by equipping them with tools to enable them to engage more effectively through a non-violent approach to activism. Successful case studies from sub-Saharan African countries that have undergone successful regime changes are utilised to produce activism tools such as documentaries to push for change. In addition, the individual activists produce weekly programmes and campaigns, which are then disseminated through online platforms including podcasts, online radio and newspapers to push for human rights, democracy and governance in Equatorial Guinea. The online radio station Macuto, for instance, runs the programme Voice of the Voiceless on an almost daily basis to push for human rights and democracy. The online newspapers Ario Rombe and Asodegue have also been key platforms utilised by civil society activists.

# 3.11 Challenges of Coalitions and Networks

There was reluctance among older civil society groups to work with recently founded groups; the older groups viewed the new groups with suspicion, not to mention that their modes of operation differed. On one hand there are civil society groups of youthful and tech-savvy individuals utilising modern technology; and on the other, conservative civil society groups wary of embracing new technology. Thus, there is difficulty in initiating collaborations. The generational gap thus poses a great challenge to the formation of coalitions in Africa. The statement below captures the view of a young human rights activist leading a civil society group:

*"In terms of building these coalitions and networks... we've only built them over the last few years, and I think it is very much because of the emergence of a new, younger civil society that is tech-savvy – thus, more flexible and more willing to adapt compared to traditional civil society, who are stuck in their old ways and are quite territorial. I think the key is when there are shared interests, ideals and goals; so you are not being forced into a coalition, but it is a coalition of different, willing, committed partners who really want to achieve the same thing."*

Though civil and political freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed and enshrined in the constitutions of most of the sub-Saharan African countries reviewed, they are violated by administrative authorities, who intimidate and attack those fighting for human rights; and in other instances, amend the laws to restrict certain freedoms, making the operation of the coalitions and networks restrictive. In August 2019 in Togo, the National Assembly – citing security reasons – modified the freedom of assembly law, restricting the right to assemble peacefully by restricting time and venues for assembling.

This amendment has since seen a number of HRDs arrested and imprisoned for not respecting the restrictions.

In most sub-Saharan African countries, the process of registering coalitions and networks is frustrating. In Kenya, for example – and this applies to many other sub-Saharan African countries – the NGO Coordinating Act of 1990, revised in 2012, gives strict requirements for financial compliance, as well as stringent registration provisions. This is despite the provision for freedom of association in Kenya's constitution, and a court petition by the civil society movements in 2012.

Most coalitions are thematic and subject-specific. They are formed around common themes, such as democratic reforms and attendant competitive elections; media freedom and freedom of expression; resource distribution, such as that of land, including historical injustices; constitutional reforms; human rights abuses; labour rights issues; and political governance. From interviews with some Kenyan pioneers of the struggle for multiparty democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s – and later, in the 2000s, in the agitation for a new constitution – it appears the nature of coalitions is structurally informal but operationally formal. This allows them to fizzle out once they accomplish their goal, just to reconvene and work together when the situation demands.

Long-term and formal coalitions between the media and civil society are complicated by the fact that each operates under different philosophies. While most media operates by economic logic, civil society is more driven by the need for equity and social justice. According to one respondent from Zambia, media and civil society often have an adversarial relationship, arising either out of pure misunderstanding or because of divergent interests. The media often accuses civil society of financial impropriety with donor funds, and is therefore interested in investigating their conduct, which makes civil society uneasy. The media, on the other hand, is accused by civil society of relentlessly pursuing profits, and collaborating with the corporate sector (their source of advertising revenue) and politicians to perpetuate corruption. In the view of the Zambian respondent, the media is only interested in collaboration with civil society for self-preservation. This is corroborated by respondents from Kenya who observed that in the 2013 Kenyan election, the media was accused of 'preaching peace' at the expense of free and fair elections, so as to avoid a repeat of the 2007/2008 election when they lost business.

There have been instances of co-option of civil society activists into mainstream government through high-level appointments. This has been common in Zambia and Kenya, where the governments do not want to be seen to be cracking down overtly on civil society. From the third multiparty election in Kenya in 2002 to date, there has been a wave of incorporation of key civil society activists into the government. From the Ford Foundation, the former Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court (2011-2016) joined the government. A prominent clergyman who led the clamour for constitutional change through a civil society/media coalition umbrella body, the Ufungamano Initiative, became a member of parliament and was subsequently appointed chair of the powerful parliamentary committee on budget. Other prominent activists were appointed government ministers and members of the powerful Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC). While most of them felt entitled, due to their untold suffering, including imprisonment without trial, such appointments systematically disabled civil society movement in Kenya. In Zambia, top journalists have been appointed to ambassadorial positions and as advisers to the government in various capacities, abandoning their cause for reform. One veteran journalist and activist from Zambia views civil society as a vehicle to larger personal political goals; in such circumstances, coalitions are reduced to a convenient means to pursue these goals.

In Zimbabwe, a serving member of parliament of the opposition party said that coalitions between civil society and the media cannot work effectively unless each is able to organise themselves. Journalists, for example, are attuned to being managed by media owners while civil society is attuned to the policies and direction of sponsors or donors. He opined that coalition would only work where there is conviction and purpose independent from a master.

Another challenge to collaboration between the media and civil society is giving too much credence and premium to journalists' ability to understand, interpret and communicate facts about matters at the heart of civil society or happenings in a country. Sometimes media practitioners display sheer ignorance, particularly when young reporters are not given guidance. A key respondent opined that in fact, journalists should not be given as much credence as they are. Over-expectation from civil society leads to the media being accused of undermining issues, and being driven purely by events and not substance. Training is imperative, as is engagement, to understand each other's expectations. Hold conversations on the nature of the problem at hand to create a common understanding. It is important to amplify the agreed issues. For the media, it is imperative that civil society activists with a better grip of issues at hand are invited to their newsrooms. On the other hand, civil society should base lobbying and protests on well-grounded issues. Facts and figures on a state of affairs that can easily be understood by the media are equally important.

In some sub-Saharan African countries there is a lack of adequate legal frameworks to regulate the media and protect journalists, besides a very hostile civic space. A key respondent from Guinea Bissau noted that the media operated in a harsh environment, constraining their operations. Security-related threats such as terrorism in Burkina Faso have also impacted on free speech and freedom of association, leading to self-censorship by the media for fear of detention or assassination. In Benin, laws inimical to media freedom and freedom of expression are a deterrent to media/civil society coalitions.

Financial constraints and lack of understanding of the importance of media/civil society engagement are major impediments to coalitions. Some respondents opined that the media ought to be financially independent, to avoid manipulation and compromising of editorial independence. A respondent from Senegal noted that there was high taxation of media outlets and apathy towards print media by the public, which further constrained their operations. Excessive corruption was also pointed to as a contributor to disputes between the media and civil society. A Niger respondent indicated that most media in the country were private and profit-oriented, while civil society had a vocation to cultivate citizenship; which made it very difficult for the two to collaborate.

## 3.12 Emerging Issues and Coalition Building

The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed greatly to the reorganisation of civil society, changing how it usually operates. The partnership of civil society with mainstream media has metamorphosed, with civil society becoming more independent in content production, information dissemination and publicity endeavours. Civil society has now taken on the role of content production, and incorporated journalism in its own operations – and in an interesting twist of events, now shares this content with mainstream media.

A key informant confirmed that there has also been outflow and employment of top journalists in civil societies that pay well. Most civil societies in sub-Saharan Africa now have journalists working for them as experts in media and communication. This arrangement has become increasingly convenient now that there is limited interaction and few media conferences because of the social distancing, limited travelling and isolation restrictions caused by Covid-19.

Civil society has now become reliant on digital platforms to disseminate information, publicise events and initiate conversations and campaigns. Digital platforms such as online audio and video platforms, e.g. SoundCloud and YouTube; social networking sites, e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram; and websites and blogs, among others, are being utilised by civil society in day-to-day operations. In Kenya, civil society groups first thrust the misuse of Covid-19 funds into the limelight via their digital platforms, which led to protests against the misuse of funds in various counties. These digital platforms have also been a source of news to mainstream media.

A professionalised civil society has emerged. The current organised and professional civil society could be explained as an attempt to repackage for survival, because basically the situation we were in two decades ago has changed completely. It is important to explore how the professionalised civil society can now best and most effectively engage with the media to address democracy, governance and human rights issues in sub-Saharan Africa.

"We are now in the era of professionalised civil society. We are here because there is career progression; I am a professional activist. It is not by circumstance… everything is now programmatic, well-documented, with outcome and outputs."

There is a new pattern and form of collaboration emerging in countries classified as closed and repressed. In countries under dictatorship and autocratic regime, where civic space, media freedom and freedom of expression are extremely constrained and HRDs, activists and journalists are court-martialled, imprisoned without trial, jailed under flimsy excuses about 'threatening state security', harassed, assaulted, beaten and maimed, a new form of coalition to defend activists, journalists and HRDs has emerged. Uganda is a very good example.

**CASE STUDY**

# UGANDA

Formal engagements and collaboration between the media and individuals and organisations that provide legal, referral and protection services to HRDs and CSOs have emerged. Freedom of Expression Hub, which is involved in advocacy on human rights and freedom of expression issues, carries out research and lobbies the government on these issues, including legal representation on human rights violations. It works closely with the media on coverage of their activities, and collaborates with Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda to enhance the promotion, protection and respect of human rights through defending and building the capacity of journalists to exercise their constitutional rights effectively.

These coalitions are mainly geared towards defending HRDs. The new legislation – i.e. the Human Rights (Enforcement) Act 2019 – has given them new impetus and legal grounds to protect against human rights violations. Where there are explicit laws on human rights in addition to the human rights commission and where the level of human rights abuses is on the rise, there are visible and effective coalitions between the media networks and Defenders of Defenders.

# 4
# CONCLUSION

**Close observation of the four regions of sub-Saharan Africa covered in the study revealed diverse patterns and structures of collaborations between media and civil society. Indeed, the strength, effectiveness and sustainability of collaborations and coalitions vary with the regions. In Western Africa, collaborations are extremely informal; but their regional and international networks are well-knit. They go beyond collaboration between formal organised groups to individuals in the diaspora. They are generally weak, mainly because of an underdeveloped private media market, the cost of information access due to the high cost of internet, and narrowing civil and freedom-of-expression space. There is more online media collaboration with civil society, as opposed to the dominantly state-owned traditional media.**

Central Africa on the other hand had more individual HRD coalitions working closely with online media. There is only a handful of CSOs. Indeed, one respondent, based in the diaspora, is helping local activists to form CSOs and collaborations using case studies from different parts of Africa and other continents. This is an admirable strategy.

In the Southern Africa region, we have interesting collaborations between humanitarian organisations such as Oxfam, ActionAid and the media. We also have one example of the regionally founded media alone coalition (MISA), which works closely with media houses and civil society to advance the cause of media freedom and freedom of expression in the region. This is an example of a network of media and civil society working closely in 11 countries under the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Eastern Africa, particularly Kenya, has a tradition of establishing formal and deliberate engagement between the media and civil society, since the agitation for democracy and clamour for constitutional change between the mid-80s and early 2000s. However, it has one of the most unstable civil society environments because of the incorporation of civil society activists and leaders into mainstream government. This said, civil societies have become elitist and urban-based, with minimal links to the grassroots. Coalitions are therefore more prevalent at national level than at community level. This diversity of structure and pattern of collaborations notwithstanding, the common denominators among them were that they were either formal or informal, spontaneous or deliberately planned, and short-term or long-term.

New technology, creative art, data and content creation distributed on social media and attendant platforms is driving coalition movements between the media and civil society, particularly among youthful civil society leaders who also happen to be tech-savvy. Though not widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, they have a close-knit network of like-minded youth groups. Thus their ability to reach a critical number of people through digital technology exerts influence among the youth. The Magamba Network of Zimbabwe is such a coalition. It not only produces and live-streams content on online media platforms and digital television, but also uses data and information authoritatively on diverse issues affecting society. This is becoming more popular, given the increased penetration of the internet and the widespread use of smartphones in Africa. It is therefore important to support such initiatives to build knowledge among journalists and civil society, leading to changes even among less tech-reliant civil societies and coalitions. Given that engagement and lobbying must use hard data, it is important to impart skills on data mining and data access research, and on managing disinformation and misinformation.

We are also cognisant of the fact that the current 'programmatic' funding model by donors – where funds are earmarked for specific purposes and activities, with no room for adjustment and/or variation to respond to emerging challenges

and realities outside the programme – are a deterrent to building coalitions and collaborations. CSOs unable to respond immediately to emerging challenges often lack a local constituency – a reason the media shy away from collaboration, opting to hold CSOs to account regarding their work and financial prudence.

The duplication of effort and competition between civil society and media organisations is overwhelming. This is compounded by the fact that some donor agencies also compete for relevance and recognition, and rarely speak to each other to (for example) set up basket funds from which coalitions can draw funding. Such funding models are only common during general elections and emergencies such as famine or related natural catastrophes such as floods. As with the donor-driven, siloed approach to change by civil society, it is possible to establish collaborations and networks that are donor-driven, but dictated by local realities.

Collaboration and coalition between national-level media outlets, media development and professional associations and civil society, tackling national issues, tend to exclude smaller grassroots community movements. It is important to review collaboration driven by 'size and resource sufficient syndrome', which is often symbolic, as opposed to tackling real issues.

Deliberate rather than spontaneous collaboration has produced better results. This is evident in Kenya and the Gambia, where there is collaboration based on open conversation, deliberate initiative and formal engagement; the media and civil society create policy and make strategic decisions to collaborate, agendas are discussed and agreed, and results are realised faster.

# 5

# PROPOSED MODEL

## Intereffication Model and Framework for Establishing Media and Civil Society Coalitions

Proposed by Günter Bentele, Tobias Liebert and Stefan Seeling in 1997 to describe the relationship between public relations and the media, the intereffication model has been borrowed and modified to explain the complex relationship between media and civil society. While media and public relations strive to cope with each other's style of work and operations, media and civil society view each other in terms of mutual interdependence, mutual influence and mutual orientation in the effort to effectively play their normative role in society.

The model posits that activities of one side can be more efficient and effective when the other side is willing to join in and collaborate. It's only at the point of mutual orientation and policy engagement at organisational level that coalitions can be realised (see illustrations below).

This model argues that for collaboration to work more effectively, there should be mutual interdependence between civil society and the media that goes beyond the common, conventional relationship where the media treats civil society as a source of news, and civil society treats the media as a publicity tool.
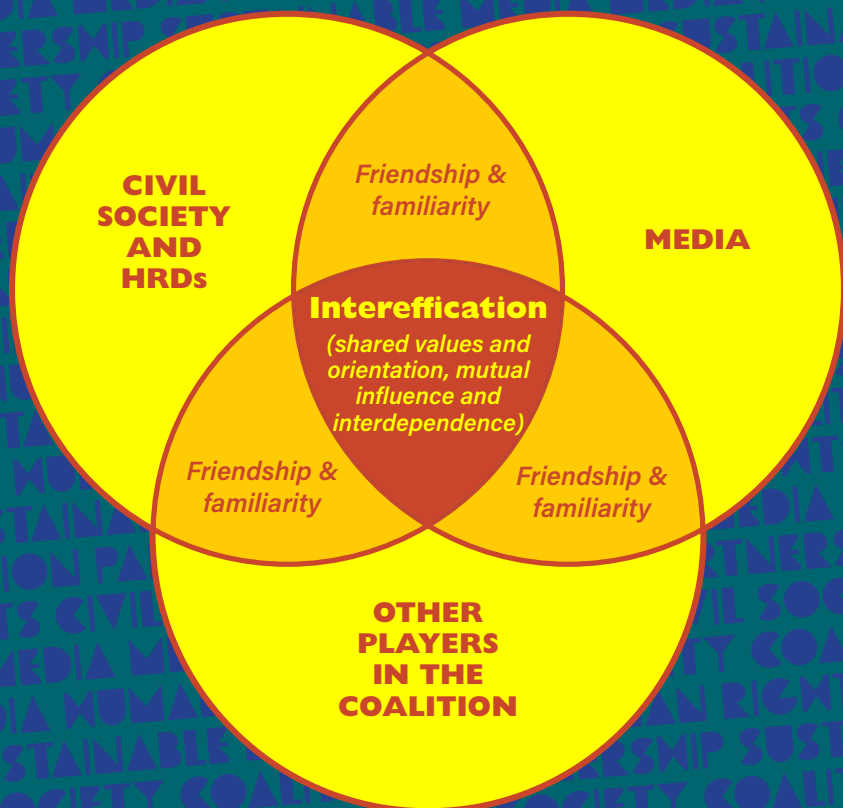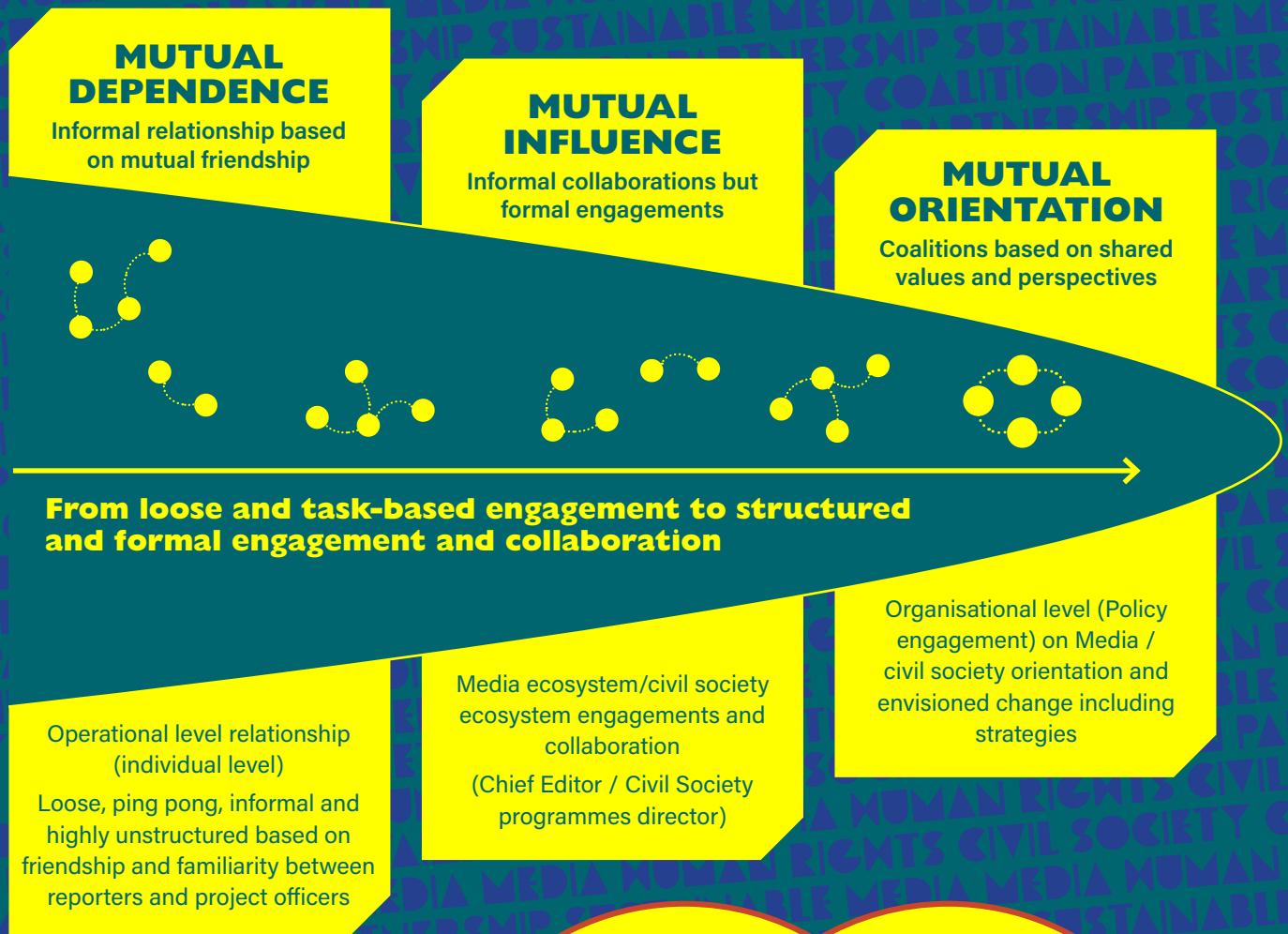
The model argues that for effective coalition to work, there are multilayered relationships of mutual influence, mutual orientation and mutual dependence, often characterised by resonance and adaptation in between.

Of interest is the fact that coalitions are driven not so much by the need for mutual interdependence for the purposes of effective internal efficiency, but more by the role each party plays to make it possible for the other to respond to external pressure, ranging from narrowing media and civic spaces to freedom of expression and related human rights, social justice and democracy. The more intense the external pressure, the more the need to constructively engage and enter into coalitions.

Thus, building coalitions can be conceived as a continuum, starting from the most basic relationship at operational level and continuingto the most formal policy engagement at organisational level. These are discussed below:

- Reporters ⟵⟶ Project officers (friendship- and familiarity-based relationship)
- Civil society technical and operational officers ⟵⟶ Media editors (relationship based on common responses to civil society media ecosystem constraints).
- Civil society orientation, agenda and policies ⟵⟶ Media actors orientation and agenda (beyond the normative)

# FRAMEWORK OF COLLABORATION AND COALITION BETWEEN THE MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PLAYERS

## MUTUAL DEPENDENCE
Informal relationship based on mutual friendship

## MUTUAL INFLUENCE
Informal collaborations but formal engagements

## MUTUAL ORIENTATION
Coalitions based on shared values and perspectives

**From loose and task-based engagement to structured and formal engagement and collaboration**

Operational level relationship (individual level)

Loose, ping pong, informal and highly unstructured based on friendship and familiarity between reporters and project officers

Media ecosystem/civil society ecosystem engagements and collaboration

(Chief Editor / Civil Society programmes director)

Organisational level (Policy engagement) on Media / civil society orientation and envisioned change including strategies

CIVIL SOCIETY AND HRDs

MEDIA

*Friendship & familiarity*

**Intereffication**
*(shared values and orientation, mutual influence and interdependence)*

*Friendship & familiarity*

*Friendship & familiarity*

OTHER PLAYERS IN THE COALITION

## Reporters ⟷ Project officers (friendship- and familiarity-based relationship)

Most collaborations are characterised by a reporters/project officers relationship in which the media provides coverage and civil society supplies news. This is based on an understanding of each other's system of operation; for example, news value of a media house and project implementation approaches and output of civil society including funding. This is a relationship between individual journalists and project actors that is often delinked from official editorial decisions and the leaders of civil society programmes in order to collaborate. Such relationships are often based on friendship and familiarity, in addition to the ability of one party to adapt to the other's expectations – for example, the ability of the project officer to understand the news value, timing, reliability and facts so as to attract coverage. Though the relationship is informal, it is based on basic mutual dependence. It's the most basic form of collaboration between the media and civil society, with parties prompting each other when the need arises.

## Civil society (technical and operational offices) ⟷ Media editors (decisions based on common responses to civil society media ecosystem constraints)

This is a higher-level collaboration and engagement between media and civil society editorial and programme leadership respectively. It's middle-level engagement and collaboration to respond to similar constraints within the parties' operating environments; for example, laws inimical to media freedom and freedom, and those narrowing civic space. Both parties face challenges related to what they would define as individual organisational success, and feel that building synergy would easily change their circumstances. The engagement here is based on mutual interest to respond to an unfriendly environment, as opposed to the larger public good of social and economic transformation. It is mechanical engagement, as opposed to organic collaboration based on philosophical and normative orientation.

## Civil society orientation, agenda and policies ⟷ Media actors orientation and agenda – beyond the normative

More effective and long-term collaboration is based on a common understanding of each other's aspirations and perspectives, beyond the technical and activity-based engagement. It goes beyond mutual dependence and mutual influence based on anecdotal, ping-pong support of each other to policy engagement at institutional level aimed at working together for larger goals and constructive delivery of the normative role of each party. The normative and philosophical role of media and civil society when engaging in matters of social justice, equity, politics, democracy and governance becomes a rallying point in the coalition. Coalitions at this point work when the parties effectively share a vision of these social and political issues, and agree on long-term intervention and strategy. Shared vision, common orientation and an aspiration to transform society build solidarity and better working relationships.

For a coalition to take place, whether formal or informal, it must address and make efficient each other's 'spirit' at activity level (mutual dependence), at technical and strategy level (mutual influence) and at policy level (mutual orientation), which speaks to the philosophical and empirical role of media and civil society in responding to challenges within the social economic environment in which they operate. Engagement that considers one level of interaction to the exclusion of the others will be unsuccessful, while its impact may be difficult to quantify.

From our observations in and the outcomes of this study, this model negates the ideology of self-assessment for journalists, where they view themselves as independent observers of all that happens in our societies, which cannot or can hardly be influenced. From our observation, the media was highly influenced by civil society, and like a pendulum, shifted from being an observer to an actor in issues of political reform. Civil society's self-acclaimed authority and understanding of human rights, justice and democracy, and its attempt to use the journalistic 'vibe' cannot itself exclude the role of the media in making its work effective. Thus this intereffication model provides a framework for establishing coalitions based on interdependence, and the need to meet the philosophical and normative roles of the two parties as agents of social change.

# APPENDICES

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## Interview Questions Guide

1. Background of the respondent, i.e. working in media/civil society
2. Are civil society/media collaboration and coalitions important?
3. What is your experience with civil society and media organisation in your country, particularly in the struggle for democracy? Give specific examples of such collaborations
4. Are you aware of any collaboration between the media and civil society in your country and in the ECOWAS region?
5. Are these coalitions part of the network within the region, Africa and other parts of the world?
6. 'Despite the many informal collaborations between the media and civil society, there has not been evidence of substantive and formal collaboration.' What is your view?
7. Is it possible to build successful media/civil society collaboration?
8. How has media and civil society worked together in your country? Has it been successful?
9. Specifically, what are the challenges of collaboration and networks (organisational, political, institutional/legal/policy challenges)?
10. What are the challenges of donor-driven civil society?
11. What would be your recommendations and strategies for building these coalitions?

# List of Interviewees

| | NAME | POSITION/ORGANISATION | COUNTRY |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20. | Aladje Tanzigora, | General Coordinator, Coalition of Children's Rights Organisations in Guinea-Bissau (CODEDIC-GB) | Guinea Bissau |
| 15. | Ali Idrissa | Coordinateur du Réseau d'Organisation de la Société civile Nigérienne | Niger |
| 21. | Alphonsus B. M. Gbanie | Executive Secretary, Human Rights Defenders Network – SL | Sierra Leone |
| 18. | Bonaventure N'Coué Mawuvi, | President of Togolese Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (CTDDH), President of Media Institute for Democracy and Human Rights | Togo |
| 24. | Catherine Anite | Freedom of Expression – HUB | Uganda |
| 7. | David Kode | Advocacy and Campaigns Lead, Civicus | South Africa |
| 22. | Delfin Mocache Massoko | Human Rights Defender/Journalist, Diario Rombe | Equatorial Guinea |
| 5. | Faisal Elbagir | Freelance Human Rights Defender | Sudan |
| 19. | Fifamin J. Miguèle HOUETO | Lawyer, Activist and Specialist in Human Rights (DDH), Human Rights Priority NGO | Benin |
| 17. | Florence Ouattara | Coordinatrice Nationale de la Coalition Burkinabè des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CBDDH) (National Coordinator of Burukinabe Coalition for Human Rights Defenders) | Burkina Faso |
| 4. | Henry Maina | Immediate former Executive Director, Article 19 | Kenya |
| 9. | Joseph Kabiru | Advocacy and Communications Officer, I4C-Africa Hub | Kenya |
| 12. | Madi Jobarte | Country Representative, Westminster Foundation | Gambia |
| 16. | Mamadou Wane, | Coordinator, Platfome pour la Promotion des Droits Humains – PPDH (Platform for Promotion of Human Rights) | Senegal |
| 25. | Sofie Gullberg | Fojo/CHARM | Sweden |
| 8. | Mesfin Negash | Programme Officer, Civil Rights Defenders | Sweden |
| 13. | Muhammed Bah | Vice President, Gambia Press Union | Gambia |
| 23. | Nsang Cristian Simi-Cruz | Human Rights Defender/Journalist | Equatorial Guinea |
| 2. | Oliver Kanene | National Facilitator, International Training Programme | Zambia |
| 1. | Prof. Franz Kruger | Wits University | South Africa |
| 10. | Sam Farai Monro | Creative Director, Magamba Network | Zimbabwe |
| 11. | Sohna Sallah | Vice President, Democratic Union of Gambian Activists | Gambia |
| 6. | Titus Gitonga | Programme Officer, Transparency International | Kenya |
| 3. | Wangethi Mwangi | Former Editor in Chief, *Daily Nation* | Kenya |
| 14. | Yusef Taylor | Editor/Journalist, Gainako | Gambia |