



# People-Powered Media Innovation in West Africa

Accelerating development & good governance in the new media landscape

REBOOT

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Accelerating development & good governance in the new media landscape

## **Authors & Researchers:**

Panthea Lee, Nonso Jideofor, Kate Reed Petty

## **Researchers:**

Adam Talsma, Akinloluwa Olaoluwa, Tahir Sherriff, Ken Henshaw, Lauren Gardner, Merlin Chatwin

## **Designers:**

Adam Parker, Emily Herrick

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# Executive Summary

As media ecosystems in West Africa are increasingly diversifying and opening up after decades of state control, innovative and independent journalism is advancing government transparency and accountability. New opportunities for funders are opening in tandem, with potential for both social and economic impact.

This report explores several of these opportunities, surfaced through in-depth research on Nigeria and Ghana. While both countries lead the region in terms of both economic and media development, they operate under many of the same dynamics and constraints that exist across West Africa, and show how other markets may evolve, politically and commercially.

Traditionally in West Africa, trust in the media is low. Citizens view most media as political instruments that are frequently biased and easily corruptible. Many media organizations, for their part, compromise editorial independence to survive, and resort to lowest-common-denominator content to drive traffic. This mistrust, however, has led to a wholehearted embrace of new and social media tools, where citizens can seek alternative views, contribute their perspectives, and redefine popular media narratives on platforms which are not beholden to elites.



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Citizen participation in the new media landscape has led to a dramatic reshaping of the dynamics between citizens, media, and government.

## Citizen voices on social media are reshaping media.

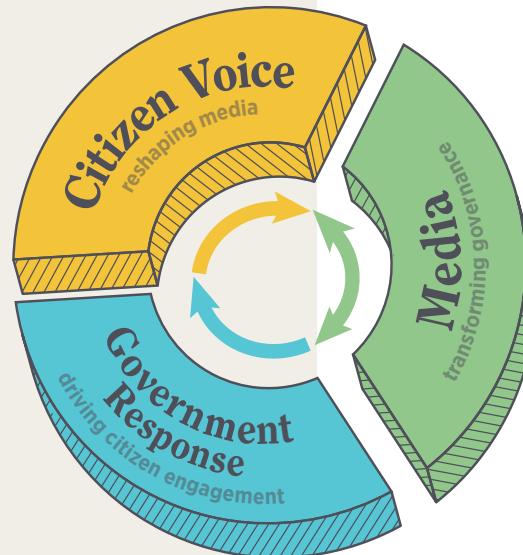
Media faces competitive pressure from social media to deliver critical examinations of official narratives. Citizen participation has upended traditional media models and inspired new ones.

## Media is influencing politics and government in unprecedented ways.

Citizens are beginning to reinvent the media landscape in their own image; this, in turn, puts pressure on governments to follow suit. Spurred by audience demand and contributions, media is increasingly uncovering corruption and holding leaders accountable to their promises.

## Government response (and media feedback) is driving more citizen engagement.

As government is held to account for breaches of public trust, citizens will continue to contribute to the media dialogue to the extent that they can see that they are helping move their democracies forward.



The historic 2015 Nigerian general election demonstrates this virtuous cycle. Citizens photographed polling results, compared them to the official government results, and discussed their analyses on social media. Their evidence spread across new and traditional media, giving their contributions audience and influence, which in turn incentivized more citizen participation.

Despite citizens' critical role in reshaping media and improving governance, surprisingly few organizations are thinking deeply or critically about how to leverage them for both social impact and financial sustainability. Beyond the low-hanging fruit of elections and major corruption scandals, citizen energy remains largely untapped.

Based on this analysis, funders should focus on two key opportunity areas:

**1 Activating audiences**

**2 Providing sustainable investment**

## OPPORTUNITY AREA 1: Activated audiences as the key leverage point

In the digital age, audience engagement is key to media's impact and survival. A media entity's impact on governance hinges on its ability to ignite public dialogue, incorporate and amplify citizen voices, and engage its audiences. Audience engagement is key to financial sustainability.

Funders can help media organizations engage audiences and motivate them to act in the public interest. Few people (citizens or public officials) leap straight from reading a news story to taking political action, but media can funnel audiences toward action, through increasing levels of engagement:



### 1. Acquisition

The crowded marketplace requires media to differentiate. To win audiences, media needs to resonate with citizens' unique identities and specific interests.

While new media outlets have mushroomed, few have a well-defined strategy, and fewer still have leveraged the power of niche. Instead, most attempt to imitate traditional mass media. These "do everything" organizations rise and fall quickly; yet in the process, they undermine quality journalism by plagiarizing content, distracting attention, and undermining audience trust in new media.

**Opportunity: Invest in foundational research to understand audiences and identify unmet needs.** By providing foundational market research, funders can help fledgling media entities develop empirically grounded business and editorial strategies.

### 2. Activation

Converting passive readers to active citizens is challenging. More politically opportunistic content (tied to unfulfilled promises) can motivate citizens and government to act in the public interest.

Recent successes of citizen and media efforts for governance change show how public energy and conversation can be further harnessed and directed. One key to success is pegging content development to political commitments. This makes coverage hard to ignore. Citizens will mobilize to demand what they have been promised and officials are eager to be seen as accountable to their own word.

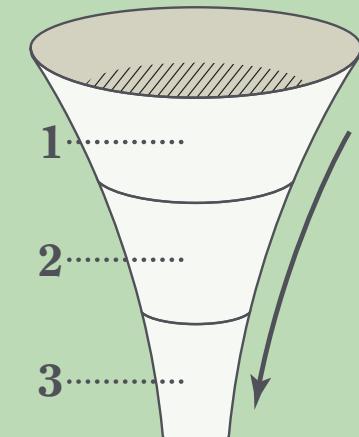
**Opportunity: Develop substantive content through specialized partnerships.** Recognizing media's resource constraints, collaborations with civil society can support more in-depth reporting and open paths to citizen and government action.

### 2. Activation

To deepen audience investment in a news platform or story, media must help audiences engage with (not just consume) content. Media needs to understand what makes audiences tick and why.

New organizations need deep and nuanced analyses on how audiences are responding to their work—what they cover, how they cover it, and how they distribute and promote content. Yet most media organizations use simplistic analytics and blunt engagement metrics. This leads many to optimize for clickability while undermining credibility.

**Opportunity: Improve the sophistication of audience engagement mechanisms and analysis to better tailor editorial strategies.** Funders should encourage media to find creative ways to engage audiences, and provide direct support in analyzing the nature of audience engagement, to target and refine editorial.



## OPPORTUNITY AREA 2: Sequenced, creative investments for sustainable media development

While funding models were beyond this study's scope, the research showed a clear need for new financial pathways. Independent finance is a prerequisite for independent editorial. Balancing commercial success with integrity of content remains an enormous challenge for both established organizations and start-ups. Success depends on rigorous business models based on diverse sources of income that can withstand not only market but also political pressures.

Funders can help create the space and motivation for more media innovation to thrive, and open long-term pathways to sustainability, at each of three investment levels:

### 1. Individual level: Incentivize quality journalism

As journalists face intense financial and career pressure to maintain the status quo, those working outside of media organizations are some of the most productive independent media voices, using social media to push out critical information directly to enthusiastic audiences. Individuals are not only a powerful source of innovation, they are also more shielded from the compromises that plague larger organizations.

**Opportunity: Invest in individuals.** Providing funding, journalism training, and business guidance to promising individuals who are driving civic movements through media can be a quick-win strategy for short-term impact.

### 2. Organizational level: Improving investment approaches

Funding for high-quality, in-depth reporting from donors is usually tied to specific sectors or issues. There is a greater need for core operating funds that enable media organizations to set their own agendas and editorial strategy. This allows media organizations to pursue the open exploration and self-directed experimentation that is so important to innovation.

**Opportunity: Tailor support to organizational needs and stage of growth.** Funders should design responsive funding mechanisms that meet media's unique needs (and provide greater agency) across different stages of the organizational lifecycle.

### 3. Field level: Innovate financing

Many media organizations wrestling with questions of editorial independence and operational sustainability are reaching the conclusion that it is impossible to maintain both. Philanthropic and private sector funders can offer hope through more flexible and innovative solutions than those typically provided by development donors that support media development.

**Opportunity: Provide innovative financing.** Funders should consider their unique value in a media landscape: how they can provide more creative financing, leverage their capital, or support media loan funds, which "incubate" media organizations through long-term, supportive relationships.

# Looking Forward

In the digital age, the most successful and impactful media entities will be not just delivery channels to the people, but platforms for the people. There are exciting opportunities for funders to support media organizations in making this shift, and to increase their agency and power by winning and engaging audiences.

Citizens have increased confidence that today's fourth estate is able to fulfill its watchdog function, and that it needs their help. In a challenging market, where political influence is rampant and finance is tight, this citizen energy is media's most valuable asset. It is also a renewable resource.

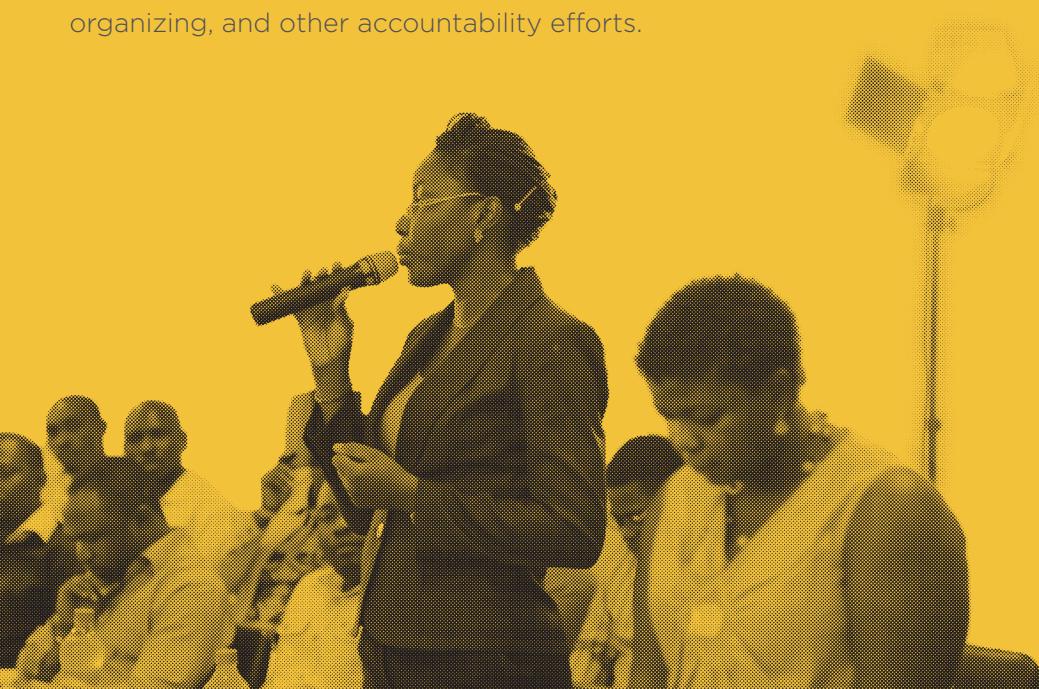
Now is the time for funders and media organizations to support this energy, and work alongside citizens toward a fairer, more accountable West Africa—and a playbook that can help others advance independent media and good governance around the world.

# 1

## Introduction

### Spotting new opportunities in the West African media landscape

Independent media plays a critical role in driving social progress. In West Africa, where media ecosystems are increasingly diversifying and opening up after decades of state control, innovative and independent journalism is advancing government transparency and accountability. In addition to directly holding powerful institutions accountable, media also amplifies the work of advocacy organizations, citizen movements, political organizing, and other accountability efforts.



Despite independent media's critical role in advancing global development, overall investment in media development is surprisingly small. Of the USD 110.3 billion spent on official development assistance in 2012, only 0.4 percent was targeted at supporting media. Private impact investors often overlook media, as its impact is diffuse and difficult to measure.

To help build a wider understanding and the further development of independent media in West Africa Reboot, supported by Omidyar Network, conducted research and analysis on independent media in the region, with a focus on Nigeria and Ghana, countries chosen for their vibrant media ecosystems. This draws on the work that Omidyar Network has undertaken in recent years, to support innovations to strengthen independent media around the world, including investments that improve the volume (e.g., Global Voices, Publica), quality (e.g., Africa Check, The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting), and sustainability (e.g., Media Development Investment Fund) of independent media.

Ethnographic and user-centered approaches guided four months of in-depth market analysis, which included primary research with citizens, journalists, media professionals, and government representatives, as well as a survey focusing on citizen and civil society perspectives. A team of nine researchers (including six Nigerian and Ghanaian nationals) surfaced factors that can help improve the quality and sustainability of regional independent media and increase civic participation and government accountability. (*Full details are in Annex A: Methodology.*)

This report contains the results of that research. Recognizing the breadth of available opportunities, Reboot and Omidyar Network decided to share a set of the findings and recommendations to help other investors, funders, and entrepreneurs when they are thinking about how to engage and create impact in this vibrant sector. We hope this report will inspire and inform strategies to support the development of fairer, freer media. As the majority of research on media in West Africa is academic in approach, we also hope this report will offer a complementary lens, through a deep, empirical understanding of the ways people experience and interact with media systems. Most importantly, we hope this report will help give media practitioners and citizens in Nigeria and Ghana a greater voice in the shape of related investments in the region.

1. Eduardo Gonzalez, C. and Shanthi K. 2015. Official Development Assistance for Media: Figures and Findings A Report by CIMA and the OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/publications/documentuploads/CIMA.pdf>

2. In "West Africa," we include the countries defined by the African Development Bank Group: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

# How to Read This Report

## KEY DEFINITIONS:

### Traditional, New, and Social Media

There are multiple and conflicting definitions for emerging digital media categories. To avoid confusion, this report will use three distinct terms: traditional media, new media, and social media. The opportunities detailed in this report are largely a result of intersections between traditional, new, and social media innovations and businesses.

#### Traditional media

Broadly, we use the term “traditional media” for any media platform that can operate without digital distribution, e.g., radio, television, and print newspapers.

**Example:** The Punch Newspaper, Channels TV, as well as the websites for both outlets

#### Social media

We use the term “social media” for any platform whose content is entirely populated by users (as opposed to paid staff); it is a tool used by both new media and traditional media.

**Example:** Twitter, Facebook

#### New media

We use the term “new media” for two broad categories:

Platforms founded entirely on digital distribution. These may include innovations that incorporate or boost citizen voices, or simply one-way digital broadcasts.

**Example:** Sahara Reporters, Premium Times

Platforms created under the aegis of traditional media, but that specifically use digital media to capture or amplify citizen voices.

**Example:** Mobile app of Channels TV (the iWitness function allows citizens to send in photos/videos/tips, which Channels uses daily to source stories for on-air coverage)

## Report Wayfinding

In addition to broad recommendations describing media trends surfaced through the research, specific opportunities that could be explored in the short or medium-term are highlighted (although all will require further investigation into feasibility and best approach).

### PROJECT IDEA

Ideas for initiatives to address current challenges in the media environment, which practitioners may wish to explore.

### CASE STUDY

Concrete examples highlighting the experiences of media actors, organizations, and initiatives in Nigeria and Ghana, offering nuance and real-world examples of the broader trends described.

### OPPORTUNITY

Specific opportunities for funders to explore. Each includes a few pieces of context:

#### BEST LED BY:

Media Development Funders, Impact Investors, or Development Funders

#### DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

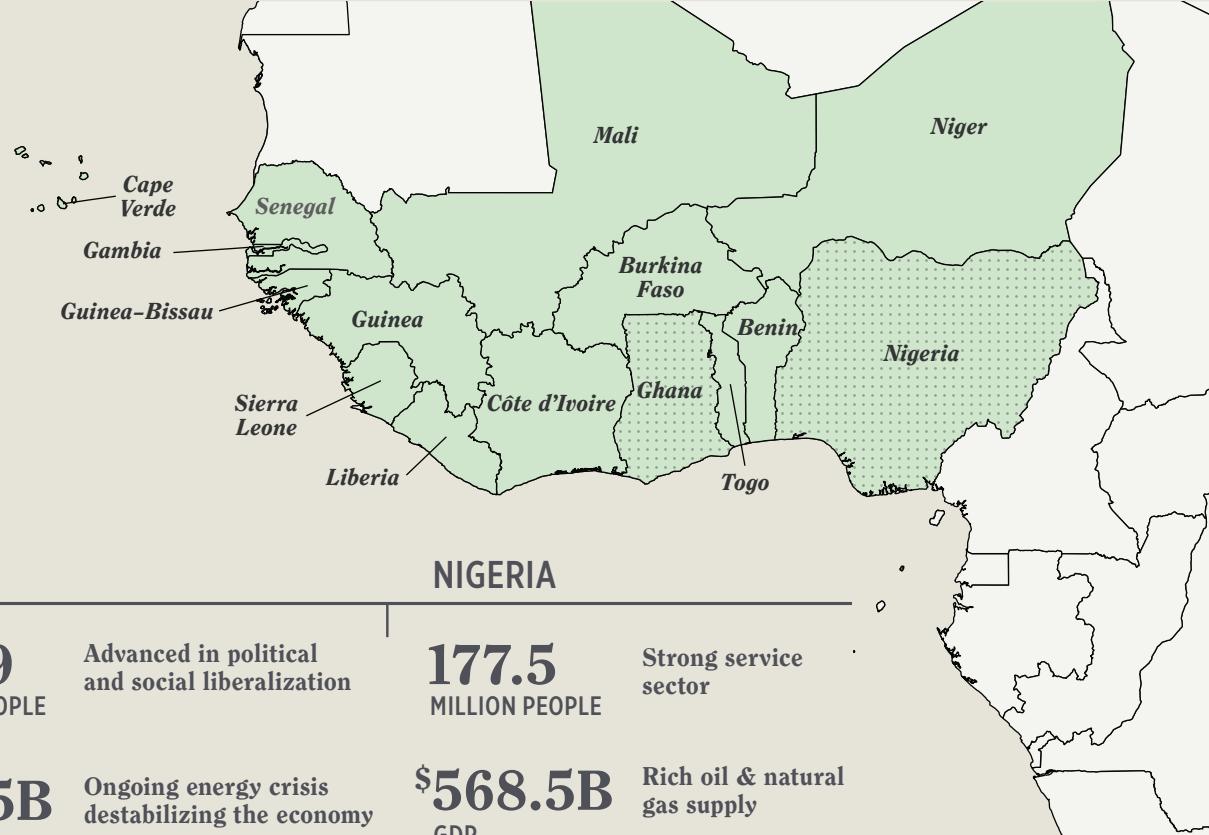
Individual journalists, independent media organizations, or the broader field

# Nigeria & Ghana in Context

In many ways, Nigeria and Ghana, the focus countries of this report, are outliers in West Africa: English-speaking, lower-middle-income countries with comparatively large media ecosystems. Both lead the region in terms of population, GDP, and common metrics of media development. And while government ownership of all media outlets is in the norm in the region, both countries have numerous privately owned enterprises.

## Illustrating Forward Potential

Despite these differences, the media in Nigeria and Ghana operate under many of the same dynamics and constraints that exist across West Africa, and show how other markets may evolve politically and commercially.



\* Source: The World Bank Group, 2014

<sup>+</sup> Source: Reporters Without Borders, 2015 World Press Freedom Index (of 180 countries)

# Media's Political Evolution

As former British colonies, both Nigeria and Ghana have longer media histories than their neighbors and may be helpful illustrations of how other national markets might develop.<sup>3</sup>

Media in West Africa has long been a struggle between platforms for citizen voices and instruments of power and control.<sup>4</sup> For over 200 years, media freedoms have waxed and waned. The current moment is part of this same tradition: digital media isn't a magic bullet, it's the latest battleground of the ongoing struggle.

## Media's Financial Opportunities

In Nigeria and Ghana, there is greater potential for independent media experiments to achieve a degree of financial sustainability. The proliferation of mobile phones is expected to drive consumer spending on media. In Africa as a whole, expenditure on media and entertainment is projected to grow at 5 percent annually; two of the four markets with the greatest growth are Nigeria and Ghana. In Nigeria, total media and entertainment expenditure is forecasted to exceed USD 9 billion in 2017; between 2013 and 2017, the forecasted compounded annual growth rate is 23.7 percent.<sup>5</sup>

For funders, the potential for stronger financial security for media organizations should strengthen the case for providing seed support to innovations in the region. After all, successful media development means financially sustainable media enterprises that can thrive without ongoing foreign assistance.

## A Brief History of Control of the Press

*Colonial governments imposed authoritarian definitions of the press, restricted indigenous media, and printed newspapers largely for educated expatriates. Missionaries printed some papers in local languages for African readers.*



Former slaves print the first known newspaper in Black Africa in Sierra Leone.

1801

19th  
CENTURY

The roots of journalism in the continent have been traced to West Africa; from the very beginning, citizens and political actors have competed to control the voice of the press.

1940-60

20th  
CENTURY

After a brief period of relative press freedom (resulting from the political revolutions in the region), the trend toward state control of media intensified through political turmoil.

1957  
1960



*The promise of vibrant, critical press was ruined through years of political turmoil. Many new governments assumed greater control over the media as a tool of political propaganda.<sup>6</sup>*

Ghanaian Independence  
5 coups occur between 1966 and 1981

Nigerian Independence  
6 coups occur between 1966 and 1993

1992

## Digital Age

The struggle for new media is reminiscent of past struggles over whose interests the press will serve. Between 1992 and 2015, 19 Nigerian journalists and one Ghanaian were killed, and many more threatened and harassed.<sup>6</sup>

2000s

*Today, social and new media are being heralded as unprecedented innovations, with potential to upend traditional power structures. But political actors are expert at monitoring and quickly adapting to mitigate challenges to their power. Digital media is being tamped down in some ways, and corralled for political purposes in others. More dramatically, funding and revenue challenges are undermining the fourth estate. The latest chapter in West Africa's media history is being written right now. The opportunity to help forge a strong, independent, and thriving critical press is urgent.*

3. French colonies developed the press some 70 years later than British ones. Some scholars have attributed the relative advancement of the press systems in Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana to this fact. Per Faringer, L. 1991. Press Freedom in Africa. New York: Praeger.

4. Faringer, L. 1991. Press Freedom in Africa. New York: Praeger.

5. Fiske de Gouveia, F. 2005. An African Al-Jazeera? Mass Media and the African Renaissance. <http://fpc.org.uk/fslblob/481.pdf>

6. Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/killed/africa/nigeria> and <https://cpj.org/killed/africa/ghana/>.

7. The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)

8. Eric Kacou, "Chapter 11: Entertainment and Media", Africans Investing in Africa, eds. McNamee, T., Wiebe Boer and Mark Pearson. 2015.

# 2

## A Brave New World for Citizen-Powered Change

Mistrust of old media drives new media reinvention and impact

Citizens are acutely aware that political actors have vast influence over the media in Nigeria and Ghana. They have long held little trust in traditional media—an attitude which has carried over to new media, and has been deepened by a firm skepticism of online information.



Social media presents citizens with a true alternative, a stream of content that isn't underwritten by the elite. Ordinary citizens are now creating and accessing new information sources through social media. They are now able to pick and choose where they get their news, based on trusted and even personally familiar sources. They are also able to participate in public debates online, and get immediate feedback (and thus validation) on their contributions.

As this section will show, this citizen participation has upended traditional media models and inspired new ones. Citizens are beginning to reinvent the media landscape in their own image. This, in turn, puts pressure on governments to follow suit. The potential for this energy to continue has profound implications for both media and governance.

## Fragile Trust in the New Media Landscape

In West Africa, trust in the media is complicated. Many view the media as frequently biased and easily corruptible. Survey results show that only 56 percent of respondents believe that the media can be a source of credible news. Television ranked most highly, with 83 percent believing that such content can be found on TV; 43 percent believe the same for online media.

In this environment, trust is tough to earn and easy to lose. There are three key factors that undermine citizen trust in media, presented from those that are hardest to easiest for organizations to control:

### 1. Citizens assume that most media are political instruments.

In general, citizens in West Africa are skeptical of their government. A 2006 global study found that only 34 percent of Nigerians trusted their government, and 75 percent believed that the government interferes too much in the media. No other country polled had a greater proportion of citizens who were as concerned with government involvement in the media.<sup>9</sup> Most mainstream media outlets are seen as tools of government or of the opposition—an assessment that is not groundless.

It is important to note that there are few fixed, distinct platforms or positions between the major political parties in both Nigeria and Ghana; each has only two

dominant parties. The practice of political defections is particularly popular in Nigeria. Factions and personal connections, based on regional, ethnic, economic, and other loyalties, drive many party allegiances. In this climate, audiences often perceive critical media coverage as bias. One popular radio journalist said that his political commentary frequently earns him the tag of “partisan,” although it swings from one side to the other, depending on which party’s policies or actions he is critiquing: “I have been called both a PDP and APC ally from both sides, so many times.” Because political parties are driven more by alliances than ideology, citizens assume the same of media. Coverage is typically viewed through partisan lenses.

### Changing Citizen Trust in Media

Interestingly, a shift in credibility between traditional and new media is underway.

In the last five years, new media has gained significant credibility, but that trust is precarious.

Survey results show that, since 2010, Nigerians’ belief in the credibility of online media has grown by nearly 15 percent. This, however, reflects all online media—that is, both traditional media that have come online (which tend to have higher trust ratings) as well as new media platforms (which are generally less trusted). Changes in credibility between 2010 and 2015 for different media types are as follows:

#### Changes in Credibility: 2010–2015



And when it comes to online media, citizens have a lower threshold for breaches of trust, real or perceived. Traditional media has a higher “trust retention” rate: 83 percent of survey respondents that trusted at least one TV station in 2010 continue to trust those same stations today. Online sources, however, only have 42 percent “trust retention,” meaning citizens are more likely to lose faith in an online source they may have previously trusted.

9. BBC, Reuters, GlobalScan Incorporated, Media Center, 2006. The Media Poll. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/02\\_05\\_06mediatrust.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/02_05_06mediatrust.pdf)

## 2. Media organizations compromise editorial independence to survive.

Media outlets struggling for revenue may have an especially difficult time winning and maintaining trust. While some media organizations are experimenting with revenue diversification to decrease advertiser influence in their editorial practices, certain attempts for greater independence may actually compromise their credibility. This is especially risky for smaller organizations who are striving for independence. The publisher of an influential digital news platform explained that while he enjoys a small amount of advertising revenue, he has to supplement it with work in public relations. The PR work, he said, supports his journalism habit; yet from time to time, the two overlap and he

publishes sponsored content from clients on the news site to remain afloat.

Many media outlets publish sponsored content; young organizations (which are disproportionately digital publishers) are particularly likely to do so. While such stories are usually identified, one blogger said that most audiences do not fully understand what “sponsored content” means. As new media organizations are striving to build trust with audiences who, by default, are skeptical of online-only sources, such compromises made for paying clients (whether branded or not) may endanger the already fragile audience trust.

### PROJECT IDEA

#### Reflective Journalism Platform

To encourage more media organizations to adhere to high standards of journalistic integrity, a new regional media platform might focus its reporting entirely on other media outlets, calling attention to and rewarding excellent examples, while criticizing those that publish paid content and connecting this poor coverage to impact on audience's lives. For Western media, Poynter.org is one such example of this, published by the US-based Poynter Institute for Media Studies. The site is dedicated to "teaching and inspiring journalists." It does so by "promoting excellence and integrity in the practice of craft and in the practical leadership of successful businesses."

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### **3. Organizations resort to lowest-common-denominator content to drive traffic.**

Gossip sells. It is inevitable that any media entity working to drive interest in politics will publish some sensational content about public figures; the way most advertisers and donors evaluate their success practically necessitates this. While these approaches may drive short-term readership, they undermine long-term credibility.

This is especially true for new media platforms, which are generally seen as having lower standards for verifying news. Trust in online news is weaker in rural areas—arguably as a function of access—but even in Accra and Lagos, where new media enjoys the most popularity, it does not take much for new media to be dismissed outright. As one research informant noted:

“I don’t trust online sources. I go there to see the good and bad. They use catchy headlines and when you read the body of that headline, you notice a lot of distortions that don’t make sense. I still go online because there is wide coverage, but I wait on other traditional sources to confirm the news.”

—Foundation Manager, 42,  
Port Harcourt

#### CASE STUDY

## Premium Times

Despite notable challenges to citizen trust in media, there are bright spots. Among online-only outlets, Premium Times is an outlier in perceived trustworthiness and may serve as a role model for other new media organizations.

Both citizens and media practitioners frequently cited Premium Times as a standard-bearer of trustworthy journalism. The online publication specializes in technically rigorous and detailed investigative reporting, and has covered high-profile investigations on public spending, extractives industries, and government corruption.

The outlet was started by veteran investigative journalists who had cut their teeth at NEXT newspaper, which was renowned in Nigeria for its fierce independence but was short-lived. NEXT’s editorial policies made quick enemies in both business and politics, who then throttled the outlet’s advertising revenue. When starting Premium Times, the founders wanted to continue their tradition of uncompromising journalistic independence, but knew this meant they couldn’t survive on traditional advertising. They started a nonprofit center for public interest investigative journalism to attract funding from international philanthropic and development donors.

Multiple philanthropic donors have helped Premium Times maintain its integrity. One journalist at the outlet called it a place where “people cannot be bribed,” and had turned down better-paying jobs elsewhere because he believes Premium Times is the “mark of integrity.”

## People-Powered Media Innovation

Mistrust of professional media has led West African citizens to embrace new and social media tools that allow them to seek alternative views, contribute their perspectives, and redefine popular media narratives. In doing so, citizens are participating in democracy in ways that were previously impossible. This has led to a dramatic reshaping of the national media landscapes which, in turn, has driven profound political shifts.

### Citizen voices on social media are reshaping media.

Citizen voices, as conveyed and aggregated through social media, are driving rapid change in regional media. This can be seen in:

**Events and issues covered:** Media organizations now mine social media for stories, increasing the potential for coverage of incidents surfaced by citizens and of content generated by citizens. In Ghana, a prominent television anchor estimated that just under half of current news stories break on social media. They often start as “rumors” that are then investigated by media organizations with sufficient resources to do so. Other practitioners in both Ghana and Nigeria confirmed that such practices were common, and that larger media houses have dedicated staff to monitor social media for breaking news.

**Coverage framing and development:** The proliferation of social media has made it harder for media organizations to serve only the interests of a few elite. Citizens now have access to breaking news from a dizzying array of sources. This has led to growing demand that their media organizations keep up not just in the speed of reporting but, more importantly, in their critical examination of official narratives.

**Mushrooming of new media entities:** Social media has contributed to the influx of new media properties. In Nigeria, the increasing demand for political commentary, breaking news, and citizen perspectives has inspired a wave of investment and experimentation. There are now more media organizations, and a wider spectrum of innovation among them.



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## Media is influencing politics and government in unprecedented ways.

In West Africa's new, citizen-powered media landscape, media is influencing politics and government in previously unprecedented ways. Prominent examples of media's influence on regional governance can be found in recent general elections.

Ghana's 2008 general election illustrated the media's critical role in increasing government transparency; this, in turn, significantly influenced electoral outcomes. When the vote ended in a tie and went to a runoff, many feared violence would break out. But the media played an important role in helping to broker peace, including through a heavy documentary presence at polling units. By the following election in 2012, when the losing New Patriotic Party contested the results in the Supreme Court, the defending National Democratic Congress party was able to have the case thrown out, using a strong repository of entirely media-based evidence. The case, while complicated, confirmed the growing value and power of media in the public eye. The next national election in 2016 will be a milestone in whether and how the Ghanaian media has maintained this momentum.

Nigeria's 2015 election offers a more recent example of emerging media trends in West Africa. It was also historic: The first time since the country's independence that citizens have ousted an incumbent president through the ballot box. Many observers credited the media for driving the election outcome. Indeed, the high degree of media scrutiny on the electoral process inspired voter confidence. In the research, 90 percent of survey respondents believed that high degrees of citizen attention on and participation in the election happened because the media provided a level of unprecedented transparency.

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## Government response (and media feedback) is driving more citizen engagement

The dynamics described in this chapter represent the beginning of a virtuous cycle: The changes in media and government responsiveness, driven by citizen engagement, are in turn driving more citizen engagement. It is human nature to spend energy only on activities that deliver a satisfactory return on one's investment. Citizens are continuing to contribute to and engage in media dialogue because they are seeing the impacts of their participation.

These impacts include immediate, and very personal, results, such as the thrill of seeing or hearing your story or your contributions broadcast (something call-in shows, popular in West Africa, have tapped into). In an age of fewer media gatekeepers and greater digital opportunity, citizens are seizing the increasing opportunities to spread their own messages. The Nigerian elections provided the best example of how this nascent virtuous cycle can lead to tangible change: Much of the content that led to the unprecedented transparency of the voting process was created by citizens. They took photos and videos of polling results, actively compared them to the official government results, and discussed their analyses on social media. Citizen-generated content then

spread across new and traditional media. All three forms of media gave these citizen contributions audience and influence, which in turn incentivized citizens to participate more.

**“The visibility that the media gave the populace on all the key issues around the election allowed people to feel that any attempt to rig the election or sabotage any particular process [would] be quickly exposed.”**

—Entrepreneur, 30, Lagos, Nigeria

Above and beyond the personal results, citizens are beginning to see the larger social impact of their collective contributions. As politicians are held to account for corruption, poor decisions, and other breaches of public trust, citizens will continue to participate to the extent that they can see that they are helping move their democracies forward.

## Audience engagement as the key leverage point

Despite citizens' critical role in reshaping media and improving governance, surprisingly few organizations in Nigeria and Ghana are thinking deeply or critically about how to leverage them for both social impact and financial sustainability. Beyond the low-hanging fruit of elections and major corruption scandals, citizen energy remains largely untapped. Elections especially make easy media stories: They are dramatic events, and most people know something about the process and significance of elections. This supports both narrative storytelling and popular organizing.

Media should consider the recent elections in Nigeria and Ghana "proofs-of-concept" for what can happen when the media taps into the energy of its audience. Now, it is time to carry these lessons forward and experiment with rallying audiences around harder-to-communicate issues in public policy, government spending, social services, and more. These experiments will not only be necessary for media to improve social outcomes, they are also critical for organizations to be financially viable. It is time for media to not only seek "clicks" and "pageviews" as indicators of success, but to focus on engaging audiences as the key leverage point to drive success.

Photo by U.S. Embassy Ghana, used with a  
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# 3

## The Key Leverage Point: Activated Audiences

Media success requires activating audiences and driving them to action

In the digital age, audience engagement is key to media's impact and survival. Research showed that a media entity's impact on governance hinges on its ability to ignite public dialogue, incorporate and amplify citizen voices, and engage its audiences.

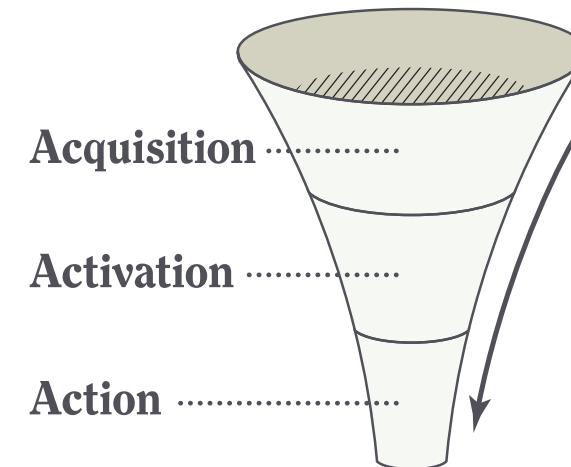


SECTION

3. The Key Leverage Point:  
Activated Audiences

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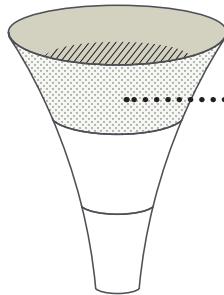
People-Powered Media  
Innovation in West Africa



Audience engagement also serves as a proxy indicator for organizational independence and innovation, two important considerations for many funders. In an increasingly competitive landscape, audiences will not invest in media that doesn't represent their interests (i.e., is not independent) or that doesn't evolve based on how they like to consume and engage with information (i.e., is not innovative).

Perhaps most importantly, audience engagement is key to financial sustainability. Audience attention is vital for every journalistic business model on the planet. By focusing on stories that appeal to audiences and drive conversation, outlets may build their audience base to the point of earning a more sustainable (and, over time, more independent) revenue stream.

Despite these realities, many media organizations struggle to engage audiences and motivate them to act in the public interest. While media practitioners spend much of their time producing content or trying to drive traffic, these activities on their own will not lead to social progress. Few people—whether citizens or public officials—leap straight from reading a news story to taking political action. Media organizations can, however, progressively funnel their audiences toward action, through increasing levels of engagement: acquisition, activation, and action. The following section describes how media organizations can drive their audiences to action and how funders can best support them.



## 1. Acquisition

**In a crowded marketplace, media needs to differentiate from the competition. To win audiences, media needs to resonate with citizens' unique identities and underserved interests. Media needs a niche.**

Media strategies for winning audiences are similar around the globe: Understand your audience, establish a beat or niche that appeals to them, and communicate in relatable terms. Successful examples of these approaches include:

- **ProPublica**, an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest
- **Malaysiakini**, a popular news website in Malaysia whose editorial policy promotes justice, human rights, democracy, freedom of speech, and good governance
- **News Deeply**, a new media startup which develops deep, single-subject information hubs

In Nigeria today, new media outlets have mushroomed. Some are motivated by the relative ease of starting a digital media outfit, others by the quest for quick profits. Few, however, have a well-defined strategy, and fewer still have leveraged the power of niche. Instead, most such outlets attempt to imitate traditional mass media. They do so by frantically reposting content from across the internet, usually across a large number of verticals. These “do everything” organizations rise and fall quickly; yet in the process, they undermine quality journalism by plagiarizing content, distracting attention, and undermining audience trust in new media.

An analysis of 30 media entities in Nigeria showed that those that succeeded both in being innovative and in maintaining editorial independence tended to have a unique mission, well-defined audience, and/or a niche angle. In short, they ignore the temptation to be everything to everybody and instead focus on narrowly targeted content. It's worth noting that these same outlets tended to be fairly young and with comparatively limited reach. With their success built on a narrow focus, key to their continued success will be balancing audience's appreciation of niche, with funder and advertisers' desire for scale.

**“Do everything” organizations rise and fall quickly; yet in the process, they undermine quality journalism by plagiarizing content, distracting attention, and undermining audience trust in new media.**

## The right niche positioning validates an individual's identity or underserved interests. Meeting these needs generates loyalty.

Interestingly, while several new media platforms analyzed had chosen a niche, none had chosen a local, regional, or language-based focus, even though these are common features of traditional media. This presents an opportunity. For many in West Africa, tribalism remains a strong force that influences their worldviews. People identify strongly with their place of family origin, and political divides exist along geographic lines. Nigerian newspapers, for example, have traditionally reflected regional allegiances. One newspaper editor noted: "All the papers have regional interests. If you read the Daily Trust understanding that you are read-

ing a northern newspaper, you can't go away misinformed or think they are biased. The Tribune is a southwest newspaper, The Guardian and This Day are south-south, and The Sun is eastern. As a Nigerian, if you want a particular perspective, you know where to go."

While new media entities need not emulate these same regional strategies, it is important to remember why they worked so well for so long: The right niche positioning validates an individual's identity or underserved interests. Meeting these needs generates loyalty.

### PROJECT IDEA

#### Innovate with paywall technology

Many new media entrepreneurs expressed frustration with rampant plagiarism. A technological solution might be made available that would help limit aggregator sites' ability to copy-and-paste, and could also test whether the Nigerian public (and perhaps the diaspora) would be willing to pay for content, and what kind (such as the work of a beloved columnist).

### CASE STUDY

#### Sabi News

Nigeria's Sabi News has realized the value of a niche orientation in a crowded news landscape. Its approach to market positioning may provide lessons for other young media organizations.

Sabi News is a digital news and opinions platform known for its popular columnists. They feature a roster of social and political commentators whose analysis of current events run from bitingly critical to refreshingly entertaining.

Prior to Sabi's launch in 2014, its founders conducted an audience survey asking Nigerians to name five journalists. Over 80 percent of respondents couldn't name more than one, but most could name at least five columnists with ease. This insight drove the site's editorial strategy and positioning. Sabi now publishes two new columns a day, which drive the majority of its traffic. (As an experiment, the site ran only news stories and no columns for one week, and found that most of its traffic continued to come from archived columns.) Its columnists have become minor media personalities, and many have dedicated readers.

While Sabi is still young, this strategy has proved promising. Today, Sabi's audience engagement metrics—daily pageviews per visitor, daily time on site—are comparable with more established and better resourced outlets.<sup>10</sup>

## LOCAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING: Untapped Opportunities to Engage Audiences

There are an estimated 500 spoken languages in Nigeria and 250 in Ghana. While English is an official language in both countries, it is only spoken fluently by an estimated 10 to 30 percent of Nigerians<sup>11</sup> and by 67 percent of Ghanaians (as of 2010).<sup>12</sup>

Despite this, there is woefully little media in local languages. (Many local languages are only spoken, thus limiting their potential in online or print platforms.) The exception is radio, which has long catered to local languages and issues, and is an interesting bridge between new and traditional media: while an established medium, it is the only one founded on citizen voice and dialogue. Indeed, the ability to hear peer opinions through call-in shows seems to drive trust in radio. In Ghana, for example, radio stations—most of whom are small, community radio stations—have the largest reach of any media.

The potential for expanded local language radio is strong. And the time is ripe, as new space for broadcasting is opening. In early 2015, Nigeria approved 12 new licenses for community radio, bringing the total number of licensed stations to 17. This is significant, as licenses must undergo presidential review. In Ghana, the Ministry of Local Government is considering private-public partnerships to support community radio.

### OPPORTUNITY

#### Invest in foundational research to understand audiences and identify unmet needs.

Providing foundational market research can help fledgling media entities develop empirically-grounded business and editorial strategies.

##### BEST LED BY:

Media Development Funders,  
Impact Investors

##### DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

Broad field of independent  
media startups

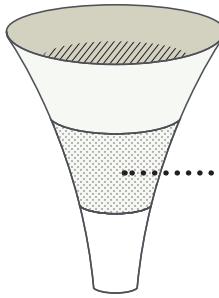
To develop successful business and editorial strategies, media outlets need robust intelligence on the markets in which they operate and the audiences they seek to serve. They need to segment potential audiences, understand unmet or underserved information needs for each, and determine which segments/needs they are uniquely positioned to serve.

To do this, media organizations need information on audience demographics, psychographics, news-seeking behaviors, technology usage, and other topics. However, even the most basic data, such as population numbers and distribution, is often inconsistent, dated, or simply unavailable. While larger media houses commission market research, this is out-of-reach for most small organizations. The lack of data pushes media entrepreneurs to develop strategies based on intuition and untested assumptions.

By supporting foundational audience research, funders can produce a public good that would empower a new cohort of savvier media organizations. To encourage more public interest journalism, this research should also seek to surface specific topics or editorial lenses that are priorities for different audiences. Addressing this need is a tall order: On top of gathering the data, maintaining it will require additional and ongoing effort. However, the potential for elevating multiple small organizations is significant.

11. Baker, Colin, and Sylvia Prys Jones. 1998. Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education. 365.

12. Ghana Statistical Service. May, 2012. 2010 Population & Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results. Accra: Sacoa Press Ltd.  
[www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Census2010\\_Summary\\_report\\_of\\_final\\_results.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Census2010_Summary_report_of_final_results.pdf)



## 2. Activation

**To deepen their investment in a news platform or story, media should help audiences engage with (not just consume) content. Media needs to understand what makes audiences tick and why—and meet them where they are.**

Many media outlets in Nigeria and Ghana struggle to track and understand the success of their content, both in terms of reach and engagement; this gap prevents them from successfully evolving their editorial strategies. To activate audiences, media needs deep and nuanced analyses on how audiences are responding to their work—what they cover, how they cover it, and how they distribute and promote content.

Yet, for the most part, the use of analytics on these topics remains elementary. Most online media outlets rely on simplistic metrics (e.g. page views) or on tools provided by the third-party platforms they use to disseminate content, such as Twitter and Facebook. Beyond the number of “likes” or anecdotal evidence, there is little analysis of the deeper impact of stories. Reliance on such blunt engagement metrics pushes many organizations to more sensational content (“clickbait”) that drives up these counts, which can then be used to attract advertisers. While the business pressures are understandable, optimizing for clickability often undermines credibility.

Globally, different organizations are experimenting with how to deepen audience engagement. Filipino

news site Rappler is among the more innovative. Alongside each story is a question: “How does this story make you feel?” Readers can choose from eight emotions, selected with help from psychologists: happy, sad, angry, afraid, annoyed, inspired, amused, and don’t care. The question, while deceptively simple, has proved highly successful. Readers are enthusiastic in sharing their feelings about stories and Rappler believes this may be a “gateway” to further engagement on the substance of news stories and debates. The data on reader reactions has also informed its editorial and distribution strategies. In the newsroom, journalists are learning how to tell stories that resonate. On the site, stories that inspire the most emotion are featured, and readers also have the option of navigating top stories based on their mood preferences.

Some of the most successful new media platforms are both appealing to human emotion and meeting audiences where they naturally express, discuss, and experience emotion—increasingly, this means social media. Today, Facebook drives one-quarter of all web traffic. For media organizations, the percentage of Facebook-referred traffic is in the same range.<sup>13</sup> (By comparison, Twitter drives about 1.5 percent of traffic for typical news organizations.)<sup>14</sup> Enterprising outlets such as Vox.com have built their growth strategies around today’s hyper-social-networkers. The news site believes that content doesn’t have to be frivolous to go viral—it has trained every journalist to apply “social packaging” to substantive content, and to craft stories for shareability. It’s worked: in its first year, Vox.com saw 23 million unique visitors a month, up to 40 percent of which came from Facebook referrals.<sup>15</sup>

SECTION

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TITLE

People-Powered Media  
Innovation in West Africa

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13. Adrienne, LaFrance. “Facebook is Eating the Internet.” *The Atlantic*, April 29, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/04/facebook-is-eating-the-internet/391766/> Accessed, May 9, 2016

14. Twitter has outsized influence, but it doesn’t drive much traffic for most news orgs, a new report says.” NiemanLab, April 13, 2016. <http://www.niemanlab.org/2016/04/twitter-has-outsized-influence-but-it-doesnt-drive-much-traffic-for-most-news-orgs-a-new-report-says/> Accessed, May 9, 2016

15. Liz, Heron. “In First Year, Vox.com’s Audience Soars on Facebook.” Facebook Media, Mar 23, 2015. <https://media.fb.com/2015/03/23/how-vox-uses-facebook-to-grow-its-audience/> Accessed, May 9, 2016

## OPPORTUNITY

## Improve the sophistication of audience engagement mechanisms and analysis to better tailor editorial strategies.

Encourage media to find creative ways to engage audiences, analyze the nature and depth of their engagement, and refine accordingly.

## BEST LED BY:

Media Development Funders,  
Impact Investors

## DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

Independent media organizations

Upworthy, a website for viral content recently celebrated as the fastest growing media site in history, illustrates why the mix of emotional appeal and social packaging is so powerful. Its leadership believes that “for democracy to work, the world needs more empathy.” As a result, Upworthy seeks to present social issues through a human, emotionally resonant narrative. In terms of distribution, it also optimizes for Facebook, sometimes at the expense of its own website. Volume of Facebook shares is an important indicator of success—its founder believes that if a reader cares about a story enough to associate their identify with it, that’s a sign of empathy and therefore of impact—but not the only one. Its key metric is “attention minutes,” or how much time people spend on Upworthy content and per piece, calculated using sophisticated data analytics. It then uses this information to promote topics and pieces that rate higher on “total attention” captured.

In West Africa, sites such as Zikoko—which bills itself as “the best place for shareable content from Africa”—are attempting to emulate the strategy. The site publishes entertaining short articles, listicles, and quizzes. Although only a year old, its content is spreading steadily across social media on the continent and with the diaspora, earning it the moniker of an Afrocentric Buzzfeed.

News organizations have much to learn from these digitally savvy organizations. Especially for public interest journalism, which can be technically dense or have complex narrative arcs, organizations need to understand what audiences respond to and what falls flat. This will help organizations tailor future reporting and, over time, generate citizen interest in not just spectacle, but substance.

To both build public appetite for, and media capacity to deliver, goal-driven public interest journalism, media organizations need better ways to analyze audience response to their work.

But first, funders and media organizations must establish a shared definition of success in terms of “audience response”—that is, what audience reactions or actions do they hope will ultimately result from their reporting? Funders should also assess whether the metrics they are using to evaluate media success (such as blunt pageviews) might be inadvertently encouraging poor editorial practices. Funders should be impact-focused, not traffic-focused. They should be encouraging organizations to examine the nature and depth (not just the volume) of audience engagement.

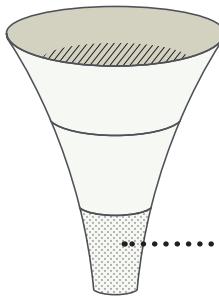
With agreement on targets, media should search for ways to help audiences engage more deeply with their content. On-site approaches could include well-designed polls, well-moderated comment sections, or annotation functionality. Off-site, organizations should spark dialogue on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, where their audiences are already gathering and chatting; however, simple “share” or “like” buttons are insufficient. Media should pose questions, run contests, or otherwise inspire and stoke informed conversation.

Across the board, these strategies should be informed by foundational audience research.

With support from funders, strategies can then be iterated, based on detailed analyses of how audiences are actually responding. Funders can further encourage and support relevant data collection and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative work may include more sophisticated use of data analytics, whether through specialized platforms that analyze visitor behavior or through improved internal data management. For the latter, organizations could tag all their content with standardized, granular metadata. They can then run custom analyses to better understand what specifically resonates with audiences and to identify trends. Qualitative work may include design research with various audiences (e.g., citizens, government, other media actors). User observation work can help identify ways to improve audience interactions with existing platforms; in-depth interviews can surface how to tailor editorial choices to their interests.

Post-mortems on highly successful content that blend quantitative and qualitative analysis could also be valuable. They can help organizations understand what worked and why, and better develop more content that captivates audiences.



### 3. Action

**Converting passive readers to active citizens is challenging. To motivate citizens and government to act in the public interest, content should be politically opportunistic and tied to unfulfilled promises.**

The recent, major successes of citizen and media efforts for governance change show how public energy and conversation can be further harnessed and directed. To do so, media needs to export new strategies to other important (but less visible) issues, seizing on political opportunities for accountability, and eliciting enough government response to continue the virtuous cycle of engagement.

As previously noted, a powerful example of citizens taking action in concert with media was during the 2015 Nigerian general election. The outpouring of civic action was driven by the clarity of need and the potential for payoff: during a specific window of political opportunity, citizens could hold the government accountable to its own promises.

Some media outlets have been able to generate this kind of citizen action, even without the dramatic narrative of an election to capture audience attention.

One key to success is pegging content development to political promises, as shown by the success of radio station Nigeria Info and budget advocacy group Niger Delta Citizens and Budget Platform in Rivers State. Frustrated by the state governor's signature education initiative, which was woefully underperforming, the partners developed a radio program dedicated to education issues. It quickly gained popularity, and a highly engaged listenership put pressure on the state to deliver on its commitments. Within a year of launching the program, the government had implemented several overdue policy reforms and initiated promising new educational programs. The radio station has since applied this strategy to other negligent government bodies, including the National Emergency Management Agency and the state power company.<sup>16</sup>

With the spectre of potential citizen mobilization looming in politicians' minds, media outlets also have the potential to elicit government response directly. In some cases examined through the research, government was motivated to act in order to prevent citizen action, instead of in response to it.

#### PROJECT IDEA

##### Armies of Fact-Checkers

There are too many media startups struggling to produce high-quality content, and too many students with few opportunities to gain practical journalism training. One is short on human talent, the other has a steady supply. Partnerships between media organizations and academic bodies may provide a rich opportunity to create internships or research projects where students can support in-depth and/or ongoing news stories. Under the guidance of professors (perhaps as part of relevant courses), students can monitor certain beats, surface newsworthy stories, and support research and fact-checking. This would simultaneously help train a new generation of investigative journalists, and provide much needed resources to identify and produce high-quality, politically opportunistic news stories.

16. Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and Department for International Development (DFID), 7 Months After: Delivering on Campaign Promises, The Buharimeter Report (4), December 2015. [http://www.buharimeter.ng/assets/uploads/docs/file\\_mKkr8ynEBI.pdf](http://www.buharimeter.ng/assets/uploads/docs/file_mKkr8ynEBI.pdf)

Successful coverage in this model tends to be grounded in specific government initiatives, especially those that are higher-profile. Substantive, technically strong critiques of politicians' own promises and actions makes the coverage hard to ignore; officials are eager to be seen being accountable to their own word.

For example, a Premium Times series on President Buhari's first 100 days in office examined how the newly elected president had fared on his "My Covenant with Nigeria" campaign promises. Its effectiveness was due to the specificity of its analysis, and its persistence on this theme. This angle was picked up by other media sources, putting more pressure on the President to deliver on his commitments: These included the "Buharimeter," a project of the Centre for Democracy and Development, which based its analysis on daily monitoring of citizen's views and media coverage, and which recruited relevant government officials to join in holding Buhari accountable to his promises.

In cases when politicians have not made explicit pledges, media organizations are creating opportunities to secure new promises that can be monitored. Ghana's Citi FM and Penplusbytes, a civic technology non-profit, teamed up to interview government officials on air about campaign promises and public spending commitments. Penplusbytes then uses the transcript to follow-up on delivery of commitments made. This is a smart strategy and merits wider consideration.

## OPPORTUNITY

### Develop substantive content through specialized partnerships.

Collaborations with specialized partners, as well as encouraging civil society-driven journalism initiatives, can open paths to citizen and government action.

#### BEST LED BY:

Development Funders

#### DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

Broader field

Recognizing the resource constraints faced by media organizations, collaborations with civil society can help them do the technically sound, in-depth reporting needed to force government action. CSOs have the substantive content that media needs, and media has the skill in framing and packaging content to elicit the responses both partners desire.

CSOs can help platforms identify a specific focus area or goal, as well as offer guidance on narrowing conversations—as noted throughout this section, specialization and specificity are critical to media's ability to generate interest and achieve impact. And, as media organizations are on tight budgets, CSOs can provide research skills or supply evidence, allowing them to better pursue long-term stories.

However, to work effectively with media, many CSOs need additional training. One CSO leader said that it was hard to sustain a news organization's interest because they are always "after the next story." In supporting CSOs and journalists to work together, it may be beneficial to build the capacity of CSOs on key communications skills, such as capturing the news cycle by tying a story to a larger issue, or in ways to sustain a story beyond a single exposé.

## CASE STUDIES

# Media-Savvy Civil Society

As this section illustrated, working with civil society can help media produce the type of technically specific and substantive reporting that motivates government action. In Nigeria and Ghana, there are many communications-savvy CSOs that have a lot to offer and that have been proactive in seeking media partners.

## **Penplusbytes:** Prioritizing Media as a Strategic Tool

Ghana's Penplusbytes works to "enhance governance by deepening citizen's participation through ICT." It recognizes, however, that going direct to citizens is not always efficient or effective. The organization frequently works through media infomediaries to reach citizens and generate broad interest. A key element of its strategy is teaching journalists how to better leverage digital technology to improve their reporting. Penplusbytes provides courses on digital journalism and social media, and on reporting in specialist technical areas—it has trained some 50 journalists to date on how to report on the oil and gas sector.

Citizen mobilization is core to its work, and Penplusbytes sees the media as critical allies in doing so. As such, media outreach and partnership is integrated across its programs. A recent initiative exploring the development potential of drone technology included specific journalist-tailored use cases—e.g. for monitoring concession sites of extractives companies they are reporting on—to spark interest among media practitioners. Penplusbytes' media-savvy approach provides lessons for other CSOs.

## **BudgIT:** Selling its Unique Value

BudgIT, a ON grantee, helps Nigerian citizens understand government budgets: where they come from, how they are spent, and what they achieve. The CSO does so through several of its own initiatives and channels—its Twitter account, for example, has broken stories of corruption to the public—but it also recognizes the importance of media partnerships to fulfilling its mission. It recently partnered with Premium Times on a story exposing N170 million (USD 850,000) allocated to power generators in missions in developed countries that didn't need them, insinuating corruption. The data-driven story led to responses from senior government officials and won a 2015 African Fact-Checking Award.

BudgIT is keen to collaborate more with media organizations, but the interest isn't always mutual. "It's hard to keep [a news editor's] attention," said one staff member. "They want stories that break fast." Despite this, BudgIT remains motivated to get more budget data into the media. It recently launched Fitila.ng, a site that produces data-driven news stories. The site aims to publish one substantive story each month—the last was on job creation in Nigeria, in August 2015—but is seeking funding to ramp up its editorial capacity. BudgIT hopes it can eventually offer fellowships to reporters to help them develop data journalism skills.

## **WANGONeT x NigeriaElections.org:** Making Data Accessible & Usable

Femi Aderibigbe was a frustrated program officer at WANGONeT, the West African NGO Network. He was upset by civil society's inability to build citizen interest in governance issues and by politicians' influence over media. And so, for Nigeria's 2011 election, he helped start NigeriaElections.org to put data into the hands of those that know how to promote it (journalists). Femi's key insight was that while elections data are widely available through the electoral commission website, their presentation was tough for journalists to engage with. NigeriaElections.org provides easy-to-use tools for viewing and analyzing data.

Today, it has 24 media and 49 CSO partners that contribute data. In terms of holding the powerful to account, the site has been successful. In the 2015 election, its polling booth finder feature revealed cases of political manipulation of station locations and ghost stations. This fueled a national conversation that led to several political victories, including the reallocation of polling stations. Its larger win, however, may be the increased trust it built in the electoral process. The extensive monitoring of the 2015 election, much of it by new media platforms, reassured citizens that their votes would matter. This, in turn, led them to vote.

# A Note on Legislative Press Protections

Policy reform is inching along, sometimes through unexpected channels

Engaging citizens to advance good governance presents exciting opportunities—not a magic bullet. The strength of the fourth estate is threatened not only by the audience and revenue factors that are the focus of this report, but also by the regulatory environment. Among the tools political actors have to quell the press, legislative maneuvers are particularly insidious.

On this topic, development funders invested in other advocacy efforts (but not media development) have much to bring to the table, to share with media development colleagues, and to potentially find synergistic partnerships. Investors in media, similarly, should consider the public policy work of their colleagues when thinking about how to create external support for their investments.



## Reform is happening in theory, but not in practice

Efforts to pass legislation protecting public access to government data have made moderate progress in West Africa. Yet implementation and compliance remain a challenge. Hurdles to effective implementation include lack of staff or technical capacity, manual government record-keeping practices, and limited judicial expertise in both applying laws and resolving disputes on disclosure.

The struggle to pass freedom of information laws, which empower journalists and citizens to access certain government records, demonstrates the challenges of a regulatory environment where policymakers are actively antagonistic to journalists.

Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act passed in 2011, nearly 12 years after it was presented to the legisla-

ture.<sup>17</sup> Yet it has struggled in implementation. In 2014, the Federal High Court ruled that states were not subject to the national FOI Act.<sup>18</sup> As of late 2014, only three states have adopted or are in the process of adopting it. Other states are reviewing measures to "domesticate" the law; in many cases this maneuver has stalled implementation, potentially indefinitely.

Similarly, Ghana's Right to Information Act has been in the drafting stage for 14 years.<sup>19</sup> When joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, Ghana committed to passing it by the end of 2013.<sup>20</sup> The Act has still not passed. Analysts have criticized the proposed bill on various issues: it exempts 13 broad classes of data, has little provision for record-keeping, and includes problematic access and enforcement mechanisms.

## Reformers are creating new opportunities

Yet while these national battles are protracted, there may be less obvious opportunities in working on reform at the subnational level. There is a nascent but growing trend toward "open government" politicians, who are staking their careers on greater transparency and accountability. As the political systems are increasingly opening and former opposition leaders are winning power, their appointments are beginning to expand to tap experts in social media and citizen engagement.

In Nigeria, many of the newly elected officials from the APC, the incumbent party, are demonstrating various degrees of commitment to transparency and reform. The new APC governor of Kaduna State, in Northwest Nigeria, is one leading example.

Nasir El-Rufai is a progressive leader that sees media as a tool to be leveraged, rather than a burden to be managed. Among Nigerian politicians, he was an early champion of using social media to communicate with the public. According to an aide, the governor felt

**"There is a nascent but growing trend toward 'open government' politicians, who are staking their careers on greater transparency and accountability."**

17. Open Society Justice Initiative. "Freedom of Information Act Signals Consolidation of Nigeria's Democracy." Open Society Foundations, May 31, 2011. [www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/freedom-information-act-signals-consolidation-nigeria-s-democracy](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/freedom-information-act-signals-consolidation-nigeria-s-democracy)

18. "Nigerian Judge Says FOI Law Not Applicable to States" FreedomInfo.org, November 12, 2014. [www.freedominfo.org/2014/11/nigerian-judge-says-foi-law-applicable-states](http://www.freedominfo.org/2014/11/nigerian-judge-says-foi-law-applicable-states)

19. Baiden Bernice. "Critique of the Ghana Draft Right to Information Bill." Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. [www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/international\\_laws\\_papers/ghana/CHRI%20critique%20of%20draft%20RTI%20bill.pdf](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/international_laws_papers/ghana/CHRI%20critique%20of%20draft%20RTI%20bill.pdf)

20. Open Government Partnership. "Ghana: Overview." [www.opengovpartnership.org/country/ghana](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/country/ghana)

21. Shiklamm, John. "Kaduna to Domesticate FOI Act." This Day Live, September 7, 2015. [www.thisdaylive.com/articles/kaduna-to-domesticate-foi-act/219535/](http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/kaduna-to-domesticate-foi-act/219535/)

liberated and empowered by social media. It provided him a way to directly engage citizens in real-time, without being limited by or beholden to the media. He saw social media as a way to challenge the power and political interests of traditional media organizations. Citizen engagement through social media was a big part of El-Rufai's election campaign and, now that he is in office, continues to be a focus for his administration.

El-Rufai has demonstrated his commitment to transparency, participation, and accountability. He is planning to pass the FOI Act in his state.<sup>21</sup> Since his election, he has started a citizen service hotline, and begun upgrading the state's website to allow citizens to report issues in their communities that require government attention. The governor is a supporter of civic technology: his administration is partnering with BudgIT to make the state budget publicly available.

And citizens are responding. As of April 2016, El-Rufai had 812,000 followers on Twitter, compared with President Buhari's 528,000 followers (even though El-Rufai's Kaduna State has just 4 percent of Nigeria's population).

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Overall, legislative change in government policy and process will be incremental and long-term, and beyond the scope and focus of this research. This short commentary, based on the perspectives of research informants on the current opportunities and challenges in Nigeria and Ghana, is a mere reminder for funders to keep the entire ecosystem in mind with resource allocation decisions.

## OPPORTUNITY

### Partner with Subnational Reformers

To achieve shorter-term victories in press freedom reform, target and collaborate with self-identified "reformers" who have committed to transparency.

#### BEST LED BY:

Media Development Funders,  
Development Funders

#### DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

Broader field

Funders interested in improving the environment for independent media through advocacy should look first to elected leaders at the state level. Self-styled reformers, having staked their positions on accountability, certainly have incentives to respond to citizen voices and targeted advocacy campaigns. Even where leaders are not explicit reformers, subnational governments are generally more responsive to citizens, with shorter feedback loops and more direct points of contact with their constituents. Strategic leverage of subnational advocacy can lead to direct wins for citizen and press rights in the immediate term, and may also put pressure on other state and national governments. Opportunities include advancing legislative protections of press freedoms, and open government efforts that can provide journalists with greater access to and insight on government processes.

In Nigeria, focusing on state-level implementation of the FOI Act, for example, may set new precedents. Ensuring that leaders (like El-Rufai) follow through on their commitments to the FOI Act, and encouraging other reformers to implement the Act as an important step toward their commitment to transparency, can build momentum for full national adoption. A few successful campaigns can set examples for groups in other states; once there is a critical mass of states reached, it will make it more difficult to block passage. In Ghana, the general election in 2016 may represent an opportunity to secure a commitment on the Right to Information Act from one or both of the dominant political parties.

Beyond legislative reform, there are other opportunities to advance public interest journalism through progressive subnational leaders. Funders may consider, for example, encouraging and supporting efforts around open data. Increasing the supply of government data is critical for data journalism initiatives which are starting to gain traction, and for broader investigative journalism efforts.

21. Shikloman, John. "Kaduna to Domesticate FOI Act." This Day Live, September 7, 2015. [www.thisdaylive.com/articles/kaduna-to-domesticate-foi-act/219535/](http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/kaduna-to-domesticate-foi-act/219535/)

# 4

## Investing for Financial Sustainability

Sustainable media development requires a holistic approach and sequenced, creative investments

The dream of a vibrant, independent fourth estate in West Africa is ambitious and long-term. Change will be incremental, and will depend on media's ability to secure the space to build and experiment in an incredibly challenging business environment.

While funding models were not within the scope of this study, the research showed a clear need for new and creative financial pathways for independent media. This section describes challenges faced by media organizations in Nigeria and Ghana, as observed through field research, and highlights opportunities to address them, based on both primary and secondary research. These few possibilities should inspire other funders to share their expertise and generate new ideas.

It is worth noting that some of the best public interest journalism may never be able to support itself without donor funding. High-quality, independent, and investigative journalism seeks to optimize for social, not economic, returns. Too strong an emphasis on its financial potential misses the point—and can undermine an organization's social impact as it chases the chimera of commercial sustainability. Media organizations and funders must be realistic.

This section highlights opportunities where funders can help improve the viability, effectiveness, and sustainability of independent media in West Africa. They can do so by incentivizing journalism at the individual level; improving investment approaches at the organizational level, and innovating financing at the philanthropic field level. These opportunities can help ground conversations between funders and media organizations, and serve as a jumping off point for other ideas.

## “The Capitalization Gap” and the role of investors and funders

Independent finance is a prerequisite for independent editorial. Balancing commercial success with integrity of content remains an enormous challenge for both established organizations and start-ups in West Africa. Success depends on rigorous business models based on diverse sources of income that can withstand not only market but also political pressures.

Globally, most successful media organizations have established business models based on a mix of differentiated product, high-quality content, highly viral content, cost-efficient distribution, and steady revenue from advertising or other business lines. Young organizations need capital and time to develop a robust, sustainable business model. Yet there is a broad lack of capital available for independent media ventures.<sup>22</sup> This “capitalization gap” presents an existential challenge.<sup>23</sup>

This is certainly true in West Africa, where early-stage outlets must choose between delivering on their missions with sparse resources (personal, friends and family, or grant funding) or compromising their edito-

rial independence to secure funding from the powerful interests they should be covering. Few are able to strike a successful balance.

Given this tight financial atmosphere, in the short-term, international funders can play a valuable role in creating the space and motivation for more media innovation to thrive. In the medium- and long-term, new approaches to funding will encourage more strategic experimentation, and open pathways to sustainability.

There are multiple levels of opportunity for intervention; in this final section, we offer recommendations for investments at each of three levels:

### Incentivizing journalism at the **individual level**

### Improving investment approaches at the **organizational level**

### Innovating financing at the **philanthropic field level**

22. Global Forum for Media Development. <http://gfmd.info/en/site/news/575/What-Now-For-Independent-Media.htm>

23. Addressing the Capitalization Gap for Independent News Media, 2011. World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers & Sida. [http://www.wan-ifra.org/sites/default/files/field\\_article\\_file/WAN-IFRA\\_capitalization\\_gap.pdf](http://www.wan-ifra.org/sites/default/files/field_article_file/WAN-IFRA_capitalization_gap.pdf)

## Incentivizing quality journalism at the individual level

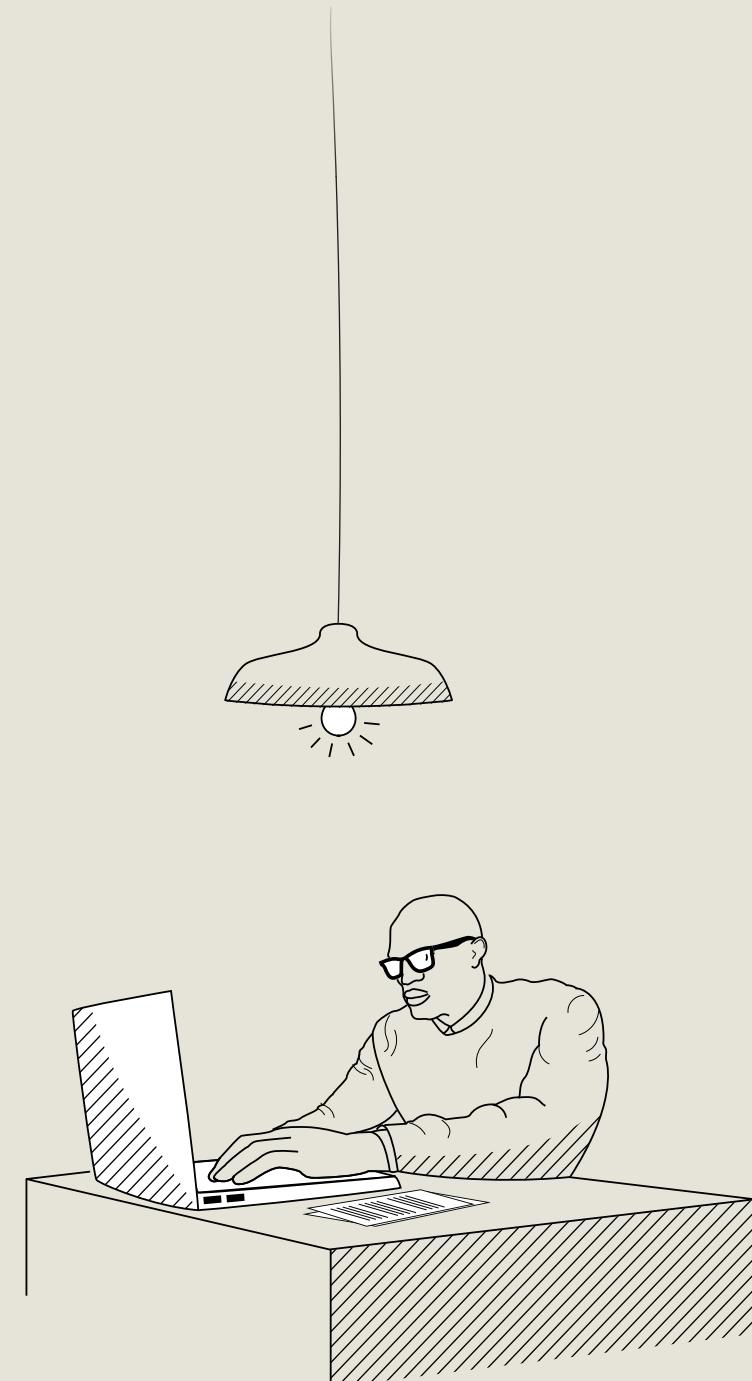
In West Africa, journalists have few incentives to produce in-depth, investigative, critical reporting. Instead, career and financial incentives encourage them to perpetuate the status quo.

Both Nigeria and Ghana boast a wealth of smart, idealistic, hard-working journalists who want their work to have positive social impact. However, most are paid very poorly and/or irregularly. Some employers justify withholding pay because they expect their staff to take “tips” from government and other actors in exchange for covering a certain issue, event, or angle.

The practice of paying journalists in order to shape their coverage is so entrenched that there is common parlance for it: In Ghana, coverage is purchased with “soli,” or solidarity money. In Nigeria, reporters get “brown envelopes,” financial compensation for attending (and therefore covering) certain events. The head of stations at a major Nigerian broadcaster explained:

“If there’s a cholera outbreak from contaminated water sources and the Ministry of Water Resources is doing an event, reporters will cover the event and not bother about the cholera outbreak itself. This is not because they don’t care; [editorial choices] have mostly become economic decisions. The Ministry will pay for the event to be covered, that is how the system works. **You aren’t supposed to pay for news but you can pay to make news.”**

—Radio Station Manager,  
37, Port Harcourt



## CASE STUDY

# Japheth Omojuwa

Given a challenging job market for professional journalists in West Africa, it is often amateur reporters, not seasoned organizations, that can afford independence. Their messages appeal more directly to citizens, and are more likely to compel them to action.

Popular Nigerian activist Japheth Omojuwa, who has been involved in Occupy Nigeria and other movements, is a critical force driving online dialogue about national politics. Due to his ability to wield new media, he has emerged as one of the voices of his generation. While he has a blog that receives modest attention, social media is where he reigns. On Twitter, Omojuwa broadcasts 140-character messages on politics and current affairs to a loyal audience of over 345,000 followers. His tweets spark online conversations, and followers will also tweet at him asking for commentary on breaking news items. His commentary on the 2015 general elections was highly influential among ordinary citizens.

Omojuwa's strategy is twofold: He describes how their civic rights are being violated in simple terms, using examples that are relatable for the everyman. Then he appeals to his readers' and followers' sense of civic duty to address these injustices.

"People are very interested in facts but they need to understand how facts relate to them, I bring numbers down to reality, in terms they can understand. For example, a newspaper might say that a government official spent N10 million on a car. I would write that he spent the school fees of 50,000 students. [...] Then, I communicate to people's egos and sense of pride. I say: 'You can either choose to sit at home, or take up the mantle of active citizenship. I've always said that I am not an activist, I'm an active citizen.'"

The personal appeals have resonated with citizens. Many young Nigerians look up to Omojuwa, and have tried to emulate him by seeking out news stories and sharing their own views. This demonstrates the ability of just one individual to drive and change the terms of popular discourse.

## SECTION

4. Investing for  
Financial Sustainability

## TITLE

People-Powered Media  
Innovation in West Africa

In addition to the lack of pay, the job market for journalists is competitive, but driven by low wages instead of training or talent. In Ghana, experienced journalists often find themselves competing with untrained peers with no credentials, who are preferred solely because of their lower rates.

There are few paths for journalists to practice their craft as a primary career, and few rewards for in-depth, high-integrity work. One journalist said that his profession is not well-regarded "because everyone believes journalists are corrupt. And it's true." Others confirmed that journalism was a "fall-back" career, or a stepping stone to a more lucrative career in the private sector or government. This, naturally, generates incentives for journalists to demonstrate loyalty to a potential future employer. In aggregate, these factors lower the

market rate for corruption, making it easier for political interests to purchase coverage.

Principled journalists seeking to persevere without graft thus take on side projects and freelance work to survive. Some of these side-gigs (such as working as a fixer for international journalists) may contribute to general journalistic skills. Some, however, exist in a questionable area of journalistic integrity, such as public relations (PR) work. Just as conflict-of-interest issues are common at the ownership level of major media houses, they are common for individual journalists who take on PR clients, as the firewall between the two careers is not well defined. Journalists need greater financial support if they are to uphold their trade's standards for integrity.

## PROJECT IDEA

### Freelance platform for journalists

With many journalists moonlighting in various ways to support themselves, a platform where vetted journalists could secure freelance gigs, such as fixing, working as a stringer for international media, or providing photography, could help them make ends meet while improving their journalistic skills. Participating journalists would be chosen specifically for their integrity and critical journalism, so that employers posting on the site know they are advertising to quality candidates, and journalists who follow good journalistic practices could be rewarded with access to income.

Despite these challenges, individuals are making large leaps in media. Journalists and citizens, and not organizations, are some of the most productive innovators in the ecosystem. Taking inspiration from global trends and movements, social organizers in West Africa are using social media to push out information directly to audiences. Individuals are media brands in their own rights. The Nigerian activist blogger Japheth Omojuwa and the Ghanaian journalist Manasseh Azure Awuni are two notable examples. Their voices often are more relatable to citizens, compared to those of professional journalists or more established organizations, and therefore resonate more deeply.

Many citizen respondents spoke highly of bloggers, whose perspectives and personal tone appeals to them. Some media organizations are beginning to explore partnerships to capitalize on these influencers' reach.

## OPPORTUNITY

### Invest in Individuals

Funding, journalism training, and business guidance to promising individuals who are driving civic movements can be a quick-win strategy for short-term impact.

#### BEST LED BY:

Media Development Funders,  
Impact Investors, Development Funders

#### DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

Individual journalists

In the near-term, there is unfortunately little that donors can do to address the systemic problem of journalist pay. Funders can reinforce the importance of paying for good work with their partners, but in the face of financial constraints and industry norms, such guidance can only be a suggestion.

There is, however, an alternative: Help more independent, individual journalists thrive.

Individuals are not only a powerful source of innovation, but are more shielded from the compromises that plague larger organizations, as they need less funding to operate. The great power of the digital revolution is that one person can build a platform with little capital investment, limiting

the number of strings attached to advertisers and investors. While individuals do maintain links to governments and corporations, including through advertising, their smaller overhead makes it is harder for them to get co-opted and easier, in theory, to find sufficient sources of independent revenue.

While individual reporters have fewer checks and balances on their work, the potential return on investment may be significant. And larger organizations are not necessarily better at maintaining editorial integrity. Funders may find that supporting promising, influential individuals may accelerate larger goals while circumventing the thorny business-editorial linkages that are unlikely to change for media organizations in the near-term.

## Improving investment approaches at the organizational level

Currently, funding for high-quality, in-depth reporting that is critical of government comes almost exclusively from international donors. Funding is usually tied to reporting on specific sectors or issues that are prioritized by the donor programs, as opposed to core operating funds.

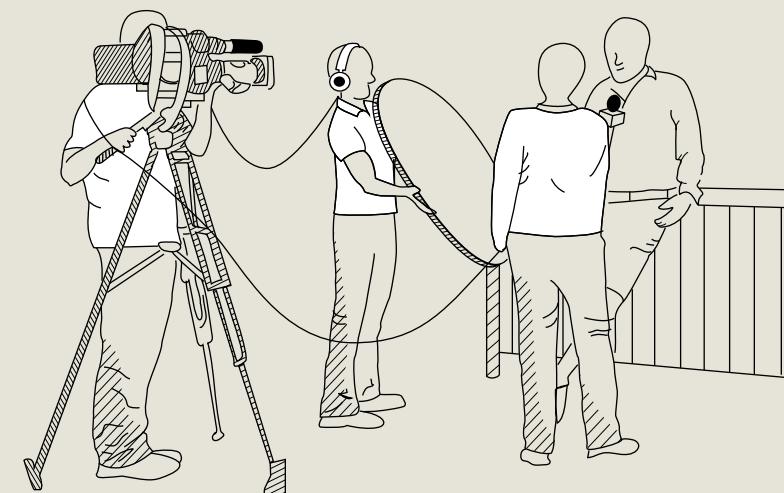
For example, the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism, the platform's non-profit arm, is funded by three foundations—Ford, MacArthur, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)—and DFID. Much of this funding is for reporting on specific topics. OSIWA, for example, funds its Parliament Watch vertical. DFID funds two reporters, one focused on the intersection of conflict, security, and gender; another on accountability in the oil and gas sector.

As many international donors do not have consistent presence in an implementation context, they may be susceptible to false assumptions about what is possible. This may lead them to champion types of work that are ill-suited to a particular environment. Grantees, eager for funding, rarely push back.

For example, the global momentum around open data and promising developments in Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation have sparked great donor interest in data journalism. Most recently, in August 2015, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a USD 4.7 million grant to expand the Code for Africa data journalism and civic technology initiative—which is already in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa—

to six other African countries. Such an investment in data journalism is exciting, and will go a long way to advancing the field. Yet it won't be able to address core challenges to data journalism, such as FOI laws that are passed but not implemented (see “A Note on Legislative Press Protections”, page 26) or government data management methods that are largely analog. At least for much of West Africa, the amount of donor interest in data journalism seems disproportionate to its medium-term potential for impact. Such a strong focus on this or any approach may divert resources from local experimentation based on local priorities.

It is also important to acknowledge that donor revenue streams, in practice, offer a similar arrangement to that which is widely practiced between politicians and media organizations: funding in exchange for coverage on a certain issue or using a certain approach. While their target objectives are obviously different, both forms of influence reinforce the notion that revenue is inextricably linked to a specific type of coverage. This prevents media organizations from pursuing the open exploration and self-directed experimentation that is so important to innovation.



## OPPORTUNITY

# Tailor support to organizational needs and stage of growth

Design responsive funding mechanisms that meet media's unique needs (and provide greater agency) across different stages of the organizational lifecycle.

**BEST LED BY:**

Media Development Funders,  
Impact Investors

**DIRECT BENEFICIARY:**

Independent media  
organizations

Prioritizing ways that media organizations can maintain their agency and set their own agendas and editorial strategy is important. Doing so enables media organizations to promote their own agendas based on their contextual knowledge, supports progress tracking, and provides them the space to experiment.

Funding is typically offered for issue-based reporting (project funding), for core operations, and for specific organizational growth initiatives; all three have roles to play. The type of support organizations need differs at different stages of their growth. Issue-based support will be most useful in the scaling stage, when the influx of funding will not comprise the majority of an organization's resources (skewing its balanced growth). And when providing issue-based support, funders should encourage grantees to be targeted and opportunistic within a specific topic. For example, instead of emphasizing a broad topic like "government accountability," a grantee may be encouraged to focus on specific events or political opportunities (i.e., publishing a story about unpaid teachers to coincide with the re-election campaign of a politician who promised to improve education).

Wherever possible, funders should consider an organization's stage of growth when determining what type of support is appropriate. They should also recognize that funding alone is insufficient—technical assistance in organizational strategy and planning, financial management, human resources, marketing and sales can have enormous impact. In later stages, expert advice can be more valuable than funding, and prevents an over-reliance on donors. Coordinating technical assistance, however, will require more time investment from donors to intimately understand what their grantees and investees might need.

## Responsive Support across the Organizational Lifecycle

Inception	Incubation	Scaling
0–2 YEARS	1–4 YEARS	2 YEARS–ONGOING
<b>NEED:</b> Seed capital to conduct research, develop a strategic plan, and do basic business planning	<b>NEED:</b> Working capital for operations, organizational growth, staff salaries, and asset investments	<b>NEED:</b> To transition to primarily advertising or other self-generating revenue
<b>CHALLENGES:</b> Few funding options available. Most investors want to see a track record of at least 1 year. Grant funding may lead to reliance on donor funding, loans from family and friends limits ability to grow	<b>CHALLENGES:</b> Banks are still unlikely to invest, as risk remains fairly high	<b>CHALLENGES:</b> Need time and space to experiment, and to define a sustainable business model
<b>BEST SUITED INVESTMENTS:</b> Equity investments (versus debt financing); some core operating support	<b>BEST SUITED INVESTMENTS:</b> Core operating support; also, debt-based finance, mixed debt, equity and quasi-equity products	<b>BEST SUITED INVESTMENTS:</b> <i>(at this stage, it won't be the organization's primary source of revenue, but rather provide space for further innovation)</i>
<b>BEST ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:</b> Some organizational development support on an ad-hoc basis; management training for leadership	<b>BEST ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:</b> Organizational development support on an ad-hoc basis; management training for leadership	<b>BEST ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:</b> Ongoing training for management and journalists, both around core practices and new technical skills

## Innovating financing at the field level

The fundamental challenge to independent media is the need for independent revenue. Many media organizations in Nigeria and Ghana wrestling with questions of editorial independence and operational sustainability are reaching the conclusion that it is impossible to maintain both.

However, one journalist said that government is still “the biggest business in Nigeria” and therefore a major source of all revenue for most media organizations. Through the research, although no organization disclosed funding information in detail, analysts confirmed this is true across West Africa.

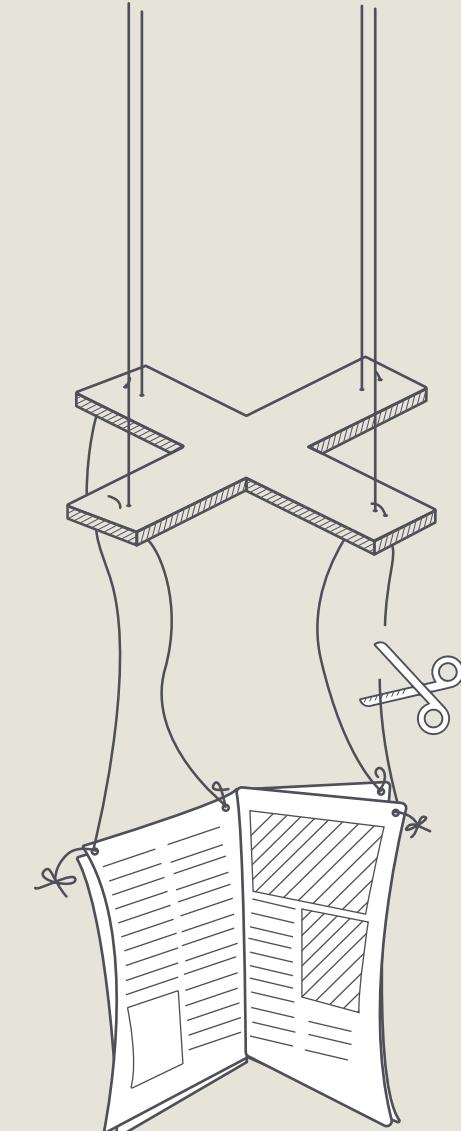
In Nigeria especially, the pervasive role of politics in all economic matters means that most corporate advertising comes with political strings attached. Indeed, owners of large media houses themselves have political motivations behind their business investments. While these strings are not always explicit, they are ever-present. One producer at a widely respected TV station described how he has learned to self-censor and curb any editorial instincts that may be deemed inconvenient by superiors.

There are media organizations working to buck this trend, and to try carve out revenue streams that enable critical, independent coverage. (See “Going Beyond Advertising: Media Adventures in Revenue Diversification” on the page 37.) Yet most have been so far daunted by the challenge, and many doubt that any media can ever be truly independent. An executive at a leading broadcaster said that “independence” is nice in theory, but near-impossible in practice:

“We have other interests that puts braces on how we report stories. We don’t want to hurt our other interests. A lot of media is that way. As you go online, it might be less so, but how many of them are actually productive and making money? Most of us are owned by politicians and businessmen.”

—Radio Station Manager,  
37, Port Harcourt

Even for media houses owned by journalists or independent entrepreneurs, the extensive connections between business and government limit their ability to maintain advertisers. Coverage that challenges political and business interests also threaten outlets’ access to networks, as potential board members and other important connections will certainly have political ties.



## Media Adventures in Revenue Diversification

Some media entities are attempting to diversify their revenue streams to win or maintain greater editorial independence. Some models being explored include:

**Leveraging an umbrella structure:** AIM Group, a major Nigerian business conglomerate with media properties, attributes its success to its “umbrella” model. The conglomerate includes construction, real estate, hospitality, and IT businesses, and also owns three influential radio stations: Cool FM, Wazobia FM, and Nigeria Info. AIM invests revenue from one business line to support others that are less mature or profitable, while assessing profit and loss as an entire corporate group. Such a model has allowed the stations to experiment with its editorial and operational models, and has enabled efficiencies in developing internal tools and processes (e.g., those for quality assurance or content distribution).

**Organizing sponsored events:** Ghana’s Citi FM, a popular radio station, is boosting its revenue by selling sponsorship to events it produces. Multinational companies pay for exposure in different channels, from inclusion on event banners to mentions in event jingles. Nigeria’s Quramo Report, a quarterly magazine focused on public policy, is taking this strategy a step further by producing themed conferences for corporations that prioritize thought leadership as part of their strategy. Revenues from events then help fund the magazine (currently on hiatus), which has struggled financially.

**Experimenting widely to see what sticks:** Respected Nigerian online news platform Premium Times recognizes the need to diversify its revenue sources, which currently rely on advertising and donor support. It is considering a number of additional income streams, including offering capacity training to other organizations, book publishing, selling its data, publishing sponsored content, selling Google ads, and appealing for diaspora donations. These experiments are all in either early or planning stages, and the organization does not yet know which (or what mix) will best support its editorial ambitions while meeting its financial needs.

While these models demonstrate promise, none have yet been proven, and many operate in tandem with more traditional advertising-based approaches.

### OPPORTUNITY

## Provide innovative financing

Philanthropic and private-sector funders should offer long-term, responsive funding models that can support the experimentation necessary for innovation.

#### BEST LED BY:

Media Development Funders (Private), Impact Investors

#### DIRECT BENEFICIARY:

Independent media organizations

Philanthropic and private sector funders can offer unique advantages to independent news media outlets. They can provide more flexible and innovative solutions than development donors that usually support media development, who are frequently limited by more institutional restrictions. In addition to direct support, they can also can help attract investment from others who wouldn’t normally consider investing in media, by leveraging their capital directly. For example, they might provide guarantees for investment vehicles, such as structured capital market products, in order to raise capital. USAID achieves a similar goal by using the Development Credit Authority to stimulate lending for public health and other initiatives; partial credit guarantees cover up to 50 percent of any losses on loans made to these goals by financial institutions and investors.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth considering establishing or setting up media loan funds, which “incubate” media organizations through long-term, supportive relationships. They provide technical and managerial advice, patient capital, below market-rate loans, flexible loan structures, empathetic relationship management, and intensive monitoring. Most provide a range of financing options

suited to small and medium-sized enterprises, including debt, equity, quasi-equity, finance leasing, factoring, mortgage financing, and guarantees.

Media loan funds may also attract local investors who might otherwise be reluctant to invest in independent media in their own countries, for fear for retribution from powerful actors. By channeling their support through a fund, they would be able to support a free press while minimizing the personal risks of doing so.

Two such funds are noteworthy. In Indonesia, a loan fund operated by radio news agency provides small loans—typically up to USD 10,000—to stations within its network. Loans are secured against future revenues from shared advertising across the network. In Russia, the Association of Independent Regional Publishers provides loans to members of the trade association.

In short, building sustainable, independent news media businesses takes time; short-term funding commitments are not sufficient. Funders must be willing to devise innovative mechanisms and provide long-term commitments.

24. Partnering for Impact: USAID and the Private Sector, 2015. [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/usaid\\_partnership%20report\\_FINAL3.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/usaid_partnership%20report_FINAL3.pdf)

# 5

## Looking Forward

“I voted for the first time in my life because there was a significant level of civic participation. People had a heightened sense of civic duty because we felt that this time, we could trust the process.”

—30-year-old entrepreneur, in Lagos, on the 2015 Nigerian election

Innovations in new and social media have opened up new possibilities for how we understand and contribute to the world around us. Embracing these channels, citizens in West Africa have won historic victories, both in major elections and in smaller stories of corruption scandals uncovered and political accountability increased. As citizen participation in media helps drive these victories, they are in turn driving more citizen participation.

In this new world, the most successful and impactful media entities will be not just delivery channels to the people, but platforms for the people.

There are exciting opportunities for funders to support media organizations in making this shift, and to increase their agency and power by winning and engaging audiences.

Citizens are already displaying increased confidence that the fourth estate is now able to fulfill its watchdog function, and that it needs their help. This has reassured them that their voices and actions matter.

Of course, many remain skeptical. Citizens are aware that in West Africa, rife with powerful state and corporate interests, change will take time. But they are excited and energized to continue the push. In a challenging market, where political influence is rampant and finance is tight, this citizen energy is media's most valuable asset. It is also a renewable resource.

Now is the time for funders and media organizations to support this energy, and work alongside citizens toward a fairer, more accountable West Africa—and a playbook that can help others advance independent media and good governance around the world.

## ANNEX A

# Methodology

This research was conducted over a period of four months, July to October 2015, and was built on interviews with experts on regional media trends, and field research with media practitioners and consumers in the focus countries.

Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with and observations of 58 respondents, including those representing media (53 percent of respondents), government (21 percent), civil society organizations (14 percent), and citizens (10 percent). Field research sought to understand how media organizations determine how to report on different governance issues, and how governments and citizens decide to act based on information received through the media.

The research team also conducted a survey, which focused on citizen and civil society perspectives, with 68 citizens and civil society representatives in Nigeria. The survey was used to understand respondents' views of different types of media and such media's influence on their actions—both today and how their views have changed in the last five years. Questions covered citizen's media consumption habits, assessment of trustworthy and influential media, and likelihood of taking action

based on information received from the media. 78 percent of survey respondents were from urban and peri-urban areas, and 22 percent from rural areas.

In November 2015, Reboot spoke with a wider range of funders (public and private) to better understand what their interests (and questions) were as they related to media, which informed this current public report.

While the research can be used to spark discussions about broader regional trend, it is important to note the limitations of any single study, especially one with field research focused on two countries. Reboot focused its field research primarily on Nigeria, with a smaller presence in Ghana. This was due to the relative scale of Nigeria's media field In both countries, research focused primarily on the major urban areas (Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt in Nigeria; Accra in Ghana); surveys were used to assess trends and incorporate perspectives from rural areas, but the depth of those findings are limited.

## ANNEX B

# Respondents

Respondents that participated in this research are below. The list does not include two respondents who did not wish to be named.

### Key Informant Interviews

1. **Aduratomi Bolade** | Head of Stations, AIM Media (Nigeria)
2. **Bernard Avle** | Director News & Programming, Citi FM (Ghana)
3. **Cheta Nwanze** | Founder, Writer & Blogger, SBM Intelligence (Nigeria)
4. **Emmanuel Kuyole** | Africa Deputy Director, NRG (Ghana)
5. **Japheth Omojuwa** | Blogger / Organizer, Omojuwa.com (Nigeria)
6. **Ken Henshaw** | Activist, Social Action (Nigeria)
7. **Kofi Mangesi** | Director of Strategy & Partnership, PenPlusBytes (Ghana)
8. **Musikilu Mojeed** | Journalist & Former Managing Editor, Premium Times (Nigeria)
9. **Muyiwa Adekeye** | Special Advisor of Media & communications Kaduna State Governor (Nigeria)
10. **Russell Southwood** | CEO, Balancing Act Africa (Regional)
11. **Tolu Ogunlesi** | SA on Social Media, Office of the President (Nigeria)
12. **Yemi Adamolekun** | Executive Director, Enough is Enough (Nigeria)
13. **Yinka Adegoke** | Editor, Quartz (USA)

### Ghana Field Research

14. **Abdallah Alhassan** | Secretary, Slum Union of Ghana
15. **Abigail Larbi** | Program Officer for Media for Democracy and Development, West Africa Media Foundation
16. **Bernard Avle** | Director of News & Programs, Citi FM
17. **Bright Kwame Blewu** | Director, GIPC
18. **George Ankrah** | Journalist, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
19. **Isaac Dupey** | Public Relations Officer, Ministry of Local Government
20. **Jerry Sam** | Program Manager African Elections, PenplusBytes
21. **Martin Asiedu-Dartey** | Presenter & Anchor, TV3
22. **Nana Akwasi Awuah** | Activist, Former Member of Occupy Ghana

### Nigeria Field Research

23. **Abdulrahman Abubakar** | Reporter, News Agency of Nigeria
24. **Abdulrazaq Jimoh** | Team Leader Social Media, NTA
25. **Adedoyin Adesanya** | Squad Lead, Diplomatic Protection, Nigerian Police Force
26. **Aduratomi Bolade** | Head of Stations, Cool FM, Nigeria Info & WAZOBIA FM, Port Harcourt
27. **Alkasim Abdulkadir** | Media Coordinator, Victims Support Funds
28. **Arochukwu Paul** | Legal Practitioner & Activist, Ebonyi and Rivers States
29. **Arome Saidu** | Assistant Registration Officer, INEC
30. **Asuquo James** | Bulletin Editor & On Air Personality, TVC
31. **Ayo Alabi** | On Air Personality, Rhythm FM
32. **Ayo Sogunro** | Lawyer & Author, ayosogunro.com
33. **Aziza Uko** | Founder, Trentonline
34. **Azuh Amatus** | Founder, Daylight.ng
35. **Babarinsa Olusola** | Editor, Businessday / Founder, LensNigeria
36. **Carl Orakwe** | On Air Personality, Garden City Radio
37. **Cheta Nwanze** | Founder, SBM Intelligence & Relations
38. **Chinedu Ekeke** | Blogger, ekekeeee.com (independent)
39. **Chris Ogunlewe** | Citizen
40. **Dayo Ayeitan** | Executive Director, International Centre of Investigative Reporting
41. **Emmanuel Idoko** | Assistant Producer, Africa Independent Television (AIT)
42. **Esther Oyegue** | Head of News, Cool FM, Lagos
43. **Fashetire Jide** | Citizen
44. **Femi Aderibigbe** | Co-founder & Head, Development Diaries, Program Manager | WANGONET
45. **Femi Daniels** | Presenter & Video Jockey, HipTV
46. **Fredrick Nwabufor** | Bureau Chief , The Cable
47. **George Obiam** | Editor, Lagos State Tourism Magazine
48. **Gloria Essien** | Producer & Reporter, VoN
49. **Helen Osamehin** | Reporter, TVC
50. **Isine Ibanga** | Senior Reporter, Premium Times
51. **Jonathan Lyamgone** | Station Manager, WE FM
52. **Josephine Alabi** | Executive Director, Kith & Care Foundation
53. **Kelvin Ebiri** | Bureau Head, Guardian Newspaper, Rivers State
54. **Kofi Bartels** | On Air Personality, Nigeria Info, Port Harcourt
55. **Livingstone Wechie** | Media and Strategic Assistant, Rivers State Government
56. **Mohammed Bawa** | Deputy Director of Programs, Radio Nigeria
57. **Ndidi Okafor** | Deputy Director of Publicity, INEC
58. **Ngozi Akpati** | Regional Manager, FATE Foundation, Port Harcourt
59. **Ohimai Amaize** | Publisher, Breaking Times
60. **Okey Muogbo** | Ministry of Special Duties, Former S.A to Minister of Special Duties
61. **Olumuyiwa Adekeye** | Special Adviser on Media, Kaduna State Government
62. **Oluseun Onigbinde** | Co-Founder, BudgIT
63. **Patrick Ebi Amanama** | Photojournalist, Leadership
64. **Perez Tigidam** | Creative Director, Arden & Newton
65. **Saratu Abiola** | Activist & Communication Officer, PIND
66. **Terkola Igidi** | Editor, Daily Trust
67. **Toni Kan** | Co-Founder, Sabi News / Publisher, Radiate
68. **Uche Nwaneri** | Head of Stations, Cool FM, Nigeria Info & WAZOBIA FM, Abuja
69. **Victoria Barsma** | Reporter, Daily Trust
70. **Yinka Lawal** | Head of Marketing, Inspiration FM

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