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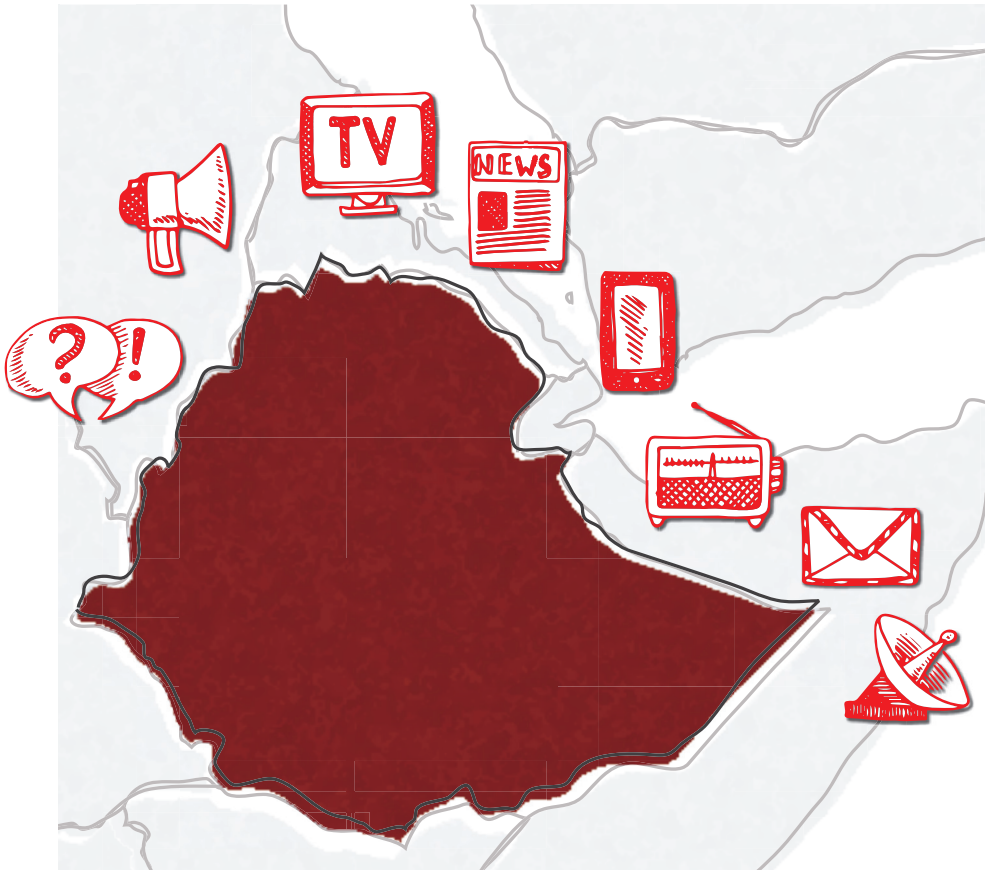
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# **MEDIA SPACE AND THE STATE**

## **OF MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS**

### **IN ETHIOPIA A BASELINE STUDY**



Abdissa Zerai (PhD) - Consultant

## About CARD

The Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) is a board-led, for-profit organization registered in Ethiopia under the Civil Societies Law 1113/2019 with registry number 4307. CARD acquired its legal personality on 24 July 2019.

CARD aspires to see Ethiopia where democratic culture flourished on human rights values and has been working with a mission to empower citizens and groups of citizens to ensure their ability to promote and defend human rights and build democratic governance in Ethiopia.

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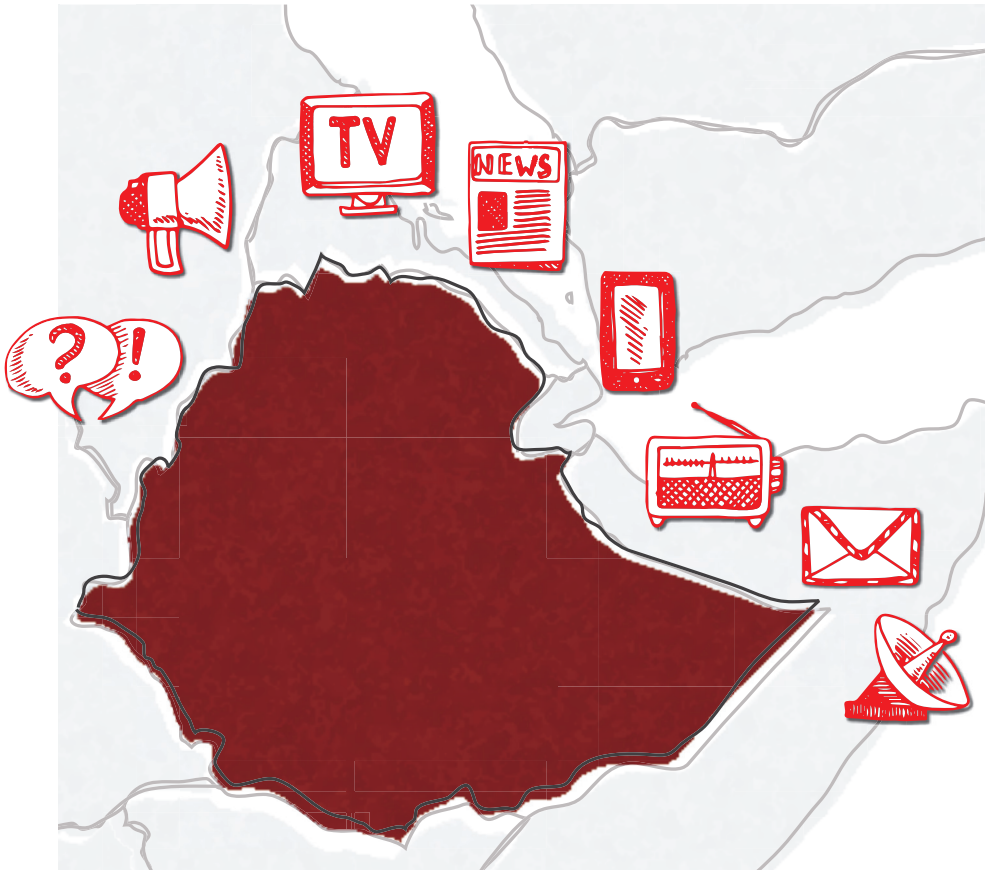
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# **MEDIA SPACE AND THE STATE OF MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS IN ETHIOPIA** A BASELINE STUDY



Abdissa Zerai (PhD) - Consultant

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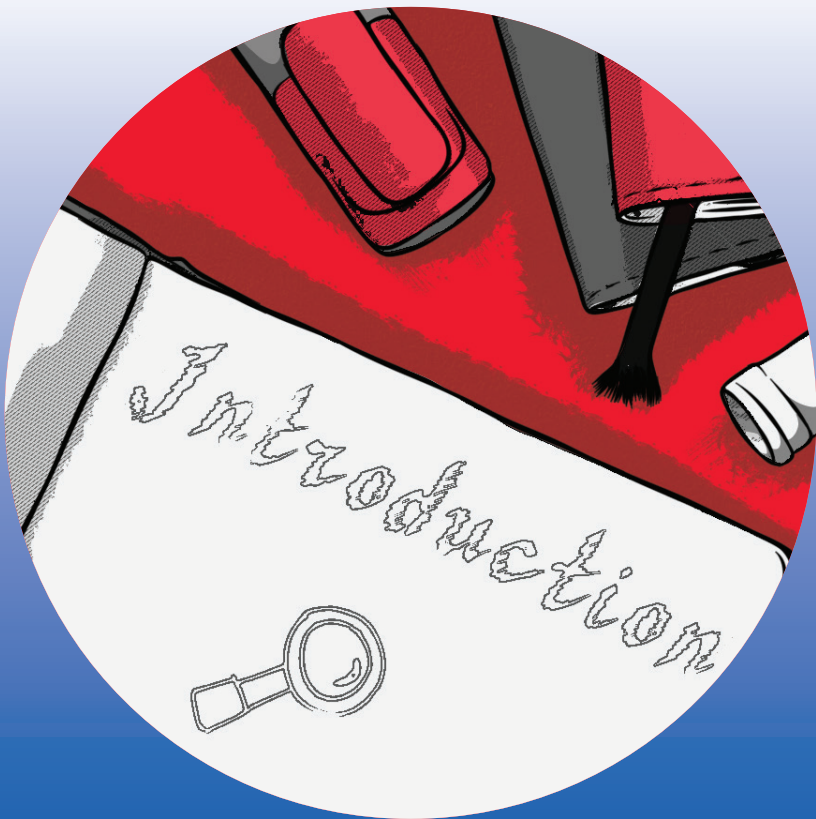
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# INTRODUCTION



Since the dawn of a democratic dispensation following the coming to power of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, freedom of expression and of the press has formally been codified in the Ethiopian Constitution. However, the practical exercise of such formally recognized and codified freedom had remained highly constrained during the tenure of the EPRDF.

The new *Prosperity Party (PP)*-led government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, which succeeded the EPRDF-led government, promised, upon arrival, to overhaul government and enact institutional reforms and thereby create conducive politico-communicative environment so as to transition to a genuine democratic polity.

One of the major steps that the new reform government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took had to do with the liberalization of the political and communicative spaces. Especially, in its liberalization of the communicative space, the new government passed decisions to unblock hundreds of diaspora-based news Websites, Blogs, Portals, Satellite TV and Radio channels that had been blocked or jammed during the *EPRDF* tenure. It allowed diaspora-based political dissidents, opposition political parties and exiles, including those who had been running media outlets to return home and legally operate in the country.

What is more, it initiated serious sectoral reform endeavors in a wide range of areas including the media sector, which culminated in the drafting and eventual adoption of two important policy and legal documents: *the media policy and the media proclamation*, respectively. The relative opening up of the communicative space and the endeavor to create a conducive legal and policy environment engendered high hope that the transformation of the media environment was on the horizon.

In the meantime, however, cracks started to appear between Abiy's nascent coalition government and the *Tigray People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (TPLF), which initially was one of the coalition members in the new government. The disagreement gradually degenerated into the breaking out of war between the central government of Ethiopia and the Tigray regional state in November 2020. What is more, various armed groups sprang up in various parts of the country posing serious security challenges as well as contributed to the exacerbation of political polarization. The war and the armed conflicts raging here and there have, thus, convulsed the nation for the last two years, and we are not yet out of the woods.

It is a well-documented fact that the politico-security context has a bearing on the way the media operate. Research (Santos, 2021) often affirms that the more stable the political environment of a country, and the more functional its democratic institutions are, the freer, more viable and more professional the media are. In other words, the media landscape in a politically stable context tends to be plural and diverse while functionally professional and critical. On the other hand, the more uncertain, unstable and transitional the political environment is, the more precarious the state of freedom of expression and/or the press and the less assertive media are in their monitorial and watchdog roles.

Since the Ethiopian media and the media professionals' associations are operating under an unstable transitional context in general and under an armed conflict and the resultant security challenges in particular, it is of vital importance to attempt to understand the nature of the existing media space and how the professional media associations are faring in such a space. Thus, the objective of this baseline study is examining the nature of the existing media space and finding out where the media associations stand against such a backdrop, for such an understanding would help identify and design appropriate intervention mechanisms.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

**To this end, the study specifically aims at addressing the following specific objectives:**

- ▶ To examine how the surge in violent conflicts such as communal violence and armed conflicts and the accompanying propaganda narratives have affected the media freedom and safety of journalists.
- ▶ To assess the state of media professionals' associations with respect to their role as collective agencies in promoting professional and independent media practices and in helping ensure the protection of safety and security of journalists.
- ▶ To gauge the state of institutional and programmatic capacities of media associations.





# METHODOLOGY



In order to address the research objectives stated above, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Under the quantitative method, a simple survey was administered to 17 purposively selected informants currently in leadership positions (except two of them) in the 16 selected media associations (see the appendix section for details). The survey was intended to gather basic descriptive data about the media associations. For the qualitative method, in-depth interviews were carried out with purposively selected 17 key informants all (except two) of whom are currently in the leadership positions in the 16 selected media associations (see the appendix section for details).

The interviews and survey were carried out from the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, 2023 to the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2023. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the 17 informants via phone, face-to-face, and email. Accordingly, data from 13 informants was gathered via phone, from 2 informants it was collected face-to-face, and from 2 other informants, it was gathered via email. For the qualitative data, the telephone and face-to-face interviews took from 25 minutes to an hour and 20 minutes. On average, most of the interviews lasted between 40 to 50 minutes.

What is more, desktop research was undertaken to gather publicly available pertinent literature, statements, press releases and reports, etc., and were analyzed systematically. Thus, the data that was generated through these methodological triangulation was finally organized thematically and subjected to analysis. The insights that were gained from the analyses were finally used to produce this report.

# MEDIA SPACE UNDER PROSPERITY PARTY-LED GOVERNMENT



In order to understand the nature of the media space under the Prosperity Party-led government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, it would be analytically useful to look at it in two phases: the first phase being the time between Abiy's ascent to power and the start of the war between the central government and the Tigray regional state, and the second phase being the time after the start of the war.

## **MEDIA SPACE BEFORE THE START OF THE WAR**

The first phase, which could be labeled as the formative years of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reform government, was considered by many national and regional/international observers as quite consequential. Especially in the first two years of Prime Minister Abiy's government, the new reform government took serious and observable reform measures in a range of areas. As noted in the introductory section, one of these significant reform measures taken by the new government had to do with the liberalization or the opening up of the communicative space. For the sake of emphasis, the provision of a summary of some of the key measures the new government took in its endeavor to liberalize the communicative space is order:

Soon after controlling the lever of power, Prime Minister Abiy's government lifted the state of emergency and suspended the anti-terrorism law. The state of emergency and the anti-terrorism law were two critical instruments that the old regime had used as a potent

weapon to effectively curtail basic human and democratic rights including freedom of expression and of the press as well as to prosecute and persecute critics of the regime.

The new government also unblocked hundreds of news Websites that had been banned by its predecessor in an attempt to suppress critical voices. It dropped criminal charges that had been leveled against the diaspora-based dissident media outlets, such as *Oromo Media Network* (OMN) and *Ethiopian Satellite Television* (ESAT) by the old regime and allowed them to come home and operate legally; it released several journalists who had been thrown in jail by the previous regime. It went on to setting up an independent and expert team to spearhead serious reform endeavors in the media sector, which resulted in the production of the existing media policy as well as the media law.

Owing to such an unprecedented opening up of the media space, a number of new media outlets sprang up, allowing the expression of more diverse voices. Because of a much improved media space, there were no reported cases of journalists in jail in Ethiopia for the first time in 14 years; besides, there were almost no reported cases of serious threats from the government security forces against journalists (CPJ, 2019).

A country that had ranked 150th out of 180 nations in 2017 on *Reporters Without Borders'* World Press Freedom Index- a ranking just behind countries like Russia and South Sudan- leap-frogged to a rank of 99th out of 180 countries in 2019, a phenomenal improvement by 51 places just in about two years. In recognition of such a phenomenal improvement of the media space, UNESCO decided to host the 2019 World Press Freedom Day in Addis Ababa for the first time in the Ethiopian history (Abdissa, 2021; Mulatu, 2022; Henok, 2022; Tesfaye & Melisew, 2022). It could, thus, be argued that in the formative years of the *Prosperity Party*-led government of Prime Minister Abiy, we saw a comparatively unparalleled liberalization of the communicative

environment that created a promising media space where freedom of the press and the expression of divergent views were relatively respected and tolerated.

## MEDIA SPACE AFTER THE START OF THE WAR

As noted above, the political disagreement that emerged between the new coalition government of Prime Minister Abiy and the *Tigray People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (TPLF) degenerated into a full-fledged war between the central government and the Tigray regional state in November 2020, following a sudden attack against the *Northern Command* by the Tigray forces. Following the start of the war, the widely acclaimed reform that brought about an improved media space began to deteriorate, triggering various national and regional/international actors to raise their concerns against such deteriorating environment and called upon the government to reaffirm its commitment to the liberalization of the communicative space.

As evidences for the deterioration of the media space relevant actors often listed, in the statements they released on different occasions, blatant violations in the assignment of board of directors for the media regulatory body (EMA), the assignment of management for the publically funded national and regional state media organizations, the kidnapping of journalists and media professionals, the increasing arbitrary detention of journalists, the prolonged pre-trial detention of journalists, the refusal to disclose the whereabouts of detained journalists, the detention of journalists in irregular detention facilities, and the continued harassments and intimidations of journalists, among others.

## UNLAWFUL ASSIGNMENT OF BOARD OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE ETHIOPIAN MEDIA AUTHORITY (EMA)

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The assignment of CEOs for the publicly funded state media organizations (both national and regional) in general and the assignment of the board of management for the *Ethiopian Media Authority*- the regulatory body- in particular has been one of the serious measures taken by the government which led various actors to question the commitment of the government to maintain an open media space.

It is to be recalled that the *House of Peoples' Representatives* disclosed the assignment of Board Members for the *Ethiopian Media Authority* (EMA) on its official Facebook page on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2021. According to the House, the Board members were assigned based on the *Media Proclamation no. 1238/2021*. Among the members that constituted the Board, it was noted that Redwan Husen, State Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (at the time), was assigned as Chair of the Board while Nasise Chali, Minister of the Ministry of Tourism, was assigned as the Deputy Chair of the Board. The list includes nine Board members- three University professors from Addis Ababa University, and three individuals from faith-based communities.

The announced appointment of the Board of management created an uproar from the public and the media civil society for its blatant violation of the provisions of the new media law. The appointment drew criticism for at least three reasons, the first of which is related to its deliberate exclusion of individuals from the media industry in the Board membership.

According to Article 9, sub-article 5a of the *Media Proclamation*, dealing with the composition of the Board of Management, "two of them shall be drawn from civil society organizations, two of them from media and two of them from other institutions that have relevance to the media

sector.” The exclusion, from the Board membership, of individuals from the Media Industry has, thus, been seen as a serious violation of the media law.

In this regard, the *Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association* issued a two-page statement noting that the assignment of the Board members was clearly in breach of the *Media Proclamation*. Hence, the association called for corrective measures to be taken, and warned that such clear violation of the *Media Proclamation* could adversely affect the development of the nation’s media industry and its pivotal role for nation-building.

The second reason why the assignment of the Board membership was in breach of the Media Law has to do with its inclusion of political party members. According to the *Media Proclamation* no.1238/2021, article 11, sub-article 6, an individual is deemed qualified to be appointed to the Board membership if such a person “is not a member or employee of a political party.” However, some of the assigned members of the Board, including the Chairman, are not just party members, but are executive committee members of the ruling *Prosperity Party*.

The *Ethiopian Media Council*, on its part, expressed its frustration on its website in the following words: “Members or employees of any political party cannot serve as board members of the Authority, as laid out in the proclamation. However, the Parliament has approved the appointment of the ruling *Prosperity Party*’s members, such as Agaredech Jemaneh (PhD), who is a member of the Addis Ababa City Council, and Redwan Hussein (Amb.), State Minister of Foreign Affairs, among others.”

The third reason why the appointment was in violation of the *Media Proclamation* is related to the disregard for an open and transparent process in the appointment of Board members. According to Article 9, sub-article two of the proclamation, “Members of the Board must be appointed in an open and transparent manner.” The proclamation further states that the public should have the opportunity to nominate



members, share opinion about them, and to that end, the selection process and nominees should be published via media or other electronic means of dissemination. However, none of these was pursued in the appointment process of the Board members.

## PREVALENCE OF ARBITRARY DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

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One of the troubling signs often noted as indicative of the deterioration of the media space over the last couple of years is the arbitrary detention of journalists. In a statement released on 28 May, 2022, the *Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders' Center* reported that a total of 19 journalists were arrested as of the date of the report. The statement reads: "With new arrests on May 26, May 27, 2022, and May 28, 2022, of journalist Sabontu Ahmed (Finfinnee Integrated Broadcasting), Bekalu Alamirew (Alpha TV), and Journalist Meaza Muhamed, founder of Roha Media, which brings the total of detained journalists and media personnel to 19." The Center warned that "Targeting journalists and human rights defenders because of their work might open the door to shrink the media space and pose a threat to the country's democratization."

The *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission* (EHRC) - also a national rights organization- condemned the arbitrary detention of journalists. In a statement it released on May 28, 2022, the *Commission* denounced the detention of journalists in violation of the provisions of the *Ethiopian Media Law* and called for the release of the same. The statement reads: "With new arrests on May 26 and May 27, 2022 of journalist Sabontu Ahmed (Finfinnee Integrated Broadcasting) and Bekalu Alamirew (Alpha TV), which brings the total of detained journalists and media personnel to 18, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reiterates that

Ethiopia's media law clearly prohibits pre-trial detention for any alleged offence committed through media, and all detained media personnel should be released.”

Along a similar line, the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ) noted that there were 63 journalists arrested between the beginning of the war in Northern Ethiopia and the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 2022. The report reads: “CPJ has documented the arrest of at least 63 journalists and media workers since November 4, 2020, at least eight of whom remain detained as of August 1, 2022.” *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF), on its part, reported on June 03, 2022 that at least 18 journalists were arrested between 19 and 28 May, which could result in Ethiopia overtaking Eritrea as the sub-Saharan Africa's biggest jailer of media personnel.

## **KIDNAPING JOURNALISTS AND KEEPING THEIR WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN**

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The other alarming concern raised by various relevant actors in the recent past about the deterioration of the media space has to do with the kidnapping of journalists and the refusal to disclose their whereabouts. In an open letter written to the Prime Minister on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2022, the *Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association* (EMMPA) noted that the association has witnessed tendencies that violate freedom of the press with serious potential to undermine the freedom of media professionals and to cast a dark shadow over a glimpse of hope that the media sector has seen with the coming to power of the new government. The association stressed its concerns with the kidnapping of a number of journalists from their work places and homes and the difficulty of tracing the whereabouts of some of these journalists, and the enormous stress and anxiety this has caused to their families and friends.

Similarly, in a statement released on 5th May, 2022, the association expressed its concerns in relation to the arbitrary detention of journalist Gobeze Sisay and the apparent lack of information about his whereabouts. The association noted that it is seriously concerned “with the sudden and unlawful detention of journalist Gobeze Sisay by unidentified security agents on Sunday, May 2, 2022.”



## PROLONGED PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

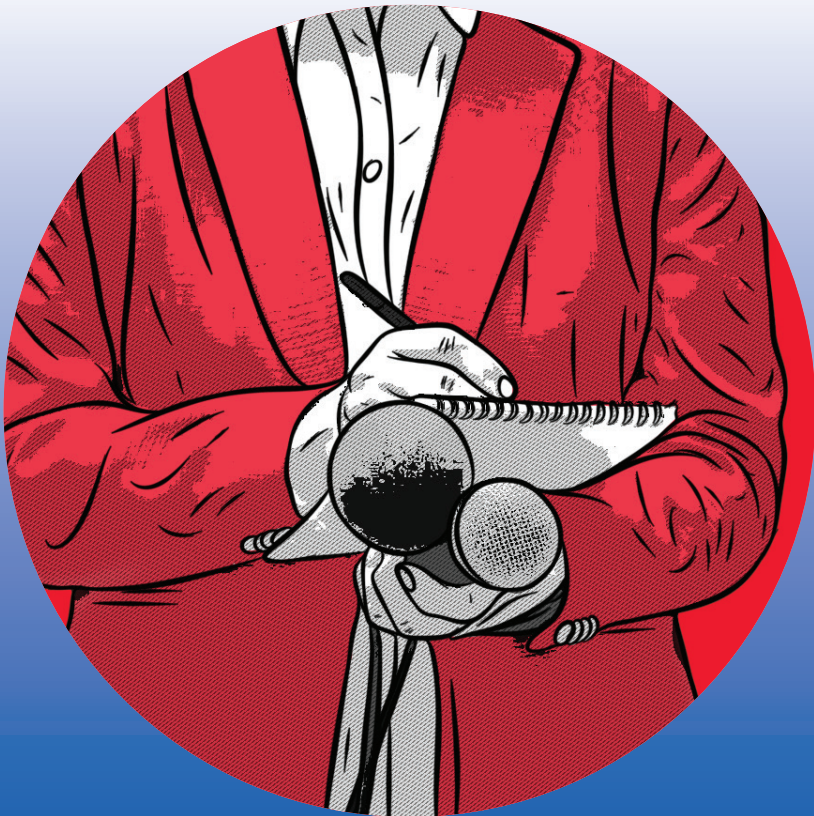
A prolonged pre-trial detention- a practice that has almost been normalized in the last couple of years- is another growing concern for various actors that it is taken as an indicative of the fact that the media space is in trouble.

The *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission* (EHRC) is one of the key actors that have been sounding alarms in this regard. For instance, in a short text posted on its official Website on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 2022, the Commission reiterated that “No claim about the alleged offence committed through media justifies violation of the newly adopted media law which clearly prohibits pre-trial detention of persons charged with committing an offence through the media.”

The *Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association* (EMMPA) also shares a similar concern with respect to the frequent occurrences of a prolonged pre-trial detention of journalists. The association has been putting out statements noting the illegality of the practice and its potentially chilling effect on the maintenance of an open and a healthy media space. In its February 16, 2022, statement, for example, EMMPA notes: “Even though detaining journalists without a court order and putting them in jail to this much time is unacceptable on legal and moral grounds, the practice has sadly become the new-normal in Ethiopia.” Along a similar line, *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) in its statement released on June 03, 2022, quoted Tarikua Getachew- the Director for Law and Policy at the *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission* (EHRC) - and stated that: “EHRC remains concerned about the unlawful pretrial detentions, denial of visitation rights and some of the detention conditions. We call once again for the Media Law to be respected and for their immediate release.”

Taking concrete examples like the ones discussed above, which have clearly demonstrated what is actually transpiring on the ground, there is a strong feeling on the part of the various relevant actors that there is a progressive narrowing of the media space over the last couple of years. This has increasingly made it difficult for the media to operate independently and exercise its professional freedom. What is more, it has also made the safety and security of journalists at stake.

# MEDIA SPACE IN THE EYES' OF THE ASSOCIATIONS



In order to corroborate the assessments of the various national, regional/international actors with respect to the challenges the media space has been facing in the last couple of years, as gathered from their reports and press releases issued on various occasions, the summary of the analysis of the interview data that was generated from those who are actively engaged in the journalistic work is presented in the subsequent sub-section. From the analysis of the interviewees' reactions, the following key problems, which are believed to have been encroaching on the media space, have come to the fore especially following the break out of the war between the central government and the Tigray Regional State as well as the proliferation of inter-communal violence in various parts of the country: denial of access to information, unlawful detention of journalists, instrumentalization of the media through capture, and curtailment of freedom of mobility.

## **DENIAL OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

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As discerned from the analysis of the interview data, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees concurred that the media space in today's Ethiopia is not conducive for the flourishing of vibrant, independent, and professional media. According to Abdi, the situation has increasingly gotten worse, especially in his region as the government does not seem to have any interest in allowing media professionals from independent media outlets to have access to information. Abdi notes, "The current media space is not conducive at all, especially in our region. It is very difficult to get access to information particularly for media outlets that are not affiliated with the government. Cooperation of the government is always only for government-affiliated media, and not for the new and independent media. There is great pressure on the independent media."

In relation to the lack of interest most regional officials in the South have in cooperating with journalists, Henok also said, "Several journalists whom we met at different training sessions that we held told us that

government officials are not interested to collaborate with journalists whom they consider 'Others.' He added that it is not uncommon for the regional officials to be heard boldly asking media organizations to send them journalists whom they refer to as 'Ours.'

On the other hand, Meseret believes that the problem associated with the lack of access to information even goes beyond the usual government versus private binary. According to him, when journalists from the private media go to cover some stories in relation to the government, oftentimes they are not welcome. In a similar manner, when journalists from the government media go to give media coverage to a protest against the government, they usually receive undesirable treatment from those who have organized the protest. In both ways, the journalists are denied of their right to access to information.

Along a similar line, both Muluken and Fitih argued that the government often denies access to information, especially for the independent media. What is different this time is that such denial to access to information has become worse following the break out of the war.

## UNLAWFUL DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

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The interviewees also noted that following the war, the unlawful detention of journalists has intensified. According to Abdi, over 17 journalists were detained in the Somali region just in the last one year for a duration that ranges from one day to one month. These journalists were detained for such a duration without being given a chance to appear in the court of law, which is in violation of the law of the land. Lamenting the increasing arbitrary detention and abuse of journalists, Meseret was of the opinion that "the problem is more serious for journalists who work for the private media as the police and security officers often mistreat and harass them to the extent of keeping them in jail at whim for three or four days."

What is more, Amare noted that nowadays the unlawful detention of journalists has become quite a common practice. He attributed the current unfavorable media space to the apparent lack of translating the media law into reality. According to Amare,

Article 29 of the FDRE Constitution carries exact same words in Article 19 of the UN declaration which talks about freedom of expression and the government's responsibility to provide protection to journalists. Yet, the fact on the ground is very different. Contrary to the provisions of the law, one may even come to see instances where families have no idea where their loved ones who work as a journalist has been jailed. Even the media itself and sometimes the concerned government authorities have no information about the journalist's imprisonment. Therefore, you see a serious problem in respecting the law.

Another serious challenge the media community is grappling with has to do with the safety and security of journalists. In this regard, Tibebe admitted that sending journalists for fieldwork has become more difficult than any time ever due to safety and security concerns. He explained the grim situation in the following words:



As you might understand, now-a-days, it is difficult for journalists to travel to places as many see the work of journalism as a crime. Identifying oneself as a journalist may result in beating, detention, breaking of your camera, or even forcefully taking your camera away. If you want to conduct an interview in a certain city, you face harassment from illegal group of youngsters



or from police officers. These days, I feel uncomfortable to send my journalists out on duty; I even prefer if they observe the situation as any ordinary person and report on it with no one knowing that they are journalists.

Concurring with Tibebe's views, Fitih on her part noted that "The government and security forces' tendency of stifling journalists has become increasingly alarming on the ground. In my view, security forces' tendency of arbitrarily detaining journalists and stifling dissenting voices is one of the serious challenges" facing the journalistic community in Ethiopia today.

## INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE MEDIA THROUGH CAPTURE

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Following the break out of the war, the warring parties have engaged in serious information warfare. There has, thus, been a race for controlling the war narratives in one's favor. Since, in the Ethiopian context, the dominant (legacy) media in terms of both reach and resources are the state media, the warring parties seized the opportunity to capture the dominant state media and instrumentalized them in advancing a singular narrative by denying the public of the right to have access to diverse point of views.

In this regard, Selome expressed her frustration with respect to how the government has captured the 'public' media and used it as an instrument to parrot the official line day and night. She referred to the behavior of the entire 'public' media during the recent crisis in the *Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church*. Although the crisis has serious implications for the security and stability of the nation, the tax-payer funded national 'public' media refused to cover the story, precipitating public outrage against the organization.

In sync with Selome's views, Henok Nigussie pointed out how the 'public' media in the Southern Regional State have been tiptoeing the official line and have chosen silence when it comes to covering issues that matter the public the most. As Henok noted, "It is almost impossible to find private media organizations in the Southern Regional State of Ethiopia... all the media in the region are "state-run..." The media outlets in the Southern Regional State could not qualify as media in the real sense of the word; they are labeled as media only in nomenclature. To him, "these 'media' are just like properties which have identification plates; properties a regional government uses in whatever way it sees fit."

Elaborating further, Henok said that "The regional media in general are not allowed to entertain the public interest. Rather, they are under a serious influence of the regional authorities and are there to serve the interest of the governing elites. This, for example, has practically been observed when half a million people of *Gedeo* and *Guji* were displaced from Konso. There was no single media outlet that tried to cover the issue." He noted that it was only after some regional authorities came to acknowledge the problem that the 'public' media started to provide some sort of coverage to the issue."

The interviewees were of the opinion that the war has exacerbated the media capture under the pretext of national security concerns, with chilling effects on press freedom. According to Berhan, the government's interest to monopolize the narratives and counter the TPLF's informational war has negatively affected the freedom of the media. Along a similar line, Muluken argued that the conflict in various parts of the country has enabled the government in power to take advantage of the situation to muzzle the media and advance its interests. In his own words, "The conflict has given more space to the government to muzzle the media in the name of national interest and national security."

Owing to the fact that the media is operating under the influence of the government and does not function independently, its reporting cannot be fair and balanced. When the public recognizes such subservient role that the media play, they suffer from credibility crisis, and this phenomenon is what has been transpiring in today's media sphere in Ethiopia, said Meseret.

What we can conclude from the preceding discussion is that the war has exacerbated the condition of media capture by the state and/or warring parties in pursuit of narrative control. In the process, press freedom has become a casualty. Instead of the media serving as an independent monitor of power, it has become part of the war machinery working in cahoots with the governing elites. Any media outlet that dares to maintain its independence and step out of the official line risks being treated as unpatriotic and is often pressured to get in line or suffer the consequence. This phenomenon has put press freedom and media professionalism in jeopardy over the last couple of years.

## **CURTAILMENT OF FREEDOM OF MOBILITY**

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Freedom of the press cannot be separated from freedom of mobility. When freedom of movement is in jeopardy, journalist cannot properly do their information gathering duty. Information is the 'raw material' that the media use to produce media content. Without access to sufficient and reliable information, there is little the media can avail in the marketplace of ideas. The security challenges following the war and the countless inter-ethnic conflicts have made free movement of citizens and goods very difficult over the last couple of years. This situation has posed serious challenges to the work of the media. According to Asegid, the constraining media environment we have at the moment is partly attributable to the lack of freedom of movement. Following the war, said

Asegid, “It has generally become very difficult for citizens to move freely to different places in Ethiopia. This is also true when it comes to media professionals.”

Explaining the challenge that the problem of the lack of freedom of movement has posed to journalists and the journalistic work, Muluken noted the following: “The government denies access to information, especially for the independent media. At the same time, journalists from these media are unable to get out of the cities to cover stories due to safety and security concerns.”

Henok, Tibebu, Neway and Rebka all share the concern that insecurity is one of the daunting challenges in today’s Ethiopia. As a result, journalists are not able to move from place to place to do their journalistic work. Along the same line, Fitihi argued how worse the condition has become lately. In her own words, “Mobility is definitely a problem given the national situation we are in. Moving physically from place to place and collect information for journalistic work is costly not only financially but also in terms of risking your life. There are lots of places which are not accessible not only to journalists but also to other citizens.”

Some interviewees connect the lack of freedom of mobility with the safety and security of journalists. In this regard, Nazif argues that “Journalists’ inability to freely move from place to place is mainly associated with our ethnic and political tensions. He goes on to note that “... when some communities see a certain journalist who is not of their own, they may attempt to physically attack him. Even some individual police officers, government officials, and wealthy personalities can force journalists to leave an area if they feel so despite the fact that such an act has no policy support.”

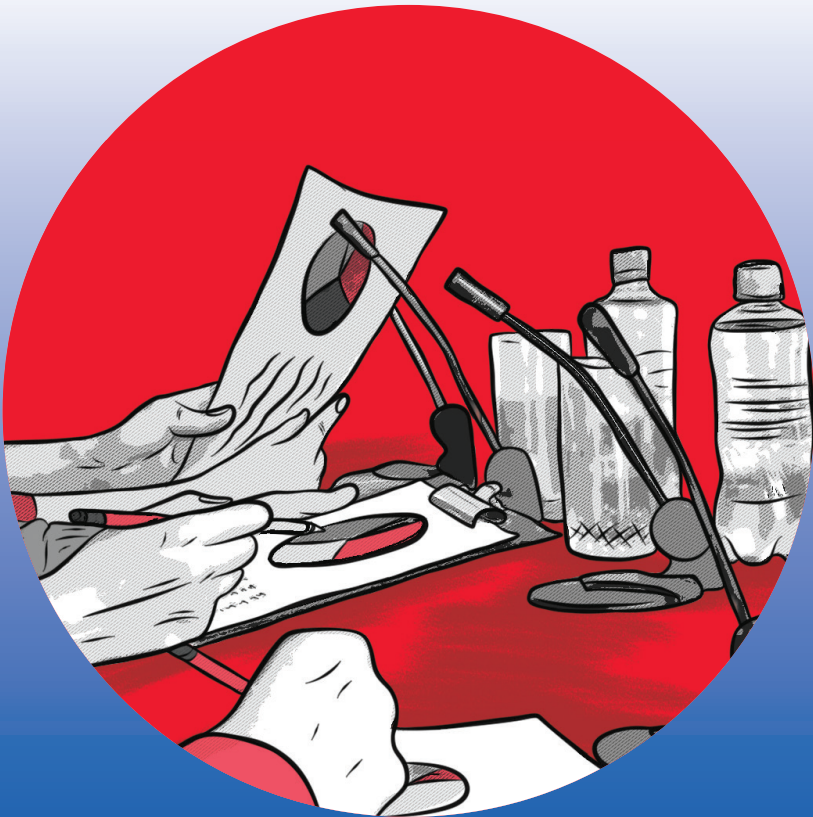
On the other hand, Meseret believes that the violent conflicts we have been experiencing over the last couple of years has contributed enormously to the journalists’ sense of insecurity. According to Meseret,

the current conflict in the country has influenced the activities of the media in two ways: The first one is that “Journalists are not given protection while moving from place to place in order to cover issues. Sometimes they are deliberately forbidden to go to places like *West Welega* or *Tigiray*, or *Sekota* for media-related work.” Second, if at all allowed, Meseret argues that offering media coverage from these places is allowed only to journalists from the state media, a privilege that is not extended to the private media journalists.”

In sum, it could be argued that the proliferation of violent conflicts over the last couple of years have created security related mobility challenges; and these in turn have had serious bearings on the safety and security of journalists and the journalistic profession.



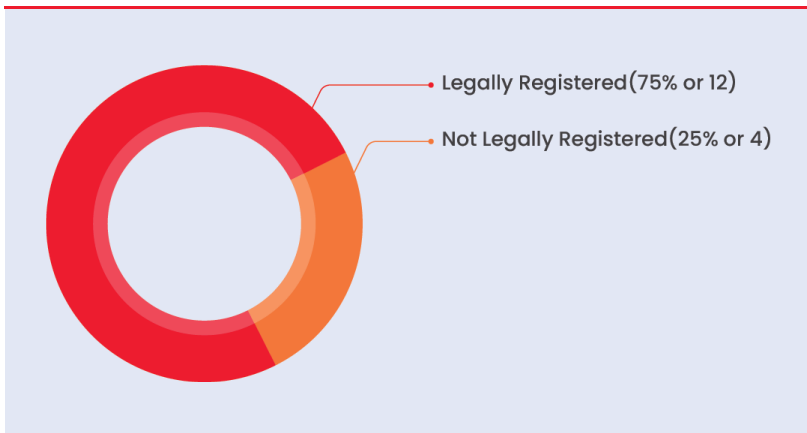
# STATE OF MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS



If Ethiopia's media space is tumultuous and unflattering as discussed in the preceding section, it is of vital importance to seek to understand how the media associations are faring in such a tumultuous media space, and whether they have the institutional and organizational foundations and programmatic capacities that could help them weather the storm. In the following sub-section, an attempt is made to capture the state of media associations.

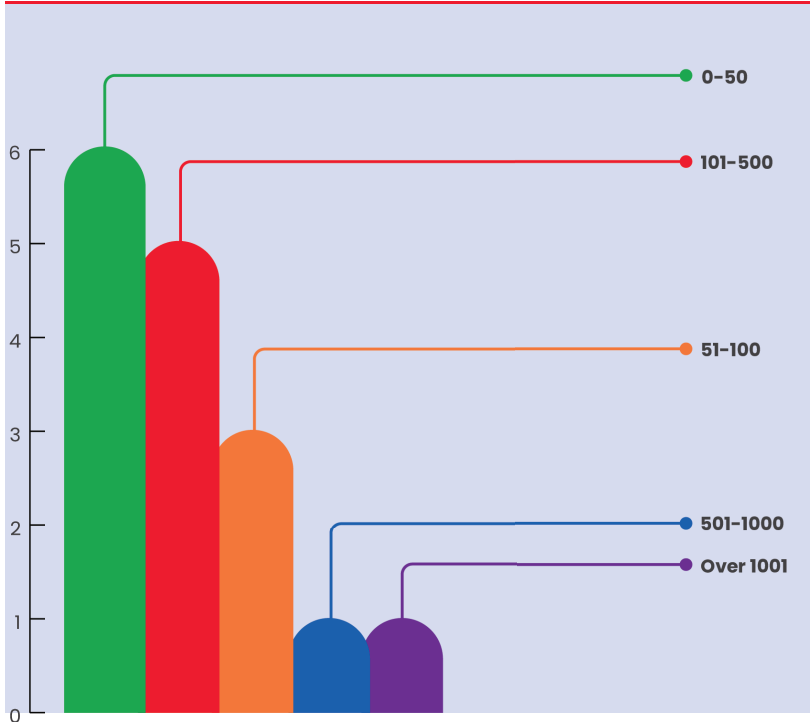
## BASIC FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT THE MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS

### Legal Registration Status of Media Associations



**75% (12)** of the associations are legally registered  
**25% (4)** of them are not legally registered.

## Association Membership



# 56% or 9

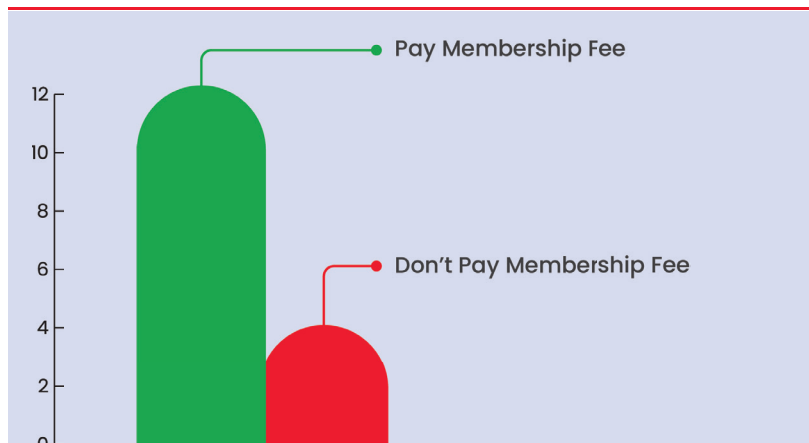
of the associations have a hundred or less than a hundred members each,

# 44 % or 7

Of them have more than a hundred members each.



## Membership Fee



# 75% (12)

Of the associations collect membership fees from their members

# 25% (4)

Of them do not collect membership fee from their members

Except in the case of those associations which have not yet been officially registered, almost in all of the registered associations, members are required to pay regular monthly membership fees of varied amounts which range between 17 birr to about 850 birr per month. The only exception is the *Ethiopian Media Council* whose membership fees range from 40,000 birr to 250,000 birr annually.

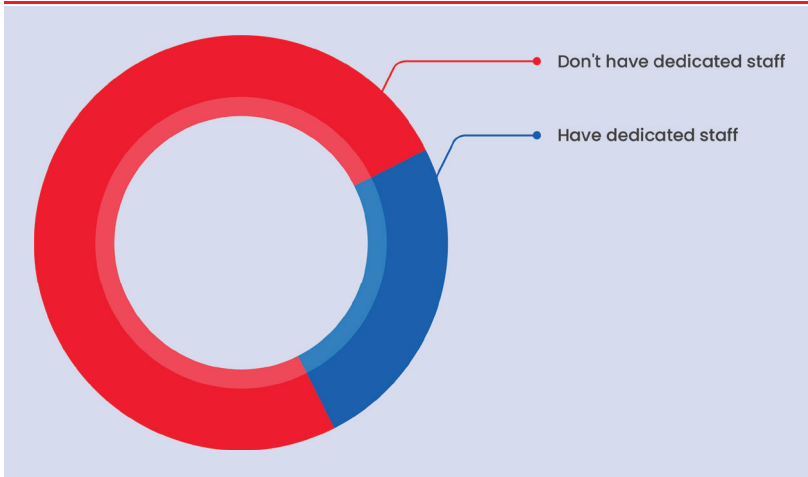
However, the interviewees (almost all of whom are leaders of these associations) disclosed that the association members often lack commitment to faithfully pay their monthly membership fees. According to Tibebe, for instance, members of his association are expected to pay a monthly membership fee in the amount of 100 birr. However, out of 1200 members, only close to 500 of them pay their fee regularly. This means that about 60% of the members do not pay their membership fees on a regular basis. “Had there been serious commitment on the part of our association members to pay their dues regularly, our association would have been in a much better place financially,” he added.

The weak commitment of association members in regularly paying their dues is widely shared among many of the interviewees. On the other hand, interviewees representing the *Ethiopian Mass Media Women Association*, the *Somali Region Journalists Association*, and the *Ethiopian Media Council* affirmed that the members of their respective associations faithfully pay their regular membership fees.

As the members of most of the associations considered for this study do not commit themselves to paying their membership fees on a regular basis, it should be incumbent on the leadership to figure out why there is such glaring lack of commitment from the members to pay their dues regularly, and work on things that could best boost the members’ sense of ownership.



## Dedicated Full-Time Staff



**25% (4)**

Of the associations have dedicated staff

**75% (12)**

Of them do not have dedicated staff members to run office duties

The above pie-chart indicates that three-fourth (75%) of the associations under the study do not have fulltime staff, whereas a quarter (25%) of them has fulltime staff. Even those associations which said that they have a few dedicated staff noted that such staff members are project-bound staff who would often leave as the project phases out. The interviewees added that most of these projects are not beyond

six months long; hence, the employees who are recruited by the project usually leave by the end of the project. In that regard, it could be said that almost all of the associations considered in this study do not really have permanent staff.

The main reasons the interviewees pointed out with respect to not having permanent staff include *the problem of generating reliable revenue stream, the challenge of securing long-term financial assistance, the need to prioritize the limited finance resources for other more important activities than pay employee salaries, and the delay in securing official registration of the association.*

In this regard, Tibebe, for instance said the following: “we don’t have regular income, nor do we have dependable financial support to recruit dedicated staff. We only get very few and irregular short-term projects. Aid organizations and other relevant organizations are afraid of supporting and working with journalistic associations.” On his part, Henok Seyoum noted that their association decided to spend the limited financial resources they have on their core activities instead of recruiting dedicated staff. He added that they usually outsource office related routine works, such as those related to financial management, branding, crafting project proposals, and searching for funding, to a consultancy firm.

In other associations such as the *Ethiopian Sports Journalists Association, Oromia Journalists Association, the Ethiopian Journalists Association, and the Southern Ethiopia Journalists Association*, members of the management often volunteer to run office duties in view of making up for the absence of dedicated permanent staff. The only exception in this regard seems to be the *Ethiopian Media Council*. According to Amare Aregawi, head of the *Ethiopian Media Council*, “the council has dedicated staff including a secretary, a finance officer, and

a director to run office affairs.” He added that each employee performs his/her tasks under the supervision of the director who oversees the proper executions of office duties.

### Owning Their Own Office



**50% (8)**

Of the associations have their own office while another

**50% (8)**

Of them do not have their own office

As could be seen from the above *histogram*, while half (50%) of the media associations considered for the study have their own office, the other half (50%) of the associations do not have their own office.

According to the interviewees, the associations lack of having their own dedicated office is attributable to *financial constraints, lack of cooperation on the part of the government to provide the associations with an office space from the public housing agency, as it usually does for political parties and other relevant entities, the fact that some of the associations are not yet legally registered or are in the process of getting registered*, among others.

Among the reasons noted above, **financial constraint** stands out as the single most dominant and recurring problem for not having a dedicated office. This is actually a pressing challenge not only for those which do not have office space but also even for those associations that have reported having their own office. This is because they are worried about how long they could afford maintaining their current offices, as they are uncertain of their financial security.

According to Tibebe Belete, President of the *Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association* (EMMPA), their associations' board members pay from their own pockets in order to cover the thirty-thousand (30,000) birr monthly office rent, although they could sometimes secure a few irregular short-term projects.

On the other hand, for those associations that have not yet been legally registered, it is difficult to think about owning an office. This argument is shared by Fitih Alemu- cofounder of the *Ethiopian Journalism Educators Network*, Teklehaimanot Gebray- a representative of the *Tigray Journalists Association*, and Henok Nigusie- an executive committee member of the *Southern Ethiopia Journalists Association*.

The representatives of the associations that do not have their own office reported that they use different mechanisms to try to carry out their work as much as they can. Some of these mechanisms include, carrying out their activities virtually by using group e-mails, using social media platforms (e.g., telegram channels) to run their activities, using partners' offices as a means to hold meetings and conduct discussions about their

association's affairs, using offices of other private organizations, sharing offices and halls of other stakeholders working in a similar sector, holding meetings in hotels and cafes, etc.

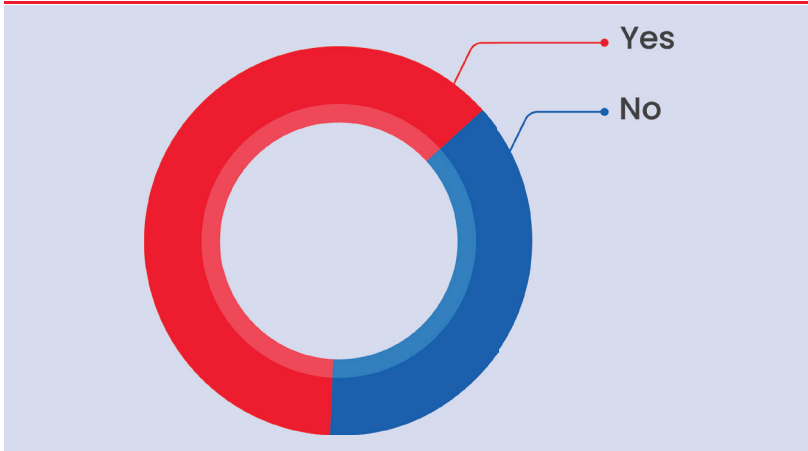
This being the case, however, the interviewees did not hide the challenges they often encounter using the mechanisms noted above. Some of these challenges include experiencing information access challenges when there is poor internet connectivity and/or when the internet is completely shut-down by the operator, the inconvenience of meeting at someone's' places, of meeting in hotels and cafes, the difficulty of holding thorough discussions as the virtual platform cannot genuinely replace the face-to-face meeting, and the difficulty of handling paperwork in time.

With respect to the challenges associated with the timely handling of paperworks, for instance, Henok Nigussie had the following to say: "It may take us a month to sign minutes of discussions due to the fact that members of the executive committee who attend the telegram group meetings are from different places."

From the above discussion, it clear that the issue of office space is a critical one. It won't be difficult to imagine the kind of work these associations could execute without having a decent office to run their affairs, given the poor internet infrastructure Ethiopia has on top of the frequent interruptions or shut-downs of the internet by the operator dictated by the political temperature.



## Conducting General Assembly Meetings



**62.5% (10)**

Of the associations convene general assembly meetings

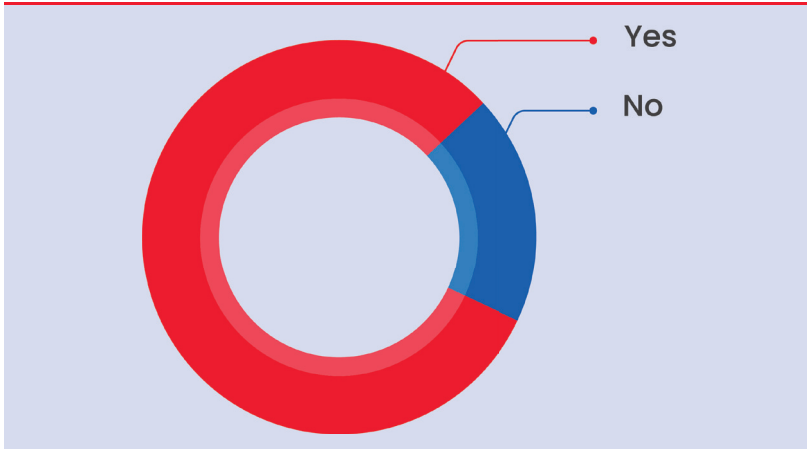
**37.5% (6)**

Of them do not hold general assembly meetings

Although the majority of the associations that do not convene general assembly meetings are those that have not yet completed the legal registrations, it can be observed that there are also a couple of legally registered associations that do not convene general assembly meetings. Those that convene general assembly meetings hold their meeting at varying frequencies. While some of them convene every six months, some others hold their meetings every one year, and still some others convene every two years.



## Formal Management Structure



**75% (12)**

Of the associations have formal management structure

**25% (4)**

Of them do not have formal management structure

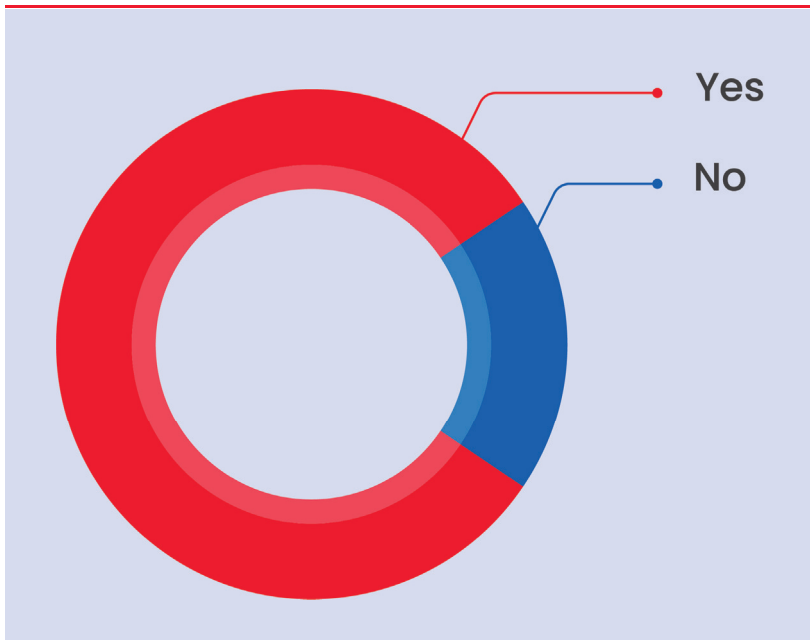
Except for those associations (25%) which have not yet been officially registered, almost all (75%) of the officially registered associations considered for the study said that they have formal management structure, although the type of structure varies from association to association. For instance, under the general assembly, some have governing board, followed by executive management body; whereas, others have a structure where there is general assembly followed by an executive management body of some sort. And the interviewees

confirmed that the management in the different layers (general assembly, governing board, and/or the executive committee or bod) normally convenes regular meetings.

Some associations convene their general assembly meetings every 6 months, while others convene once every year, and still others meet once in every 2 years. However, almost all of the interviewees admitted that they were unable to hold any meeting for a long time due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the war in northern Ethiopia.

On the other hand, out of the sixteen associations studied, the *Amhara Journalism School Association*, the *Amhara Educational Media Association*, the *Ethiopian Journalism Educators Network* and the *Tigray Journalist Association* do not have formal management structure.

### Structured Work Plan



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# 88% (14)

of the associations have structured work plan

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# 12% (2)

Of them do not have structured work plan

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Except the interviewee from the *Amhara Educational Media Association*, almost all interviewees said that their respective associations take programmatic approach in the way they operate. In other words, they noted that their associations have structured work plan. Some even goes to the extent of noting that their associations have developed a ten-year, a five-year, etc., strategic plans on top of their annual operational plans. However, the associations vary when it comes to performing according to the plan. In this regard, some associations said that they have performed well measured against their plans, while others acknowledged that their associations have not lived up to their plans, and attributed their less than expected performance to various factors.

According to Rebka, her association (*Ethiopian Mass Media Women Association*) has executed 90% of its plans despite the myriads of challenges it has encountered. “After our reestablishment, we performed over 90% of our plan. In her words, “Our basic work is empowering our members, and we have given plenty of trainings and held roundtable discussions to this end.” Similarly, Fitih noted that her association has achieved what it has planned to do in its first phase. “We have achieved 100 percent of our first phase of the plan. Our primary goal was capacity building in different areas; and we achieved that. We plan to create

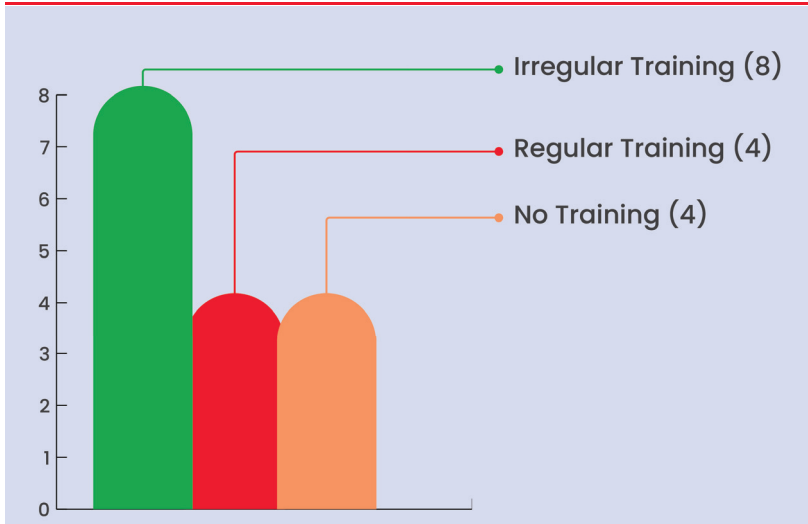
mediated journalism dialogues on issues such as conflict reporting, dis, mis and mal information, and we have had virtual and face-to-face workshops,” she said.

What is more, Amare Aregawi asserts that: “The media council has a work plan endorsed by the general assembly.” Included in the work plan, according to him, are activities like building office capacity with skilled personnel and facilities like computers and others, developing an official website for communications, offering training programs in different parts of the country targeting journalists, media owners and lawyers. To this end, Amare said that his organization has organized trainings on various topics in cities, such as *Bahir Dar, Hawassa, Adama, Jiggiga, and Addis Ababa*, among others. The trainings were sponsored by various international organizations.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees admitted that their associations have not executed much of their plans. The major obstacle often mentioned by the interviewees for their associations’ dismal performance has to do with *financial problem*. The interviewees argued that they often plan to undertake projects. However, if they fail to secure funding for the planned projects, there is little they could do to realize the plans.

Other contributing factors for their associations’ failure to perform as planned include, *capacity limitation of the management, Covid-19 pandemic, the civil war, office shortage, lack of support from the government, and not being able to get support from international organizations*.

## Offering Capacity Building Training



**25% (4)**

Of the associations provide regular trainings

**50% (8)**

Of them provide trainings in an irregular basis

**25% (4)**

Of the associations do not give trainings at all

Only a quarter of the associations provide capacity training programs to their members periodically (some do once in three months and others do once in six months). On top of that they also take advantage of training programs organized by other partners or actors. But almost fifty percent of the associations provide capacity trainings on irregular basis. The trainings are often offered either by the associations themselves as part of their annual plan, or through collaboration with funding organizations, or by sending their members to the training programs organized by others. Among these association, a few of them try to carry out needs assessments before they organize trainings or seek funding for the training programs they would wish to offer. However, the actual execution of the training programs depend on being able to secure funding from relevant actors. Otherwise, their plans usually fail to materialize due to financial constraints.

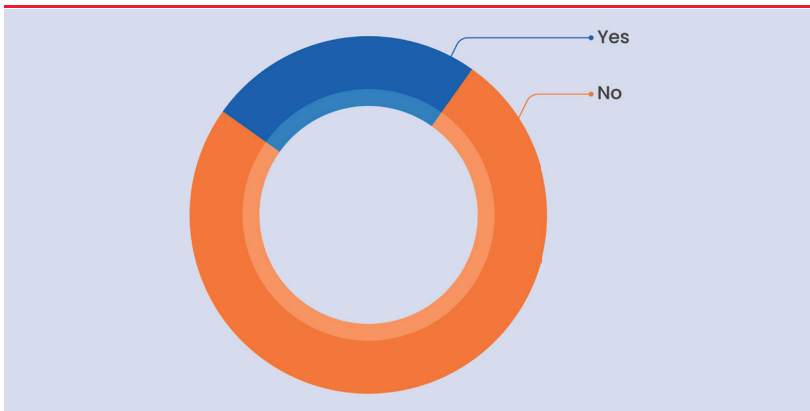
Along this line, Rebka has the following to say: “We carry out needs assessment by going to each region.... Then, based on these needs assessments, we craft projects. If the project is accepted by the funding organizations, we go ahead with the training, if not, there is no way that we can administer the training, as we don’t have the money to do so.”

What is more, a quarter of the associations do not offer training programs for their members either due to financial constraints or having not yet completed the official registration of their associations.

Overall, what could be discerned from the interview data is that except a few associations which provide capacity building training programs to their members periodically (and even some of them able to send their members abroad for training programs), the overwhelming majority of them depend on training programs organized by others for participation. In other words, most of the training programs they participate in are *supply driven rather than demand driven*. They try to send their members to training programs organized by media development organizations or other associations. When capacity building training programs are nor

demand driven, associations may send their members to take part in the training programs organized by others. However, the effectiveness of such training participations is doubtful as they might not necessarily address context-specific needs of the associations.

### Experience Sharing Program



**25% (4)**

Of the associations have involved in experience sharing programs with others

**75% (12)**

Of them have not involved in experience sharing programs

Although a quarter of the interviewees representing their respective associations said that they have participated in experience sharing programs, either by organizing them or by taking part in such programs

organized by other national or international associations and/or organizations, it does not mean that they have experience sharing program in their annual activity plans.

Except the *Ethiopian Mass Media Women Association*, almost all of the associations do not include experience sharing program in their annual to-do list. Some of the main reasons the interviewees noted for not having experience sharing program as part of their associations' annual activity plan include the following: *capacity problem, culture of mistrust, and budgetary constraints*

With respect to institutional capacity limitations, some interviewees confessed that they don't feel that their association has gotten to the level where it has accumulated experience worthy of sharing to others. In this respect, Nazif concedes that

"In order to be able to share our experiences, we first need to work a lot to build up our own experiences. As it stands now, we are not there yet."

According to Tibebe, most of the experienced associations in terms of longevity, except for *EMMWA*, are not in a condition where someone would feel that they have experience worthy of learning from. In his own words,

"Some of the oldest associations are not in a condition where one could learn worthy experience from. You might perhaps learn how to dissolve a strong and historical association into oblivion or how a single management can stay in his position for quite a long time and kill an association. Most of these associations are captured by an individual or a few individuals."

On the other hand, he added that

"...new associations are also not ready enough to impart experience as they don't have structured organization, office, etc. I don't think that they have experience and professional asset that could be shared. There might be experienced individuals in these associations from whom



you can learn. But there is little you can learn from their associations' experience."

In relation to the problem associated with culture that hinders the development of the practice of experience sharing among the associations, Wondwossen has the following to say:

"When you come to see the trend here in Ethiopia with respect to organizing experience sharing events, it leaves us much to be desired. The problem among the local associations is that one never listens to the other."

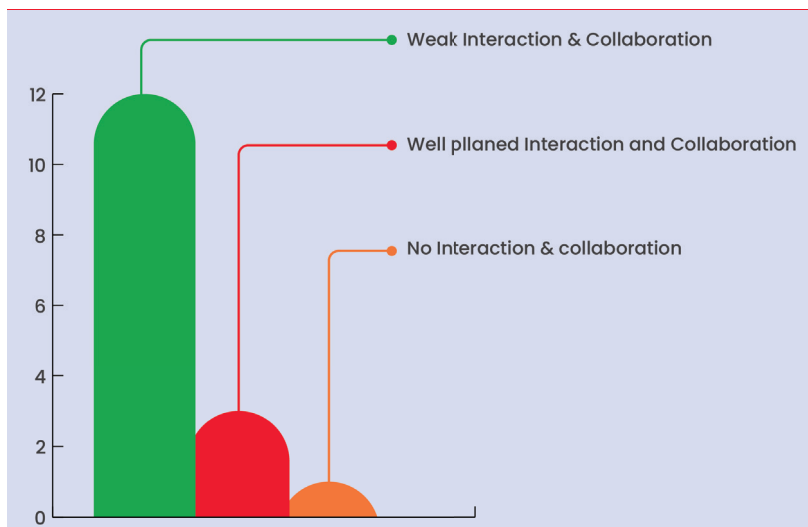
Along a similar line, Meseret laments that

"Media associations hate each other as they label each other as private versus government, pro-government versus anti-government. From his perspective, such an attitude makes it very difficult to promote the culture of learning from each other through experience sharing schemes.

Budgetary constraint is another factor stressed by the interviewees for the associations' poor record when it comes to having experience sharing programs. In this regard, Kenok Nigussie, for example, has the following to say:

"When you expand your plans to include many things, there comes a question of finance. Thus, let alone to organize experience sharing events, we are able to conduct general assembly meetings only because of the generosity of hotels in willing to extend sponsorships. Financial problem is the major issue we are still unable to resolve."

### Interaction and Collaboration with Others



**19% (3)**

Of the associations have well-planned interaction & collaboration program with other associations;

**75% (12)**

Of them have weak interaction & collaboration program;

**6% (1)**

Has no collaboration & interaction plan with other media associations.

Except representatives of a few associations which boast of having a relatively well-planned interaction and collaboration programs with other organizations, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees representing the selected media associations admitted that there is little or no *planned* interaction and collaboration with other sister associations to speak of. If there were some collaborative efforts, they said that they were more of random or sporadic.

This being the case, however, most of the interviewees expressed their membership in the *Ethiopian Media Council* and the recent initiative undertaken by CARD and IMS to bring all associations in the area to work together in addressing safety and security concerns as their main interaction and collaboration platforms so far. According to them, especially the event organized by CARD and IMS recently aimed at bringing all the associations together and encourage them to work together on safety and security concerns have given the associations valuable opportunity to come together and advance their shared interests. They believe that such a coalition would be instrumental in creating an environment where solidarity among the associations would be strengthened. This in turn would contribute to building trust among the associations and thereby facilitate information sharing and help them in promoting and defending their collective interests.

With respect to factors that might have affected the associations in having a well-structured and meaningful interaction and collaboration among themselves, some interviewees have attributed it to the ethno-political fragmentation observed in the society today. According to Rebka, there is proliferation of associations with different names and frames, which makes it increasingly difficult to get to know who is who and to have a clear understanding of what can be gained from a collaboration with such associations. Elaborating on the point, Rebka noted the following: “As you know, associations are being established here and there in regional format, language format, ethnicity, etc.,

almost in the same way government structures are set up in the country...Actually, now-a-days, we don't clearly know which association is which and for what common goal it is established. Once such clarity is established, it would be easier to come onboard and work together.”

This indicates that there is a lack of clarity among the various associations with respect to what the other associations stand for and what common visions such associations share with them. In such an environment where there is lack of clarity and trust, the role the *Ethiopian Media Council* and the recent coalition forming initiative undertaken by CARD could play in serving as a platform, in demystifying misconceptions, and in helping rally the associations behind collective and shared goals cannot be underestimated.

## **ASSOCIATIONS' CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVING MEMBERS' PROFESSIONALISM**

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The interviewees were of the belief that their respective associations are striving, at varying degrees, to contribute to the professional development of their members. Many of the interviewees cited the training programs their respective associations have availed to their members so far as the measure of the efforts they have been exerting on improving journalistic professionalism. In this regard, for instance, Tibebe noted that his association often directs the lion's share of the available funds towards capacity building training programs that are aimed at improving the members' professional standard. However, he conceded that it is a daunting challenge to make the opportunity available to all of the association members due to budgetary constraints. In spite of such challenges, he still believes that his association's contributions in improving the members' journalistic professionalism cannot be underestimated.

Tibebu added that his association's contributions could have been much better, had the financial problems been solved. "We envision to reach out to every member of our association and beyond if we can secure adequate financial support. With such support, we would be more than happy to provide trainings every month and reach a wider journalistic community and thereby contribute to the enhancement of professionalism" he reiterated

In a similar vein, Henok Seyoum believes that his association has been contributing to professionalism in an observable manner. According to him, his association members show observable professional mastery in their work as reflected in various ways. Commenting on the observable manifestations, Henok Seyoum noted the following: "As a sector based specialized journalism, our members have better status of challenging, crosschecking and delivering knowledge-based arguments in the sector. More than 50% of our members have been working for over ten years focusing only on tourism, travel and hospitality. I think, among the sector-based specialized journalism, it is by far the best, may be next to sports journalism specialization."

On the other hand, the younger associations admitted that although they are trying their best to find ways to work towards improving journalistic professionalism, their contribution so far is limited. They noted that the limitations are attributable to factors such as limited organizational capacity, budgetary constraints, infrastructural (e.g., office space, etc.), among others.

Taken overall, it is observed from many of the interviewees' reactions that most of the training programs facilitated by individual associations or by other partners often focus on improving the journalistic professionalism. They believe that the improvements being observed here and there are the result of such endeavors. However, if the extent of such improvements are to be measured vis-à-vis what is transpiring

in the overall media sphere, most of the interviewees believe that we still have a long way to go before we witness significant observable improvements in professionalism in the sector.

## **ASSOCIATIONS' ENDEAVORS IN PROTECTING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF JOURNALISTS**

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Most of the associations asserted that they have been working hard to protect the safety and security of their members. According to the interviewees, the efforts the associations have been exerting to protect the safety and security of their members include, providing trainings that focus on safety and security issues, releasing statements when journalists face detention and are sent to jail, linking journalists to human rights organizations when they face safety and security concerns, facilitating information sharing, working with rights defenders to encourage them to release statements regarding the detention of journalists, facilitating financial support for families of detained journalists, bringing the issue to the attention of concerned government authorities and holding discussions with them over the detention of journalists.

In this regard, Tibebu from *EMMPA* reiterated the fact that his association's primary focus is on ensuring the safety and security of its members. He claimed that his association is perhaps the primary, if not the only, media and journalism association which releases statements protesting the unlawful detention or kidnapping of journalists- regardless of association membership- and calls for the release of the same.

Tibebu further added that on top of issuing statements or press releases, his association often holds discussions with concerned authorities about the whereabouts of detained journalists and engages in facilitating conditions where the families of the victims could get support from

human rights groups, such as the *Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders*. What is more, he explained his association's commitment in the following words: "We fight until journalists are released from their detention and every executive committee member is committed to working day and night to this end."

Based on the reactions of the interviewees, it is noted that the associations deal with the issue of journalists' safety and security in three ways. These include taking *reactive approach, proactive approach, and passive approach*. The associations which focus on a reactive approach take an active role regarding the issue after the incident, i.e., after something has happened to journalists. Such a reaction takes the form of issuing statements or press leases, holding discussions with concerned authorities, contacting rights organizations, etc. On the other hand, the associations that focus on a proactive approach often engage in providing training on, creating awareness about, and educating members about safety and security issues. The associations that take a passive approach often choose (for various reasons) to keep quiet on or do nothing about the safety and security issue of their members.

Of the three approaches, many of the interviewees pursue either reactive or proactive approach. Only a couple of the interviewees subscribe to the passive approach. What is more, except *EMMPA* and *Oromia Journalists Association*, the associations that pursue reactive or proactive approach to the issue of journalists' safety and security often focus on the members of their respective associations. They rarely attempt to get involved beyond their own associations when addressing issues related to the safety and security of journalists. This indicates that there is a lack of synergy among the associations in addressing the issue of the safety and security of journalists. The hope is that the recent initiative undertaken by CARD towards the creation of the associations' network or coalition might help overcome the hitherto fragmented efforts and thereby encourage the pursuit of collective response in dealing with the issue of journalists' safety and security.

# CONCLUSION





The study set out to examine the existing media space with respect to its suitability for the exercise of press freedom and the flourishing of vibrant, independent and professional media. It also aimed at assessing the state of media associations with the view to gauging how they are faring in such media space.

The study revealed that the promising liberalization of the communicative space seen with the coming to power of the *Prosperity Party*-led government of Prime Minister Abiy has increasingly been constrained following both the break out of the civil war between the central government and the Tigray regional state and the proliferation of inter-communal conflicts in many parts of the country.

The environment of the civil war and inter-communal conflicts seems to have contributed to the exacerbation of the government's proclivity to control media narratives through media capture; Owing to the environment of conflict, access to information has increasingly become challenging; harassment and arbitrary detention of journalists has become a common practice; and mobility of journalists has been curtailed.

Media associations do not appear to have sufficient institutional and programmatic capacities to effectively navigate through such tumultuous and constraining media space. Most of the associations are replete with capacity limitations, lack of human resources, crippling budgetary constraints, infrastructural challenges, fragmentation and lack of inter-associational synergy, among others.

What is more, on individual terms, there have been encouraging efforts many of the associations have been exerting in terms of promoting professional and independent media practices as well as in ensuring the protection of the safety and security of their respective members. However, these efforts seem to have been fragmented and uncoordinated, and have rarely been cross-associational. Such lack of mustering collective agency among the associations seems to have contributed to their inability to weather the storm and thereby bring about desirable changes and improvements in the communicative sphere.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on the findings of the baseline study, the following recommendations are made:

## STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

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Weak institutional capacity is one of the findings of the study, as reflected in poor infrastructure such as lack of decent office space and office facilities; lack or shortage of dedicated and competent fulltime staff.

**In order to address these challenges, media development actors should look into how they could assist in**

- ▶ Covering expenses for office rent as well as for office facilities.
- ▶ Hiring a competent fulltime staff who is experienced in writing project proposals, in grant writing, and in project management so that the association would be able to enhance its capacity in generating income for the association.

## FACILITATING DEMAND-DRIVEN CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING PROGRAMS

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The training programs that are offered being more of supply-driven as opposed to demand-driven is another challenge the study has recognized. Such a challenge is true with regards to both the management of the associations and the members of the associations. In order to tackle these challenges, there should be a concerted effort on

the part of media development actors to ensure that training programs that are organized or sponsored for the associations' management as well for the members are demand-driven.

As noted earlier, most of the trainings that have been made available to media associations so far are more of supply-driven, which might not take into account the specific needs of individual associations. Associations might respond to such training opportunities; but since they could be one-size-fits-all type of trainings, their impact could be limited. The best way to address such a problem is commissioning needs assessment surveys, and then based on the outcome of the survey results, to organize or sponsor trainings programs that are tailored towards meeting such needs.

## **ENSURING GRADUAL ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF ASSOCIATIONS**

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However valuable the assistance they provide, media development actors and/or media SCOs that are engaged in the media development sector cannot continue extending such assistance for eternity. In recognition of such fact, there should be a sound strategy that would help the associations to become self-sufficient or self-reliant as they go forward.

To this end, it might be worth considering for media development actors and/or media CSOs to encourage consultants who are competing for projects that such actors commission to collaborate in some way with the media associations so that the associations could gain experiences in undertaking consultancy projects, which would later help them to be able to compete for similar projects on their own. Such an encouragement could be effected by including a provision that states that there would be preferential treatment for those applicants who could collaborate with the associations.

What is more, associations themselves should carefully analyze why their members are apathetic in faithfully contributing their membership fees, and then design a sound strategy that could effectively address their members' concerns. By doing so, association leaders could help boost their members' sense of commitment to their associations, which in turn would increase their sense of loyalty in faithfully paying their dues. Such strategies, coupled with others, could be instrumental in contributing to the associations' efforts to become self-reliant in the long run.

## **STRENGTHENING SYNERGY AMONG THE MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS**

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Another major finding that came out of the study is that there is serious lack of synergy and collaboration among the media associations. Such lack of synergy and collaboration has subjected the associations' efforts to be fragmented and less impactful. In order to claim collective agency, and thereby effectively advance their shared interests, there must be collaboration and synergy among the associations.

In areas like the protection of the safety and security of journalists, sharing experiences, promoting responsible, ethical and professional journalism, exerting positive pressure on the government to create and sustain conducive environment for the exercise of press freedom, etc., mustering collective energy and acting synergetically is key. Thus, it would be important for media development actors and/or media CSO's to allocate resources towards the emergence and strengthening of such synergy and collaboration among the media associations. Strengthening and building on the existing initiative (e.g., media associations' network or coalition initiated by CARD) would be one example.

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# I APPENDICES

## DEMOGRAPHIC LIST OF INTERVIEWEES WITH THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

R. No.	Name of the Interviewee	Name of Association	Position in the Association	Remark
1	Abdi Hassan Mohammed	Somali Region Journalists Association	Chairman	
2	Birhan Dejen	Amhara Journalism School Association	Chairman	
3	Fitih Alemu	Ethiopian Journalism Educators Network	Cofounder	
4	Henok Seyum	Ethiopian Culture and Tourism Journalists Association	President	
5	Meselech Zelalem	Amhara Region Media and Journalists Association	Deputy Manager	
6	Selome Desta	Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Women Association	Late Chairwoman	
7	Teklehaimanot Gebray	Tigray Journalists Association	Representative	
8	Tibebu Belete	Ethiopia Mass Media Professionals Association	President	
9	Rebka Tadesse	Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Women Association	Chairwoman	
10	Neway Yimer	Ethiopian Sport Journalists' Association	President	
11	Nazif Jamal	Oromia Journalists' Association	President	
12	Meseret Atalay	Ethiopian Journalists' Association	President	
13	Henok Nigussie	Southern Ethiopia Journalists' Association	Member of the association's executive committee	
14	Muluken Asegidew (PhD)	Amhara Educational Media Association	Head	
15	Wondwossen Mekonnen	Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association (Not active at the moment)	Former President	
16	Asegid Hamza	Ethiopian Community Radio Association	Former President	
17	Amare Aregawi	Ethiopian Media Council	Chair Person	

## LIST OF SELECTED MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS WITH THEIR DETAILS

<b>Name of association:</b>	Amhara Journalism School Association
<b>Date of establishment:</b>	Mid 2013 E.C.
<b>Kind of association:</b>	University journalism and communication departments/schools
<b>No. of members:</b>	7 departments,
<b>Members monthly fee:</b>	No
<b>Membership composition:</b>	-
<b>Scope of the association:</b>	National
<b>Legal registration status:</b>	Not registered
<b>Office:</b>	No
<b>Dedicated staff/employee:</b>	No
<b>General assembly meeting:</b>	-

<b>Name of association:</b>	Ethiopian Journalism Educators Network
<b>Date of establishment:</b>	December 2021 G.C.
<b>Kind of association:</b>	University journalism & communication educators
<b>No. of members:</b>	145 (Telegram)
<b>Members monthly fee:</b>	No
<b>Membership composition:</b>	Journalism & communication educators
<b>Scope of the association:</b>	National
<b>Legal registration status:</b>	In the process
<b>Office:</b>	No
<b>Dedicated staff/employee:</b>	No
<b>General assembly meeting:</b>	-

<b>Name of association:</b>	Ethiopian Culture and Tourism Journalists Association
<b>Date of establishment:</b>	2013 E.C.
<b>Kind of association:</b>	Culture and Tourism Journalists
<b>No. of members:</b>	40
<b>Members monthly fee:</b>	100 birr
<b>Membership composition:</b>	State, private community
<b>Scope of the association:</b>	National
<b>Legal registration status:</b>	Registered
<b>Office:</b>	No
<b>Dedicated staff/employee:</b>	No
<b>General assembly meeting:</b>	6 month

**Name of association:** Ethiopia Media Women Association  
**Date of establishment:** 1991 E.C.  
**Kind of association:** Media professionals  
**No. of members:** 170  
**Members monthly fee:** 50 birr  
**Membership composition:** State, private, community,  
**Scope of the association:** National  
**Legal registration status:** Registered  
**Office:** Yes,  
**Dedicated staff/employee:** 5  
**General assembly meeting:** 1 year

**Name of association:** Tigray Journalism Association  
**Date of establishment:** Not officially established  
**Kind of association:** Journalists  
**No. of members:** -  
**Members monthly fee:** -  
**Membership composition:** -  
**Scope of the association:** Regional  
**Legal registration status:** Not registered  
**Office:** No  
**Dedicated staff/employee:** No  
**General assembly meeting:** -

**Name of association:** Ethiopia Mass Media Professionals Association  
**Date of establishment:** 2013 G.C.  
**Kind of association:** Media professionals  
**No. of members:** 1200  
**Members monthly fee:** 100 birr  
**Membership composition:** State, private, community  
**Scope of the association:** National  
**Legal registration status:** Yes  
**Office:** Yes  
**Dedicated staff/employee:** No  
**General assembly meeting:** 1 year

**Name of association:** Somali Region Journalists Association  
**Date of establishment:** November 2020 G.C.  
**Kind of association:** Journalists  
**No. of members:** 26  
**Members monthly fee:** 50 birr  
**Membership composition:** State, private, community

Scope of the association: Regional  
 Legal registration status: Yes  
 Office: Yes  
 Dedicated staff/employee: Two staffs  
 General assembly meeting: 1 year

Name of association: Amhara Region Media and Journalists Association  
 Date of establishment: 2013 E.C.  
 Kind of association: Media professionals  
 No. of members: 732  
 Members monthly fee: 50 birr  
 Membership composition: State, private, community  
 Scope of the association: Regional  
 Legal registration status: Yes  
 Office: Yes  
 Dedicated staff/employee: 5 contractual  
 General assembly meeting: 6 month

Name of association: Ethiopian Media Council  
 Date of establishment: 2011 E.C.  
 Kind of association: Media Institutions and Associations  
 No. of members: 61  
 Members monthly fee: Ranges from 40,000-250,000 annually  
 Membership composition: State, private, community  
 Scope of the association: National  
 Legal registration status: Registered  
 Office: Yes  
 Dedicated staff/employee: Yes  
 General assembly meeting: 2 years

Name of association: Ethiopian Sport Journalists Association  
 Date of establishment: 1970s E.C.  
 Kind of association: Sport Journalists  
 No. of members: 190 (only 95 of them have membership ID.)  
 Members monthly fee: 25 Birr per month  
 Membership composition: State, private, community  
 Scope of the association: National  
 Legal registration status: Registered  
 Office: Yes  
 Dedicated staff/employee: No  
 General assembly meeting: 1 year

**Name of association:** Ethiopian Community Radio Association  
**Date of establishment:** 2013 E.C.  
**Kind of association:** Community Radios  
**No. of members:** 31  
**Members monthly fee:** Universities' community radios pay 2000 annually. Others pay 10000 annually  
**Membership composition:** Community  
**Scope of the association:** National  
**Legal registration status:** Registered  
**Office:** No  
**Dedicated staff/employee:** No  
**General assembly meeting:** -

**Name of association:** Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association (Not functional now)  
**Date of establishment:** 1985 E.C.  
**Kind of association:** Journalists from the Private Press  
**No. of members:** 80-100  
**Members monthly fee:** -  
**Membership composition:** Private  
**Scope of the association:** National  
**Legal registration status:** Was registered  
**Office:** Had office  
**Dedicated staff/employee:** No  
**General assembly meeting:** Held 6 annual meetings

**Name of association:** Amhara Educational Media Association  
**Date of establishment:** 2009 E.C.  
**Kind of association:** Journalists  
**No. of members:** 30  
**Members monthly fee:** 200 Birr annually  
**Membership composition:** State, private, community  
**Scope of the association:** Regional  
**Legal registration status:** Registered  
**Office:** No  
**Dedicated staff/employee:** No  
**General assembly meeting:** -

**Name of association:** Southern Ethiopia Journalists' Association  
**Date of establishment:** 2014 E.C.  
**Kind of association:** Journalists  
**No. of members:** 63  
**Members monthly fee:** 100 Birr per month

Membership composition: State, private, community  
 Scope of the association: Regional  
 Legal registration status: In the process  
 Office: No  
 Dedicated staff/employee: No  
 General assembly meeting: -

Name of association: Ethiopian Journalists' Association  
 Date of establishment: 1961.C.  
 Kind of association: Journalists  
 No. of members: Around 400  
 Members monthly fee: 25 Birr per month  
 Membership composition: State, private, community  
 Scope of the association: National  
 Legal registration status: Registered  
 Office: Yes  
 Dedicated staff/employee: No  
 General assembly meeting: 1 year

Name of association: Oromia Journalists' Association  
 Date of establishment: 2006 E.C.  
 Kind of association: Journalists  
 No. of members: 300  
 Members monthly fee: 30 Birr per month  
 Membership composition: State, private, community  
 Scope of the association: Regional  
 Legal registration status: Registered  
 Office: No  
 Dedicated staff/employee: No  
 General assembly meeting: 2 years



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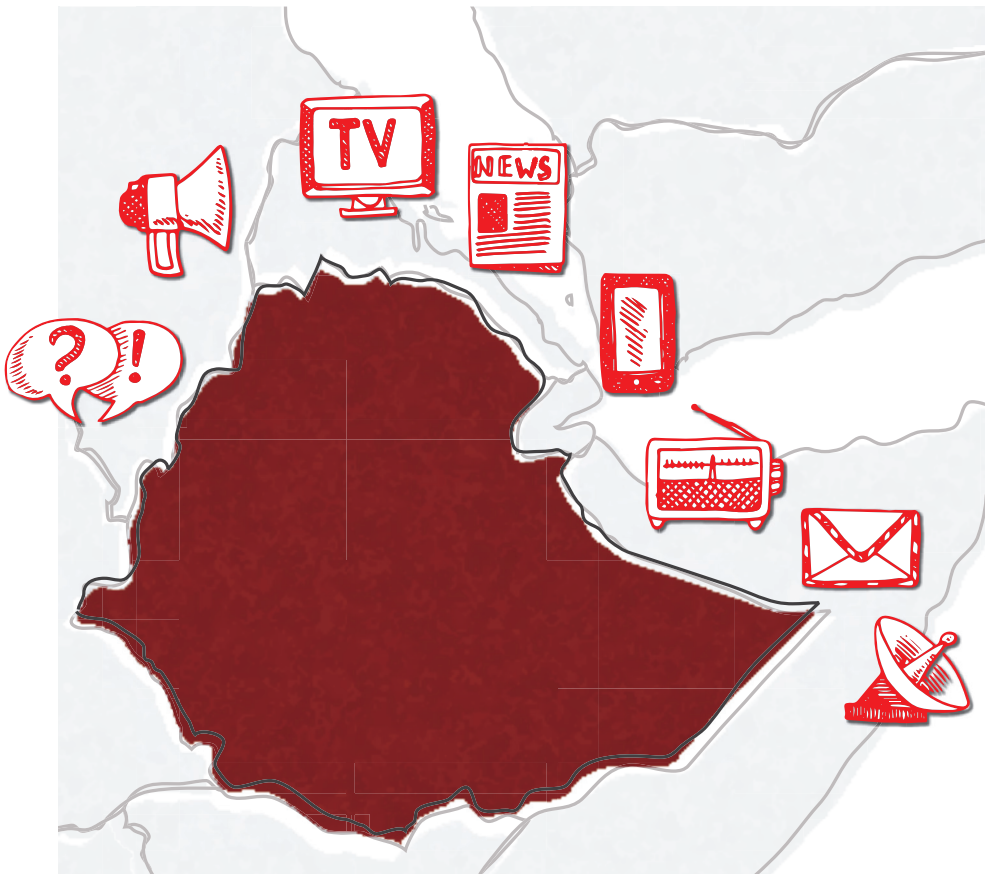
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# **MEDIA SPACE AND THE STATE**

## **OF MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS**

### **IN ETHIOPIA** A BASELINE STUDY



Abdissa Zerai (PhD) - Consultant