

AT THE CROSSROADS
Prospects for Media Training in Ethiopia

**A Needs Assessment Prepared for USAID
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I. Introduction

Eight years into Ethiopia's political transition, the news media are at a critical juncture. The profession has made halting progress since censorship was officially lifted in 1992 and a press law enshrined the right for private newspapers to publish for the first time in Ethiopian history. And yet, whether in the private or government domain, the news media generally remain entrenched in the past – for a combination of professional, political and cultural reasons. The level of professional standards is still very low, whether measured by African or global standards, while information itself – only grudgingly offered at the official level - is still wielded more as a political tool, than as a means to involve, educate and entertain the public.

At the same time, there has never been a point in history that has held more promise for development of news media in Ethiopia. For one, the otherwise disastrous return to war has actually spawned a notable improvement in relations between government and press, as well as between government and civil society at large; private papers, private NGOs and even political opposition groups report “more space” in which to operate since conflict ignited between Eritrea and Ethiopia in May 1998. For another, upcoming general elections in May 2000, which will likely field a broader range of candidates and parties than previous such exercises, offer a genuine opportunity for the Ethiopian news media – still one of the only avenues for divergent opinions and ideas - to contribute to the debate and inform the public in a constructive and timely manner.

Other developments indicate gradual improvements on the media scene. Those include:

- the number of journalists in jail is at its lowest since 1992 (eight as of Nov. 1999);
- more private journalists, even from openly critical newspapers, have been allowed to cover official institutions such as Parliament;
- the presence of government and private journalists together in media training seminars – once a “taboo” for both sides – is becoming more of a norm;
- a broadcast bill aimed at privatizing the airwaves has been passed and awaits official publication, as well as appointment of a overseeing broadcast board;
- the government says it plans to grant autonomy to telecommunications sectors, including the Internet, and promises ultimately to open them up to private management;
- media education is slowly expanding, with improved training at the government's Mass Media Training Institute, as well as the establishment of a new Journalism and Communications Department at the private Unity College;
- “globalization” of the information business has meant that Ethiopian citizens have, and will increasingly have, unprecedented exposure to ideas and reports from all over the world.

These factors indicate that the time is ripe for strengthening and enabling the Ethiopian news media to fulfill its potential as a pillar of civil society; to do so will require training and education in every sphere of the news business – from basic ethics to the use of modern technology. This paper will examine in depth both historic and recent trends within the news media, as well as what has been done to date in media training. It will also look at what is planned in that area, and make recommendations for what *could be done* by donors and other institutions interested in contributing to the development of the field of journalism and communications in Ethiopia.

And yet, this is an opportunity to be “plucked” soon, both to capitalize on current positive trends, as well as to help set the stage for the elections only six months away. There is much to be done in this field, and the “window of opportunity” should be seized before it is once again slammed shut. This is a process that must fully engage all sides of the Ethiopian news media, the government, the judicial and educational systems, as well as supportive institutions in the Ethiopian civil sector and the international community.

Genenaw Assefa, a well-known figure in expatriate opposition politics, wrote recently:

A vital element of our public life, freedom of the press, is imperiled both from within and without. Externally it is threatened by the state whose new officials not only take constant police action aimed at undermining freedom of expression, but also derive a warped sense of pleasure from the follies of the free press and revel at its diminishing public credibility.

It has not yet dawned on these parvenus that the pursuit of democracy without a rigorous and critical free press is chimerical. No less perilous is the abysmal lack of integrity within the free press itself. If this problem is not rectified, public confidence in the very notion of freedom of the press may be irreversibly eroded. *This is precisely why the demand for higher standards of journalism and greater accuracy of reporting is constitutive of the struggle for freedom of expression (italics mine).*

Ignoring the media’s promise as a key player in civil society will ultimately undermine more general efforts to build civil institutions, to broaden the scope of popular opinion and debate and, ultimately, to open up a society that has been repressed and isolated for most of its recent history. On the other hand, supporting the growth of professional news media will contribute visibly - and audibly - to the process of political liberalization. In sum, free and independent, vigorous and professional news media remain among Ethiopia’s last best hopes for establishing a genuine culture of democracy.

II. The Media in Ethiopia: History and Current Trends

In the conventional sense, “mass media” have only existed in Ethiopia for some 100 years. The first newspaper was published under Emperor Menelik II and, like most media outlets to follow, was an instrument fixed securely under government control. Official censorship and near-absolute control of information have been the rule for most of this century, as Ethiopians endured one authoritarian government after another. Virtually all government activities have been shrouded in secrecy, while public criticism of the official *status quo* has been either muted or brutally silenced. This legacy of repression has been compounded by built-in cultural restraints, as well as by Ethiopia’s profound isolation from the outside world.

Today, of course, this “bubble” of isolation has been irrevocably punctured – by international radio broadcasts, satellite TV, the Internet and an increased influx of

foreigners since the 1991 change of government. In spite of high numbers of journalists who have wound up in jail, the Ethiopian press is far freer and more vocal than at any other time in the country's history. Ethiopians tend to forget that, only 10 years ago, they were routinely questioned by security if they chanced to frequent foreign company, while a backwards glance over the shoulder – to assess who might be listening – was an obligatory prelude to any discussion away from home. The heavy, oppressive atmosphere that prevailed under Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam is largely a bad memory, while the cacophony of new, often discordant voices in the private media signals striking change.

And yet sociological, intellectual and cultural patterns persist and retain their impact on the day-to-day workings of journalists; they are nearly as influential in this regard as is the difficult political environment. It is worth looking at some historical trends to illuminate some of the persistent political and cultural barriers to establishing a truly professional, modern and open media in Ethiopia. Without some knowledge of this background, any professional would be ill-equipped to venture into the challenging arena of media training.

Briefly, the past

Unique in Africa, Ethiopia has been independent for most of its 2,000-plus years of recorded history, while the country is reckoned to be the only sub-Saharan country to have developed its own indigenous alphabet (Ge'ez) and writing system. Ethiopian scholars and religious leaders published illuminated manuscripts for some 1000 years; and, only a century after Johannes Gutenberg invented a crude printing press in Europe – marking the beginning of mass communication in the West - they had printed Solomon's "Song of Songs" in Ge'ez.

In spite of these encouraging historical factors, freedom of expression – and correspondingly, mass communications - have been held tightly in check by authoritarian rule in Ethiopia. For centuries, at least through the Menelik era, official pronouncements and directives were heralded by the boom of a big drum. The court crier, or "Negarit," would climb to a high spot and shout "Awaj, awaj!" (Decree, decree!) to publicize the latest news and imperial proclamations. This established a pattern of "top-down"- and largely one-way - delivery of information that is still very much alive today.

Technologically speaking, Ethiopia got off to a good start at the turn of the century – an edge it has subsequently lost to most of the rest of the continent. A Franciscan missionary published what was apparently the "first" genuine newspaper, *La Semaine d'Ethiopie* (The Week in Ethiopia) in 1906, toward the end of the Menelik era, and several modern printing presses were imported in the next decade. Most newspapers – indeed publishing in general – remained firmly under state control throughout most of the century, but there were brief periods where independent thought and criticism flourished in the press. These years included the early 1930s under Haile Selassie, when lively Amharic-language weeklies sparked public debate, and in 1974/5 – the so-called "Ethiopian Spring," when again independent newspapers sprang up - only to be brutally suppressed by the emerging *Derg* regime. Radio broadcasts started up before World War II, while the emperor launched Ethiopian television in the early 1960s. Much later, in

1993, Ethiopia was hooked up to the Internet via a United Nations server - later replaced by a single government server.

The historical pattern of expression in Ethiopia, particularly among highland, Amharic-speaking Orthodox Christians, is a reflection of many centuries of life under feudal, authoritarian systems and a hierarchical church that has stubbornly resisted reform. One Amhara expression captures the sense of fatalism that church and state instilled: "The sky cannot be farmed and a government cannot be sued" (*Semaye A yeta res, Mengist a yekeses*). Direct criticism of the powers-that-be, church as well as state, was rarely tolerated; as a result, Ethiopians adopted a largely indirect, almost "coded", system of communication and the rich, nuanced Amharic language seemed almost uniquely tailored to obscure the message. This was true the closer one got to the "center" – almost always somewhere in the north-central highlands – and is not as relevant a custom, say, for a lowlander living in the Somali or Omo regions. In fact, Somalis like to say that "highlanders keep their words, and thoughts, in their stomachs" while they, Somalis, will speak their minds – even hurling insults right in one's face.

And yet because the physical center dominated Ethiopian intellectual life, this indirect method of communication – perhaps most strikingly exemplified by the "Wax and Gold" (*Semena Work*) technique deployed in poetry and prose – became the dominant motif in public expression. The traditional *asmaris*, or roving bards, were virtually the only outlets for public criticism of the ruling class and its practices – at least through the end of the Mengistu regime; and yet, while they were often clever and got their pointed messages across, they were also careful to encode these messages so as to avoid punishment. Many of Ethiopia's best-known journalists or writers from the Mengistu and Haile Selassie eras became masters in weaving criticism or even insult into their writings; presumably, "everyone knew what they were talking about," although in fact, their accounts were left open for various interpretations. It was a survival skill since getting caught practicing direct criticism often meant prison or death.

"Wax and Gold" expression - perhaps a dying art as more assertive generations come up - remains an important consideration in any endeavor to tackle a communications project: it is safe to say that many if not most Ethiopians are conditioned to read between the lines of what is written and said, seeking out hidden meanings and hidden agendas behind what might otherwise seem, or even be, a "harmless story" or straightforward public statement or endeavor. Ethiopians also pay close attention to what is *not* said or done – employing a sort of "Kremlinology" to assess what is *really* happening behind the scenes in the halls of power. For example, if Prime Minister Meles Zenawi does not appear on TV for months at a time, the interpretation may be that he is under fire from "hardliners" and in danger of losing his power and thus under wraps.

Of course, these tendencies have only been reinforced by successive regimes that persist in using information as a propaganda tool. This means information is rarely taken at face value; on the contrary, it is regarded with suspicion, skepticism *and* speculation, particularly if it comes from an official source. This is a built-in problem that largely undermines the credibility of Ethiopian governments – and by extension that of the state-run media – particularly when the inner workings of government remain opaque. This tendency toward mystification also laps over into the private media. Trainers at a recent workshop were astonished to hear one well-known editor and commentator remark that he didn't feel the need to spell things out, in articles or editorials: "It's up to my readers to read between the lines," he said.

Three other related cultural tendencies that bear mention here are secrecy, lack of trust and what can often seem to outsiders to be an extreme sense of caution, bordering on suspicion, with regard to anything strange or new. All three attributes can be interpreted as characteristic Ethiopian responses to totalitarian systems that showed little tolerance for divergent or dangerous opinions. In fact, all three were in practice proven by long and bitter experience to be the intelligent ways to survive – especially during the dangerously uncertain and brutal days under Mengistu.

Veteran Ethiopian journalist Mairegu Bezabih, now an instructor in journalism at Addis Ababa University, observes that the need for secrecy – which he describes as “a highly revered social norm in most societies in Ethiopia” - is bred into children within the family structure. Traditionally, he says, Ethiopian children are coached never to reveal family business to anyone outside the home – not even family name or address. The tendency toward secrecy is underpinned by a generalized “lack of trust,” noted by many Ethiopian commentators. Homespun sayings express this feeling, like the song that says “Trusting a person comes after he is buried” (*Sewen mamen kebro neew*). The overall cultural impulse seems to be: keep your head down and away from the front lines, your family close around you and your thoughts to yourself. As one poet told me, “We have an expression, ‘Never be Monday’ – the first day of the week, the first one with a bright new and possibly dangerous idea or thought.”

These inhibiting cultural tendencies were violently imprinted during the bloody days of the ‘Red Terror’ period of the late 1970s, a cataclysm that turned neighbors against each other and even tore apart families. In the process, the Mengistu regime jailed, killed or otherwise beat the spirit out of much of the domestic intelligentsia. Whatever societal tendency there might have been toward trust or candor, risk-taking or initiative, was crushed.

In the meantime, Ethiopia’s traditional, authoritarian-style educational system did little to challenge the status quo or train its children to be critical and independent thinkers. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a handful of private schools along with the university enjoyed a measure of intellectual ferment and freedom – ultimately producing the generation that brought down the Emperor in 1974. However, this period was short-lived and once again, harshly brought to heel by the *Derg*. Overall, the traditional bent of education has served to reinforce the tendency toward excessive, often unquestioning, respect for authority and passive acceptance of a top-down flow of information – not the most fertile ground for developing assertive, inquisitive and challenging reporters and communicators.

Secrecy, indirect communication and caution: these are all logical “coping mechanisms” for managing the high risks of life under totalitarian regimes. But they do not foster an optimum or “enabling” environment for either transparency in government and other institutions, or for the free and open flow of information. They do not naturally encourage the development of straightforward, facts-based news reporting, ready access to government officials, or, in general, a pro-active, positive-thinking and open way of doing business. In fact, these cultural inhibitions constitute the *antithesis* of what we would consider ideal conditions for creating a modern and free-thinking press. Further, they make understanding what is going on – as well as obtaining hard facts – a devilishly difficult pursuit for any observer – especially for outsiders - whether they be journalists, diplomats or scholars.

A final thought on how Ethiopian experience has fed into the psyche of journalism today is what can only be called a lack of tolerance for different points of view, even amongst the supposedly most enlightened intelligentsia. Some Ethiopian scholars believe this stems from the dominant role in shaping intellectual traditions here played by the Orthodox Church – with its rigid doctrine, inscrutable edicts in Ge'ez and suspicion of anything that deviated from its strict and unyielding teachings. This “orthodoxy” of intellectual spirit fed into the “you’re with us, or you’re against us” mentality that first surfaced in a big way in the ranks of the radical, Marxist-oriented Ethiopian Student Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s; it became an operative philosophy both under the Mengistu regime and in the field among the guerrilla fighters.

As such, middle ground and neutrality – generally considered the starting point for respectable journalists – are neither well-understood nor particularly respected, and can easily provoke emotional over-reactions. Seen in this context, positions are thus defended to the last breath, issues are black and white, and compromise impossible. An offshoot of this thinking is a tendency to view public criticism of one’s own particular group as an act of disloyalty or betrayal. “Consequently,” writes the aforementioned political activist Genenaw, “an objective assessment of the political balance of forces, sober evaluation of strategies, and calm debate on alternative approaches (has been) virtually impossible.”

Even today, well into the political transition, journalists are swiftly and seemingly indelibly labeled as “pro” or “anti” one camp or another, often without justification. Hence, a journalist who pokes his or her nose into an “off-limits” area may well be accused of “bitter hatred” of a particular group when the curiosity or interest was merely professional. Similarly, in a reflection of immature political thinking, those who report from a divergent perspective *must* be in bed with the “other side.” From there, it is easy to see how the war, today, has sharply accentuated both the tendency to accuse critics or non-partisans of “consorting with the enemy,” or of being “disloyal to the national cause.”

Any individual or institution approaching the field of media training should be aware of this background to understand the challenges faced by Ethiopian journalists in their struggle to modernize and assume professional standards. Contrary to what many in the government believe, the current low standards do not flow from an endemic lack of desire to improve the profession; on the contrary, I have found most of my trainees eager to learn, particularly when confronted with the comparative sophistication of media from African neighbors (*African Journal* on Sunday night TV has been an eye-opener). Certainly, there are political motivations that undermine ethics and professionalism in the media, but many of the problems of journalism in Ethiopia can be directly traced to the historical experience, as well as a lack of exposure to any other way of doing business. And, as we have seen, these are only compounded by cultural constraints and by fear that, once again as so often in Ethiopia’s turbulent past, the political process will again betray their cause.

The Ethiopian media today

The Ethiopian media today languish well behind most other countries on the continent. This is true at virtually every level of the profession: the quality of layout and printing; management and editorial decisions; reporting and ethics; public relations and advertising, *et alia*. These weaknesses are evident whether one scrutinizes government or private media, print or broadcast, Amharic- or English-language. The practice and overall climate have changed for the better since 1992, when press freedom was first decreed, but only in small increments. At the end of the century, the most profound change is perhaps one of attitude – a newly evident determination to improve the profession in spite of still deeply held political feelings that have undermined that desire so severely in the past.

Bad habits persist, however, and constraints of every kind remain daunting. In fact, it is humbling for foreigners to recognize that there are few environments in the world in which journalism is harder to practice. Broadly, one can trace most of these constraints to extreme poverty, overall degeneration of education, seemingly unending cycles of socio-economic upheaval, conflict and the legacy of totalitarian systems. Yet the challenges vary from sector to sector, so we shall examine the media in this way.

Technical Side

The typical journalist writes his or her copy by hand, hands it to a secretary for typing, while the typewritten draft – not always corrected or edited – is passed on to the production side for typesetting, layout and printing. Only a few reporters – like those at the English-language version of *The Reporter* – actually type in their own stories, with an obvious impact on the overall accuracy – not to mention a sense of ‘ownership’ - of the end-product. It must be added here that computers and computer training are being introduced, albeit slowly, at government media outlets like *The Ethiopian Herald*.

Private newspaper publishers blame their low-tech approach on both financial constraints, as well as laziness on the part of the journalists (manual skills still regarded as a lower-status occupation). Reporters say that if computers are available for a particular newspaper, they are often locked up in management offices and inaccessible to them. Whatever the case, trainers should factor in the lack of typing and general computer skills, as well as access, when they contemplate offering more sophisticated courses like “computer-assisted reporting.”

The quality of printing on Ethiopia’s venerable but still-dominant government-owned presses, **Berhanena Selam** and **Bole**, is poor. Although there are more private presses now and at least one paper, the *Monitor*, prints its own, government presses are still the only way to print the tabloid style favored by the other Ethiopian newspapers. Probably as a result (and because of the high cost of imported newsprint), they are also expensive. The editor of one modestly sized private paper, *Capital*, reports they are spending 1.05 Birr to print papers sold for .85 Birr on the street; the difference, and any profit, is made from advertising sales. Printing in any case remains a huge expense for the tiny private papers that operate on shoestring budgets averaging between 10- and 30,000 Birr *per annum*.

On the production end, layout and graphic design tend to be dull and repetitive, with most papers “looking” alike. Front pages crowd in as many stories as possible, often

sandwiched between ads, creating a messy and confusing appearance. Headlines often don't fit the allotted space and, editorially speaking, frequently distort the message of the news article they are intended to capture. Articles "jump" in awkward places (sometimes never to be retrieved again) and are riddled with spelling and grammatical errors.

Photographs are rarely captioned and tend to be grainy, out-of-focus, unimaginative and poorly executed (unless "borrowed" from a foreign publication). Like television camerawork, the overall point of most news photography seems to be to record who was at a particular event, rather than to "tell a story": long rows of unsmiling faces attending a seminar, sometimes even pasted together to include everyone! – or, as in the case of government media, Prime Minister Meles, President Negasso or another senior official shaking hands with a visiting dignitary or accepting a donation.

The overall visual effect is amateurish and boring, with few exceptions (like the "cleaner"-looking *Capital* and more creative, magazine-like English-language *Reporter*). Although there are clearly technological constraints, there also appears to be a fair amount of resistance, or reluctance, to try something fresh and new. For example, *The Ethiopian Herald* has been visited by any number of foreign consultants bent on re-designing its pages, but still looks virtually the same as it did in the 1960s – except now it looks *antiquated*.

A similar story comes from Ethiopian Television (ETV). Although it is home to at least five gleaming teleprompters, all but one newsreader still bow their heads to read from news copy on their desks; the new technology remains largely idle. To be fair, ETV presents by far the most polished product from the technical standpoint - reflecting significant investment from the government, as well as considerable foreign largesse. Yet, even ETV has far to go to meet even the standards of neighboring countries, technically and especially on the editorial side.

One area of media that has improved dramatically on the technical side is advertising. Within a few years, television ads have started to look quite professional and attractive, although as in the West, there have been public concerns about questions of taste and calls for some sort of regulation.

A related technological concern is at the user-end. Since Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries on earth, with widespread illiteracy, newspapers reach only a miniscule portion of the population, mostly urban elite. Circulation among private papers ranges from between 2,000 to 25,000 copies, with occasional surges such as the one in the weeks after war broke out.

Access to radio and especially television is limited outside the major cities and towns. The 1994 census indicated that in the city of Addis Ababa – long the primary beneficiary of modernization campaigns and thus theoretically far ahead of other towns – there were only 66,804 telephone sets, 59,876 TVs and 266,200 radios for a population of around 4 million. Nationwide, according to the 1999 UNDP *Human Development Report*, television and phones reached 3 or 4 people out of every 1000 in Ethiopia – one of the lowest standards in the world. Radio, however, is more widespread – perhaps one out of five have access to a radio set (UNDP/1994 report). In fact, according to Radio Ethiopia's own figures for 1998, its range covers 65 percent of the national territory and some two-thirds of Ethiopians tune in.

The Internet (which doesn't even show up in UNDP figures yet) is even more limited in terms of whom it reaches. According to the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation, there were 2,560 Internet subscribers as of November 1999, with a new \$1.3 million budget allocated to expand it to regional states. In spite of current limits, the Internet could – with ingenuity and thoughtful planning - exert a far-reaching impact in the future, particularly in areas like distance education and agricultural extension. At present, however, it is still largely inaccessible to even educated city dwellers, including the average journalist. Few newspapers have computers, and if they do, they are often either unavailable to reporters or not hooked up to an Internet account. Thus, most journalists who wish to access the World Wide Web must go to one of the expensive private Internet “shops” (at least 5 Birr, or 75 cents, a minute), the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce, or to the UNECA or British Council, both of which – it should be noted - are experimenting with free web access for journalists.

Times will definitely change, particularly as telecommunications are privatized and the costs of Internet access – now averaging a prohibitive \$45 a month for subscribers – come down. Already, one private newspaper, *Addis Tribune*, and two news agencies, the government-run *Ethiopian News Agency* and the EPRDF-affiliated *Walta*, have their own websites, as do many other Ethiopian organizations, government and private. Two other newspapers, *Reporter* and *The Monitor* publish their stories on the web via the US-based Africa News Service. In fact, a great number of Ethiopian expatriates get their news (and yes, gossip) about Ethiopia from those sources, and are active participants in “chat rooms” and other web forums on political issues. It therefore seems only a matter of time before the Internet revolutionizes the business of transmitting information within Ethiopia itself.

In the near future, however, radio – as is the case for most of Africa - is clearly the medium with by far the biggest audience - and biggest potential impact. Privatization of broadcasting can thus be expected to reap some dramatic changes in the field over the next decade, political environment permitting.

Editorial side and reportorial ethics

PRIVATE NEWSPAPERS: SOUND AND FURY

In 1993, one study of the Ethiopian media (ICFJ) reported: “Unfettered journalism in Ethiopia today is lurid, lively and highly political. It is mass media for a small, starved readership.” Even before the 1992 press law enshrined the freedom to publish, the streets of Addis Ababa began to fill with young boys hawking scores of tabloid newspapers to an audience that had never before experienced such an opportunity. At one point, the Ministry of Information had registered more than 150 applications to publish, and in the early days of press freedom, there were easily 60 or so papers or magazines to choose from on any given week.

Gradually, however, market forces and a more-satiated – and likely disillusioned - readership cut into sales of most papers, while an increasingly intolerant government forced others to shut down publication through arrests, detentions and steep fines. This latter group, unfortunately, included some of the more moderate voices of the private press – *Ye Africa Kend (Horn of Africa)*, *Ruh (First Breath of Life)* and *Eyita (Insight)* in

the first years, and in 1998, *Nishan (Medal)*. As of 1998-99, there were roughly 30 papers publishing at any one point in time, many of them irregularly.

Today's private journalism, at least the Amharic-language press, remains true to the description above (English-language papers tend to be more staid and responsible); Addis Ababa still qualifies as the Wild West of journalism in that respect with headlines that scream nonsense like "War and Napalm in Gondar" and "Mengistu Returns to Lead Troops in Southern Ethiopia."

Few practice even the basic principles of journalism. Balance, accuracy and fairness are often sacrificed to sensation, scandal, revenge and rumor, even slander – supposedly the stuff that sells their papers (though only if one totally underestimates one's readers). The wry journalistic adage "Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story" is upheld with relish, particularly when it comes to those perceived as living on the other side of the political fence. One commentator compares this total disregard for facts to Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo*, a (fact-based) play in which Roman Catholic inquisitors refuse Italian astronomer Galileo's challenge to look through the telescope themselves. Why? They fear that the actual evidence might compromise their verdict!

A good number of private papers are stridently anti-EPRDF in tone, not unlike the early, partisan and sensation-filled days of American journalism. And yet, even the "more responsible" members of private press, as well as government media, can stoop to what would be considered libelous attacks anywhere in the world. For example, BBC correspondents reporting from Eritrea have been roundly attacked by government and private media alike – rare common ground between the two opposing camps, it must be added!

Typically, rather than focusing on offending *content* in the BBC reports, the Ethiopian media have attacked the messengers in a personal way – accusing them of marrying or having affairs with senior EPLF officials, working as mercenaries, or being sacked from their jobs for their ostensibly pro-Eritrean reporting. One radio report even entitled its report on the matter, "The Pimp and the Prostitute." Most of these scurrilous reports (alleged love affairs aside) could have been easily checked – and knocked down - with one phone call to BBC: said reporters are still employed as well as unmarried. Most media organizations here, however, preferred to run with the juicy unconfirmed version. Sadly, that's still SOP (standard operating procedure) here.

Other ethical violations abound. Many papers, for example, routinely pirate foreign news stories, content and photos without even the courtesy of attribution; apparently, this is technically legal since Ethiopia isn't a signatory to international copyright treaties. Other journalists are flagrantly wined and dined by, say, the Sheraton and then – voila! – gushing purple prose that would make even a hired public relations hand blush. Some publications clearly carry water for certain political and economic interests, while the line between opinion and fact is crossed so often that most readers wouldn't know which is which – although, as noted before, Ethiopians may be more astute in this regard! (*NB: This style is actually common in many non-American schools of journalism, where opinionated journalism is considered livelier and better reading than dull, gray 'balance and objectivity'.')

Another nearly universal practice with negative ethical fallout is writing – or even publishing - under an assumed name. Genuine bylines of actual reporters on stories are

still quite rare: among the private papers, only *Capital*, the English-language *Reporter* and the *Monitor* use them with any regularity, a practice that even the best tend to drop on the more opinionated pieces (particularly in the political arena). As a result, inflammatory writing, cheap personal attacks and simply careless reporting routinely hide behind pseudonyms, rendering the writer virtually blame-proof in the public eye. This means there is little incentive – no sense of personal responsibility - to check one's facts the way one does in the West. There is no public "check" on irresponsible reporters, no way to call up and berate the editor or reporter for botching a story. Clearly, this does little to enhance credibility of the free press.

When asked why, Ethiopian journalists give different responses. Many cite fear of legal prosecution, although writing under a pseudonym prevents neither arrest nor harassment, and in the end, it simply does not wash in court. In fact, one sly publisher who put his (non-journalist) girlfriend's name on the masthead in the hope of eluding official detection wound up with both him and girlfriend in jail. Some have more credible excuses: their day jobs are with government media and they feel they must "moonlight" under an assumed name or risk being fired. Some editors say that if they used bylines, readers would realize what tiny staffs they had (in other words, all copy is written by one or two reporters). Other editors reportedly believe that if a reporter gains a public reputation, he or she will leave the paper for another, more lucrative job. And finally, there is the cultural thing again. As one reporter, reflecting the views of many colleagues, put it: "I don't want my neighbors to know what I am thinking."

Whatever the rationale, this practice must end if Ethiopian journalism is to attain serious professional standards.

On content, few papers recognize a good story and few reporters know, or choose, to go out and dig one up. A recent training exercise run by the World Bank in which reporters were dispatched to various official institutions to obtain documents was instructive: not only did it show how difficult it is to procure information, especially documents, it also showed how few of them were familiar with what is a routine journalistic practice in the US and elsewhere. In a similar vein, the former US ambassador, David Shinn, delivered an apparently on-the-record talk to a roomful of Ethiopian journalists not long after war broke out in May 1998. He gave a detailed account of the conflict – more comprehensive on the Mekelle bombing than any other public rendering – and stated: "The aggression on the ground has been entirely from the Eritrean side." In light of the ambiguous US policy statements that followed, this straightforward assessment was striking. Not one journalist in the room chose to report it, however; tongues wagged, but the only published account, a second-hand one, appeared in a newspaper without a reporter at the embassy. Talk about missing a story!

Much preferred, it seems, are handouts and press releases – often printed verbatim in newspapers. Press conferences, all the better when accompanied by written statements, are next. It's a kind of "spoon-fed" journalism that can also be traced fairly easily to the long tradition of swallowing information handed down from the authorities on high. Entire areas of potential journalistic enterprise – such as crime or development – go virtually unreported.

To be fair, this is also a function of limited resources – although one could argue about how one should *allocate* those resources (e.g. actual reporting, rather than 'rewriting' press releases). One editor lamented that he just didn't have the manpower to cover

institutions like Parliament or the ongoing trials of former Derg members, but then neither he, nor any other media manager, stinted on lavish coverage of the Sheraton New Year's celebration. Other reporters spend long hours not only doing their editorial job, but selling advertisements and all other aspects of running a paper. There is no doubt that these reporters from the private press, especially, work long hours; many I know would attend training sessions in the morning so as to be able to return to the office in the afternoon.

And yet, there is an undeniable and widespread lack of initiative among Ethiopian journalists. One can speculate as to why: that initiative has been proven dangerous in the past; lack of exposure to the outside world and other media; a certain amount of culturally based passivity and acceptance, and a generalized shortage of independent or creative thinking. Still, this fact of life leaves most of the country's people unreported and voiceless – particularly in the countryside, home to the vast majority of Ethiopians. The "development story" is all but untouched, at least in the private media. When I asked one otherwise outstanding young journalist, for example, why few (if any) Ethiopian journalists had traveled to the rural areas to report on the recent severe food shortages that threatened to become widespread famine, he at first blamed expenses and lack of transport. When I noted that any NGO or international organization would be happy to take him there (or a reporter *could* take a bus), he replied lamely: "It's not in our culture."

Indeed, after I had taken a busload of journalists into a southern area where the as-yet unreported malaria epidemic was claiming hundreds of lives, *not one returned a single line of copy about it*. It was arguably one of the biggest stories of the year in Ethiopia, but none appeared to notice or care – reflecting what seems like a generalized indifference to the periphery by the center, particularly among the elite. To balance out this rather harsh assessment, the government media *does* make an attempt to cover development issues and rural areas. The *Herald* has a development page (albeit dull as dishwater), while the Ethiopian News Agency and Walta provide virtually the only reportage from around the country. In any case, this is clearly an area of reporting that needs *a lot of work*.

Finally, there can't be any discussion of content without touching upon the ongoing conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Simply stated, this is one time in recent Ethiopian history that government and private papers have shown congruence in editorial position. Most have lined up behind the national flag in support of the cause of "territorial integrity."

The deportation of Ethiopian residents or citizens of Eritrean extraction – clearly an important story by any measure - has been barely reported, critically or otherwise, and certainly not challenged or questioned in any significant way. What has been said has often bordered on what could be considered a violation of Ethiopia's anti-incitement laws – like the private paper that called for all people of Eritrean extraction to be dumped in internment camps, or another that urged the expulsion of "half-caste" Eritreans.

On the other hand, *Nishan*, the only paper that raised cautious questions about the wisdom of creating a potentially dangerous "ethnic" division where there hadn't been one before - in an editorial entitled "Don't unleash the beast" – was shut down as a result; its editor and reporters were detained without charge for a month, presumably on suspicion of being "pro-Eritrean" (*Nishan's* editor liked to joke that his was the first "anti-incitement" incitement arrest on record), and financial backers were scared off. Even the private

Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA) did not raise its voice against the illegal detentions of their colleagues, reportedly because they, too, questioned *Nishan's* patriotism.

In terms of straight news about the war, there hasn't been much – largely because most journalists haven't been permitted to visit the battlefield for themselves. Once again, as so often in Ethiopian history, near-absolute secrecy prevails. As a result, newspapers here rely on second-hand, usually distant, accounts alongside the frustratingly fact-less official statements from the government spokesperson's office or ENA's and Walta's propagandistic bulletins. Ironically, it is a practice that is counterproductive for the Ethiopian government's own campaign to gain credibility at home and abroad; it irks the Ethiopian authorities no end when the EPLF gives foreign journalists comparatively free rein to travel about Eritrea and talk with whomever they like, but that is the primary reason their northern cousins are winning the "propaganda war." (NB: No one, of course, buys the absurdly inflated official casualty figures from *either* side)

GOVERNMENT MEDIA: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

In 1998, while visiting media outlets in preparation for the launch of journalist training, I visited several government media offices, where I was greeted warmly and told how they were all cognizant of their weaknesses and thus ripe for change. Could I help? How many trainees could I take at once? Many cited a supposedly landmark internal performance evaluation that lambasted every sector of the official media, ranging from simple story construction to graphic design. The surprisingly candid conclusion reached, I was told by several officials, was that the government media was "neither serving the people, nor democracy, nor even the government itself." Added one official: "We are just like a spokesman for the government and that serves no one."

In spite of this self-critical analysis, little of substance has changed. A dedicated consumer of government-run media can certainly find more critical statements and reporting than has ever been the case before, but this requires much slogging through reams of boring copy and on-air reports that still look and sound largely like a parody of "official media." In fact, the war, with its shrill tones and overheated, amateurish war propaganda, has only emphasized state media's principle role as "mouthpiece" of the regime. All one has to do is scan the headlines of the average daily "news report" at ENA to see that this is so. Overall, in spite of what government says, the official media is only marginally more professional than the private press, and not at all when it comes to "political enemies" (remember "The Pimp and the Prostitute?").

Curiously enough, many in ranking positions of the government media today were similarly prominent under the last regime. One current senior official, for example, was notorious as an on-air interrogator of so-called "counter-revolutionaries" during the Red Terror era. As one ex-colleague noted: "He had to do some fancy footwork when the *Ihadiq* (EPRDF) came to town." Whatever their background, it remains clear that senior appointments throughout the government media – in spite of ostensible moves toward broader autonomy - are still largely made on the grounds of politics and loyalty rather than professional qualifications. To generalize, it seems to be the case that government journalists have been playing by the same rules for so long, that no one dares to do it any other way.

Articles and especially editorials are plagued by archaic, Marxist-style rhetoric such as ‘anti-people elements’ – a phrase that has remained unchanged through regimes, but now targets different groups. In addition, not unlike their free press cousins, few pages of government papers contain what we would call “news stories.” Although government press is generally read by those who want to determine the official point of view, it falls short even there. As journalist Mairegu notes: “Messages received by Ethiopian leaders from foreign governments or discussions carried out by government officials with foreign delegations are given prominent headlines in the government media. *But the substance of the matter is never revealed* (emphasis mine).” Information that is generally considered vital public knowledge in democratic systems - like appointments, transfers or dismissals of government officials is held secret – only, if then, to be disclosed to the public by the head of state/government or by their representatives (not a mere ‘public relations’ official, who must consult superiors before making a move).

Mairegu notes that the chain of command in determining what news can go public is so long that the issue often has lost its currency by the time it gets the “green light.” A good example is the recent internationally sponsored seminar on “The Ethiopian Media in Development,” an event that mixed government and private press journalists. Ethiopian television reporters, at first barred from airing news about the event, were subsequently “scooped” by *Radio Fana* and even *The Ethiopian Herald*. Some four or five days later after the event ended, ETV coughed up a brief news item, to the embarrassment of its reporters. “We were humiliated,” one noted. “It was so unprofessional.”

As with the private media, politics often interferes with professionalism. In an Orwellian twist, broadcast media were forbidden to use the word “war” for the first weeks of last February’s Ethiopian offensive. Another example was coverage of the funeral of Prof. Asrat Woldeyes, a vehement opponent of the EPRDF who sickened in jail, was finally allowed out of the country for medical treatment and died in the US. When his body was returned, the government media developed a sudden interest in covering him – but only to a point. At least one government reporter was told to excise the crowd figures from his report – clearly to downplay the politician’s level of popularity.

Of course, there are good media practitioners sprinkled throughout the government or party media outlets, but they rarely fulfill their potential. Self-censorship is still quite prevalent. As one government official said, “It’s lack of training and experience, constraints by management – sometimes over politics – and fear, although with this there is no justification.”

Again, having said that, the ones who do succeed to “work the system” and print or air real journalism must be admired for personal initiative and ingenuity; their professional lives are a careful negotiation of the Byzantine labyrinths created by arbitrary directives from on high and usually unspoken, sometimes even imagined, editorial limits. Take one recent first-rate investigative piece on the Awash River flooding, which included criticism of a sitting government minister: it was deliberately aired on a weekend so as to bypass some of the hierarchy they feared would cut out the critical bits. In fact, the high-level furor that resulted indicated that their instincts were probably right.

The notable ambivalence within government media toward training opportunities – particularly sessions that include private journalists – is also revealing.

Many of the best journalists in training workshops have been from organizations like the *Ethiopian Herald* and *Ethiopian News Agency*, while training applications flooded in from government journalists. Demand for training in the government ranks was clearly high, especially among the younger generation. And yet, I was shocked to learn that some participants, several of them repeat trainees, were attending workshops without the knowledge of their supervisors – who they feared would say “no.” Ultimately, I elected to encourage these individual initiatives by directing invitations to promising reporters, rather than through the laborious chain-letter process of official channels as I did at first (ineffectual, in any case).

This was true with ETV, Ethiopian Radio, *Addis Zemen*, the Ethiopian News Agency and Region 14 news organizations. The only exception was the *Herald*, which cooperated at first, but later barred reporters from attending altogether (ironically, this was the mirror image of what happened with some private newspapers, which sometimes dispatched reporters to ICFJ training, and at others retreated into icy aloofness – presumably also for political reasons). It should be noted here that “para-party” news organizations like *Efoita* and *Radio Fana* were cooperative throughout the training process. So were the Addis Ababa Police media.

In any case, it is this writer’s assessment that it is precisely the layers of political opportunists within government media, combined with sheer political expediency on the part of the government and that inhibiting “legacy of fear”, which remain the biggest obstacles to genuine professional development in the Ethiopian official, or semi-official, media. One can do a lot of training of promising official journalists and affect individual approaches to the news business. And yet it will take a conscious act of political will – at the highest levels and reinforced throughout the system - to change the parameters in which they work. It is unclear whether this will happen to any meaningful extent in the near future, although privatization of broadcasting may certainly provide a push in that direction.

LAURELS

This assessment of Ethiopian media has erred on the side of criticism, since the point is to show how badly training is needed in every sector of the business. And yet, on the positive side of the ledger, there have been more examples of constructive and even in-depth reporting than at any other period of time. The trouble is always consistency, since even the most promising publications tend to fall back either into politically motivated mud-slinging, or mute, monotonous caution. However, it is worth noting a few recent examples so that they can be publicly praised and cited as models for others.

On the government side, there have been a number of commendable reports aired on ETV in the past year, including the aforementioned report on the devastating Awash floods and a more recent piece on large quarries in Addis Ababa that are wreaking environmental destruction and threatening nearby civilian institutions like schools and a hospital. These television reports “scooped” any one in the print media and definitely qualify as some of the best all-round pieces of journalism from any quarter in recent memory.

Ethiopian television also offers some innovative and professional programs, such as the weekly “Meet ETV” interview show and the enormously popular “police blotter” program on Sundays – one of the only formats for coverage of crime and related social problems. A related kudo goes to the official police media, which not only covers crime, but has introduced thoughtful ethical procedures like not revealing the identity or face of rape victims and under-age crime suspects.

On the policy end, the public (and legally mandated) commitment by government media to give airtime and print space to all certified political candidates for next May’s election – regardless of political affiliation – is a welcome development that should be monitored closely. As of December 1999, the first round of televised sessions featuring opposition politicians signaled a very positive break with the past and has proved enormously popular; lot’s of Addis Ababans were reliably reported “glued” to their TV sets.

In addition, as noted previously, the official media makes much more of a concerted attempt to cover areas like development and rural activity, but alas, not in a very interesting or informative way. Official papers like *The Ethiopian Herald* also use bylines and give the editor’s name and contacts at the top of specific pages. This is a positive step in terms of transparency of the media itself.

There is also a marked attempt at professionalism among the various “semi-official” media organs that include *Efoita*, *Radio Fana* and *Walta*. The latter two, which grew out of EPRDF media in the field, have now vigorously disavowed official ties to the ruling party. In practice, they have simply been taken over by a private enterprise – Mega – closely linked to the EPRDF. Ironically, this means that *Fana* is in legal limbo until the new broadcast bill is enacted (since “private broadcasting” is not yet permitted). Whatever their affiliation, all three have made significant contributions on the issue of corruption within government – notably *Walta*’s recent public forum in which it raised complaints against Ethiopian Telecommunications (ETC), the Ethiopian Electric Power Corp. (EEPCCO) and the Agency for the Administration of Rented Houses (AARH), describing them as three of the most corrupt official institutions. *Efoita* can run quite critical editorial pieces – in the Marxist ‘self-criticism’ kind of way – while *Fana* reportedly has siphoned off some of the best talent from government mass media. *Fana*’s reporters in fact numbered among the best in recent training sessions.

In the private sphere, *The Reporter* has made a reputation for itself as producing some of the best reports in Ethiopian journalism, including ‘expose’ type articles on institutions like Ethiopian Airlines and the Maritime Authority. Run by an ex-EPRDF propaganda chief in the field, Amare Aregawi, the paper was credited with “great sources” (and thus, leaks) and its Amharic weekly quickly became the best-selling private paper. On the English side, it caused a stir with a sloppy but nevertheless ground-breaking report on alleged pedophilia in a foreign NGO (Terre des Hommes), while reports by its star young reporters, Yemisrach Benalfew and Emrakeb Assefa, demonstrate real reporting talent (pieces on the new, “privileged” Ethiopians displaced from Eritrea, court cases against Ethiopian journalists and a critical look at the new broadcast law come to mind). Also unique was a long interview with human rights activist Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, one of the few prominent Ethiopians to publicly raise concerns about how Eritreans were being deported. Since the war, the *Reporter* has lost popularity and credibility because of its jingoistic and unprofessional views of the conflict. However, as noted, it is not so different from the rest in this regard.

Capital, run by a dynamic young journalist named Tamrat G. Giorgis, has emerged in the past year as perhaps the most professional of newspapers here. Generally, it is cautious and limits its reporting to the business scene, but some of its editorials and opinion pieces offer articulate and constructive criticism on issues like the Broadcast Bill and the economic impact of AIDS in Ethiopia. Recently, it was the only Ethiopian paper to carry the original U.S. media report that alleged a financial link between a bank run by Ethiopian investor Sheik Mohammed Hussein Al-Amoudi and terrorist Osama Bin Laden (the others ran only a rebuttal by Al-Amoudi's PR firm). It paid a price for doing so: many readers called to terminate their subscriptions, others to pull advertising. The accusations fit into the typical pattern of political discourse: the substance of the reports was not at issue; according to them, *Capital* was "disloyal" and "unpatriotic" for reprinting foreign allegations against the country's principal, and sorely needed, investor. Some even saw a US-Egyptian-Eritrean plot to undermine the Ethiopian economy.

The rest of the English-language press, while improving slowly, remains dull and unimaginative, although there are exceptions that should be highlighted. The *Monitor*, the only private paper to publish three times weekly, features opinion pieces by writers Minas Gelan and Berhe Aregay that offer different perspectives and topics, often in the development area. *The Monitor* also ran front-page feature photographs by Asfeha Semere on things that didn't work around town, an innovative feature that sadly has been discontinued. In the *Addis Tribune*, the 'Speaking of People' column, usually penned by Indrias Getachew (also, perhaps, the best photographer in the newspaper business), brings dynamic new faces and forces to the public view. Sometimes, the *Tribune* also excels in its pieces on economics. Arts and culture coverage in the *Reporter*, the *Tribune* and sometimes, the *Monitor*, are also worth noting.

Tobia, reputedly the top-selling paper after *Reporter*, emits mixed signals. Sometimes, it appears to have simply inserted a computer diskette from the bad old mud-slinging days of 1992-3, when its writings were all raw emotion and partisan vengeance. At others, it offers some of the best critical reporting in town. One example of the latter was an in-depth piece on the malaria epidemic – making *Tobia* one of few media outlets to take note of what was happening out there. In addition, prodded by an original and well-reported story in another private paper *Mabruk*, it ran an investigative piece that – apparent fact by fact - described the unsuccessful struggle of elders from the Wolayita region to overcome bureaucratic and political barriers and resolve a simmering conflict over language instruction. The reporting of this struggle actually resulted in a high-level delegation visit to Wolayita, and the reversing of this unpopular government policy for that locality. Now that is the way journalism is *supposed* to work in an open society!

Also notable was a recent opinion poll on the "hot" subject of the war with Eritrea. The methodology used in this poll was deeply flawed: it didn't contain the total number of respondents, nor a margin of error, and it was based entirely on readers who took the time to fill out the questionnaire and return it to *Tobia*. Some of its questions were obviously slanted to achieve a certain result, and in any case, the results were skewed to a particular audience. However, in spite of these problems, it was perhaps the first-ever attempt to consult an audience beyond the newsroom on a particular political subject, and in a reasonably systematic way.

One of the great weaknesses of the Ethiopian "mass" media is that they simply do not reflect – or even consult - popular opinion, in spite of a lot of loud talk about speaking *for*

“the people.” This poll marked a tiny step in that direction and such efforts should be encouraged, particularly in the run-up to the Year 2000 elections.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

One can't write about journalism here while overlooking the extremely difficult environment in which Ethiopian journalists work. All the historical tendencies we have mentioned – a secretive and opaque culture, the bitterly divisive nature of political discourse, the suspicion of and lack of tolerance for new and different ideas – seem grossly magnified when it comes to the sensitive and charged arena of media. This is especially so with regard to the relationship between the current government and the private press. Sometimes it looks as though the whole exercise of journalism has brought out the worst in everyone!

For years, the Ethiopian government has carried the unhappy distinction of being one of the world's leading jailers of journalists; last year, the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists labeled Prime Minister Meles one of the “Top 10 Enemies of the Press.” As of November 1999, there were eight journalists in jail, the lowest number in years, but still more than most other countries. Although many of the journalistic offenses that have locked up reporters and editors would be grounds for libel lawsuits (sometimes even jail) anywhere in the world, other charges seem trumped up to harass or intimidate discordant voices into silence. In any event, it is unfortunate that Ethiopia has chosen to *criminalize* what in more democratic countries would be civil actions at most.

Until this situation is resolved with fairness, it will continue to undermine the credibility of the government's professed desire to bring about democracy. The same goes for the frequent and heavy-handed harassment of private journalists by police and security forces, as well as illegal detention. In fact, the most common, and well-documented, violation of human rights by authorities has been the detention of journalists without the chance to appear in court within the prescribed 48-hour period. Most languish there for days or even weeks without their day in court.

It should also be noted here that legal and police problems for private media are potentially far worse in the rural areas, where there is no international or media spotlight to check excesses. If private papers can afford to hire a stringer out there – and most cannot – they must work virtually undercover, since alignment with the reviled private press can invite harassment or arrest, journalists say. Journalists also report other financial and political constraints in terms of distribution of papers outside Addis, although recent visitors to southern cities including Awossa and Jijiga spotted a wide range of papers for sale.

The overall legal framework that journalists operate within is complex and ambiguous - much like the greater society. Laws used to prosecute them come from all over the map – from the 1992 Press Law to the 1957 penal code – and often conflict directly with guarantees of freedom of expression as written in the Ethiopian Constitution. Most of the charges to date have fallen in the broad categories of: sedition (instigation to armed violence against the state); defamation; incitement of one national group against another, and agitation for war. There has also been at least one case of prosecution for obscenity.

One year ago, a seminar on 'Media, the Law and Ethics,' demonstrated that there was little knowledge of the legal system among journalists, although more than a few had experienced its sting in prison and in the courts. And, as one leading jurist noted: "To challenge or change the law, you must at first know it."

Similarly, the draft broadcasting legislation – passed, but not yet enacted into law via the official gazette - appeared full of potential legal pitfalls for journalists. Although we have yet to learn the details of the law's final version, the draft bill has been criticized roundly for denying political and religious groups the right to own stations, as well as ambiguously worded criteria that would affect applicants for licenses under the future Broadcast Board. In any case, it is unlikely that private radio stations will open before the May elections, although many groups are poised to do so once it is legal.

The overall politics of the media business, which we have amply explored, have hurt the profession in two other important ways: in terms of professional solidarity and in gaining access to the government.

Until recently, Ethiopian journalists have had two primary professional organizations to choose from – the government-run Ethiopian Journalists Association (EJA) and the private, not-yet-registered Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA). These two organizations, like opposing military camps, have spent much time and energy on attacking the other, to the detriment of the profession at large. One result of this bitter enmity has been to dilute the impact of professional training, since until 1998, private and government journalists would simply not enter a training session together.

Happily, that climate has changed significantly in the past years; a large measure of credit must be given to training run by the US Information Service (USIS) and ICFJ (International Center for Journalists) – both of which insisted on joint participation. Lo and behold, journalists – especially the younger ones – found that they could "talk" to the other side and that they had more in common than they had ever imagined.

Furthermore, the war has also contributed in a roundabout way to the lowering of barriers between the two groups. As one private journalist told me, "There has been a cease-fire between government and journalists since the war." More and more, the discussion is centered around professionalism, rather than politics – an encouraging development. A clear manifestation of this new and growing spirit was the recent 'Ethiopian Media in Development' seminar, attended by roughly 50 private journalists and 20 from the official/semi-official media; at the end, organizers wrested a joint statement from participants urging the Ethiopian government to exhibit more tolerance toward journalists - quite an historic feat given the background. The group also called for foreign assistance in helping them uplift professional standards through training and other opportunities.

In the meantime, female journalists have outpaced their male colleagues by organizing a professional association that embraces both government and private sectors. With more than 60 members, the Ethiopian Media Women's Association (EMWA) – whose overarching goal is elevating professional standards among women journalists - has finally secured legal registration and is now attracting international support, and rightly so. Their members include some of the more promising – and open-minded - journalists on the media scene today.

Another possible professional media grouping is a media council, an option apparently being explored by the government. This idea has worked well in countries where the council is independent, like Tanzania's effective Media Council, which handles some 90 percent of press complaints and functions sort of like a "court of peers." However, in Uganda and Zambia, where press councils are run by government, the effort has not been successful. The Ethiopian government has also sought funding for drawing up a professional Code of Ethics for journalists, as well as "protocols" to strengthen government-press relations. These are all signs, at least, that the thorny relationship between government and press is being re-evaluated.

In the meantime, access to government officials remains a difficult endeavor for most Ethiopian journalists, even within the official media. Although the overall climate has improved, suspicions remain high all around and most government activities remain hidden from public scrutiny. As we discovered in the World Bank's "documents exercise," many journalists were denied access to officials simply because they hailed from the private media.

Although the 1992 Press Law requires public officials to provide information to journalists, the open and forthcoming official remains a rarity. This is even true for government journalists seeking basic information. On the flip side, a fair number of private journalists don't bother to even try, either because of the self-defeating "I won't bother because it won't work" attitude, or because of sheer political ill will. In the latter vein, one private journalist said he wouldn't bother to cover the upcoming elections because "my readers aren't interested to read about the EPRDF." Only repeated exposure, determination on the part of the journalists as well as government, and confidence-building all round are likely to change this pattern in any significant way.

III. MEDIA TRAINING IN ETHIOPIA

EXTERNAL ACTORS

We have seen that the media business in Ethiopia is a highly sensitive, politicized and emotion-charged arena. This is likely the main reason that donors and other international organizations that deal with media have been reluctant to do much. On the whole, few substantial or sustained resources have been put into media training here to date; this is true compared to other parts of Africa, but especially with regard to the huge amounts of money lavished on media projects in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Further, there has been little coordination, or even shared knowledge and experience, among the agencies involved in media training (although the currently dormant International Media Donors Committee was a positive step in that direction). And yet, it is recognized that the development of independent and professional media is critical to any genuine growth of democratic practices and thought, as well as to the opening up of society and government.

To date, the undisputed leader in media training here has been the US Information Service, with an extensive record of training workshops, mostly funded by partner USAID. Next in line among external players is the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), a private American organization that conducted the first two comprehensive sector studies in 1992/1993, and later dispatched one Knight International Press Fellow

(the author) in 1998, for a period covering 16 months. ICFJ will send another Knight Fellow here in early 2000 to work with the private Unity College on developing its Journalism and Communications program.

Other support for media development has come from the British Embassy (including ODA/DIFID), the British Council and the World Bank Institute, followed by the embassies of Norway, Austria, the Netherlands, France and Germany. Some work has also been done in the area by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Swedish SIDA, Heinrich Boll, PANOS, UNICEF, UNECA and PACT. In 1996/7, UNESCO tried to encourage the launch of an Ethiopian branch of a regional professional association (East Africa Media Institute), but got caught in the crossfire between the EJA and the EFJA and abandoned the effort. There may have been other attempts, as well, but nothing consistent or on a large scale. We will itemize the training to date by sponsor, as well as list any known future plans in the area:

1. **United States Information Service/Agency, or USIS/A (re-named Public Diplomacy Section (PD) in October 1999 after it merged with the State Department):** From 1994 to the present, USIS has conducted 24 short-term workshops – of 2/3 days – on subjects including:

- *Political affairs reporting*
- *Reporting on war crimes tribunals*
- *Election reporting*
- *Ethics*
- *Media and the law*
- *Economic affairs reporting*
- *Radio production*
- *Photojournalism*
- *Graphics and newspaper design*
- *Investigative reporting*
- *The role of journalism in public affairs and nation-building*
- *Women and the media*
- *Internet*
- *Basic news writing*
- *Building a women's media association*
- *TV production*
- *Broadcast management*

In the same period, USIS brought in consultants to work for longer periods, mostly with individual media organizations. These included:

- *Writing for the mass media* (9 weeks)
- *Wire service reporting (with ENA)* (2 weeks)
- *Civic education media training (EMA: Educational Media Agency)* (3 weeks)
- *TV production training (EMA)* (6 weeks)

In addition, USIS ran a 12-week, once-a-week workshop using WorldNet video lessons and four local trainers on various topics that included story development, editorial writing, ethics, law, language and style, and newspaper layout and design.

Further, the well-regarded International Visitors Program (IVP), administered by the former USIA, has dispatched a number of Ethiopian journalists to study tours in the US – visits that include stops at CNN, *The Associated Press*, *The Washington Post* and other noted media organizations.

Although USIS/PD media programs are no longer funded by USAID, the agency is planning on continuing in the field to the extent possible. Current concrete plans include bringing in an American communications professor to work with Unity College on curriculum development in early 2000, as well as a series of English-language writing workshops for women journalists. Also in the works are follow-up on radio program production, election reporting, desktop publishing, broadcast media management, sales and advertising, and TV production.

It is instructive to hear from the USIS team that has done more than any other agency in the field. Their assessment of the program to date is that successful training needs to be “longer, hands-on and preferably include an Ethiopian counterpart/trainer” – the latter to help overcome the language barriers, as well as to bring in relevant information. They have also had positive experience bringing in trainers from other parts of Africa, largely because, “the examples the African journalists used and how their papers reached where they are now had a lot of relevance for the trainees here.”

2. **International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)**: This Washington, DC-based organization, one of the largest private media training institutions in the world, published the two comprehensive surveys of Ethiopian media in 1992 and 1993, ultimately proposing Addis as the site of an independent, regional media training center. It’s not clear why this proposal never went anywhere.

In early 1998, ICFJ dispatched a former Horn of Africa special correspondent for *The Washington Post*, Jennifer Parmelee, to train journalists and work on setting up a training center with the *Reporter’s* Media and Communications Center (MCC). Parmelee ran and coordinated a series of 12 workshops for reporters, including three two-week sessions on basic news skills, and involving many of the same journalists – from private and government media – throughout. Although plans for the MCC center didn’t work out, Parmelee wound up consulting with Unity College on setting up a Journalism and Communications Dept. in spring 2000. Early next year, ICFJ will dispatch another Knight Fellow, Samson Mulugeta, an Ethio-American reporter for *Newsday*, to work with the Unity program for nine months.

3. **British Embassy (with support of ODA/DIFID) and British Council**: The British government has co-sponsored several media training workshops, including a two-part series on investigative reporting for government and private journalists in 1998-99. Each five-day segment was run by a Canadian journalist working for the World Bank Institute, and locally facilitated by ICFJ/Knight fellow. The British Embassy also co-funded the aforementioned October 1999 seminar entitled *The Ethiopian Media in Development* (see text for more details), as well as a workshop for Ethiopian government spokespersons. In a related activity, the British Council (which also offers journalist/members one of the best research libraries in town) is offering free

Internet access, on a trial basis, for Ethiopian journalists who wish to consult the World Wide Web.

Earlier, in 1995, an ODA-funded project brought in a private British consultant to write a report on "The State of the Ethiopian Media," while in 1993, the British Council, in conjunction with Thomson Foundation (UK) ran an intensive, three-week training seminar (five mornings a week) on basic news-gathering and writing skills. A related and promising-sounding Thomson proposal in 1993 for a 3-year-training program in Ethiopia apparently remains unfunded. British Council also funded a consultant during that time to work with Ethiopian Radio and Television, and help them devise a plan to modernize production.

The British government has sponsored several short training, or seminar, visits to the UK for individuals in the Ethiopian media. And currently, it is working to help the Ethiopian Prime Minister's Office draw up a new protocol for government-press relations, as well as a code of practice for journalists, a plan that includes a two-week study tour and advice from a foreign consultant.

Future plans remain uncertain, although the Embassy, the British Council and DIFID have all expressed interest in continuing work in the media sector. So has the private Thomson Foundation. A potential avenue of cooperation with other donors here, as well as with the Vienna-based International Press Institute (IPI), is to spin out ideas that came during the recent 'Media in Development' conference: one that has been discussed is to host a regular weekly journalism training course, likely using local trainers in conjunction with IPI, over a period of six months or so.

4. **World Bank Institute (WBI):** The former Economic Development Institute, an offshoot of the World Bank, has become one of the most active organizations in media training in Ethiopia. In conjunction with ICFJ (investigative journalism and economic reporting) and the British Embassy (investigative journalism and Internet), the World Bank Institute ran five reporting workshops here in 1998-99, involving journalists from the government and private press. WBI also is running a series of teleconferences (co-sponsored by Commonwealth Press Union) with journalists from different parts of Africa, including Ethiopia, in conjunction with Unity College, while leading an eight-week, once-a-week training workshop on economic and business reporting via African Virtual University at AAU. In addition, WBI translated training materials in investigative journalism into Amharic. It plans more journalism training programs here in the Year 2000 – "Reporting on Poverty" and another round of its successful two-part program in investigative journalism.
5. **Embassy of Norway:** The Norwegian Embassy has been involved in three media projects, all of them this year, according to *Political Officer* Jens-Petter Kjemprud. These include co-sponsorship of the October conference, 'Ethiopian Media in Development,' (with British and Austrians) as well as two research projects: 1. A pilot study on media training, conducted by a consultant from the Media Training Institute in Norway and 2. A media survey and background paper on the launch of independent broadcasting, conducted by the local NGO, Forum on Social Studies. Kjemprud says there are continuing discussions on future donor cooperation in the area of media training, as well as a plan to include Ethiopian journalists in a scholarship program in Norway starting in the Year 2000.

6. **German Embassy:** Dr. Dietrich Pohl, *Counselor for Press, Culture and Legal Affairs*, says the embassy has conducted limited training on media policy issues for senior officials at the Ministry of Information, and has started cooperation with the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association. However, he feels the results have been disappointing so far and that the “ideal” partner has yet to be located. Although the Germans are keen to continue in this sector, he notes: “We need to find partners who are able to translate input into output.”
7. **French Embassy:** France’s main target for funding in the media sector is in the audio-visual area, says cultural attache Denis Gaillard. As such, the embassy has sponsored two training visits by a French audio-visual expert to work with ETV on image and sound, as well as presentation of news. They are contemplating further work in this technical area, such as training ETV presenters to use the teleprompters they have now. The French Embassy has also sponsored working visits to France by several Ethiopian newspaper editors.
8. **Austrian Embassy:** Co-sponsored the recent seminar on ‘The Ethiopian Media in Development.’ In addition, says Ambassador Thomas Michael Baier, the Austrians are interested in working with the British and Norwegian embassies on a continuing training project as described above.
9. **Dutch Embassy:** Information and democratization officer Bob Hensen says the Dutch have indirectly supported the development of the Ethiopian Media Women’s Association (EMWA) through the supply of facilities. Otherwise, he noted that the embassy was in the process of “policy reformulation” and would be concentrating future aid money in three or four sectors to include: 1. Health; 2. Food security; 3. Education; Urban Development and 5. Good governance and Democracy. Any assistance to future media projects would have to fit into those frameworks, Hensen noted, adding that they had no specific plans at present.
10. **Canada Embassy/Canadian CIDA:** Both organizations express live interest in the media sector and have a quite extensive project proposal out that would involve working with GOE to develop a program in investigative journalism, possibly in collaboration with WBI. The Canadians are also funding a modest media sector study, and have tentatively approved support for a series of political reporting workshops leading up to the May 2000 elections, in conjunction with Unity College and a group of African trainers.
11. **Heinrich Boll Foundation:** is very interested in three areas that relate to media: 1. The media and conflict; 2. The media and the environment; 3. The Media and gender, according to new regional director Asegedich Ghirmazion. The foundation invited a few Ethiopian journalists to a recent seminar on ‘Media and Conflict’ in Bonn, she said, but there has been no other practical work to date, apart from a recent photography exhibit entitled “Bridges.”
12. **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung:** Also interested in the media sector, but has not been involved at the local level since a problematic consultancy with Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) in 1993/4. This changed two months ago when FES sponsored a workshop on economic reporting that was run jointly by two local NGOs, the Ethiopian Economists’ Association and the Forum for Social Studies. In addition, FES has sponsored a female journalist, Seble Bekele from the *Monitor*, to the

Uganda Management Institute for a 9-month program in journalism; in this way, they can combine two traditional areas of interest for FES, media and gender. FES may also sponsor a second journalist from the Ethiopian Media Women's Association to enroll in a three-year journalism program in Tanzania, but that has not yet been finalized. No other concrete plans are "in the pipeline" yet, officials add.

13. **Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA):** conducted a survey in 1992 on the Ethiopian radio and television industry. Is interested in doing more, officials say, but no concrete plans so far.
14. **UNICEF:** Co-sponsored (with ICFJ) a training field trip for journalists to southern Ethiopia in July 1998. Retains interest in training for journalists in areas relative to UNICEF mandate – e.g. development involving women and children – and through 1998, collaborated in training sessions with the government's Mass Media Training Institute in the fields of child rights, survival, protection and development.
15. **PACT Ethiopia:** Co-sponsored (with ICFJ) a training field trip for journalists to southern Ethiopia in June 1998. Has also conducted computer and Internet training for some Ethiopian journalists at its resource center, and published a resource guide for NGOs in dealing with the media. PACT Co-Director Leslie Mitchell says they would be very interested in sponsoring other such workshops for journalists at the resource center in the future.
16. **UNECA:** This agency's mandate covers development of media around the continent and is not specifically targeted at Ethiopia. So far, ECA has sponsored a series of "issues-based" conferences and seminars on subjects including "Audio on the Internet" and "ICTs and the Media." It would also like to offer training in electronic publishing and networking, since this is one way to build African content to better reflect "the African reality," rather than relying so heavily on external input for the news media, says Peter Da Costa. At the local level, UNECA has offered computer and Internet training - in its excellent training facilities - for Ethiopian journalists in conjunction with ICFJ and WBI training programs. It has also experimented with free access to the Internet for local journalists. Its extensive, African-based research library is also a favorite resource for journalists here.
17. **PANOS:** This London-based NGO, which opened a regional office in Addis in spring 1999, has traditionally been very involved in media training, particularly on development subjects. To date, PANOS has offered one workshop on covering pastoralism, and is looking to cooperate with Unity College in the areas of communications and journalism education, linked with development studies.
18. **OXFAM/CANADA:** One of this agency's specific sectors of interest is information and communications, although its only venture to date has been to sponsor Ethiopians from outlying regions to attend a workshop on rural radio in Uganda.
19. **DUKE UNIVERSITY:** in conjunction with the John and Mary Markle Foundation, has brought in at least four Ethiopian journalists for one-month fellowships in media studies in 1999.

PROSPECTIVE DOMESTIC TRAINING PARTNERS

1. **ETHIOPIAN MASS MEDIA TRAINING INSTITUTE (EMMTI)**: This government-run institution, which started up in 1996, will next year graduate its second round of trainees. Its stated objectives are “to train credible and responsible journalists with professional ethics, who can benefit from the benefits of modern science and technology.” Its two-year diploma program, while not accredited by the Ministry of Education, offers an apparently straightforward professional curriculum, with specialization in three fields: print, radio and television. Its facilities are basic, but are being gradually upgraded. Its programs and teachers are also reported to be improving steadily. EMMTI also offers a rare chance to improve professional skills for media professionals from the rural areas and offers boarding facilities. Although it is ostensibly open to private media, the overwhelming majority of its students still come from either government or EPRDF-affiliated media outlets. Private journalists say that is due to a mixture of economic and political reasons. Encouraged by the international community, EMMTI has made overtures to the free press in recent times, inviting private journalists to at least two recent short-term training workshops; this is a positive trend that should be encouraged. In addition, its director, Tseheye Debalchew, remains quite open-minded and forward-looking in approach: one sign is that he has invited several foreign journalists to teach – with no editorial strings attached. However, as with every government institution, there is a political theme that underpins the professional side, and that must be factored into any decision to work with EMMTI. (NB: I have given a short analysis of EMMTI’s project proposal in the Annex.)
2. **ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY (AAU)**: Through the Institute of Language Studies (ILS), AAU currently offers a two-semester course in journalism studies. The first part is theory and history, the second part is more a survey of different practical aspects of the professional media – including writing news, conducting interviews, designing a newspaper, editing and practicing public relations. In the past, there has also been a journalism course taught in Amharic at the Institute of Amharic Languages. Periodically, someone raises the idea of starting an actual school of journalism, but, according to teachers there, there doesn’t seem to be the political will to conceive and carry out such a concrete plan.
3. **UNITY COLLEGE**: As the nation’s first and now-largest accredited private college, Unity has been an innovator in a number of ways. Its basic philosophy is – through intensive and task-oriented teaching - to empower a generation of entrepreneurial young people. It has introduced a number of core requirements that reflect this unusual approach: basic communications, entrepreneurship and extensive computer classes. It will launch two new departments in March 2000, Development Studies and Journalism and Communications (JAC) – both new for the country at the private and tertiary level. The two-year JAC program is well under way, with a dedicated “core group” of Ethiopian media professionals working alongside three Western journalists to make this vision a reality. Work has been started on equipping department facilities, as well as on specific syllabi and recruiting teachers. In the year 2000, Unity/JAC will host a visiting Knight Press Fellow for its inaugural two semesters. (NB: More details on Unity’s JAC program can be found in Annex.)

4. **MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS CENTER (MCC)**: Run by Amare Aregawi, editor-in-chief and publisher of the *Reporter* group of newspapers, this organization has a license to open a private media training center. In conjunction with the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and Knight Fellow Parmelee, MCC hosted a series of journalism training workshops in 1998, but has not followed up with any other program to date.
5. **ETHIOPIAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION**: Has expressed an active interest in helping train Ethiopian journalists and, along with the *Forum for Social Studies*, ran a lively and well-received workshop on economic and business reporting last month.
6. **FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES**: As one of the most active and respected actors in civil society here, the Forum acted as co-facilitator for the above-mentioned workshop and is also working on a media sector survey for the Norwegian Embassy.
7. **INTERAFRICA GROUP (IAG)**: IAG was the first indigenous NGO to tackle civil society issues after 1991, and remains a leader in that area today. Among the upcoming projects that could (and should) involve Ethiopian journalists is one to train in political polling (using census-takers as a working model) and a public lecture series aimed at elevating the standard of intellectual activity and debate in the country.
8. **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**: These include EJA, EFJA and EMWA, and the best plan is not to isolate them along political lines. One might also contemplate running a seminar on law and the media with, for example, the respected Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

I have polled dozens of journalists and editors over the past two years – including in questionnaires/evaluations at the end of workshops - and they cited the following as frequent shortcomings of media training in Ethiopia:

- too generalized;
- language and cultural barriers;
- no follow-up;
- too Western-oriented;
- not relevant to their experience and constraints;
- more theoretical than practical;
- training group an unwieldy mix between broadcast and print, or veterans and beginners;
- training group too large (e.g. over 25);
- not enough visual aids or handouts;
- condescending in tone;
- not enough time to adequately cover the subject;
- trainer unfamiliar with situation and background of Ethiopian media;
- training hasn't focused adequately on educating newcomers to journalism.

I would add another shortcoming from the donor perspective: lack of coordination and sharing of knowledge. Although this is a typical lament in the aid business, I think it is even more critical in a field that has been so sensitive and politically charged. Let's take the numerous media sector studies that are being, or have already been, done: Swedish SIDA (1), Embassy of Norway (2), USAID (2), British Council (1), British Embassy (1), Canada Embassy (1), ICFJ (2). There must be a way to better share information and pool resources, to avoid excessive duplication and even, competition, and to proceed with the nuts and bolts of developing the sector.

In addition, there has been a tendency among some international organizations to favor one "side" or another in the divided and partisan journalism environment. This is not only not productive, it is harmful, reinforcing as it does their sectarian tendencies, rather than appealing to Ethiopian journalists as a single *profession* that can rise above politics in the name of common professional interests.

It is easier, of course, to work with groups on their own. Just ask organizers of the 'Media in Development' seminar, which took 10 months to organize and was postponed numerous times – precisely because of the difficulties getting the two "sides" together in the same conference hall. Even then, there were stubborn holdouts, like the head of the government press association who claimed he hadn't been consulted far enough in advance. That last example is but a small setback, however, when compared to the overall triumph of getting these journalists together in the name of professionalism. When this is repeatedly reinforced, the groups will stop eyeing each other as "opposing camps" – well, at least most of them will, especially the young ones – and realize they have interests, and real opponents, in common.

What has worked? To generalize, the most successful training efforts so far have been those that have been **sustained** – or at least **followed up** with trainees on the ground. This has been the experience for longer-running programs like those organized by USIS and ICFJ. In my own experience, the latter, I found that journalists – especially the younger ones – benefited in a tangible way from repeating basic journalistic themes throughout a series of training courses in different disciplines (e.g. news reporting, economic and business journalism, ethics, investigative reporting, Internet, etc.). It was a way of keeping their attention and exposing them to new ideas, *as well as* stressing core journalistic principles again and again, like basic ethics - fairness, accuracy and balance –as well as writing, listening, observing, digging.

Another serious challenge is to open up and engage the trainees. Otherwise, one is left with a roomful of long, mute faces and no one to answer even the most basic questions. This is another unfortunate spinoff of the authoritarian style of education here, as well as a reluctance to express oneself in front of strangers. As such, coming in and lecturing Ethiopian journalists on Western media practices is a virtual recipe for a dreadful workshop, and yet it has been repeated over and over. The solution lies in making training **intensive, focused, task-oriented** and **interactive**.

How to do this? Here are a number of general techniques that have "worked," in my experience and observation here:

- **Keep them on their toes**: Pop quizzes, throw questions back at participants, timed ("on deadline") writing and reporting assignments, role playing, mock interviews...

- **Make it visual or audio-visual:** This is vital when teaching in a second language, but works well even in the same language. Use video materials, cut out photographs and discuss them, display sample newspaper layouts, highlight major points with an overhead or multimedia projector...
- **Get them out of the classroom:** as often as possible. Whether it is a field trip to the countryside or a reporting visit to a local business or ministry, this both breaks the monotony of class work and encourages a healthy new habit for reporters – going out and getting a story. It is also educational: I discovered most young journalists rarely leave Addis and thus have no concept of how the average Ethiopian lives;
- **Make it practical:** Coordinate each subject with a practical exercise, if possible. If you show a video or lead a discussion about interviewing, then have them practice on their colleague or a surprise visitor. If it's about writing leads, then give them 10 minutes to sort out jumbled facts and produce a lead. If you're addressing ethics, give them a mock ethical dilemma to work out. If it's photos, have them select the best photo or write a caption themselves. This is also a good way to judge how much participants are learning, and gives them a more concrete sense of satisfaction at the end, too.
- **Make it 'local' and relevant:** The liveliest sessions are often those either in Amharic, or in the least, the ones that make issues relevant to participants' experience in Ethiopia. Try to find local examples for themes you address, rather than constantly harping on the Western model. If you are discussing political coverage, bring in a journalist-trainer from another part of Africa that has been through a similar – and thus more relevant – transitional experience. Work with a local co-trainer or “co-facilitator.”
- **Make it viable:** Timing is everything. Many journalists, especially from tiny private newspapers, simply can't afford to attend full-day sessions over the course of a week or month; their employers won't let them go for that amount of time. We resolved this by offering a lot of mornings-only sessions, so that journalists could return to work after lunch. Weekends were often preferred, and one or two nights a week has proved to be another workable option.
- **Make goals of training as realistic and realizable as possible:** This is perhaps the most difficult endeavor, for all the reasons we have discussed in this delicate and difficult environment. It takes a creative and informed approach to encourage journalists to try new techniques and even take risks, without landing them in hot water. Take investigative journalism, where journalists understandably ask: “How can we use it? We'll be arrested.” A trainer must know the environment and recognize parameters, without discouraging reporters to keep pressing forward on those same perceived limits; otherwise, this becomes a totally frustrating effort for trainees and the profession will remain in its infancy. Once again, return the discussion to learning and practicing basic techniques and thus raising professional standards; the more professional a journalist, the better “protected” s/he will be.

V. A STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

As discussed, sustained professional training is needed in every sector of the media business, top to bottom, technical to editorial, ethical to practical. Probably the only sector that has developed quite quickly on its own is advertising, perhaps because it is a growth field and potentially very lucrative. Even there, the field could definitely benefit from intensive short courses and professional exchanges. In any case, here is a list of sectors that need work, followed by a dozen recommendations to serve as strategic guidelines to support and assist the development of a robust, professional and independent media in Ethiopia. In terms of numbers, it is impossible to predict *how many* people would participate in such training, as that would vary widely with approach – for example, training news editors, or funding general education for newcomers to the business. Expenses would vary accordingly.

TRAINING AREAS

- Reporting skills (basic to advanced);
- Writing skills (basic to advanced, Amharic as well as English);
- Essential tools for journalism (news judgment; story construction; accuracy; attribution; balance; distinction between fact and opinion; *etc.*);
- Writing for broadcast;
- TV and radio production/programming;
- Copy editing (to include text, headlines, captions, *etc.*);
- Media and the law;
- Media ethics;
- Opinion and editorial writing;
- Political reporting and election coverage (hopefully before May 2000!);
- How to run a fair media poll;
- Government-press relations;
- Specialized reporting: features, in-depth, regular beats like courts, police and sports, *etc.*
- Development journalism – especially getting them out to the field to the village level, to cover topics including: A) HIV/AIDS; B) Women and children in development; C) Rural poverty; D) Food security and other agricultural issues; E) Water/sanitation; F) Education;
- Business and economic reporting;
- Investigative journalism techniques (tackling corruption);
- Computer-assisted reporting;
- Research methods for media;
- Graphic design, production techniques and layout;
- Visual media: printed and filmed images;
- Newsroom and newspaper management;
- Broadcast management;
- Formation of professional associations;
- Public relations;
- Advertising
- Development of journalism courses, books and other teaching materials, preferably in Amharic, or Amharic-English editions.

TWELVE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **SUSTAINED COMMITMENT, SUSTAINED APPROACH:** Ideally, there should be continuity and coherence in media training – to reinforce basic principles and techniques over time, as well as to promote “mentoring” of promising trainees/students. This can be achieved through:
 - support of established institutions (EMMTI, Unity) with journalism and communications programs;
 - offering courses that stretch over a longer period of time – once a week for six months – like the idea that came out of the ‘Media in Development’ seminar;
 - encouraging development and continuity of successful instructors. With few solid professionals in the business – and thus few mentors to bring up the new generation – good and regular teacher/trainers in journalism are invaluable, whether at the diploma level, or working as local co-trainers (using a foreign co-trainer, or in a teleconference format that incorporates foreign content);
 - limiting short workshops to subjects with a narrow focus and very practical content;
2. **TRAINING OF TRAINERS:** This is the most effective way to achieve a “multiplier effect” for training dollars, and yet there has been very little done in this area – perhaps because journalism/communications education is such a new field in Ethiopia. Study tours and working visits for editors and department heads are fine, but educating journalism instructors is arguably a much better “investment” in the future. This can be done here, by importing a ‘trainer of trainers,’ or by sending individual educators abroad. To date, however, I only know of three occasions where Ethiopian journalism instructors were trained in this field (ICFJ, Poynter Institute (US) and WBI);
3. **EXPOSURE AND EDUCATION:** Journalists here are suffering not only from lack of training, but from the degeneration of their overall educational system, as well as longstanding intellectual and cultural isolation. In the greater scheme of things, it doesn’t cost a lot of money to sponsor scholarships and fellowships for the most promising Ethiopian journalists, whether to EMMTI, Unity or a foreign institution. I would also encourage opportunities for general higher education, as journalists should be knowledgeable about the world they are to cover. A good number of my trainees (and many of today’s young journalists) were high school graduates and their grasp of essential subjects – civics, law, history – as well as language skills, was poor. For these reasons, Unity has decided to offer journalism students a well-rounded curriculum outside their chosen field of journalism. Opportunities to broaden public education and debate, such as InterAfrica’s project for a public lecture series, should also be encouraged;

4. **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT:** Journalists need training in all areas, *practical* training. In general:
 - Support local and foreign workshops or seminars that stress classroom exercises and outside assignments, especially field trips outside Addis;
 - Encourage innovative efforts like Unity’s plans to use its college newsletter as a “training newspaper” and develop a “training radio station;”
 - Help develop internship or professional attachment programs for the most promising young journalists/communicators in partnership with media outlets, NGOs, multilaterals or successful local professional organizations such as Gemini Trust’s GEM-TV or MEGA Enterprises. Even teaching in the high school system’s “Mini Media” program might be worthwhile;

5. **PROMOTE EXCELLENCE:** Make an example out of journalistic excellence or initiative. This could be done by:
 - instituting an annual ‘Excellence in Journalism’ award;
 - citing the best reporting in training workshops;
 - compiling a book of the year’s 10 best articles;
 - taping and replaying superior ETV programs;
 - plucking the most promising young journalists out for a training workshop or scholarship abroad (if merit is actually rewarded, they will be more likely to return!);

6. **ENCOURAGE PROFESSIONAL SOLIDARITY:** Resist the pressure to segregate training into government and private camps; this will only further entrench divisions and keep the profession in its current infantile stage. The implicit message media donors give by adhering to this criterion is that *journalists must see their profession as above politics*. This is a necessary step before their craft will mature and begin to play a constructive role in building democratic expression and practice. Professional association and mutual respect across lines should be encouraged in every way, whether by bringing a mixed group together on specific issues – let’s say an ‘Economic Journalists’ Forum’ – or giving strong public support to groups who have taken this step on their own, like the Ethiopian Media Women’s Association;

7. **IMPROVE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT:** As stated, Ethiopian journalists daily negotiate a maze of legal restrictions and the threat of harassment and jail, but few really know the law. They are neither fully aware of their legal limits – nor their legal rights. This has exacerbated an already hostile climate of antagonism that is counter-productive for all: journalists, government, democracy in general. A few thoughtful programs could go a long way to improving the situation. These could include:
 - Efforts to involve jurists, lawyers, human rights activists, police and Justice Ministry officials in a dialogue with journalists;
 - Supreme Court registrar Ali Abdou Hejira’s plans for a legal handbook for journalists – with practical follow-up training to make sure it doesn’t wind up collecting dust on a bookshelf;
 - Holding up examples of factual reporting on court cases against journalists, rather than mere angry headlines, as a positive

example (NB: Most private newspaper reports neglect key facts like court dates, charges, penalties, defense, etc.);

- Workshops to try and figure out ways to resolve legal conflicts between the Constitution and other areas of law affecting freedom of expression;
- Support of legal challenges to clear violations of human rights – like illegal detention;
- A legal defense fund, like the modest one administered by the Free Press Journalists Association (staying in jail because one doesn't have \$300 seems ridiculous), but it should be *closely monitored* to make sure it is equitably distributed;
- Public advocacy to decriminalize journalistic offenses under law and to urge greater tolerance on the part of authorities;
- Encourage development of an *independent* media council to handle complaints against media;

8. **ENCOURAGE LINKS BETWEEN MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS:**

These would appear to be natural allies in the struggle to open up society, strengthen democratic institutions and encourage public participation, but politics and distrust have kept them largely apart to date. Many journalists, for example, hold the view that all NGOs are out to make money out of misery, while many NGOs are convinced that any contact with journalists will result in libelous scandal-mongering against them. Experience has borne out each of these views to a limited extent, but overall, they are losing more than they are gaining from not working together. This is why EEA/Forum's journalism training exercise is notable and laudable, and why other ideas – like InterAfrica's plans to involve some journalists in training on polling techniques – should be supported;

9. **HELP DEVELOP 'APPROPRIATE' TRAINING MATERIALS:** It doesn't take long in the training business to recognize that there are virtually no homegrown teaching materials for the journalism and communications fields in Ethiopia, while even foreign imports tend to be scarce, outdated or irrelevant. And, as noted previously, Amharic-language training (or teaching materials translated into Amharic) can have a wider reach. Some ideas:

- Supporting current proposals to develop curriculum and courses at both EMMTI and Unity would offer a chance to get in "at the ground floor" in a useful way, much as with "training of trainers" (TOT); it is a meaningful investment in the next generation of journalists, laying a foundation of good principles and practice;
- Amharic translations of respected journalism and communications textbooks and other materials would make a major contribution; to date, only WBI's "Freedonia" investigative journalism case study/mini-course has been translated into Amharic;
- A related idea is to develop a book or course or both around Ethiopia's media history, highlighting the development of expression (and related constraints) and the country's best writers, illustrated by photos from press archives (Walta reportedly has the best);

- Build up libraries of textbooks and reference materials for journalists/journalism students at educational institutions and media centers, but *make sure* they are readily accessible (a problem in the past, even at the university);
 - Involve Ethiopia's most respected journalists in the effort to train and build training materials. At least three of them – the AP, Reuters and PANA correspondents – are truly national resources, and sharing their expertise and experience (over four decades) would be a major contribution to the upcoming generation;
10. **STRENGTHEN COORDINATION AND SHARE INFORMATION**: amongst all current and potential actors in the field of media education and support. This can be done by reviving the media donor's group, or by creating a new, "multilateral" group on the issue that not only involves traditional donors, but NGOs and other civic organizations, educational institutions, multilateral organizations, professional media associations, and of course, the journalists themselves;
11. **FOCUS ON THE YOUNGER GENERATION**: One 1993 media training proposal wondered: "Should we teach the young and the restless, or the middle-aged and the hopeless?" Nothing is this black and white, of course: a good number of older journalists (notably ones like those mentioned in No.9) have managed to retain professional credibility and reputation under one heavy-handed regime after another; their expertise is badly needed and they should be encouraged to act as leaders for change. However, it is clear from training to date that, on balance, the younger generation is more open-minded and less politicized – and thus more receptive to serious professional education. Investment should be therefore concentrated with them;
12. **ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENT AND CRITICAL THINKING**: There is no magic formula to make this happen, yet it remains an essential area of endeavor if democracy is truly to take root in a country still mired in its difficult history. These suggestions could strengthen this practice, which after all underpins most successful journalism in the world today:
- Support quality private education, in media and other spheres;
 - Encourage innovative and inter-active teaching practices, whether in private or government institutions;
 - Uplift and reward those individuals and institutions that strive for excellence and intellectual independence, in journalism and all other fields;
 - Support organizations like EMWA that have broken with tired and negative old practices like political factionalism within a profession;
 - Promote and stimulate public debate and knowledge through public lectures, opinion polls, media field trips, issues-oriented political debate and coverage, broader access to the Internet and, eventually, by strengthening private radio.

ANNEX A: Comments on proposal for Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute

It is difficult to analyze this proposal, since I don't know USAID's policy framework or country objectives, but I will offer a few general comments other than the references I have made about EMMTI in the main text of this report.

1. In terms of overall objectives, this well-written report says all the right things: it notes "the pivotal role of the mass media in the democratization process," and underlines the corresponding need to improve "the quality and professionalism of the Ethiopian mass media systems and their practitioners";
2. Its framework for capacity-building of trainers and institution seems well thought-out and viable given the estimated time of five years;
3. Other key goals include curriculum development, workshops on "civics" for media practitioners from around the country and exchange of faculty and students with cooperative institutions to upgrade their skills and knowledge. These all fall within the overarching recommendation to expand and strengthen educational and professional knowledge among media practitioners;
4. Where the proposal seems weakest, and least realistic, is in the area of capital support. It is, in fact, a *highly capital-intensive* project proposal. Do students really need to "practice" on the latest digital sound and video equipment? Do donors really need to spend \$70,000 on two mini-buses? Another \$12,000 on office supplies? I feel the focus on capital input and all the high-tech equipment obscures what should be the primary mandate of this institution – and the main area of support - producing professional, knowledgeable and ethical journalists and the instructors to do so;
5. Most of the equipment in question is clearly "high-end," unnecessarily so. One can purchase a well-equipped, if basic, sound studio from China for about \$20,000, for example – perfectly adequate for training purposes. While I am unable to evaluate current prices for, say, complex broadcast TV editing equipment, I can certainly say that quoted prices for a Laser printer (\$800), a laptop computer (\$3,400), a 35-mm Pro still camera (\$1600), a desktop computer (\$5000), a copier (\$10,000), a handheld video recorder (\$5000), a regular audio tape recorder (\$2,000) – as well as roundtrip airfare at \$2400 - are well over – in some cases between 50 and 100 percent over – market prices in the US ;
6. It also reflects questionable assignment of priorities. If one is going to spend \$1600 on a still camera, why not spend the same amount on six to eight good-quality portable cameras for students to take out and shoot with? This has been done very successfully in media projects elsewhere in the world. As we've said, practice makes perfect, and no one is going to allow a mere student to take a \$1600 camera out on the streets. This example could be repeated throughout – in terms of portable video cameras, tape recorders, etc. The main point here is: ***The important basics and principles of the profession can be learned with basic equipment;***
7. The proposal also needs an accountant to crunch the numbers again. I'm no mathematician, but I caught three basic addition errors, and what appeared to be "double-billing" – contingency factored in at several stages of the expense tally, \$60,000 for a year's leave of the Principle Investigator, as well as his per diems and wages added on top of that... these are the sorts of things that make you wonder about the numbers overall (but I am *not an expert* in this area);
8. My own opinion is that one can help this institution in meaningful ways – particularly through the development of content and teaching skills - and build on the already-

productive relationship with Howard University, etc – *without spending prohibitive amounts of money*;

9. Finally, for all the background reasons I have given in the report, one has to be cognizant that this is, after all, a government-supported institution that is producing primarily government journalists. As such, the project has its *limits* in terms of affecting the greater spectrum of the Ethiopian media. If one seeks to raise standards of journalists from across the spectrum, than one needs to invest equally in private sector initiatives in the same field;
10. **Additional note:** after some communication with Prof. Abiyi Ford, a Howard University professor who is helping EMMTI in curriculum development and other areas, he informed me that the original local partner that appears on the 1998 project proposal – the Permaculture and Parasitology Institute – has been since replaced by the *Development and Capacity Building Institute (DCBI)*, a registered Ethiopian NGO that has been involved in a number of capacity-building projects in the areas of health, agriculture, education and distance learning in Ethiopia.

ANNEX B: Further details on Unity College and JAC

Unity College, Ethiopia's first private college, was founded in 1992 as a language institute. Over the years since, parallel to the development of enabling government policy, it has grown into a respected, multi-disciplinary institution that accommodates 8000 students, now the second-largest institution of higher learning in the country. In mid-1999, Unity's diploma programs were accredited by the Ministry of Education – another first for the private educational sector – endowing it with comparable status to government-run institutions of higher learning. This past fall, Unity launched its first five degree-programs, laying a foundation for its overarching goal of becoming a university. In fact, its investment project to build the university campus (by 2004) has already been approved by the government.

Unity has developed a reputation for innovation. It is working on making all classes interactive and task-oriented – quite a contrast to traditional modes of teaching here - while it has introduced a variety of programs that are unprecedented in Ethiopian education: free remedial English and math for the weakest students; a month-long orientation period, also free, for new students; mandatory computer classes for all; a weekly “English-speaking day”; student complaint forms that must be answered in three days; broadening core requirements to include semester-long courses on ‘Entrepreneurship’ and ‘Communications,’ etc.

Now, it has put in motion a plan to open a Department of Journalism and Communications (JAC) by March 2000; it has assembled a core committee of respected Ethiopian professionals in the media/communications fields, with the assistance of foreign journalist/consultants, and has made its first hires for the department. Its first communications course will be taught in December 1999.

The approach to journalism and communications education will be intensive and practical, in line with the overall Unity philosophy – which aims to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit among young people. This will be the case for the regular courses, as for short-term training workshops for working journalists, in the belief that only

practice, debate and exposure can truly elevate skills and professional standards in this field. As part of the department, Unity College is planning to open a multi-media center that will double as a “newsroom” for students enrolled in JAC courses. It will house a modest sound studio and video equipment for broadcast, as well as a darkroom and Internet access. Ultimately, Unity will open its own radio station to accompany the already existing weekly newspaper; both will be used in part as training vehicles for JAC students. The multi-media center will also be used for interdisciplinary education in which journalism or communications skills are required

SOURCE MATERIAL

Bezabih, Mairegu (now a journalism instructor at AAU and information officer for the European Union). Two papers entitled: *Access to Information and Press Freedom in Ethiopia (March 1999)* and *Experiences in Investigative Journalism in Ethiopia (May 1999)*

Greenfield, Richard, **Ethiopia: A New Political History**, Pall Mall Press, London: 1965.

Levine, Donald, **Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture**. The University of Chicago Press, 1965.

UNDP *Human Development Report*, 1994 and 1999 editions, Oxford University Press.

Innumerable discussions with journalists, editors and other Ethiopians and foreigners involved with the media over the past two years.

The Ethiopian news media.

GLOSSARY of ABBREVIATIONS

AAU: Addis Ababa University
AP: The Associated Press
CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency
EEA: Ethiopian Economic Association
EFJA: Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association
EJA: Ethiopian Journalists' Association (gov't)
EMMTI: Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute
EMWA: Ethiopian Media Women's Association
ENA: Ethiopian News Agency
EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front (ruling party in Eritrea)
EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (ruling party in Ethiopia)
ETV: Ethiopian Television
FES: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
GOE: Government of Ethiopia
IAG: InterAfrica Group
ICFJ: International Center for Journalists (Washington, DC)
IPI: International Press Institute (Vienna)
JAC: Journalism and Communications Dept. at Unity College
MCC: Media and Communications Center
NGO: Non-governmental organization

ODA: Overseas Development Agency (former British government aid arm)
PANA: Pan-African News Agency
SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency
USAID: US Agency for International Development
UNDP: UN Development Programme
UNECA: UN Economic Commission for Africa
USIS: The former United States Information Service
WBI: World Bank Institute