

## ***Executive Summary***

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The newsroom of South Africa today is a ship sailing into extreme headwinds of change – from digital disruption, regulatory change and government hostility to downsized newsrooms, declining circulation and shifting revenue models.

In 2012-2013, journalists and newsrooms have navigated major transitions from media ownership, in some cases, and a new press code to the Secrecy Bill being passed in Parliament. There were converging newsrooms negotiating the digital-first trend, the consolidation of newsrooms such as that of *Business Day* and *Financial Mail* and morale-dampening retrenchments.

But if the vessel is being buffeted this way and that, it is also showing signs of meeting change head-on such as in gender and race transformation and with varied and pluralistic training. Crucially, we found in the newsrooms surveyed more optimism than negative sentiment about the move from traditional media to digital-first although none could envision the end point.

So a leaky ship, perhaps, but a tough one and with an adventuring spirit.

The State of the Newsroom report 2012-2013 has six chapters: the Media Landscape; the Legal, Regulatory and Political Framework; Race and Gender; Digital First; the Ombudsman's Rulings; and Training. Below is a summary of what each chapter contains and the key findings:

**Media Landscape:** This is a broad outline of the country's print and broadcast media. The media landscape is described and quantified, and deconstructed into print, broadcast, and online (social media is tackled in a separate chapter). Notable changes include significant retrenchments, declining print circulation and shifting advertising revenue. Some attention is devoted to key

debates around media ownership and transformation, for instance, the change from Avusa to Times Media Group and the new Sekunjalo Independent Media consortium buying Independent Newspapers. Other media trends such as the erection of paywalls, the growth of internet use for news and rolling out of apps are discussed.

**The Legal, Regulatory and Political Framework:** This chapter deals with the environment within which journalists have to work, including the Constitution and other laws on the statute books, for instance, the National Key Points Act and the Protection of State Information Bill (Secrecy Bill). The chapter also discusses the changes to the Press Council and Code as well as freedom of expression, and freedom of information, with a narrative on the Protection of State Information Bill passed by the National Assembly on 25 April 2013. The chapter concludes that, with reference to media freedom, journalists had to contend with a mixed bag of fortunes: on the one hand, welcoming a review of the National Key Points Act and news of President Jacob Zuma dropping legal claims against the media worth R60-million to, on the other hand, worries that there were still Draconian clauses in the amended Secrecy Bill that would impact on investigative journalism and that freedom of expression would be hampered by political intimidation.

**Race and Gender:** Transformation has significance, considering that the newsrooms of the apartheid era were predominately white and male. The research outlines the Employment Equity policies of the media companies. Strongly indicated in this chapter is race- and gender-transformation progress by 2012 compared with newsrooms in 2002. The 2012 research found that in most newsrooms the majority of editorial staff members were black but not by a huge majority: The 2012-2013 findings from the nine newsrooms surveyed – CNBC Africa, EWN, *City Press*, *M&G*, *Sunday Times*, *Beeld*, SABC, *The Witness*, and *Sowetan* – were that the majority of journalists were black at 61% and that there was near gender equality with women journalists

comprising 49%. Regarding editors of the nine papers, 55% were black and 45% were white. The gender split was 55% male and 45% female.

However, with editors countrywide from the main commercial newspapers, belonging to the five print companies, the picture is slightly different: out of 42 editors, 23 are white and 19 are black, or 55% white and 45% black. With gender, it's 29 male editors and 13 female, or 69% male and 31% female.

Drilling into gender dynamics, most of the nine newsrooms had equal, nearly equal and sometimes higher numbers of women than men. The exceptions were the *Sowetan* and *The Witness*, which were male-dominated. There were no comments from women journalists regarding discrimination or victimisation. What is interesting to note is that the editors surveyed all said they were satisfied with race and gender transformation in their newsrooms (besides one SABC senior editor who found the public institution too black). In addition, there were some grumbles from journalists who said their newsrooms were not adequately transformed but could not explain why they felt this way, for instance, at the *M&G*.

**Digital First:** While digital-first policies, incorporating social media were being practiced in many more newsrooms, we selected four to examine. All four newsrooms – BDLive, *Mail & Guardian*, Eyewitness News and *City Press* – reported that their digital-first (and concomitant social-media) strategy accelerated in 2012-2013. The process seemed a bit haphazard and chaotic but the newsroom occupants stressed this was a “process” and it was a “transition” rather than digital first in actual implementation. The term “convergence” was no longer *de rigueur* and it appeared to be an ever-changing dynamic process. All the interviewees agreed the implementation of the digital-first strategy had no particular endpoint and they could not predict the future media landscape other than to say that digital media would probably supersede traditional media. The changes from traditional news media to digital enjoyed a more positive welcome than a negative one although some journalists were struggling with the multitasking required.

Interestingly, many noted that senior journalists were adapting better to change than juniors. All the newsrooms concerned were grappling with business models and the concept of how to generate revenue from online journalism. Only the *M&G* had a social-media policy up and running; most other newsrooms were drafting theirs.

**The Ombudsman's Rulings:** This chapter's background is widespread criticism of the press, especially emanating from the ANC and SACP. The chapter examines the number of complaints lodged against print-media organisations during an eight-month period in 2012, how these were resolved and what additional measures were implemented. The most common complaint fell into the category of "failing to report truthfully, accurately and fairly" – a very broad category. On closer examination, most of the complaints related to the issue of right of reply. Complaints came from a wide range of people from both the private and public sectors. Although the ANC, the SACP and various government institutions were often the most vociferous in their criticism – accusing the media of falsehoods and sensationalism – the number of complaints from these quarters did not stand out in the data examined. The most common rulings made by the Ombudsman was a call for an apology by the publication for failing to report truthfully, accurately and fairly; with rulings on the right to reply coming in at second place. Most complaints were settled informally and did not go to the hearings stage. Of a total of 48 rulings made by the Press Council in the eight months; 17 cases were dismissed (the publications were found not to be at fault); 16 were partially dismissed; 12 complaints were upheld; no rulings could be made in two cases; and one was settled. There was one appeal but the Ombudsman's ruling was upheld.

**Training:** Millions – at least R69.65-million – were invested in training in 2012 for the budget year March 2012-April 2013: Media24 spent R35.75-million; the SABC R23-million; Times Media Group R7.4-million; and Independent Newspapers between R3-million and R4-million. The number would have

been higher had the *Mail & Guardian*, Primedia and Caxton responded to the request for information about training budgets. This chapter outlines some of the policies governing training as well as programmes implemented by the media houses. Information was collected through official channels at the companies, as well as interviews with in-house and freelance media trainers to give a well-rounded picture of training in 2012-2013. The interviews revealed a pluralistic and rich diversity on the media-learning landscape. Three major issues emerged: newsrooms were under resourced in terms of senior staff, who were already overworked; there was a need for formal mentorships; and training appeared to be in line with the newsroom in transition.

Lastly, a Wits Journalism survey into training needs for working journalists showed enthusiasm to learn new skills, particularly in the field of online journalism.