



Reporting Africa Research Report 2018

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Situating The Context: Why It Matters To Understand How Africa Is Reported And What It Reports On?

Context

The African Media Initiative (AMI), in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of what role, if any, media plays in the obvious transformations taking place on the continent in the early years of the 21st century, undertook a research in 2016 on subjects ranging from the general to the specific. The research was informed by some in-house studies and anecdotal evidence that appeared to suggest that the collective actions of media in Africa were not always helping enhance the continent's development process.

We examined coverage of what may be considered the most significant annual event on the continent – a summit meeting in 2015 of the African Union – in order to assess how the issues on the agenda played out in the media. In 2014, AMI conducted a research on who and how media in Africa is funded. That same year it also engaged in some preliminary work on assessing the amount and quality of development content in mainstream African media.

AMI subsequently ran a number of capacity building workshops on key development subjects such as agriculture, energy, climate change and resilience, migration, urbanisation, technology, and fisheries, to name a few, with the aim of creating networks of skilled reporters capable of writing substantively on these issues.

Our findings led us to that inevitable question: Does media, as a collective body, play a role in driving Africa's development agenda and social transformation? In a deconstruction of the continent's major political, economic or social outcomes, is it possible to identify a direct contribution by the media collective? How does African media cover Africa and to what effect?

This report is a culmination of a whole year's work conducted from January to December 2016. It adopts a three pronged approach -- a content analysis of some 2,000 news reports, a survey questionnaire among editors across the continent and a two-day expert workshop on 'Reporting Africa'.

Introduction

There is an overarching view within Africa that international media professionals, especially those who fly in briefly from the West, are compulsively attracted to stories about the continent that lean on the negative.

News correspondents, for reasons that may be cultural or historical, always seem to bring inherent biases to the Africa story. Media in Africa is, consciously or not, caught up in the game, focusing in its non-national coverage on a very narrow range of stories that it considers “Africa News”. Virtually all cross-border news, which is invariably sourced from western agencies, is replete with stories of a troubled continent that is generally caught in the throes of conflict, war, famine, hunger, corruption, poor economic and political leadership and performance, among other calamitous issues.

Media reports are often based on factual outcomes and real events. The problem is with the editorial choices that are made, and the tone and underlying biases that determine what reports reach audiences and readers. There are also those that tend to reflect a sensationalist and very commercial approach, largely intended only to serve the financial bottom-line. The failure of states like Somalia, Libya and South Sudan, the seemingly ‘unaccountable’, poor economic and political leadership in pre-2017 Zimbabwe and the countries of Central Africa, and the persistence of autocratic regimes in a high number of countries, will somehow continue to provide a rich pool from which to source negative reports.

This, coupled with the notion that most media consumers often privilege negative news or content, may mean that Africa will continue to receive negative coverage well into this century, particularly by a media seemingly disinterested in deepening its understanding of the realities that produce certain outcomes. In the race for profitability that is determined by popularity, circulation, and ratings, the view that negativity sells still holds sway because, it is believed, audiences or buyers privilege ‘interesting’ stories which, for Africa, means intriguing tales of failure and defeat against the forces of nature. This fact is as true for global media as it is for media in Africa.

“The media industry, mostly commercial in nature and driven by a profit motive, is interested in content that sells. From a commercial perspective, news and media content are like any other commodity whose value is based on their salability. Accordingly, the media have to choose exceptional and aberrational news stories and the media may not be interested in meaningful development stories about Africa because such stories are, by media standards, mundane and unattractive.” (Wa’Njogu, 2009, p.78).

The above assertions have persisted for years in spite of growing evidence that they may not reflect recent developments on the continent. With persistent concern that these developments were not resulting in changing the narrative, AMI commissioned

a research study aimed at deepening our understanding of all that drives media coverage of Africa. The study was particularly interested in determining the factors informing editorial choices of subjects/themes and whether media companies or organizations have specific policies to guide their coverage of Africa.

The study also looked at the sources of content, principally whether media houses use their own journalists or simply rely on international news agencies for their reports. It also sought to determine the depth and tone of reports, and the most prevalent themes in African media stories.

Most previous studies have focused on 'international' media coverage of Africa; this research sought to determine if and how often media in Africa goes beyond national boundaries to cover other countries on the continent. Of particular focus was whether the kind of media coverage offered Africa is informed by 21st century realism or by preconceived ideas about the state of the continent.

This report first reviews some of the stories or articles that have defined the 'Africa narrative' in Western and even major African media. It then looks at the primary research conducted for the purpose of determining the tone, editorial orientation and how media ultimately defines African and global perceptions of the continent in this century.

This report has been further enhanced by the inputs of participants (media leaders, journalists and development experts) who attended a two-day workshop on 'Reporting Africa' held in Kenya in December 2016¹.

1 AMI collaborated with a number of key partners - KAS Media Africa, OIF, UNDP and African Union.

The discourses of hopelessness and hope

Africa has been subjected to a certain discourse of despair and dispossession in both colonial and post-colonial writings. From Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1889) to more recent exposés by the American foreign affairs expert Kaplan (1994) and the influential travel writer Theroux (2014), they describe with a certain level of contempt what can only be described as the African nightmare:

“I got a general sense of the future while driving from the airport to downtown Conakry, the capital of Guinea. The forty-five-minute journey in heavy traffic was through one never-ending shantytown: a nightmarish Dickensian spectacle to which Dickens himself would never have given credence. The corrugated metal shacks and scabrous walls were coated with black slime. Stores were built out of rusted shipping containers, junked cars, and jumbles of wire mesh. The streets were one long puddle of floating garbage. Mosquitoes and flies were everywhere. Children, many of whom had protruding bellies, seemed as numerous as ants. When the tide went out, dead rats and the skeletons of cars were exposed on the mucky beach”. (Kaplan: 1994:4)

In an article published by *Interstate - Journal of International Affairs* (Vol. 1996/1997 No. 2), Amy Biney posits, in a commentary titled ‘The Western Media and Africa: Issues of Information and Images’, that:

“When one is asked to think of Western images that come to mind when thinking of Africa, the overall mental images are of primeval irrationality, tribal anarchy, hunger/famine, civil war, managerial ineptitude, political instability, flagrant corruption and incompetent leadership. These mental images of Africa have their deep roots in a historical relationship of slavery and colonialism which was imposed on the continent. It was a relationship which defined Africa and Africans as culturally, intellectually, politically and technically backward and inferior. These ideas continue to permeate the perspectives Western journalists, editors and academics adopt when writing about Africa”.

Despite the fact that these two articles are more than 20 years old, even the casual observer will agree that not much has fundamentally changed; journalists and media commentators and even owners and managers continue to look at Africa through the prism of trouble, anarchy, war, corruption, failure occasioned by incompetent or poor political and economic leadership, and instability.

This narrative is mostly perpetuated by some Western media whose myopic and bigoted view of Africa is oftentimes evident from the editorial slant they give to their reports from or about the continent. The narrative of failure was in fact aptly captured by the respected British *The Economist* magazine which, in a leader in its May 13-19 2000 edition, stated that:

“... wars still rage from north to south and east to west. No one can blame Africans for the weather, but most of the continent’s shortcomings owe less to acts of God than to acts of man. These acts are not exclusively African—brutality, despotism and corruption exist everywhere—but African societies, for reasons buried in their cultures, seem especially susceptible to them”.

Derogatorily, if not pejoratively, headlined ‘Hopeless Africa’, the leader article was followed by a story titled ‘The heart of the matter’, which offered that “Africa’s biggest problems stem from its present leaders”. The writer of that story, Richard Dowden, was later quoted in the *New African* magazine saying that while he was not an Afro-pessimist, the story and his other articles on the continent were based on observed reality. He said that:

I am not an Afro-pessimist but journalists in particular, [I] have a duty to reflect the reality. Africa is in a bad way. The sensitive issue is why? I am also skeptical of those “success stories” in Africa proclaimed by the World Bank and the IMF and held up as models by the Western donors: Ghana, Uganda and Mozambique. They are relatively successful but they also happen to be the countries which hit rock bottom in the mid-1980s and had no alternative but to follow Western prescriptions and were, therefore, given amounts of aid which fulfill the prophecy of success. (New African: 2000: 31).

Dowden’s assertion may help assuage readers who consider the Western media part of the global conspiracy against the continent. Granted, the skepticism, and even ignorance, often demonstrated by many Western journalists is not lost to discerning watchers.

Another article in the *Independent on Sunday* on 31 March, 1991, titled ‘Weep for the Lost Continent’, argued that “Africa is so much without hope that it is difficult to believe that it can help itself. If western countries had the will they could recolonize the continent which they left in such haste. The Japanese and the Germans could run Africa, using the British, as professional ex-colonists, as their official agents.” Two years later, Paul Johnson argued in *The Spectator* in an article titled ‘Colonialism’s Back and Not a Moment Too Soon’, that “What the third world needs is a new form of imperialism: altruistic, internationally supervised, efficient and tough-minded ... the factors which will permit the revival of colonialism are in place.”

Whether benevolent or altruistic ‘colonialism’, the apologists for recolonization of the Third World and Africa continue to find space in some Western media and resonance with the readers and audiences that pay for the media products that ultimately inform their perception of the continent. The rather myopic view of these journalists and indeed other actors towards Africa generally resonates with those who consider the continent as a burden and, in the words of a Western leader, “a blot on their conscience”. In fact, this statement was once uttered by the current British foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, who posited in *The Spectator* on 2 February, 2002, that “the continent [Africa] may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge anymore”.

It is interesting to note that there has been some sort of reversal in the way the continent has been depicted in more recent times. The very magazine - *The Economist* -- that had condemned Africa as ‘hopeless’ (2000), called it ‘rising’ (2010) and ‘hopeful’ (2013). Informed observers speak of a perceptible change of heart among the editors of *The Economist*. One academic, Morten Jerven of Simon Fraser University, offered a fresh perspective in a book titled, *Africa: Why Economists Get It Wrong*, published in 2015. For Jerven, there was a certain ambivalence over whether Africa is failing or rising, and whether we should be more pragmatic when looking at and judging Africa and what parameters should be used in determining how the continent is assessed or examined and thus understood.

Africa is made up of 54 countries with varying levels of political, social and economic development. Indeed, as *The Economist* argues, “Africa is too big to follow one script”. Therefore, it is prudent to look at Africa’s development and specific countries’ records critically and judiciously and ask whether it is right for many, especially Western editors, to make conclusions about the continent based on events or issues going on in particular countries without careful consideration or interrogation of matters in specific African states.

Finding good and positive stories about Africa - a question of balance

There have been recent efforts to revise the Africa narrative by focusing on ‘positive’ stories that resonate with Africans. However, there have not been corresponding efforts to develop a critical mass of journalists genuinely interested in telling the Africa story in a manner that is informed and practical.

What really is the Africa story? Would these journalists and media avoid the ‘truth’ or frame it in such a way as to offer positivity in the face of negativity and pessimism? Would this then avoid biases and accusations of bias in the face of, for instance, human suffering, human rights abuses, corruption, conflict, poor and autocratic political leadership, and other challenges? How would such issues be spun? These are critical questions that would need to be addressed or answered as actors, including media owners, scholars, politicians and others, seek to develop an African narrative that captures the African reality as it is.

Ashish Thakkar, the founder of Mara Group and Mara Foundation, has, for example, suggested a way to tell the Africa story - 'no one wants the news to present an unnecessarily positive view of the world - just to report both the positives and negatives with nuance; and to avoid the kind of reckless sensationalism that has characterized reporting on the continent in the past'.

Famed and influential broadcaster Zeinab Badawi, reflecting on the agenda of how Africa is reported, says that "there has been a slight improvement but there is still the knee-jerk reaction of approaching African stories in an uni-dimensional way".

As for Salim Amin, Chairman of Africa24 Media, he is convinced that "there are plenty of good, actually great stories in Africa of success and human achievement, of sport, fashion, music, business and art, but they are rarely explored in the depth they deserve".

Therefore, does the solution lie in pushing for a single and unified Africa narrative? According to Anton Harber, this is a "tired line". Consider what he wrote in an article after attending the 2013 African Media Leaders Forum in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa:

"After two days of media owners, managers and journalists grappling with the challenges of technology, finance and censorship, and determined to grow the continent's media, it was disappointing to hear the line-up of Kenyan Vice-President William Ruto, his Ethiopian counterpart, Demeke Mekonnen, and our own Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, now chairwoman of the African Union Commission. Replace the old image of Africa with one that we generate ourselves, they said, one after the other. The case most often cited is The Economist, which ran the "Hopeless Continent" front cover and then, a decade later, ran another with the headline, "Africa Rising". Many celebrated the change without seeing that replacing one simple, crude generalization about Africa with another misses the point. Ringing in my ears were the wise words of Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: "Beware the single narrative." Just the idea of wanting to impose one simple story on a huge, diverse continent is unhelpful, even if it is a more positive one. The problem with the way much of the world has viewed Africa is not that they have the wrong narrative, but that many are ignorant of the many competing elements of this place. We want simply to replace one overly pessimistic story line with another crudely optimistic one, rather than embrace a complex reality with many competing, different things going on. This is a plea for complexity rather than simplicity, for a plural vision rather than a myopic one, for depth of knowledge over prejudice." (Harber: 2013)

It is imperative, therefore, that in approaching the Africa story, one must avoid the easy trappings of populist calls and discourses. Granted, there must be a genuine, continent-grown movement to define and shape that narrative that reflects the diversity of voices and multifold images of a continent on the move.

In an edited publication by Bunce, Franks and Paterson (2016) entitled *Africa's media Image in the 21st Century*, the authors speak of “the emergence of increasingly participatory and indigenous flows, in combination with a healthy cynicism and debate about traditional media and apparent decreases on Northern sources, implying a more autonomous and confident region of the world actively inventing new ways to communicate”.

What the literature says?

It is important to examine, even if briefly, what informs media coverage of Africa and the apparent imbalance in reporting the continent. Arguments have been advanced about postcolonial preoccupation with matters of inequality in development and the inherent challenges that have plagued the continent for decades. These issues in turn negatively impact the autonomy and diversity of traditional cultures and indigenous values as they become extensions of “Western tradition which tend to isolate and reify the messages and the content of the communication process” (Hahn, 1994, pp 103).

Some put this down to cultural imperialism engendered mainly by increased Western media access and consumption by people in developing countries or, to use the clichéd and derogatory term, the Third World nations.

Cultural imperialism has been defined as “the economic, technological and cultural hegemony of the industrialized nations, which determines the direction of both economic and social progress, defines cultural values, and standardizes the civilization and cultural environment throughout the world” (Sarmela, 1975, pp 13). Cultural imperialism then becomes a consequence of the presentation of images of the world suited to what Funkhouser and Shaw (1990) call the agenda of the media causing the contamination of traditional culture by mass media.

From a cultural imperialism perspective, the media possesses powerful effects on people and cultures; people in the developing world are especially “heavily affected by media messages emanating from the Western industrialized countries ... [because] ... they export their cultural products and impose their sociocultural values on poorer and weaker nations in the developing world”. (Kraidy, 2002).

This is something that the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (popularly known as the MacBride Commission) alluded to when it said the media plays a critical role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of people (MacBride Report, 1980)² and thus the imbalance between the global north and south in terms of media flows (and perhaps effects) had to be corrected.

2 The Commission started work in December 1977 and produced a detailed report in 1980 called *Many Voices, One World*.

How we see content: Coding/encoding, agenda setting and framing

Despite the spirited campaign by Third World activists, the New World Information Communication Order (NWICO) was rejected by Western powers. There have been calls to temper the apparent negative reporting on Africa with some positive stories. This is where the issue of the Africa narrative comes in although it is important to note that media performance often depends on audience reception that is characterized by coding and encoding.

According to Stuart Hall, audience interpretation of media content is central to the communication process. Hall regards audiences as active readers for whom meaning is a derivative of a range of issues, including context. Besides, he argues, ideology often determines media packaging of content, even though audiences can choose to adopt or reject. This argument means that some people or audiences can see through negative media content and derive their own meanings other than those intended by various media that may be driven by certain ideologies or agendas.

The arguments above notwithstanding, there is the notion that the media sets some sort of agenda by forcing “attention to some issues” (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, pp 177) by the way they report or frame them and, more importantly, through the selection process. By setting the agenda, the media undoubtedly create public awareness and concern over salient issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

Concomitantly, the media exerts a significant influence on what people consider to be important in society today (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In addition, a media frame has been described as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem, 1991, pp 3). On another hand, Entman (1993, pp 52) points out that *“to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”*.

Framing and agenda setting are related to the research here. First, they demonstrate the ‘power’ of the media to tell people what is important by telling them what to think about (Cohen, 1963) by focusing and covering issues they think interest the people. Secondly, they are able to filter and shape reality. Thirdly, by choosing a few issues, giving them prominence and apparent salience, the media leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than others (cf. McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

In effect, we can argue that although the media sets the agenda and frames issues that make people pay attention to them, the public or audiences can choose to interpret them differently based on factors such as their current situations, context, knowledge and experiences of the countries, and education levels. Granted, it is fairly obvious that the way African states are framed by Africa-based media continues to contribute significantly to current perceptions of the countries.

The Research

While global media has been projected as largely responsible for defining perceptions of Africa, little has been made of African media coverage of the continent. Is there a single and overarching narrative that emerges from regional media reports and analyses of events in Africa? Are there particular schools of thought and recognizable editorial alignments across sub-regions and national boundaries?

Global media organizations clearly constitute a powerful vehicle for not only shaping the global agenda but also, as earlier noted, for framing the lens through which Africa is seen. Without an African-led media organization capable of injecting an African perspective into global conversations, the question must be asked whether the African media collective can, through coordinated and consistent messaging, seize the initiative and redefine the agenda.

Our research sought to figure out what currently prevails and if, without the regional physical infrastructure and common messaging imperatives, there are any compelling dialogues that can collectively define the Africa story: It was informed by empirical data gleaned from published reports from across the region and responses provided by editors to the following questions:

1. How does African media cover the continent?
2. What is your perception of non-African media coverage of the continent?
3. What factors determine the coverage of Africa?
4. How can media in Africa contribute to the creation of a common understanding of the continent's realities beyond narratives based on preconceived ideas and stereotypes?

Methodology

The study used a mixed method approach, with a focus on content analyses and a survey questionnaire among editors across Africa. As mentioned earlier, an expert meeting on 'Reporting Africa' provided additional input and analysis.

The study looked at publications – both offline and online – for a period of six months from 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2016. A total of 2,141 reports from 59 publications were analyzed for source, issues covered, tonality (positive, neutral or negative) and depth (column size and number of words). The publications were randomly selected based on availability and perceived importance in the countries where the research was conducted.

Table 1 and 2 provide a breakdown of the Africa and global media covered by the content analysis.

Table 1: African Media Titles by Region and Country

Southern Africa	Eastern Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	North Africa	Indian Ocean Islands
South Africa The Sowetan Live, Mail and Guardian, City Press, The Daily Maverick, Zimbabwe The Herald Zambia Zambian Eye Botswana The Voice	Kenya The East African, Daily Nation, The Standard Uganda The Independent Ethiopia The Ethiopian Herald Somalia Shabelle News, Puntland Post Rwanda The New Times South Sudan and Sudan Sudan Tribune	Nigeria The Guardian Ghana Daily Graphic Senegal Le Soleil Ivory Coast Fraternite Matin	Cameroon Le Jour Chad Le Progres	Egypt The Middle East Observer, Ahram Online Tunisia Tunisia Alive Morocco The Moroccan Times MWN	Seychelles Seychelles News Agency, The Nation Today Madagascar Madagascar Tribune, L'Express de Madagascar, Midi, Madagasikara Mauritius L'Express, Defi Media

Table 2: Global Media Coverage by Publication

Western (Europe / US)	Global with an African Focus	Other Regions
France AFP, France 24, TV5 Monde RFI, Le Monde USA Time Magazine, News Week, LA Times, The Washington Post, New York Times United Kingdom The Economist, The Guardian, BBC News	China Daily-Africa Weekly Africa Confidential New Africa Africa Business Magazine New African Women Magazine	China Xinhua Japan The Asahi Shimbun North Korea The Chosun Ilbo Thailand Bangkok Post Russia Pravda

What were the Stories saying?

How African media covers the continent

The content analysis offered some interesting insights as to what makes news in Africa and how media in Africa covers the continent. From a region-wide perspective, very few stories obtained headline status in any significant number of countries. Cross-border headlines were minimal, pointing to a major dearth in what may be considered a regional conversation. Africans are clearly not talking to each other or sharing experiences through their media platforms.

The Big Issues

A small number of themes were recurrent even though they generally responded to each nation's context, with little attempt to draw from similar experiences across frontiers:

- Elections and political leadership
- Terrorism, state/human security and conflict
- Economic governance
- Development challenges and opportunities

If a single narrative emerged on any of the themes, they tended to reinforce rather than contextualize or debunk stereotypes. Elections coverage, besides publishing often-contested results, tended to harp on systemic weaknesses or opposition failures. Security and conflict reporting either put the spotlight on death and destruction or on external sponsors of terrorists. Even in sectors with obvious common denominators such as economic governance and outcomes, there was little attempt to reflect what was going on across national borders. Development challenges could not be more similar but one would not be able to tell from looking at or reading media outputs in Africa.

Other themes

A quantitative analysis of the stories that invariably found their way into the columns of African publications revealed a general and persistent interest in country-specific public events, sports, the cultural values and traditions of the country and, increasingly, the story of innovation, technology and change.

There were the occasional multi-country reports that were almost always told from a purely national perspective. The fight against poachers and the preservation of Africa's wildlife were featured as in-depth stories highlighting the increase in endangered species and the zero tolerance towards poachers from a number of governments, especially in East Africa. It was interesting, during the period covered, to find reports on the death of Congolese music icon Papa Wemba covered by a number of African publications from across the continent.

Important omissions

There was clearly an important omission in the reporting and coverage of Africa by African media – the African Union. An important gathering of heads of state and government took place during the period under study. None of the issues on the agenda of the meeting received continent-wide coverage or in any significant group of countries. Indeed, the media was not a reliable source of information or knowledge about this Pan African institution. It was also noted that Africa Day (celebrated on 25th May) was not covered by the sample used for this report.

The geography of news

The quality and quantity of the media product (print, broadcast and, for that matter, digital) varies quite significantly across the continent. There are certain markets that are more dynamic and mature, especially in the English-speaking countries on the continent. The large and multimedia institutions would be found in these countries – the Punch Group, the Daily Graphic, the Nation Media Group, the IPP Media Group, the New Vision Group, Naspers (Media24) and Mail and Guardian, to name a few.

The African media landscape is also demarcated along linguistic features. There is clearly a Francophone and Anglophone divide in the manner in which news is covered and treated. Consciously or not, media in francophone countries has only just begun to emerge from the stranglehold of state orientation, thanks in large part to new and affordable technologies and the growth, since the start of the 1990s, of independent news organizations. The legacy of state/public media is also quite often felt although there is a growing effort by the market and media professionals to ensure that the gap between state and independent media (in terms of access to information and financial resources) has been growing closer.

Social media is also responsible for redefining the role and scope of media in society. Bloggers have become a new class of media celebrities. Africans are believed to be among the world's leading users of Facebook and the WhatsApp application. With the ability to produce and disseminate content, albeit to a restricted audience, social media is filling gaps in the news business left by a capacity-deficient and resource-burdened legacy media. The downside to a rising dependence on social media for news in Africa is quite considerable and is giving rise to the growing chorus of complaints about “fake” news. There is also the recognition, at a time when the search is on for continent-wide dialogues and a new narrative that will redefine Africa, of the fact that fragmentation is within the DNA of social media.

Tilt for regionalism

The data clearly pointed to the fact that there was a regional bias by the media of countries sharing a similar geographical space, linguistic affinity or forming part of a particular regional bloc. It is true that African media is primarily national in outlook and focus, with rarely more than a page or two in national dailies devoted to news about other countries in the region. When these news organizations have ventured beyond borders, the main issues have tended to reflect geographical (proximity) or linguistic bias. The hierarchy of choice of news content will start with the national, the language community (Anglophone, francophone, Lusophone or Arabophone), the sub-region, and then the rest of the continent.

Countries in focus

When African news organizations have gone outside the aforementioned factors of editorial consideration, two countries – South Africa and Nigeria – have tended to receive the most news interest. This is not surprising as the two countries generate and command clout on the continent by the sheer size of their economies. They have also been in the news, during this research, for other reasons: South Africa with the corruption scandal linked to the presidency of Jacob Zuma, and Nigeria with the presence and spread of Boko Haram. Other countries considered major hot spots – Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Zimbabwe – have also received some attention. They have been in the news as they have been mostly hit by issues related to terrorism, human insecurity and political meltdown.

Sources

Media in Africa rely, to a large extent, on foreign news agencies when reporting on other countries on the continent. The most used are AFP, BBC News and Reuters. Radio France International (RFI), Xinhua news agency and Al Jazeera are also a growing force in the packaging and distribution of news.

It is interesting to note that news stories generated by influential African media like NMG (Kenya), Media24 (South Africa), Punch (Nigeria) or the Guardian (Tanzania) about specific countries beyond their immediate geographical zones are occasionally used but not on a scale that one would have expected to see. What is interesting about them is that they would occasionally send out their own reporters to cover stories outside their immediate geographies.

The research brought out some online portals such as allafrica.com, Ecofin Agency, Abidjan.net and icicemac.com that are contributing to an expanding delivery of African news via the Internet. This begs the question whether these platforms would eventually provide the means of projecting a new Africa to Africans and to the world.

How global media covers Africa

Western Media: Still the narrative of the Dark Continent?

Bunce, Franks and Paterson (2016) indicate that “the mainstream international print coverage of Africa shows signs of becoming more positive in tone and varied in its subject matter”.

This trend of uncovering more about Africa can also be found with mainstream broadcast channels – BBC’s Focus on Africa and CNN’s Inside Africa – and in the business segment of these broadcast organizations with programmes such as Africa Startup (CNN) and Africa Business Report (BBC). It is interesting that these and other global channels tend to use Africans in the roles of producer and presenter of the programmes. These developments notwithstanding, stories about poor governance, incompetent political leadership, terrorism, persistent insecurity and ongoing restrictions in some countries to basic freedoms continue to make the headlines. However, one also notes the push for stories that speak to the efforts and opportunities found on the continent – the Green Revolution, conservation projects, anti-poaching campaigns, the quest for peace and security, tourism as a pillar of development, anti-corruption efforts as well technology and innovation in Africa.

The data pointed to an interesting dichotomy within global media: The fact that France-based media such as AFP, RFI, TV5 and *Le Monde*, in their coverage of the continent, have a particular inclination to highlight events in West and Central Africa. No doubt, one would attribute this to proximity with the French language and culture. The most reported story during this survey was about French forces and the sex abuses of which they were accused in the Central African Republic.

Africa focused publications

There exists a whole gamut of Africa focused, externally printed publications that are building sizeable audiences and readers in different parts of the world. The IC Publication is believed to be one of the market drivers in the production and distribution of Africa-related stories. According to its website, it reaches “some 2.6 million readers in more than 100 countries”. Other influential titles are *Africa Report*, *Jeune Afrique* and *Africa Confidential*, to name a few. Africa specific content has also led to the availability and accessibility of online platforms, a development that has seen the presence of influential websites such as *African Arguments* and *Africa is a Country*. One cannot either discount the presence of *China Daily’s* Africa Weekly launched in 2012.

What is the data telling us? There is a real mix of stories, a balance in generating an informed storyline about the continent that also shines a light on the important challenges and problems it faces. In fact, one would have been slightly concerned if there was an “over-romanticizing” of the African story. As expected, the key stories in the survey were the fight against terrorism, the quality of political leadership,

democratic opportunities (and challenges) through the holding of elections, Africa's role globally and economic opportunities on the continent. These publications featured what they termed 'big reads' that offered critical and in depth coverage – "What it means to be 50?", "China-Africa", "Rwanda: A Development Model", and "The World Economic Forum in Kigali".

China's 'Constructive journalism' for Africa?

China has for the past 10 years invested heavily in media in Africa. The stories generated by *China Daily's* Africa Weekly and Xinhua News Agency were extremely positive and celebratory. This, in fact, echoes what the Deputy Head of CCTV Africa said at the 7th African Media Leaders Forum: "Our aim is to produce programmes / news stories that show the positive side rather than the old view of poverty, diseases, amongst other challenges."

A number of scholars (see Wan (2015) and Marsh (2016)) have questioned the concept of constructive journalism promoted by Chinese media about Africa:

'CCTV's overall preference for the solution-oriented responsibility frame indicates that – consciously or not, it is adopting some elements of constructive journalism. Such a framing of African events does indeed diverge from the norms of Western coverage, but it is also marked by a lack of critical focus on China and a reluctance to hold African leaders and officials to account'. (Marsh: 2016)

This was further evidenced in a recent publication: Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence (2018):

'China has stepped up its engagement especially in Africa's media sphere, expanding the presence of its state media outlets, hosting exchange programs and trainings for journalists, and acting as a supplier for Africa's telecommunication infrastructure'. (National Endowment for Democracy: 2018: 20)

In fact, the research stories carried by both Xinhua and China Daily's African Edition are extremely positive and cover a broad range of themes – youth, economic development and trade, arts, conservation and, of course, China's impact in Africa. It was interesting to note that both of these news agencies put significant emphasis on the workings of the AU. This is quite surprising in light of the fact that the African media (as seen in an earlier section) chose to "ignore" or not report on the Pan African organization.

As for the other global (but non-Western) publications that were used for the purpose of this research, namely: *Asahi Shimbun* (Japan), *Chosun Ilbo* (North

Korea), *Bangkok Post* (Thailand) and *Pravda* (Russia), there was a mix of story types ranging from development related aid (Japan), fight against Ebola (North Korea) and the spread of terrorism (Thailand and Russia).

Tonality

Tonality is related to whether reports are deemed positive, neutral or negative. Contrary to popular opinion, most articles reviewed through the content analysis revealed a level of neutrality with a significant number of them being positive. In fact, over two-thirds of the articles reviewed from Africa and global media were either neutral (45 per cent) or positive (32.5%). Only 22.5 % of the articles were adjudged to be negative (see further discussion of tonality below).

Assessing tonality

Tonality is one of the most important elements in gauging how journalists and the media cover Africa. Although tonality can be subjective, there are some stories that can be judged to be “pure” or “absolute” positive, neutral or even negative in tonality. Some stories can, however, contain aspects of positivity, neutrality and negativity. Tonality can also be seen from favourable, neutral or unfavourable perspectives.

In the context of Africa, most people often consider stories to have negative tonality if they involve corruption and theft and misappropriation of public resources, conflict, piracy, terrorism, war, failures, refugee crises, poor infrastructure, dictatorship and attendant issues such as poor political and economic governance, hunger, famine, drought, unemployment and poverty, or if they generally contain a pessimistic outlook of the continent.

Thus, it is rather easy, with the general discourses on media coverage of Africa, to consider many media stories of Africa negative, given the unrelenting focus on issues such as corruption, conflict, war, suffering, drought, and famine. As noted in the previous section, these issues still predominate the way Africa continues to be reported both by African and non-African media.

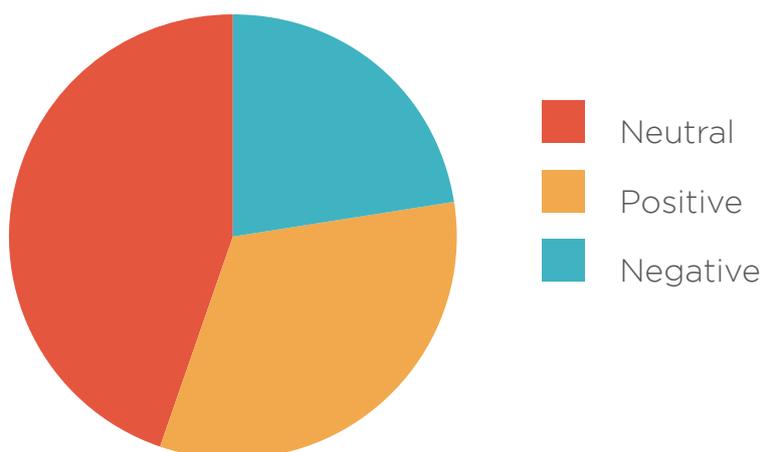
There are numerous other issues that ought to be critically interrogated when looking at story tonality. These include sources, editorial policies, ownership (these may want to generate particular reports, angle or content of the stories), objectivity, proximity, and subject. Thus, for instance, sources and owners may have prejudiced or biased views of African countries. Accordingly, some stories may paint a negative picture of different countries based on perspectives offered by sources. Without critical examination, we may not be able to tell whether the negativity in some stories is the consequence of sourcing, editorial policies and media ownership or basic empirical evidence. Consequently, such stories would offend journalistic values of objectivity, impartiality and balance. In essence, journalistic values, in addition to issues such as media ownership, editorial policies, sourcing, etc., should be used to judge the tonality of stories.

The arguments above notwithstanding, tonality can shift depending on context and historical moments, and may sometimes depend on how people subjectively (and sometimes knowledgeably, rationally) relate to stories and experience reality. For instance, claims of Africa rising are subjective based on people’s lived experiences, and their understanding and relationships with particular countries. Their understanding may also be based on whether, for example, they have enjoyed the benefits of economic developments and growth and what their current conditions are. Thus people’s interpretation of tonality may vary depending on context and experience and ‘absolute’ tonality cannot be said to be natural (or immanent in stories on and about Africa and its (dis)contents).

Tonality in the context of this study

The section below presents findings based on the tonality of the 2,141 reports from 59 publications sampled. Surprisingly, despite the common notion that most of the articles on Africa have a negative tonality, most of the articles were found to be neutral (45 %) as opposed to 22.5% negative.

Figure 1: Tonality of media coverage



Base: 2141 news articles

It is clear from the study that popular belief or opinion is often not in sync with empirical evidence on the actual coverage of Africa. While it could be claimed that the negative stories are more prominent or salient as per agenda setting arguments, it is noteworthy that most print media is majorly neutral or positive based on serious content analysis beyond the major headlines.

If future research holds up this finding, it may simply mean that perceived levels of negativity in media content are indeed a reflection of accuracy and objectiveness in reporting. What’s more, it could be that most of the negative-coverage conclusions are often bandied about by opinion shapers or leaders whose notions of negativity is skewed because of their positions or place in society. Such evidence may actually point to the changing nature of media business and evolving, and more informed perceptions of Africa in general.

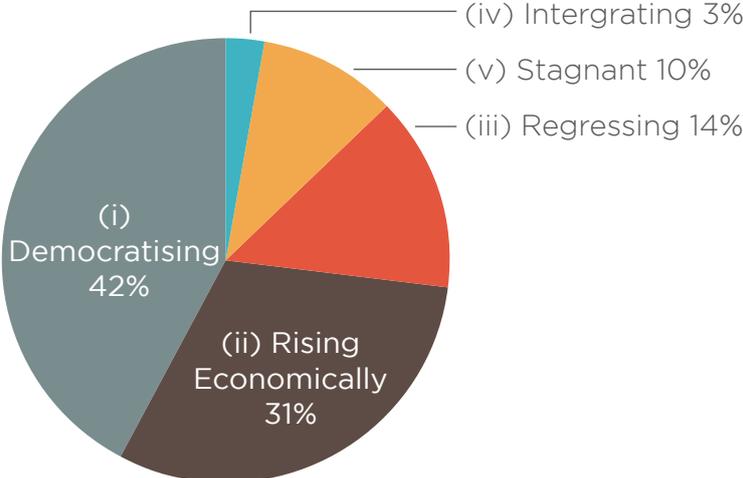
The survey questionnaire: What African editors have to say

As mentioned earlier, 60 editors from across Anglophone and Francophone Africa responded to a survey questionnaire that assessed a number of key statements concerning the way that Africa is reported. The following section offers some of the more salient thoughts and reflections from those who own / run media on the continent.

Africa: The democratic and economic performer

A majority of the respondents -- nearly three in four (73%) indicate that Africa is either democratizing or growing economically while only 24 % feel it is stagnant or regressing (see Figure 2). Notions of democratization are based on the number of elections held in Africa in recent decades and the transition to multiparty democracies. Despite this general upbeat feeling there is also the belief that Africa has untapped potential given the amount of mineral wealth in many states, and rising investment in many sectors including mining, tourism, and agriculture. The notion of growth may also be attributable to the much-publicized statistics that a number of African countries were among the top 10 most performing world economies and that Africa's time has come to effectively share in the wealth of nations.

Figure 2: General Perception of Africa



Base: 60 editors

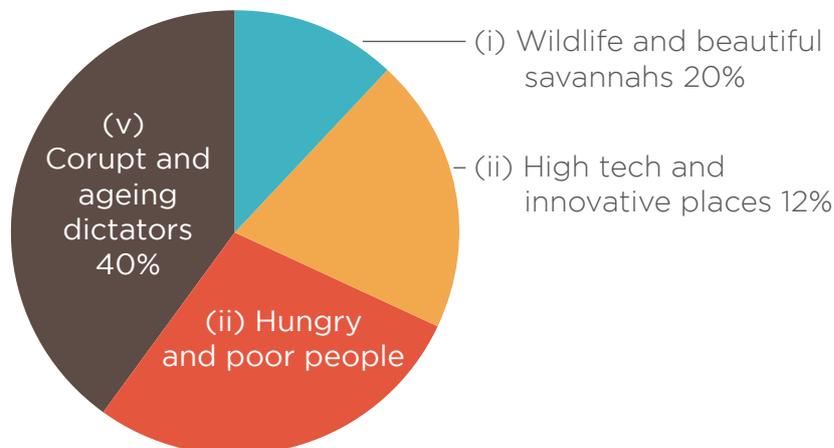
Corruption and poverty persist

The conclusions above are tempered with views indicating that people associate Africa with corruption and autocratic leadership (40 %) and hunger and poverty (28 %) as shown in **Figure 3 below**. The fact that only 32 % of the respondents see it as a continent with great wildlife and land, and innovation is telling evidence of the skewed perception of the continent. One of the respondents suggested that the image is as a consequence of the fact that the continent is replete with “a lot of poor people so much so that the Western media still see it as a story which they emphasize”.

Another respondent supports this claim suggesting that “the Western media tends to view Africa as a dark continent with a lot of poverty and struggling people”, an assertion that is backed by another respondent who feels that Africa is defined by drought, hunger, disease and malnutrition. The respondent is miffed that most of Africa’s wealth does not serve the majority because of theft and misappropriation by the political elite, illiteracy and crime.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that Africa is materially one of the wealthiest continents in the world. For example, the mineral wealth in countries like DRC and South Sudan are sometimes seen more as a curse than a blessing given the conflict and suffering in those states.

Figure 3: The Perception of Africa to the Public



Base: 60 editors

Articles done by foreign agencies, respondents noted, are often given the slant the news organizations or media editors privilege and one that they think will interest their readers or audiences. That said, since agencies get their subscription from media organizations in all parts of the world, whatever is published by various media depends on where the stories are carried. In other words, the choice of whether and what to publish depends entirely on editorial policies and editors’ and ownership preferences, and sometimes whether they think the articles will attract local readership. This means that stories, for example, from AP, Reuters, AFP and Xinhua will eventually go through the editing or gatekeeping process and may be slanted to suit what editors believe the consumers need.

Box 1: Assessing the tone of news: The case of corruption and Iran relations in South Africa

South African President Jacob Zuma should face almost 800 corruption charges that were dropped in 2009, a judge said today, piling further pressure on the embattled leader. The charges, relating to a multi-billion-dollar arms deal, were dropped by the chief state prosecutor in a move that cleared the way for Zuma to be elected president. Mr Zuma should face the charges as applied.

Although the story was published in many newspapers in different countries, editors in South Africa would have given it more prominence because of the interest in the country. It was definitely given different treatment in other parts of Africa and the world due to issues of proximity and interest. Besides, even though this story is adjudged to be negative, it merely reports the facts as they were adduced in court. Consequently, it is not clear why a story linking President Zuma to South Africa's wealthy Gupta family was considered positive given the two stories relate to political corruption. The story also done by AFP on 10 April 2016 indicated that:

South Africa's wealthy Gupta family, accused of exerting undue influence over President Jacob Zuma, have left the country for Dubai, a newspaper reported Sunday. The paper said that Ajay and Atul Gupta, two brothers from the family of wealthy Indian immigrants who own a vast business empire with interests in mining, media, technology and engineering, were seen on Thursday evening at a Johannesburg airport boarding their private jet for Dubai. In recent weeks, this family, who moved to South Africa in the 1990s, has come under fire for wielding immense power behind the scenes over Zuma and ministers in his government. Zuma, whose second presidential term ends in 2019, has also faced scathing criticism over his friendship with the Gupta family, with their relationship providing ammunition for the government's fiercest critics.

Similarly, a story done by AFP on the relationship between South Africa and Iran is considered neutral. The story merely reports what presidents Zuma and Iran's Hassan Rouhani said. Consider the contents of the story:

Iran occupies a special place in our struggle against apartheid, Zuma said, noting how Tehran cut ties with South Africa when it was under white rule, only resuming relations in 1994 after Nelson Mandela was elected as its first black president. South Africans were inspired by the 1979 revolution, which showed that emancipation is possible, whatever the odds, said Zuma, the first serving South African president to visit since. Rouhani, who Zuma confirmed has been invited to visit South Africa, said he would like to see direct flights opening up from Tehran.

From the examples offered above, it is clear that the tonality of a story may be subjective to different readers based on numerous factors including their position in society or ideological leanings. For instance, anti-corruption or anti-Iran campaigners would consider the stories positive and negative respectively. In effect, it is not lost to discerning readers, and especially active audiences, that any reading depends on context and one's position, whether societal or ideological. In effect, the notion that the African narrative is often negative may not reflect reality because professional journalistic values, for instance, demand that stories are **truthful and accurate**.

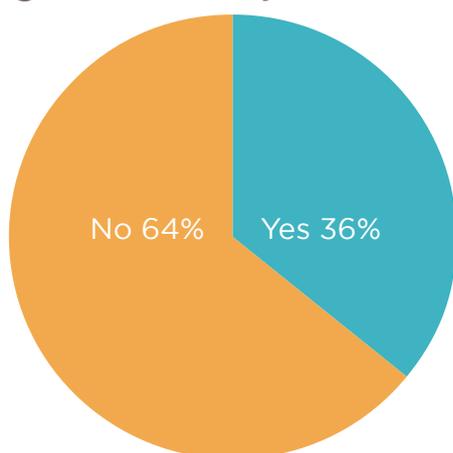
That said, journalists from international newspapers or media organizations often 'parachute' into Africa to cover specific stories. Consequently, without adequate or deeper and contextual knowledge and preparation, their focus might be skewed based on their stereotypical view of the continent, the countries or the issues they cover. Besides, the sources they rely on for material may ultimately determine the content of their articles. Thus it may be difficult to base the tonality of stories on judicial proceedings given the fact that journalists often merely rely on material adduced in court.

Despite these arguments, there are some stories that may be naturally negative, neutral or positive. For example, stories of killings in South Sudan, corruption in South Africa, war in Libya, terrorism in Kenya, Nigeria or Libya or human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and Eritrea would be judged to be negative. In effect, it is injudicious to consider African stories in the international media to be negative without looking critically at the articles, the level or depth of coverage and even quality of the arguments advanced.

Is negativity about Africa justified?

Many of those interviewed believe the negative image in the international media is not reflective of reality. Asked whether the 'general negative image of Africa in the international media can be justified', only 34 % thought it could be justified. Almost double that percentage (64) thought there was no justification (see the Figure 4 below). The overarching view that is commercialism and the media's own agenda is part of the problem.

Figure 4: Media justified in its negative portrayal of Africa



Base: 60 editors

To support his / her assertion that most of the negative portrayal of Africa cannot be justified, a respondent said that “there are many positive things, possibly far more than the negative, which need more coverage in mainstream media. The focus on the negative does not help.”

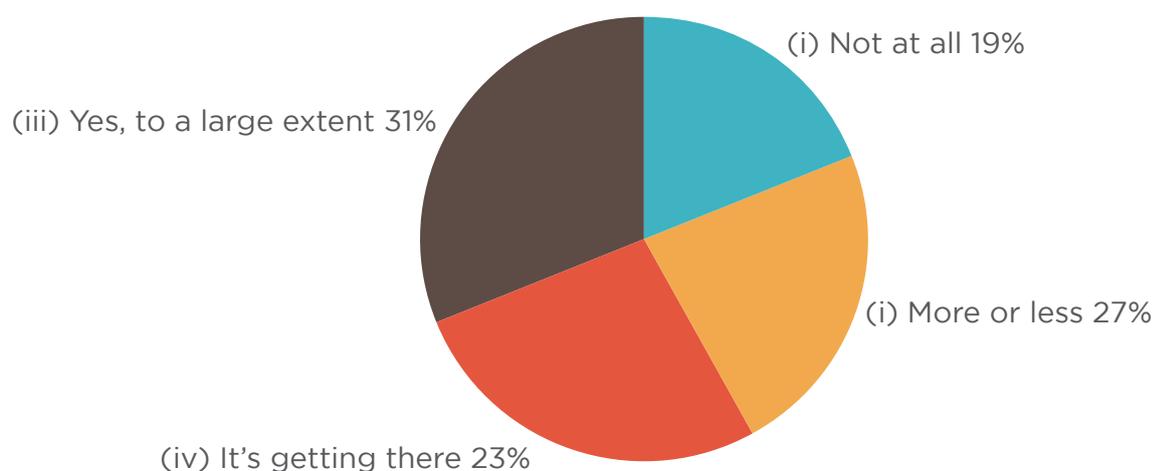
To perhaps back up the foregoing assertion, another respondent said that the international media is often driven by the misconception that Africa is a failed continent although it was pointed out that “African leaders have usually blamed the West for impoverishing Africa so the outlets [media] serve [the] interest of the West”. Such labels and issues as failed, poor or autocratic leadership have often determined or informed narratives of failure, hopelessness and dark continent. The foregoing labels can sometimes be the lenses through which Africa is framed as one respondent said.

Another respondent mentioned the fact that “most of the times it [the coverage of Africa] can be distorted because some of the international Western media view the continent from their own perception and prejudices”. This view was supported by another, which offered that the “negative image comes from journalists from the West for whom news is only news when it is sad news or a tragedy”.

Do celebratory labels about Africa stick?

What these sentiments reveal is the deep-seated notion that Africa is often treated unfairly because of certain Western-driven agendas. What's more, the study finds that notions of African rising and renaissance can be supported by the goings-on and economic and political developments. Asked whether notions of 'Africa Rising', 'African Renaissance' and 'Africa's Century' are reflective of economic and political developments and realities in the continent, most of the respondents answered in the affirmative with only 19 % indicating they are meaningless labels (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Responses to the 'Africa Rising', 'African Renaissance' and 'Africa's Century' ideas



Base: 60 Editors

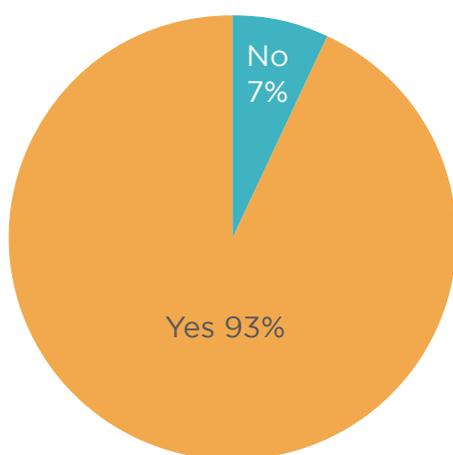
Despite the sentiments above, some respondents said there is justification for the negative image. This is based on what one respondent says is lack of genuine democracy, corruption and other social, political and economic maladies that plague Africa.

Given the notion that many people base their knowledge and understanding of Africa on media content, what can be done to change their perception and promote the positive stories emerging from the continent? And more critically, should media be involved in spin, and focus more on the positive (and perhaps ignore the negative) stories? And what would that do to the capacity of the media to offer 'truthful' and accurate accounts of the continent and the goings-on? Would a focus on the positive affect the reputation of the media and journalists as providers of truthful and reliable information?

Can Africa do anything to change the narrative?

It has often been said that Africa has the power to determine its own destiny. This includes taking charge of its own narrative, or building institutions that can guarantee better, legitimate, responsible and accountable leadership which is often seen as the cause of the negative narratives ascribed to the continent. What's more, it seems many people feel the media can contribute greatly to the change in perception of Africa. In fact, a resounding 93 per cent of the respondents believe the media has the capacity or power to change the general perception of Africa (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Can the media in Africa do anything to change the general perception of the continent



Base: 60 Editors

The assertions above are based on the fact that most people rely on the media for information which contributes to opinion formation and perception. One respondent, for example, notes that “by making more effort in pursuing and projecting positive stories, showing there is good in Africa as well”, the media can do their part in changing Africa’s image.

Another respondent reckoned that Africa can change the tide if it invests more in the media and thus control content and framing. “Africa needs to be in charge, we need to invest in our own media, develop our content, tell our own stories and change negative perceptions. Media poverty is affecting the continent,” the respondent says.

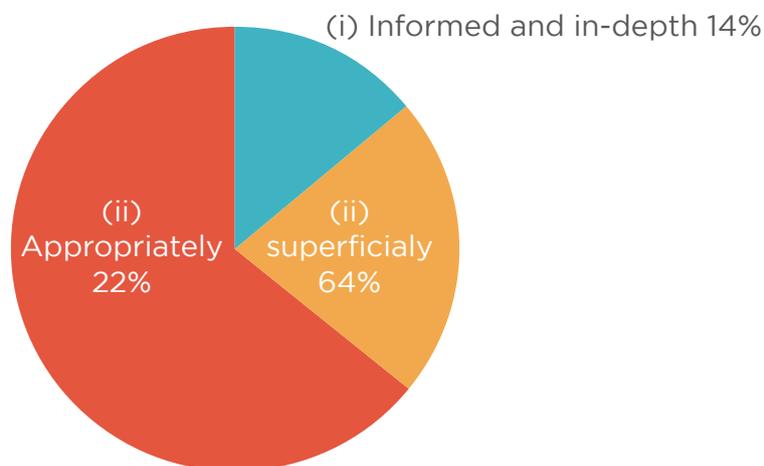
Although such views smack of media control and news and information management, there is a rising belief that ownership and control are important in determining the editorial policy and attendant news selection and publication and thus agenda setting and self-determination.

Despite the fact that such control would dent press freedom, one respondent believes “more positive stories need to be written about the continent and African media need to promote positive news in Africa”. While the ‘Africanization’ of the media may be seen a panacea to the challenges of negativity, discerning voices may oppose such moves given media control would ‘distort’ news and sometimes promote certain agendas particularly if such media is owned by governments. In fact, in a number of African countries the ‘tradition’ of state broadcasters is well entrenched.

More efforts required to cover Africa

If media in Africa is able to tell the African stories without government encumbrances, there would be the notion that they are serving public interest and would then offer more positive content about the continent as one respondent argues. But as another respondent puts it, such initiatives will require fair, honest, accurate, objective, impartial and balanced reporting which is often not the case with state owned or run media houses. These issues may in fact inform the arguments that African media are themselves not helpful in the coverage of the continent. As **Figure 7** below shows, most of the respondents believe the coverage of the continent by African media is ‘superficial’ and do not focus on the ‘real’ issues affecting it. This view is especially worrying given that only 14 % of the respondents feel the reports are informed and are deep enough.

Figure 7: How Africa’s media cover the continent

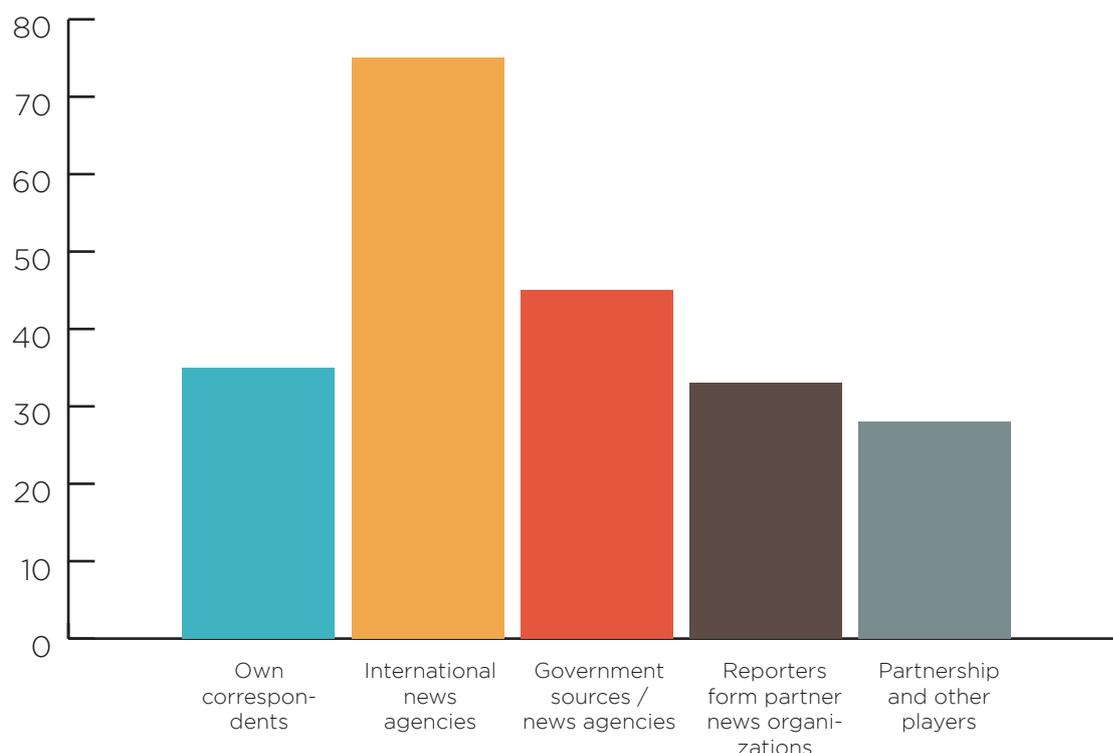


Base: 60 Editors

International sources continue to dominate

The arguments above are exacerbated by the fact that a majority of the respondents say the source of their stories is often international news agencies like AFP, AP, Reuters and others (see **Figure 8** below).

Figure 8: The main sources of stories on Africa for Africa-based media



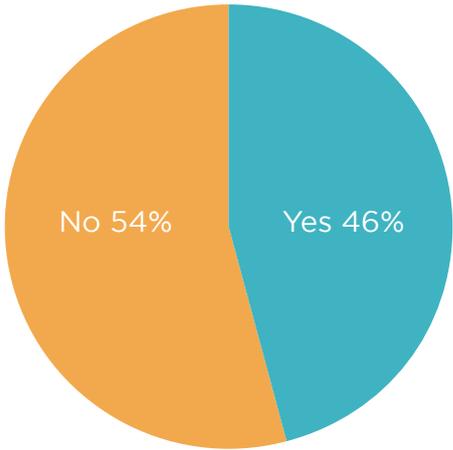
Base: 60 Editors

Encouraging a pro-Africa editorial push

It is thus then not surprising that respondents feel the need to increase investment in 'local' media as part of efforts to change the African narrative. Investment in the media may also involve having explicit policies stating how Africa ought to be covered.

While such normative policies may be problematic, they could spell out clearly what is expected of journalists and editors. Currently, as **Figure 9** below indicates, less than half of the media (46 per cent) interviewed say their coverage of Africa is informed by policy. The rest do not have specific policies guiding the coverage of Africa. Some argue that their coverage of the continent is guided not by policy but facts which are more important in journalism.

Figure 9: The existence of editorial policies guiding the coverage of Africa



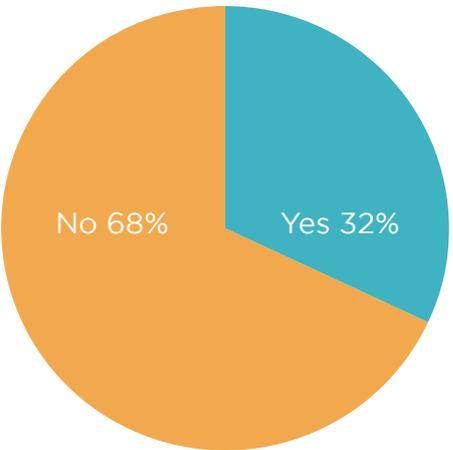
Base: 60 Editors

Investing in soft and hard infrastructure

The absence of clear policies on the coverage of Africa might also inform decisions on whether there is need for journalists specializing on the coverage of the continent. Thus, as we see in **Figure 10**, most of the media houses interviewed (68%) do not have dedicated teams covering the continent. Only 32 % have desks dedicated to Africa.

One of the reasons advanced to support this decision is that media houses do not have the necessary resources – particularly finances or capital – to support a dedicated team of journalists covering Africa. Given the cuts in the news-collection and media businesses, it is not surprising that specialized teams are not privileged anymore. This lacuna, as **Figure 8**, indicates is filled by foreign journalists whose understanding and interest of the continent is often minimal.

Figure 10: The existence of a desk specializing in the coverage of Africa



Base: 60 Editors

The challenges mentioned above have engendered debates on what can be done beyond ownership and investment to increase positive coverage of Africa as part of efforts to mend the African image and/or control/manage the media agenda.

Respondents have suggested that there is also need to enhance collaboration among African media organizations, and capacity building to enhance human capital.

As one respondent puts it, “capacity building will strengthen our digital news and new media. We need to develop our own apps such as mobile news to reach out to our readers in the rural areas as well as improve websites and means of monetizing our content ... because print media is under siege as more and more of our readers are migrating to digital news”.

While this suggestion does not take into consideration the digital divides and differentials in both the quantity and quality of access, the fact that mobile telephony access is growing exponentially in Africa means there are opportunities to extend positive news consumption. This argument is based on the fact that mobile telephony is changing the way people now access information across the continent and that mobile telephony can be used to deliver the news that the disparate audiences privilege. Such initiatives can work better if journalists in Africa are offered skills to improve their analysis and reportage of issues as well as use of mobile devices to report and share information.

Besides, as another respondent suggests, journalists in African should share experiences more often through exchange programmes. In other words, there is need to invest more in the media and journalists through capacity building, purchase of the latest technologies and relevant training to build or enhance human capital.

Experts' Workshop: Key inputs

As mentioned earlier, AMI with a number of key partners, convened a workshop in December 2016 to take stock of the research done during the course of the year on reporting Africa. Some 100 media professionals and stakeholders (development and donor agencies) from Africa and beyond gathered over two days - to discuss how the media (African and foreign based) covers the continent and to explore approaches / methods to generate a balanced and informed Africa narrative.

Opening thoughts

'The need for media to challenge its narrow sources of information about events in Africa.' (Eric Chinje, AMI)

'Either we as Africans decide to reclaim our history by telling Africa, as it is, or we continue to borrow the eyes of others to scrutinize our realities'. (Tidiane Dioh, OIF)

'There is an urgent need to deepen south-south cooperation where media houses understand the value in resource sharing'. (Christian Echle, KAS Media Africa)

'The need to develop fruitful partnerships between media and governments in Africa'. (Joe Mucheru, Cabinet Secretary for ICT, Kenya)

Working Group Thematics

The two-day discussion was to a certain extent guided by the research findings which generated four working groups, namely:

1. The construction of an Africa narrative
2. The audience market: African and non-African
3. Enlarging and expanding sources of news
4. Strengthening collaborative partnerships

WG 1: The Construction of an Africa Narrative

The following questions / issues help guide the group discussion: Does an Africa narrative exist? What is it and how can one define it? Who drives it? How can one balance the big issues and the new and emerging ones? The need to ensure balance and diversity when reporting.

MOVING AWAY FROM OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLE -

there was a general consensus that this was an old debate that is being reactualized as the need for an Africa narrative goes back the 1970s with the publication of the

MacBride Report. The WG echoed the general sentiment that Africa was too often reported using the words of non-Africans.

AFRICAN JOURNALISTS MUST UP THEIR GAME -

the need to educate the different audiences in order to nurture critics for more value addition on the content. More importantly, journalists themselves should revamp their approach of writing Africa stories by establishing their own criteria, methodology as well as own way of telling stories and interrogating the system in which they operate.

Key Recommendations:

1. The vocabulary of the media – the development of an African vocabulary that will tell the story differently.
2. Africa must be able to be part of the global agenda.
3. Greater use of African generated data sets.
4. Project like Smart Africa should be strengthened and used as a benchmark.
5. Streamline the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and integrate them into Africa's vision for development.
6. Continental bodies should play a key role in supporting the Africa Narrative.
7. Provide adequate responses to challenges such as access to information.
8. Create awareness and sensitize citizens on the need for Africa to be a member of the UN's Security Council on the basis of the size of its population.

WG 2: The Audience Market

The guiding questions were as follows:

1. Catering for a purely African market: What does this entail?
2. How to provide depth and diversity to stories?
3. Addressing language, identity and religious barriers?

BUILDING OWN STORIES -

developing a critical mass of journalists who can use new techniques and methods to write compelling stories for and by Africans. The need for the more extensive use of open data was mentioned.

FINANCIAL STABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY -

the proposal of levying a USD 1 tax on Africa's population to create a fund to support independent media in Africa.

The *creation of a diplomatic zone* in countries to facilitate freedom of movement and alleviate the restrictions engendered by the current visas regime.

Media companies to promote the production of stories in *African languages* as a way of minimizing the impact of current linguistic barriers.

The creation of *production hubs* to reduce the cost of producing newspapers.

WG 3: Enlarging and Expanding Sources of News

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Find a way of breaking down linguistic barriers to facilitate greater information flow.
2. Create a legislative framework for specialized journalism.
3. Create or revive the idea of a news agency like the Pan African News Agency.
4. Establish a database of credible journalists whose skills and contributions could be shared across boundaries.
5. Initiate a portfolio or a digital platform where someone could easily access African news.
6. Reduce the dominance of political stories in media and diversify content.
7. Create an ecosystem of information.
8. Streamline and simplify access to information for all.

WG 4: Strengthening Collaborative Partnerships

KEY CHALLENGE -

the plurality of the African media landscape requires stronger collaboration among traditional, digital, public and private media. Therefore, the challenge lies in the fact of crafting common norms and standards.

MAKING IT WORK FOR ALL -

the mutualization of efforts in the search for resources to be shared such as materials, programmes, training and equipment.

AN AFRICAN REPOSITORY -

the creation of an African story-telling library or repository would be a key development.

MARSHALLING THE SUPPORT OF MEDIA GIANTS -

well established media houses were asked to take the lead in creating the necessary framework for sharing of resources, content and other best practices. There must be the realization that an Africa narrative will only happen when mere commercial interests are put aside.

Key Takeaways

After two days of intense exchanges and debate, the 'mood' of the participants was that one could not have a 'business as usual' approach to media in Africa. It was imperative to develop an action oriented plan to achieve an Africa narrative. This, of

course, is not the responsibility of a sole entity but requires a concerted approach from all the stakeholders -- key African institutions, media owners / professionals, governments as well as development agencies.

1. Bridging the gap between state and independent media in Africa: from confrontational to collaborative.
2. Investing in a real narrative about Africa which should be driven by trust, faith and confidence and the feeling of being proudly African.
3. Ownership and control of the process.
4. Creation of an Africa Story Database.
5. Identification and mobilization of opportunities.
6. Investing in a truly Africa vocabulary.
7. Investing in journalistic skills (language, knowledge about the continent and writing skills).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Africa narrative has evolved to include some positive occurrences in the majority of countries but the overall endeavour continues to face important challenges. Representation of the continent as hopeless, corrupt, and as a place ravaged by conflict, terrorism and poor political leadership remains commonplace. In spite of ongoing attempts to reimagine Africa's image and profile, problems still abound and examples of conflict in places like South Sudan, Libya, Central African Republic, and terrorism in Kenya, Somalia and Nigeria, autocratic leadership in DRC, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, The Gambia and others regularly make 'good' news for most media, both African and international. Consequently, concepts such as African Renaissance, Africa Rising and Africa's century are seen as mere labels that are not reflective of current realities. Granted, as evidence from this research indicates, many people believe African states are often bandied together without a critical look at individual countries given that the continent is made up of 54 countries with differences in economic, political and social development levels. In short, Africa should not be seen as a single entity and the generalizations should not be applied to all the countries.

Accordingly, many of the respondents for this research call on the media, particularly international media houses, to give judicious, 'truthful' and honest accounts of the continent. Their conclusions are based on the fact that the media often focuses on the negative whilst there are many positive elements about African countries including, for example, the consolidation of democracy characterized by regular elections, and impressive economic growth rates.

Thus it would seem that international media has an agenda that it seeks to address with 'biased' reports. Granted, some of the stories are based on reports from

such 'respected' institutions like the World Bank, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Crisis Group. Most of the reports are often replete with negative outlooks of many African countries. What's more, as respondents in this research indicate, many of the stories used in African countries outside their borders come from news agencies like AP, AFP, and Reuters. Consequently, many respondents think the agencies can only focus on that which interests them, their editors and 'imagined' audiences, which is oftentimes negative news.

The lack of investment in and control of the media in the continent means editors in Africa and elsewhere rely on foreign news organizations to supply them with content. The foreign journalists covering the continent do not often possess the deeper and contextual knowledge and cultural understanding necessary for the framing of issues they cover. In essence, their coverage of the continent is blinkered by their limited experience and knowledge of the continent and this is often reflected in some of the reports on Africa.

Without investment in media and journalists, Africa will continue to receive a negative press, not only because its media houses continue to rely on reports from foreign news agencies, but also because local journalists have limited capacity to effectively report on and analyze outcomes within their own countries. Until perceptions of Africa as determined by global (Western) media are counterbalanced by credible and contextualized reports from Africa, the often expressed desire for a more positive Africa narrative will remain nothing more than a pipe dream.

This research confirms the long suspected fact that Africans know little about other Africans and generally view their neighbours through the prism of foreign reports. Even when news organizations publish reports in the Africa pages of their newspapers, for example, these articles invariably come from foreign news agencies. They very rarely focus on stories that enrich the African agenda or make for shared experiences.

New technologies now allow editors in different countries to source for information from counterpart media houses in other parts of the continent. Very few editors and publishers have availed themselves of this opportunity. Until Africa can develop the infrastructure for continental media systems and compete with existing global outlets, this may be the only recourse it has to deriving the common storyline that will form the basis of a truly Africa narrative.

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