


AFRICA
No Filter

**HOW
AFRICAN
MEDIA**

C**O****V****E****R****S**

AFRICA





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The 'How Africa covers Africa in the media' report was commissioned by Africa No Filter, a donor collaborative funded by Ford Foundation, Bloomberg, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Luminate, Open Society Foundation, Comic Relief, British Council and the Hilton Foundation.

The ANF Research consortium conducts research into narratives about Africa. Its work is done in partnership with AUDA Nepad and The Africa Union and includes funding from Facebook.

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Executive Summary



Coverage of African countries in African media not only serves to inform readers what is happening on the continent but may also shape perspectives about the continent and countries therein.

In order to explore the coverage of African countries as it appeared in African media and editors' views on the coverage, Africa No Filter (ANF) commissioned this research. The research took a three-pronged approach: media was selected and reviewed from 15 countries and the editors of these publications surveyed for their opinions on how African countries cover other African countries. The publications were drawn from all regions: North, Southern, West, Central and East Africa. In total, 56 media were included in these components of the study – the most influential media in each country.

These quantitative methods were complemented by focus groups with editors, journalists and foreign correspondents from Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. The focus groups sought to help understand which African stories – negative and positive – are prioritised by editors, how story frames are used and what ideas could help shift narratives. In total, 25 people participated in focus groups.

The review found that coverage of African countries was poor in terms of overall numbers. A closer look reveals some countries' media include great amounts of stories and others almost none. In addition, there were also variances in terms of the levels of detailed, contextualised coverage. Coverage also tended to be of a small number of countries, and many countries did not feature at all in the media of other African countries.

What coverage there was tended to evolve around a few events rather than exploring issues in depth. Stories covering Africa as a whole was the most common scope of a story, with coverage of trade and economics, agreements and events.

In covering African countries, conflicts and disputes under topics such as elections, politics, crime, conflicts and protests not only predominate, but are also considered more newsworthy by editors. In the study, coverage of some countries were mostly or all related to events, such as elections in Guinea and Tanzania and protests in Nigeria. In contrast, stories about South Africa and Egypt were more diverse in their focus.

Editors and journalists interviewed in groups and surveyed acknowledged that there were stereotypes in their own and other African media's coverage. They cited scarce resources as the biggest challenge to cover Africa more extensively (92% of the editors surveyed). There is a desire among the editors to cover African countries (87% of the editors surveyed said it was important or very important to cover African stories).

Editors and journalists in response to the survey and during focus group discussions also recognised the need for more nuanced coverage, but the available funding dictated that they use stories by western agencies, which often are in line with the expectations of western audiences, to cover stories from Africa. In fact, agencies account for almost half (43%) of the stories about African countries in the media review. Only 19% of the agency stories in the sample size were from agencies based in Africa. This means that it is often non-Africans who set the agenda or offer perspectives on African affairs and events.

Solutions suggested by the research findings from the three sources include creating more awareness of the poor coverage and the need for commitment to better stories. In order to address the lack of resources, investment would need to be made into diverse, nuanced coverage. Furthermore, networks of editors and journalists could function to pool stories and multimedia for use in different publications, in this way, more countries would be covered.



Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Rationale	5
Methodology	5
Countries	6
Selection of media	7
Editor survey	7
Media review	8
Focus groups	9
Combining the findings	9
Reflections and limitations	9
Findings	11
Editor survey	11
Commitment to African coverage	11
Do editors think there are stereotypes in the articles they run?	12
Constraints to coverage	13
Conclusion	13
Focus group discussions	14
News sources impact what story is told and how it is told	14
Is Africa interested in Africa?	14
Africa needs to invest in journalism	15
Convening of editors helps industry leaders plan and deliberate	15
Conclusions	15
Media review	16
Number of stories	16
Investment in reporting other African countries	17
Who reports?	17
Types of stories	19
Coverage of different regions	21
Countries covered	22
Story topics	25
Missing stories	28
Concluding remarks	28
Recommendations	28
Appendix 1: Survey of editors	30
Appendix 2: Topic list	31

Abbreviations

AfCFTA – African Continental Free Trade Area
AP – Associated Press
AFP – Agence France-Press
Agra – Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
ANF – Africa No Filter
BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
Covid-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019
ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States
SA – South Africa
SADC – Southern African Development Community
SARS – Specialised Anti-Robbery Squad
SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
ZNBC TV – Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation Television



Introduction

This report was commissioned by Africa No Filter (ANF) and seeks to establish how African media covers stories from the rest of Africa; and canvas media practitioners views on coverage.

Rationale

ANF is a donor collective set up to shift harmful and stereotypical narratives about and within Africa. Media are critical touch point and an influential one in setting agenda and influencing opinions through the explanations provided in stories.

In undertaking to improve narratives about Africa, it is important that Africans believe in the possibility and vibrancy of the continent, and if stereotyped narratives appear in African media, it can reinforce those stereotypes among readers.

Research suggests that key frames about and within Africa (associating the continent with poverty, poor leadership, corruption, conflict and disease) lead to narratives about Africa as broken, dependent, and give the impression that Africans lack agency.

Such frames and narratives have real-world implications, impacting foreign investment in Africa (stories that depict political upheaval could reduce perceptions of security). This has a direct impact on youth and the opportunities people see in their countries, on migration, on creativity and innovation.

As a result, the research sought to look at the kind of coverage Africans would encounter about the continent as a whole and about other countries.

The research also served to, and we hope will continue to serve to, raise awareness among African media practitioners of the possibility of different, diverse coverage of Africa by Africans.

Methodology

This research had both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative component involved the monitoring of the media stories in fifteen African countries from regions throughout Africa as well as the surveying of editors about the coverage of Africa.

The qualitative component included the analysis of stories identified by monitors that were either very good or very poor.



Countries

The countries selected to review were drawn from different regions in Africa and represented Anglophone, Francophone and Arabic-speaking countries. The following media were reviewed and editors surveyed in the various regions (North, Southern, Western and East Africa) and countries (15 in all).

North Africa

Egypt

Al Ahrām
Al Masry Al Youm
Al Youm Al Sabea

Tunisia

Mosaique FM
Nessma TV
Shems FM

West Africa

Ghana

Business and
Financial Times
Daily Graphic
Ghanaian Times
Ghanaian
Chronicle
Daily Guide
The Herald

Nigeria

Premium
Times
Punch
The Guardian
Vanguard

Senegal

Le Quotidien
Le Soleil
Seneweb
Senego

East Africa

Ethiopia

Addis Fortune
Addis Insight
Addis Standard
Capital Ethiopia
Ethiopia Review
Ethiopia
Reporter

Kenya

Business Daily
Daily Nation
The Standard
The Star
theelephant.info

Tanzania

Daily News
The Citizen
The Guardian

Rwanda

KT Press
The New Times
The Chronicles

Uganda

New Vision
The Monitor

Central Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo

Libre Grand Lac
Le Potentiel
Habari DRC

Southern Africa

Botswana

Daily Voice
Mmegi
Weekend Post
Botswana Guardian
Sunday Standard
The Botswana
Gazette

South Africa

City Press
Daily Maverick
Mail & Guardian
Sunday Times
The Star

Zambia

Times of Zambia
Zambia Daily Mail
Daily Nation
News Diggers
Newspapers

Zimbabwe

Daily News
The Herald



Selection of media

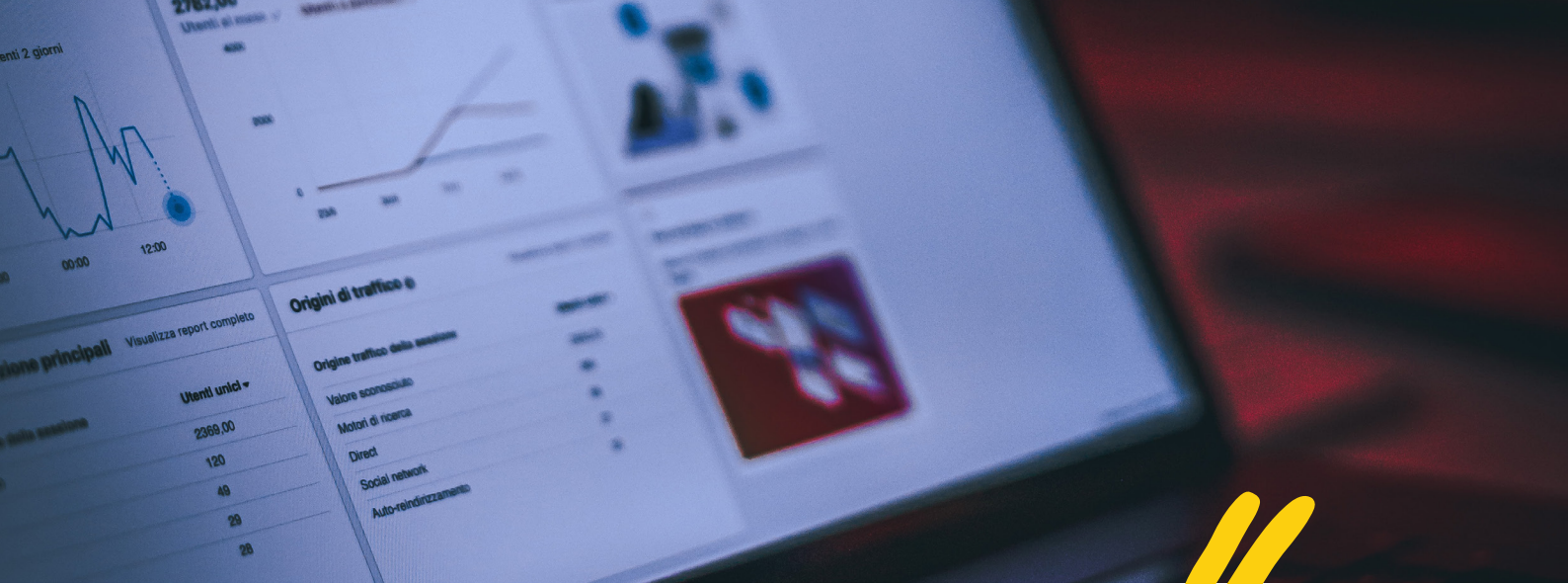
Media can be influential in two ways. They can be read by the elites and decision makers in a country or it can be so widely read that ongoing coverage influences decision makers as it subtly influences the opinions of those with access to information, becoming part of the underlying culture.

In line with the potential to influence, media were selected based on the fact that they were the ‘blue-chip’ media in the country (as in they were well-regarded and read by decision makers). However, some media were also selected on the basis that they had a broad, popular readership.

In general, media chosen were previously print publications. This is because not all broadcasters have web versions of their stories. In addition, generally media that previously was print-based tend to have longer stories with more context as broadcast stories are generally short (around 40 seconds for television and a little more than 20 seconds for radio). All broadcast media were ruled out, with the exception of Tunisian media, where broadcast media is the most influential.

Editor survey

Editors were surveyed to get their perspectives on the content that appeared in their media. The most senior editors were approached first for interviews and more junior editors were approached. The editors were all asked a standardised set of questions on the phone or online. The survey appears as Appendix 1. Editors were given the opportunity to comment on some of their answers and were asked their overall opinions about African coverage on Africa.



Media review

Websites for the selected media were monitored once a week for a three-week period, from late September into October. Content was monitored if it appeared on the home, international, Africa or regional pages. For media that had a number of stories, the first six stories on the page were monitored.

For each article the following information was captured:

- The date of monitoring
- The date the story was published
- Who wrote the story (journalist or agency)
- The title of the story
- The story's URL
- The country or region that was the focus of the story.
- What section the story appeared in (home, international, Africa or regional)
- The topic of the story
- A summary of the article

In addition, very obvious story defects were identified, namely:

- Does the story lack basic context (there is no explanation of the why and the how)
- Does the story contains shocking/dehumanising imagery
- Does the story contain clear and blatant stereotypes (for example name calling)
- Should this article be analysed for particularly good or bad coverage?

These questions served to highlight articles for further analysis. Stereotypes were not identified by monitors to avoid inter-investigator reliability issues. Reliability was also ensured by training of all data gathers prior to the monitoring. The data was checked daily. This checking ensured that articles were not missed, that monitors collected data in a consistent manner. Meetings were held with monitors to iron out problems.

The topic list for stories was developed, compared to a similar study and changed based on gaps and overlaps. Categories were made as discrete as possible. A full list appears as appendix 2. In total, 308 stories were monitored in the period based on these criteria.

Based on the responses in the data, stories were identified that warranted more analysis. This was done by the authors with stories being drawn out as examples to illustrate broader patterns. Monitors participated in a focus group to contribute their overall impressions of coverage, particularly with regard to the frames and narratives identified previously by Africa No Filter.

Focus groups

Four facilitated focus groups were held with African editors, journalists and international correspondents covering Africa from Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda – under Chatham House Rules for the discussions. Talking points included: The ways African stories are framed in African media outlets, the types of stories prioritised, constraints on reporting on Africa and how the negative stereotypes of the continent can be shifted through the media.

Combining the findings

The media review, editors survey and focus groups were conducted and analysed separately. This meant that assumptions from one part of the study were not imported into the others. The report looks at the findings both separately and where possible where the findings in one section provide possible light on other sections.

De Beer, A.S., Serfontein, L, Naude, A and Steyn, E. (1996) African news for Africa or is it still the same old story? Paper presented at the 10th Biennial Conference of the African Council for Communication Education, South Africa.



Reflections and limitations

The findings of this study cannot be examined outside the context of the lack of resources that many media in Africa have as well as the unequal distribution of media freedom (Namibia is amongst the most free in the world and Eritrea among the worst). Good, analytical journalism requires resources and the ability to express views. A lack of media freedom may also result in fewer resources for better media, as governments may for example withhold advertising expenditure or even actively harass and defund such media.



Given the lack of media freedom in some countries, some editors were reluctant to talk to the researchers. During the study, an Ethiopian editor was arrested, released and re-arrested when he went to the police station to pick up his belongings. Egyptian editors did not wish to speak to our Arabic researcher, despite the fact that she is an established journalist in the country. The Covid-19 crisis also meant that resources were particularly strained. Some editors may simply not have responded due to time pressures as the amount of staff at many media outlets was cut. In addition, many staff worked from home and were not available telephonically to administer and follow up on the survey.

Common media practice is to select stories based on news values such as the impact of stories (as in how many people were impacted by an event), the surprising nature of the event (such as natural disasters). New stories are considered more newsworthy than older ones. Conflict generally makes for good news as does what happens to prominent people rather than those who are unknown. Media, the world over, select stories that will get attention, and much of this attention may be due to the negative nature of events.

Media from the countries were reviewed over a three-week period, once a week. This may result in stories not being picked up due to the methodology, as newer stories pushed others off the pages monitored. Media with no Africa page may particularly have had coverage buried between monitoring days as they are displaced by other stories on home or international pages. The primary nature of the monitoring was quantitative in nature. Qualitative aspects of reporting are much harder to measure, and are also dependent on the reader, and subject to inter-observer disagreements far more than they would be for quantitative data. Making generalisations of qualitative data elements much harder, bearing in mind the subtleties of discourses and narratives – and they cannot be seen in isolation of other articles from the same media on the topic, and the limited sample size increases the risk of over-generalising, on the basis of just a few articles. However, unlike other studies, the quantitative nature means that overall patterns can be picked up, even if percentages may be a little misleading.

Some of the best media sources may lie behind paywalls, and these were excluded from the study. Other media restrict access to some stories, such as those that involve more investigation or those that are very new. Such stories may be in the print versions of publications, but only be made available online at a later date.

Findings

In looking at the narratives and frames of African coverage of Africa, the views of editors and the media coverage themselves were reviewed in putting these findings together. The findings first review the responses to the editors' survey and then the media review.

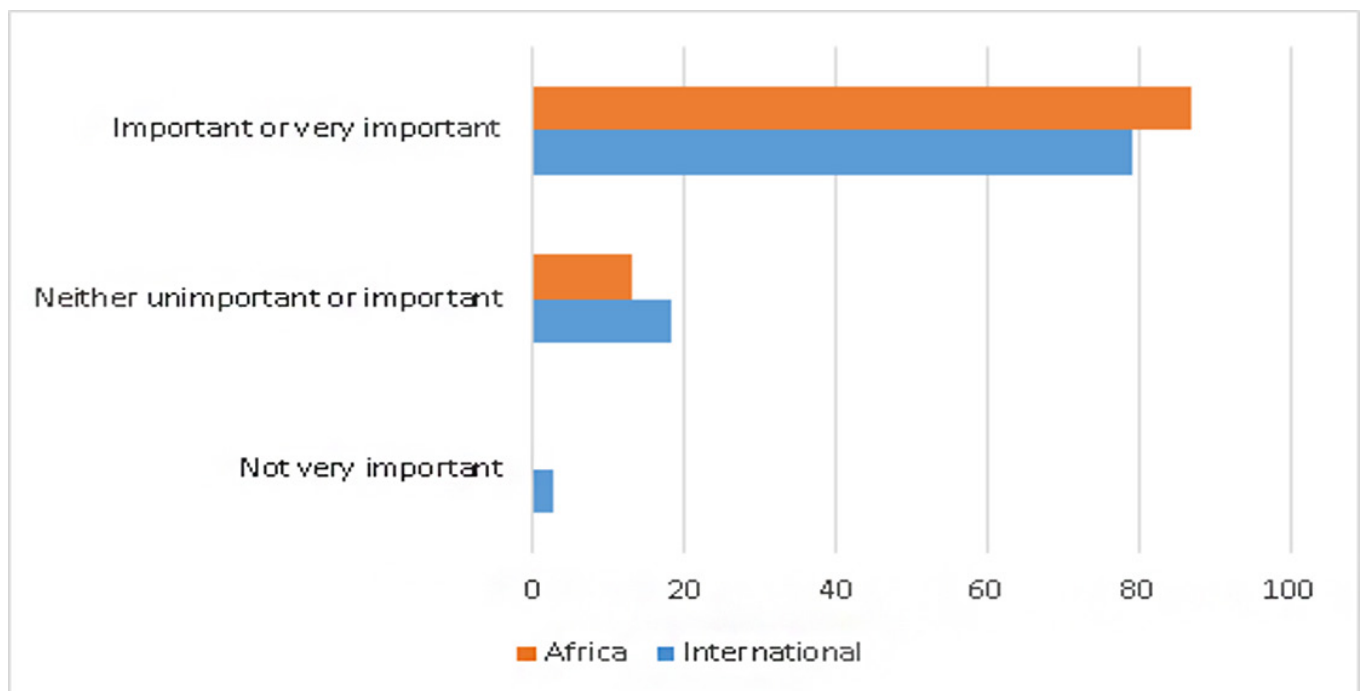
Editor survey

Editors answered a survey online or via telephone about their publications' coverage of other African countries and resources available to do so. From the responses the report looks at the commitment editors show to covering Africa and what constraints they faced.

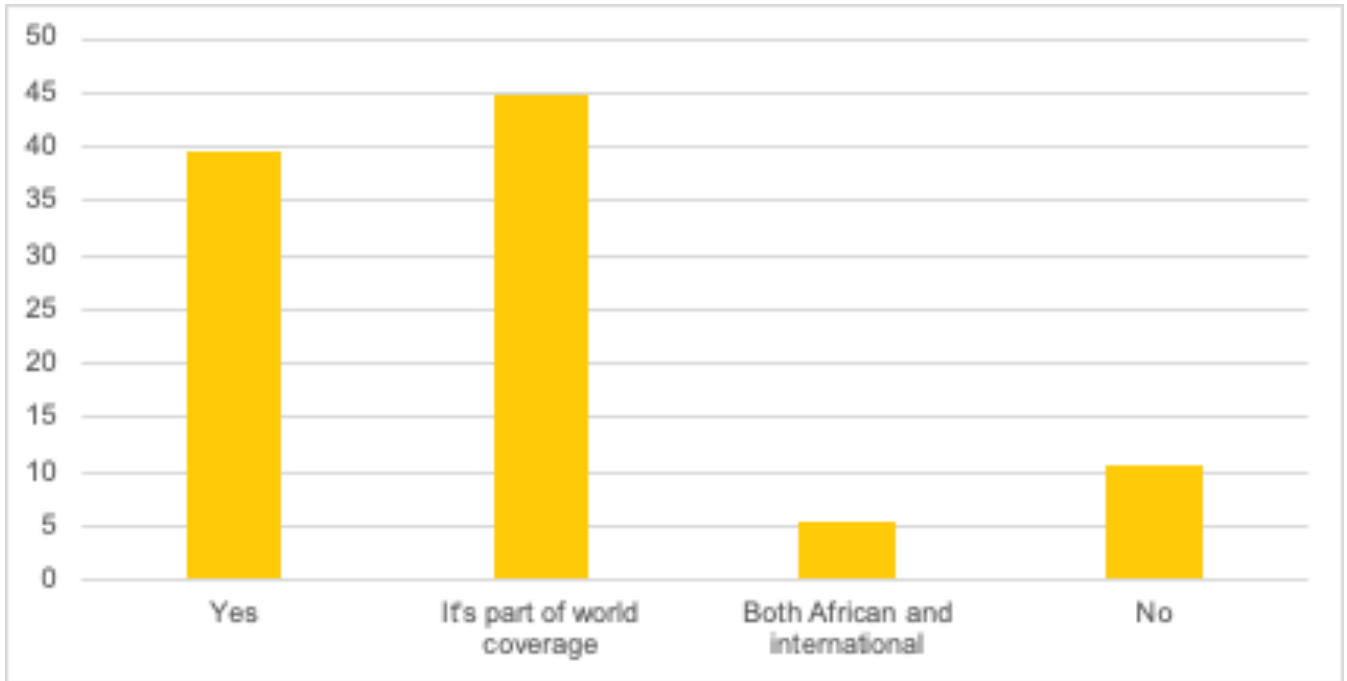
Commitment to African coverage

Commitment to African coverage was measured by asking editors whether they had an African section or whether it was part of world news and inviting them to comment on this. Editors also said whether they included events in other countries in their diaries.

Seventy-nine per cent of editors said that they thought it was important or very important to cover international stories, while 87% said that it was important or very important to cover African stories. Only one editor said it wasn't very important to cover international stories.



Most editors, when asked, said that their publications did have an Africa page (45%), and 45% featured African stories on their world or international pages. Eleven per cent of editors said they had neither.

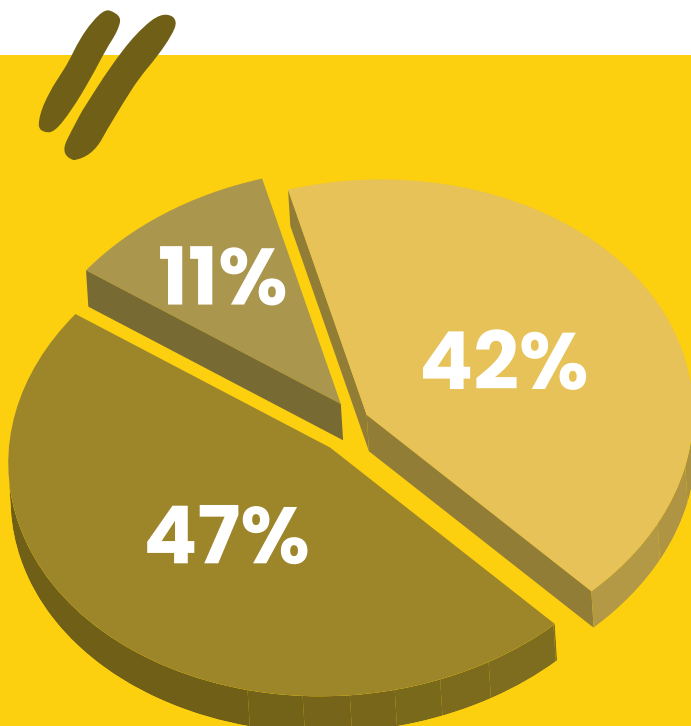


The comments provided by some of the four editors who said that they didn't have an Africa page were diverse:

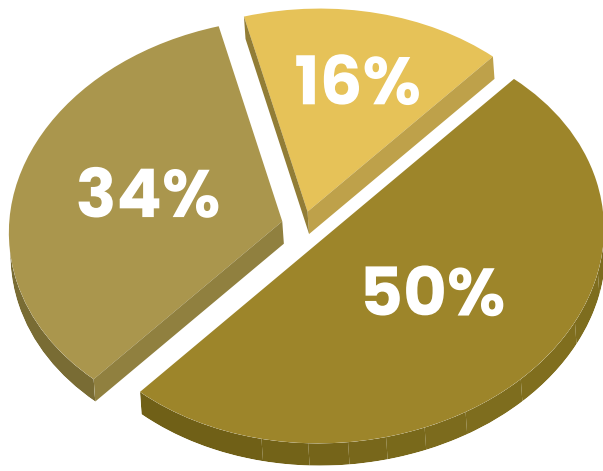
*The page is part of the world coverage but the first priority is given to Africa countries
We generally publish an African story [only] if it is popular at the time.*

We are rectifying technical challenges. For now, we have one page for African news and for world news

We have a page dedicated to Nigeria because there are many Ghanaians who live there. We also have a foreign page which includes news on Africa

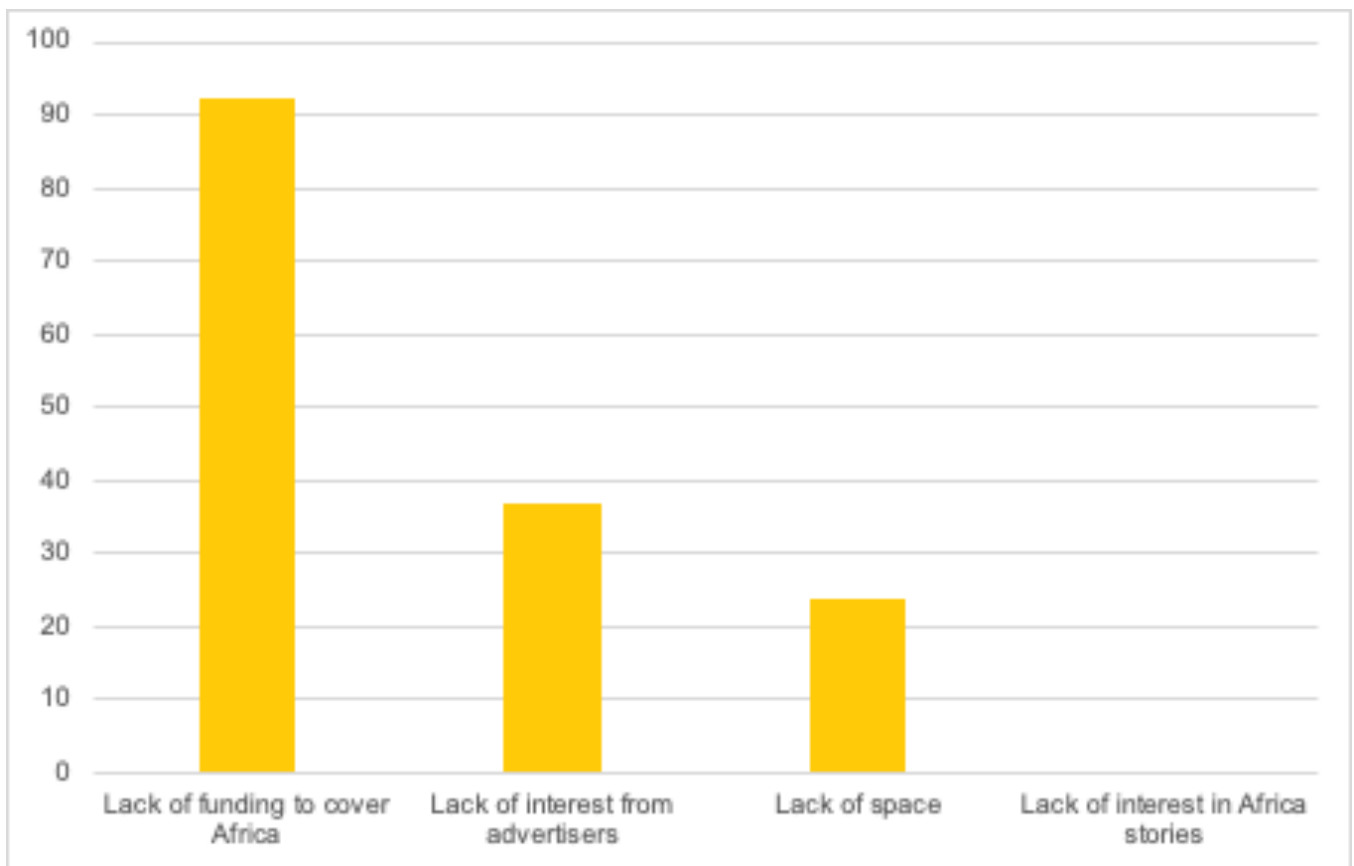


Editors were asked if they include events in other African countries in their news diaries, most answered 'yes' (47%) or 'sparingly' (42%). Eleven per cent did not include African stories in their diaries.



Do editors think there are stereotypes in the articles they run?

Exactly half of the surveyed editors acknowledged that there were stereotypes in the articles they run at times.



Constraints to coverage

Almost all editors said that one of their greatest constraints to coverage was that they had no funding (92%). Only three editors did not choose this option. The second most mentioned constraint was a lack of interest from advertisers (37%). A lack of space was the third most cited reason at 24%. None of the editors thought there was “no interest” in stories of other African countries.

Conclusion

Editors overwhelmingly felt that covering international and African news was important, with an emphasis on pan-African coverage. None cited a lack of interest in coverage of African countries as a constraint to publishing. Many editors acknowledged that they printed stereotypes about Africa despite the desire for good coverage. The gap between the coverage they would like to deliver and what was published seems to be mainly due to a lack of resources.



Focus group discussions

Many stories about Africa in the media still follow the “if it bleeds it leads” trail – even when written by African journalists for an African audience. This was a common point that emerged during four Africa No Filter (ANF) closed roundtable discussions held in November 2020.

ANF convened 25 senior media practitioners from Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda, Tanzania – including foreign correspondents and senior African journalists and editors – under Chatham House Rules for the discussions. Talking points included: The ways African stories are framed in African media outlets, the types of stories prioritised, constraints on reporting on Africa and how the negative stereotypes of the continent can be shifted through the media.

News sources impact what story is told and how it is told

Hard news stories such as politics, elections, and crisis in Africa dominate African news pages. For various reasons such as the financial constraints on retaining foreign correspondents, participants said they primarily rely on wire news agencies such as Reuters and AP to source African news. A key point raised in the first session was: “One of the main topics being left out of the narrative is change: change on the continent, in countries and how it is being brought about by the youth.” Western coverage on Africa is geared towards western audiences who want the ‘typical’ surface African story such as famine and crisis. This feeds into negative stereotypes that paint Africa as a devastated continent lacking in agency.

Is Africa interested in Africa?

Audiences do not necessarily share an interest in stories about other African countries and broader African stories unless these stories directly affect their lives.

“An audience without an interest in outside news makes it harder to put out more continental news,” was a point raised in the third session. Participants highlighted that Africans also have their own perceptions and stereotypes of other Africans and that crept into how journalists write about other countries for their own audiences. As a result, African stories are few and can be shallow and void of nuance.

“African crisis sells, but when local media positively changes how they cover stories, broader African media will pick up on that trend,” said some participants in the third roundtable session.

Africa needs to invest in journalism

Finance was highlighted as a common constraint to deeper news coverage of African stories. Most participants said their publications could not afford to send out journalists to other African countries nor assign journalists on the ground due to budget limitations.

Furthermore, a scaling down of newsrooms – that started way before COVID-19 impacted the industry – meant that while newsrooms made the difficult decision to cut back staff, they also cut back on print pages with African stories falling first.

The digital revolution, where audiences are moving online to spaces, has destabilised many African newsrooms. “This shift has made monetising the media more challenging than the traditional advertising-driven platforms,” participants said in the third session.

In the last session, a point raised was: “A challenge in covering the continent includes finding freelance talent outside of the main centres of Johannesburg, Lagos and Nairobi.”

Despite the constraints facing the journalism and media industry, participants said the industry needs to value its workers. They added that it would be important to equip freelance journalists on the continent, especially those in smaller countries that do not dominate Africa news pages like Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa do.

In the fourth session, a participant asked: “What’s the Booker Prize of African journalism?” Another way to elevate the standard of journalism in Africa is to award good journalism, they said. They pointed out that the continent needs to create its own unique awards to reward outstanding journalism in the country.

In the second session, some participants said: “Good multimedia – video and photographs – would help to illustrate Africa stories and this was something participants said they struggled to access when getting continental news.”

A way to support African storytelling would be to create repositories for stories and multimedia that African journalists could share among each other. Some participants said the increased availability of news and multimedia that can be freely distributed among journalists could help prevent negative stereotypes of the continent as the media would have a wider range of stories to tell.

Convening of editors helps industry leaders plan and deliberate

Many Editor level participants said the ANF roundtable discussions gave them the rare opportunity to not only meet but deliberate the state of African media. The roundtable discussions were a platform to share ideas and a way forward. Most participants noted the negative impact of relying on hard news to tell African stories. They said Africa needed more nuanced coverage with an increased focus on human interest stories that highlight Africa in a new light such as that of innovation and agency. “There are good things happening in African countries and that it is the local media’s responsibility to report on these occurrences first,” said participants in the third session.

Most participants said they would publish high-quality feature content from across the continent should it be made available to them.

Conclusions

Viewed in the light of the survey results, the focus groups support the idea that there exists a lack of resources to give African stories the coverage they could. The editors linked this directly with the use of wire stories that were written with a western audience in mind and carry the tropes that such audiences expect. They acknowledge the bias of African authors about other African countries. This

could explain why the editors surveyed acknowledged that they printed stories with stereotypes. While the participants in the focus group discussions acknowledged that there was not always an audience desire for such stories, a lack of interest in such stories was not viewed as a key constraint. The focus groups provided some solutions to the lack of good coverage about other African countries, including having a pool of stories and multimedia content to draw from and convening editors to facilitate collaboration.

Media review

Not only were the editors surveyed, but an independent review of the media content was undertaken. The review first looks at the number of stories that appeared, then from the content, the apparent investment in coverage of Africa. Thereafter, the coverage of different regions and countries, followed by the topics of the stories and obvious gaps in coverage.

Number of stories

Some media reviewed had reports which were almost exclusively restricted to local or national news, while other media had dedicated sections for news from the rest of Africa and provide in-depth features, and covering countries and even regions outside their own. It would be a grave mistake to ignore the dynamic nature of media in Africa, and the significant differences that exist between countries as well as between media houses and publications within countries. During the period, some publications updated their websites daily with dozens of articles, while others published one or two stories a day and some publications published no stories.

Media based in some countries were far more likely to publish stories about the rest of Africa than others. South African and Kenyan publications did very well in this regard. In contrast, Ethiopia, Tunisia and Zambia tended to have far fewer stories about the rest of Africa than other countries' media. Ethiopian and Zambian media's content focuses mainly on the countries themselves. However, a Zambian television station ZNBC TV does have a weekly programme with regional coverage called "Eyes on SADC".

The number of stories of each country was influenced by the events in the different countries. While prominent stories in other countries may garner more attention than the countries would otherwise get, it is possible that conditions within a country could make reporting hard and slant coverage too. Some of the countries in the sample have restrictions on media freedom and freedom of information. In fact, an editor of one publication was arrested twice in the research period. However, it is not clear how this impacts coverage of other countries on the continent, but may constitute an additional constraint on the resources available to independent media.

The story of the year globally was the Covid-19 pandemic, and it often appeared as a background factor in many stories. There was a significant amount of coverage on Covid-19 affecting businesses and international travel, particularly airlines reopening suspended routes due to the virus. Coverage of health and service provision to ordinary citizens remained modest. Often, little more information than the number of infections in a particular country was provided. There was minimal coverage of the challenges Africa faces to deal with Covid-19,

such as research into vaccines and production of tests. As a result, most stories about Covid-19 were business rather than health stories.

In fact, the #EndSARS protests against police brutality by the Specialised Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria were by far the biggest story during the monitoring period, and garnered media coverage from across the continent. Many media covered the unfolding events, long before the protests took

² As only the top six stories from each relevant page were monitored, providing figures in comparing the different publications and countries would give a false impression.

a dramatic turn when members of the Nigerian Army opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Lekki tollgate. In coverage, authorities were frequently cited, often stating or implying that the protestors were hooligans, rather than people with legitimate grievances. In the coverage, few stories analysed why events unfolded as they did.

There were five national elections in the continent during the monitoring period, just before the national elections in the United States of America. Coverage of the elections in Egypt and the Seychelles was minimal, coverage for the elections in Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea was more extensive. Though the latter seems to have been mostly restricted to coverage in West-Africa. The elections in these three countries were contested. Often authorities, including election commissions and observers, were cited in stories. Ordinary citizens' views were hardly accessed and when they were, they often served to reinforce negative frames of the country. The predominance of news stories rather than of features and in-depth coverage meant that the situations in the different countries were not explained.

In the context of a small number of stories from different countries in Africa, those that feature prominently in the media can disproportionately impact opinions. The #EndSARS protests would feed readers' perceptions about Nigerians' supposed proclivity towards violence and could have them question the quality of the leadership in Nigeria. The election coverage because of its lack of context, could create the impression that these countries do not comply with any democratic norms and that leadership in the different countries was de facto corrupt or authoritarian. This would perpetuate the trope of the African dictator.

Investment in reporting other African countries

There are a number of indicators that a publication is investing in good journalism. This section looks at who reports, does the publication invest in correspondents, or do they use agency stories? Another way of judging the investment in good journalism is the type of stories that are published. Are they longer features or shorter news stories, for instance.

Who reports?

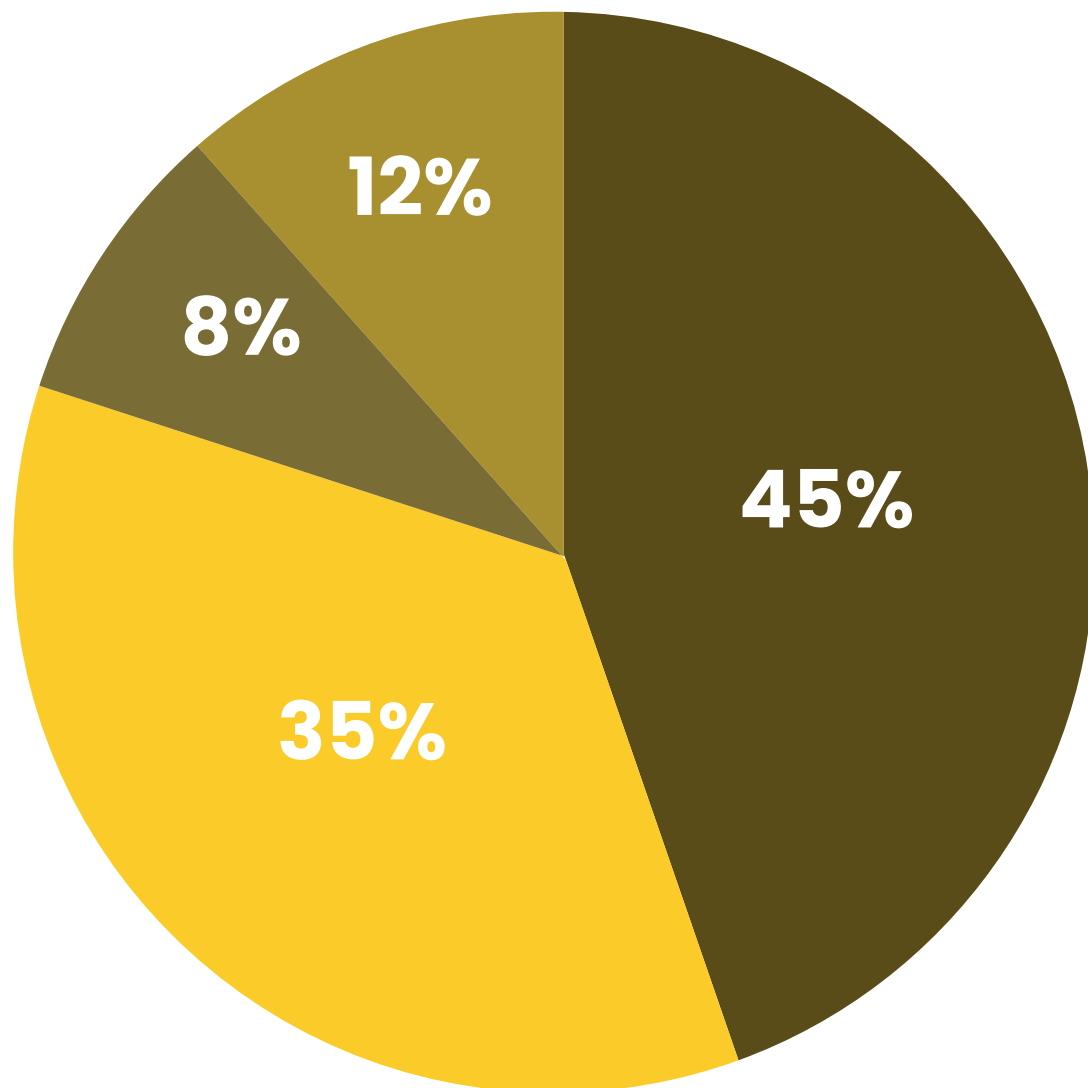
A story's author can indicate the resources available to report African stories. A foreign correspondent employed by the title or media house reflects more commitment to and investment in, and potentially the conventional way of approaching getting stories, as media who use agencies are likely to use the same agency regularly. In looking at those reports, the author of the story was not always indicated.

Common practice is to always identify the author, in most cases by name. When authors are not identified, they are referred to by title, such as 'staff writer', these were included as named authors. Agencies, too, are mentioned by name. In this study, sometimes agency stories were just attributed to 'agency', but this was still captured as an agency story. In eight per cent of the stories, no author was cited. In the stories where no author was indicated, there was often no attribution at all. In some cases, such stories appeared to be press releases. The publication of press releases indicates the least possible investment in content.

Where the author is identified, 45% of the stories were written by named reporters or correspondents. It is unclear how many of the named reporters are staff of the publication or freelancers. However, 55% of the stories were by either opinion piece writers or agencies. The majority of the agency stories were from agencies headquartered outside Africa, these accounted for 35% of the stories. The graph below illustrates.

³ Depending on the media, junior reporters may not be named until they have earned their own byline.

⁴ For example, "MTN Group announces new CEO of Lonestar Cell MTN Liberia" <https://thebftonline.com/12/10/2020/mtn-group-announces-new-ceo-of-lonestar-cell-mtn-liberia/>



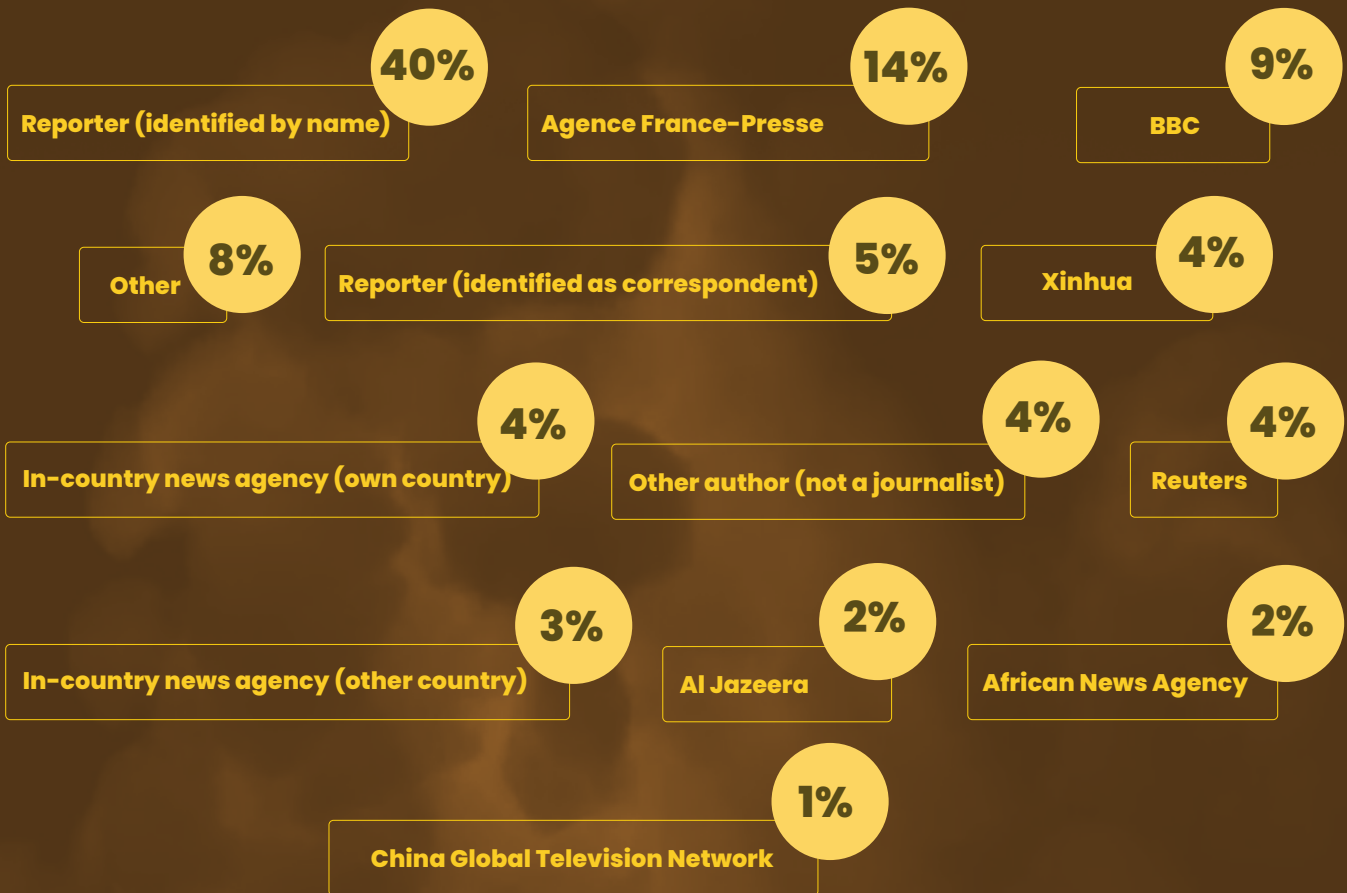
Named Journalist
 Non-African Agency
 African Agency
 Other Authors

Other authors who were typically experts or activists that hail from both within and outside Africa accounted for 12% of the stories. One such author was Jutta Urpilainen, the European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships, in ‘Green Partnership: Africa and Europe together’ which advocates for partnerships between Africa and Europe in tackling climate change . It is little more than a press release and showcases a project of the Green Deal with little or no context.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) accounted for 14% of the stories, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for another nine per cent, Reuters and Al Jazeera contributed four and two per cent respectively. Other news agencies which contributed were Xinhua and China Global Television Network (which was only used by the Tanzanian Daily News), at four and one per cent each. African news agencies contributed minimally.

⁴ <https://www.the-star.co.ke/opinion/star-blogs/2020-10-22-green-partnership-africa-and-europe-together/>

Who Reports



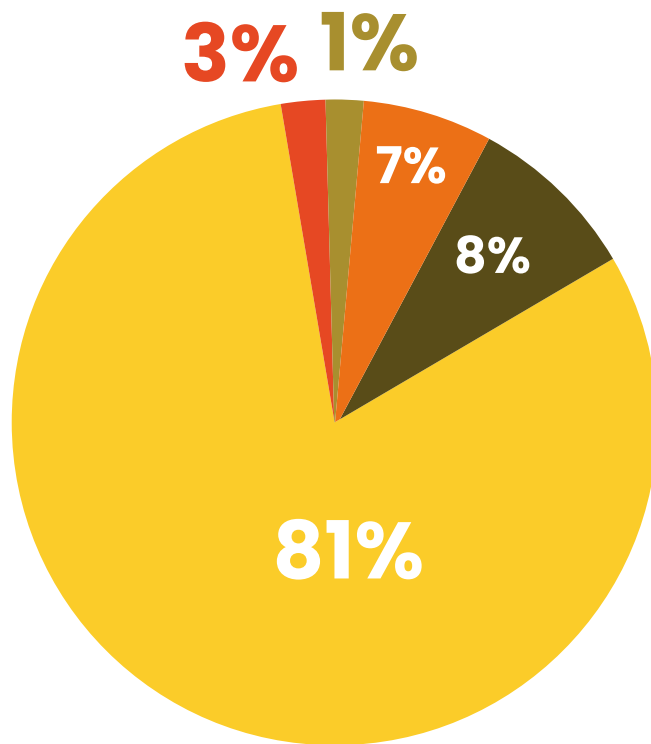
The reliance on stories that require a minimal investment may be as a result of the publications lacking funding to write or produce original stories, especially when they involve travel.

Types of stories

Traditionally there are a limited number of story types in newspapers. News is the most common story type providing the basic facts to enable the reader to understand an event. Features represent longer, more in-depth stories. Editorials are written about news events by the editor. In-briefs are a few lines of information about something that has happened.

In this research, the news format dominated the coverage of Africa, and accounts for 80% of all coverage. Features (eight per cent) and opinion pieces (six per cent) contribute more modestly towards the coverage of Africa.

Features were mostly published by websites such as dailymaverick.co.za and theelephant.info, which focus less on hard news, and more on the stories and events behind the news, though they are certainly not absent from more other publications.



● Editorial
 ● Opinion piece/column(not by editor)
 ● Feature
 ● News
 ● In-brief

Features explore an issue in-depth, and thus tend to be more informative, of what is going on in certain places than regular news stories. An example of this is ‘No War, No Peace: Life and Death in Eritrea’ by theelephant.info. The article details what is going on in Eritrea, some of its recent history and the challenges it faces socially, economically and politically. And while it is true that the article highlights issues of poor governance, it does so from a well-argued perspective, rather than making unsubstantiated claims.

This also highlights some of the challenges with regards to negative stereotypes and tropes about Africa – at times such stereotypes and tropes, particularly with regards to governance, are supported by the realities on the ground.

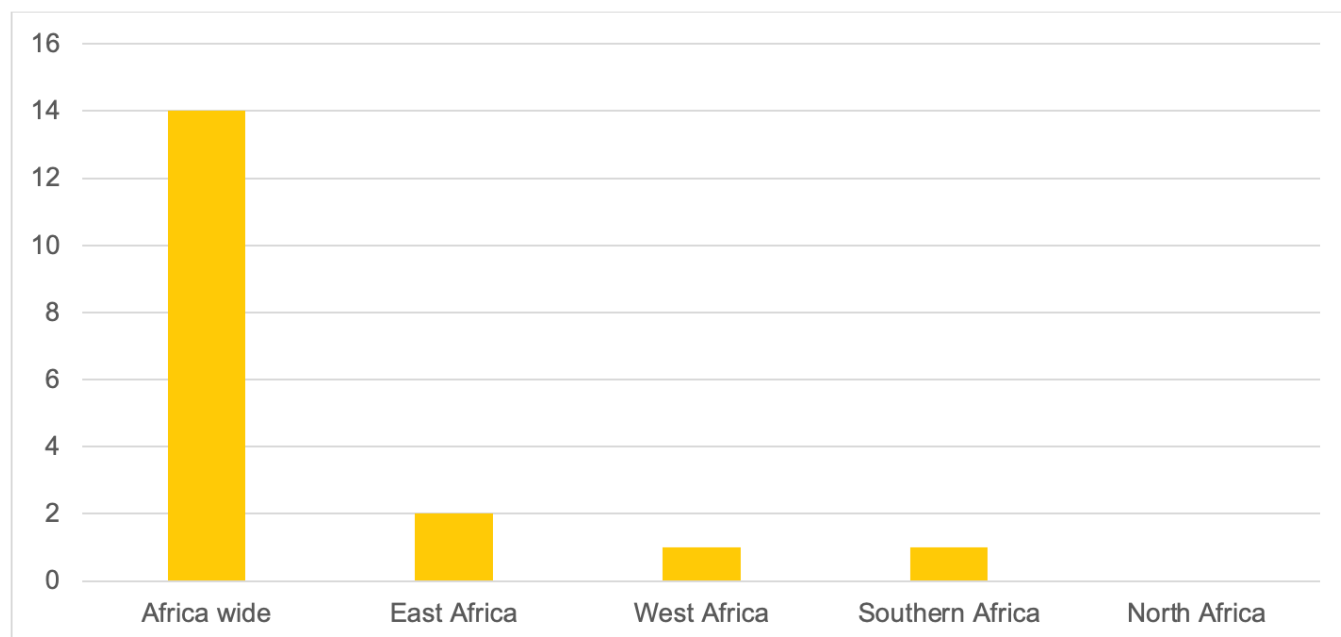
Opinion pieces cover a wide range of topics as well, such as food security. The Daily Maverick piece ‘How the green Revolution is in fact giving Africa the blues’ sees the author arguing, that SDG #2, the eradication of hunger, cannot be met by focusing on increasing yields of agriculture in the way that is currently done, but rather that the focus should be on sustainable production and equitable distribution. That this is not happening, is due to policy makers’ misdiagnosis of the problem, as well as vested interests that thrive on exploitation of poor farmers, in Africa and elsewhere in the world. Thus, a problem that is thus experienced in Africa, is partly the result of external meddling by an organisation called Alliance

for a Green Revolution in Africa (Agra), and also a worldwide problem, not particular to Africa. It should also be noted that in-briefs were almost completely absent from the monitoring, at just three per cent. In-briefs tend to lack context, and thus often obscure more than that they inform. For online publications, other than breaking news, there is no reason to publish in-brief stories. Although, some news stories were very brief.

⁶ <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2020/10/23/no-war-no-peace-life-and-death-in-eritrea/>
⁷ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-10-14-how-the-green-revolution-is-in-fact-giving-africa-the-blues/>

Coverage of different regions

Regional coverage represented a good part of the coverage at just under 20%. Fifteen per cent of the stories were Africa-wide in scope, while regional stories amounted to three per cent of the coverage.



In regional coverage, East Africa was covered the most and North Africa the least. Central Africa did not feature.

While the high amounts of coverage of Africa as a whole may give the impression that the “Africa is one country” trope is being propagated, upon inspection of the articles, a substantial amount of the Africa-wide content were stories on African summits such as African Union meetings.

In contrast, “How Africa can curb illicit financial flows to strengthen economies post Covid-19” shows how African countries are vulnerable to exploitation and provides views on how this can be curtailed in regard to illicit financial flows. Closer cooperation between African countries is mooted to curb this.

An article that puts an African country in a broader global context is “Gross domestic violence: GBV is bad for GDP growth, study finds”. It talks about the hidden costs of Gender Based Violence based on a study that was done in Lesotho, but the implications the article draws are not restricted to Lesotho itself. This article appeared to be a press release.

Some Africa-wide content may say Africa, but instead refers to Sub-Saharan Africa, such as “Trade experts call for swift implementation of AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area). The article covers calls from experts to implement an African trade agreement, as discussed in Dakar, Senegal. This would, according to these experts, boost the continental economy significantly. The article remains general, but referred to sub-programmes that would boost private sector growth on the continent.

Other stories supposedly about the continent, included examples of countries in one region. For example, a story on tax avoidance by big tech companies in West Africa “African Continent a Milking Cow for Google and Facebook”. While the article points out that tax evasion is a continent-wide problem, the examples are all drawn from West Africa, mainly Nigeria and Ghana. The role of dubious

⁸ <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-10-06-how-africa-can-curb-illicit-financial-flows-to-strengthen-economies-post-Covid-19/>

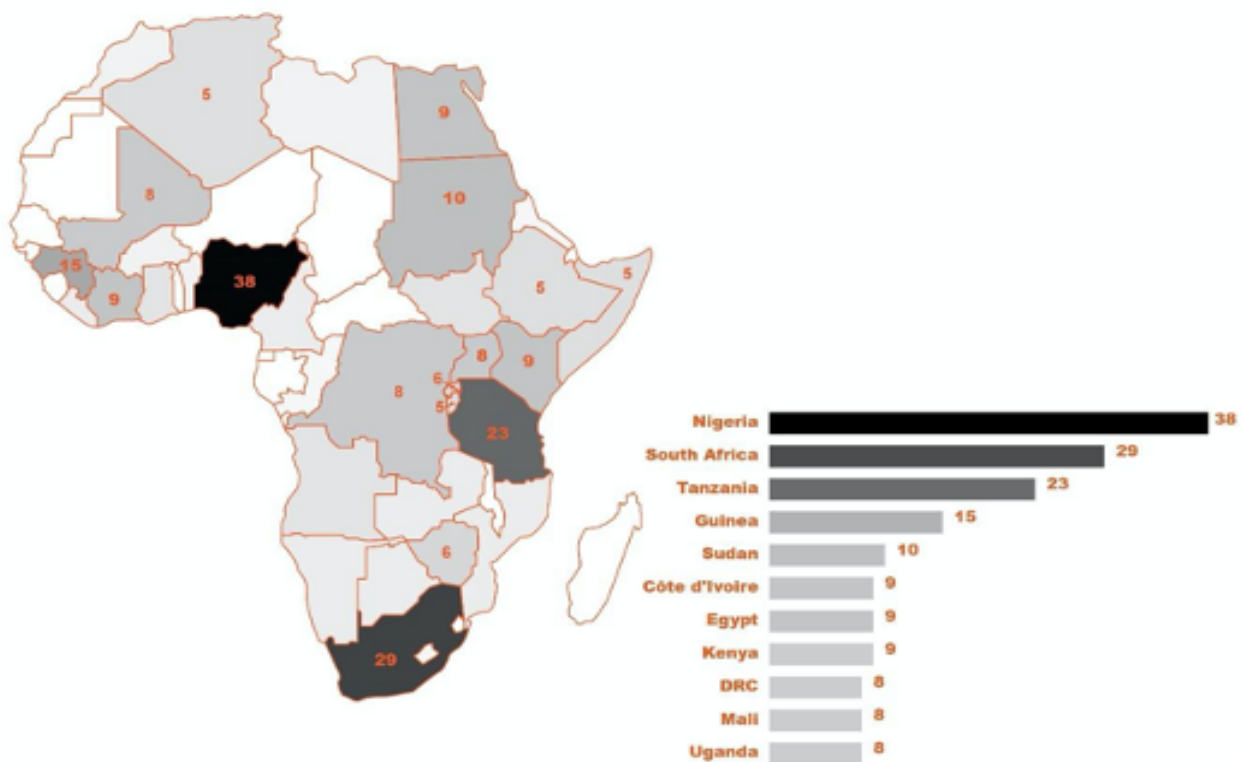
tax regimes outside of Africa is explored as well, highlighting that the problem is worldwide, and facilitated by countries such as Ireland and the Netherlands – thus highlighting that some of the problems of the continent are exacerbated by forces outside of the continent. However, some African countries are themselves tax shelters so the impacts of such practices are not uniform.

The event-based coverage of the continent was complemented by more analytical pieces that highlighted broader structures that serve to disadvantage the continent. However, few stories were really continent-wide and contrasted impacts on different African countries. For the most part, the few good stories do not make up for the great amount of content which is lacking in context and has the potential to consolidate negative views of the countries covered.

Countries covered

The country covered by stories was noted for all stories. Most of the coverage was concentrated in a few countries, as seen in the infographic below that shows the number of stories per country.

The most covered countries by the media in the study were Nigeria (12%), South Africa, (9%) and Tanzania at 7%. Guinea, was a distant fourth with 5% of the coverage. Nigeria and South Africa have the biggest economies on the continent. Coverage on South Africa included quite a few Covid-related stories, while Nigeria had the #EndSARS protests, which escalated during the monitoring period, which reportedly led to dozens of people being killed.



⁹ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times-daily/africa/2020-09-27-gross-domestic-violence-gbv-is-bad-for-gdp-growth-study-finds/>

¹⁰ <https://dailynews.co.zw/trade-experts-call-for-swift-implementation-of-afcfta/>

¹¹ <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2020/10/16/african-continent-a-milking-cow-for-google-and-facebook/>

Most frequently covered countries

Country	%	N
Nigeria	12	38
South Africa	9	29
Tanzania	7	23
Guinea	5	15
Sudan	3	10
Côte d'Ivoire	3	9
Egypt	3	9
Kenya	3	9
Democratic Republic of the Congo	3	8
Mali	3	8
Uganda	3	8

Coverage of Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Egypt each constituted three per cent of all stories. Stories about Sudan were related to the signing of a peace treaty. Côte d'Ivoire due to the contested election, Egypt received coverage that appeared to initially come from Egypt itself and at times seemed to be sponsored or about elections. The coverage of Egypt included far more diverse stories than those from other countries.

Generally, coverage of some countries was heightened as they had elections in or close to the monitoring period. Five countries had elections during or just after the period:

- Guinea: October 18, 2020
- Egypt: staggered, with the first round on October, 24 and 25 and others in November and December 2020
- Seychelles: October 24, 2020
- Tanzania: October 28, 2020
- Côte d'Ivoire: October 31, 2020

Tanzania and Guinea held national elections, and indeed most of the stories covering those countries were related to the national elections that were held there.

Several countries have upcoming elections from November on. Of these, only Ghana and Uganda received coverage of the upcoming elections.

Most frequently covered countries

The coverage of elections when they are contested, but little when they are not, could support ideas about despotism in Africa generally. But the coverage of elections themselves tended to be event-based and not overly stereotypical when taken as a whole.

In contrast, three stories appeared about Liberia, all were poor and two portrayed the country as poor and its citizens desperate and buffoonish.

The story “Liberia man drowns rescuing dropped \$20 note in Monrovia river” seems to poke fun at the tragedy of a man dying. Another story, also originally from the BBC and published in Ghanaian media, “Weah blasts Liberian youth for asking him for money” is based on a statement by the Liberian president that claims he gets texts from youths asking him for money for rent.



Some of you telling me to pay your rent; you get your ma and pa and you asking me to pay your rent; “why you can’t go live with your ma. The money you want to pay your rent [with]; you can use it with your mother to do business.

¹² [https://www.graphic.com.gh/international/international-news/liberia-man-drowns-rescuing-](https://www.graphic.com.gh/international/international-news/liberia-man-drowns-rescuing-dropped-20-note-in-monrovia-river.html)

¹³ [dropped-20-note-in-monrovia-river.html](https://thechronicle.com.gh/weah-blasts-liberian-youth-for-asking-him-for-money/) -

<https://thechronicle.com.gh/weah-blasts-liberian-youth-for-asking-him-for-money/>

Such coverage is not only salacious but seems to single out Liberia as ridiculous. Given that Liberia only features in three articles, one of which seems to be an MTN press release, the coverage is particularly problematic. In these cases, content was simply published as is and would reach African audiences with the stereotypes and lack of context intact.

Coverage of most countries were not obviously stereotypical, but the focus on countries around elections, particularly contested elections may result in broader assumptions of all African countries. Little coverage of countries can also be problematic, especially when the existing coverage includes

Story topics

Story topics Stories were categorised based on their topics to see the type of coverage over the period. The top 10 topics appear below.



Politics as a topic mostly included international politics such as bilateral discussions or the activities or bi- or multilateral agencies, requests for extradition, intra party politics or stories based on statements or conversations of politicians .

Conflict and violence related to protests in Nigeria made up most of the stories about conflict. This was the most second-most prevalent topic and made up 13% of all stories. The story was the bulk of coverage on Nigeria. Coverage of Nigeria was about conflict in 71% of cases, almost all of which was related to the #EndSARS protests and the state’s response.

Other coverage of conflicts included conflicts in Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan. Much of this reporting was event-based and lacked context or background to the conflicts. Some coverage showed how conflicts were started or exacerbated by forces outside the countries, for example “Ethiopia violence fuelled by fighters trained in Sudan: PM Abiy” and “The European companies that armed the Ivorian civil war” (referring to the events in 2010-2011).

¹⁴ “Burundi, Rwanda officials meet to restore bilateral ties” <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/africa/article/2001390876/burundi-rwanda-officials-meet-to-restore-bilateral-ties>

Protests in Sudan received little coverage, where a small group of people protested against economic hardship, in an article by Nigeria's Guardian titled 'Sudan protesters rally against economic hardship'. The article highlights that inflation is above 200%, that basic necessities such as food and fuel are hard to obtain, and that little progress has been made to hold those responsible for the deaths of protestors, in the successful oust of Al-Bashir. None of the activists are directly accessed, so we have little sense of how deep the frustration of the people run with regards to the happenings in Sudan, or whether the responses from authorities prevented mass demonstrations, which could have become even more newsworthy.

Economics, trade and business coverage made up a good proportion of the coverage at 13%. Despite the increasing integration of economies of nations and increase or mooted increase in continental trade. A lot of economics and trade stories were about airlines reopening routes after Covid scares, or the appointments of (foreign) nationals to head (a division of) a multinational business. Fully 45% of coverage on these topics was Africa-wide in scope.

In election coverage, Tanzania was often covered – the country accounted for 46% of election coverage. Almost three-quarters of the coverage of Tanzania related to the elections (74%). Election coverage tended to be clustered in

different countries. There was a fair bit of coverage of the Tanzanian elections in Kenya, and also some coverage related to the elections in Guinea in the Ghanaian and Senegalese press. Conversely, elections in island country of Seychelles was mostly ignored by the media.

Much of the election coverage regardless of country was brief and did not give history or context. Since on average there is about one national election per month in Africa, so many elections happening in the research period likely dramatically increased coverage of elections. The sample was likely skewed towards reportage on elections and concomitant issues, and thus that the tropes that may arise from these stories may be centred on leadership, governance, and corruption, and to a lesser extent African citizens' activity or passivity in the face of these events and stories.

The number of elections may have resulted in stories on other topics, such as transnational trade, infrastructure development, arts, culture and history receiving more modest coverage, if any at all, since the existing space and resources may have been instead allocated to election-related stories. An example of coverage of arts, culture & history & Entertainment / personalities, with an international slant can be found in a Mmegi article titled: SA's Makhadzi ropes in Charma Gal. The article talks about the collaboration between a artists from Botswana and a South Africa artist, in which the Motswana artist was sourced for comment.

There were a few stories on disasters and these accounted for 4% of the coverage. These included stories on the locust infestation in East Africa, the fires raging on Mount Kilimanjaro and an earthquake off the coast of Cape Town (all natural disasters). One non-natural disaster was the story 'Gas blast kills five in Algeria'. The article covers a disaster that is highly likely to be the outcome of a human error during construction work – five people died as a result of a gas explosion in an Algerian city.

¹⁵ "Letter exposes plan to expel Zuma from ANC" <https://dailynews.co.zw/letter-exposes-plan-to-expel-zuma-from-anc/>

¹⁶ Vice President of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan: The opponents of the eastern track will join the peace agreement

¹⁷ <https://guardian.ng/news/world/ethiopia-violence-fuelled-by-fighters-trained-in-sudan-pm-abiy/>

¹⁸ <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-10-27-the-european-companies-that-armed-the-ivorian-civil-war/>

¹⁹ <https://guardian.ng/news/sudan-protesters-rally-against-economic-hardship/>

All disaster stories in the sample provided context, explaining how the event came to transpire, and avoided the use of shocking imagery. Because the stories provided context, avoided gratuitous and / or shocking imagery, they were not

portraying Africa as a continent marred by (human-made) disasters, but rather Africa as a continent where disasters do happen, just like the rest of the world.

Poverty as a topic was hardly covered. If poverty was discussed, it was a background factor to news events. For instance, in stories of looting from Nigeria, after weeks of highlighted the inequalities and extreme poverty in Nigeria, and that people were suffering from acute hunger, exacerbated by Covid-19 in the New Vision: 'Looting sweeps Nigeria as authorities struggle with unrest'. Such coverage certainly did not depict the looters as being irrational, but rather pointed out the governance failures in Nigeria – a failure to distribute aid to people who are struggling due to Covid-19, along with the 90 million Nigerians who live in extreme poverty, corruption and lack of opportunities for youth.

Whether or not the reader will attribute negative stereotypes to Africans after reading that article is dependent on the readers' preconceptions and prejudices, but it is certainly not fuelled by the writing and the tone of this article.

Regions or countries were cross tabulated against topics. So the percentage of coverage of a topic was calculated per country. Lower percentages of each of the topics would indicate more diverse coverage. By explanation, if 100% of topics about a country are elections, this means there is likely to be very little diversity in coverage (it is possible for some diversity, because the stories can take very different angles). Diverse coverage is generally a good thing as it presents various sides to a country. For each country below, the most frequently occurring topic is presented.

Country / region	Topic	Percentage of coverage
Guinea	Elections	83
Sudan	Conflict (political violence, civil unrest, armed conflict)	80
Tanzania	Elections	74
Nigeria	Conflict (protests marked by conflict, political violence,	
Côte d'Ivoire	civil unrest, armed conflict)	71
	Elections	63

With the exception of South Africa and Egypt, coverage is dominated by one particular story or event. The coverage of South Africa is by far the most diverse of

²⁰ Although this could also be due to the weekly monitoring and may have been more obvious on a day-to-day basis.

²¹ <https://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?aid=87423&dir=2020/october/19>,

²² <https://guardian.ng/news/gas-blast-kills-five-in-algeria/>

²³ <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1530273/looting-sweeps-nigeria-authorities-struggle-unrest>

all the countries on the continent, as evidenced by the fact that the most observed topic, health, only contributed 21% to all the stories covered about South Africa.

These figures in themselves do not mean that other countries have been covered stereotypically; just that coverage has failed to show the richness and diversity of Africa and African societies. In general, due to the domination of big stories in some countries, readers may be likely to be left with the impression that countries can be associated with one theme, such as conflict or war. The focus on big stories almost entirely in media of other countries may serve to fuel this.

Missing stories

Stories that focused on African successes, innovations and technology were almost completely absent. This is despite notable successes in these pursuits. Africa innovates much more than it is given credit for. Innovations such as MPesa (mobile money) have been around for years in Kenya but have only been introduced to Europe recently. Africans continue to make important scientific contributions in diverse fields, including development of testing methods for Covid-19.

It may be possible that where African successes and contributions are celebrated that they are reported on a national basis, rather than by other African countries. Such stories may be covered in a nationalistic frame to show the progress that a particular country is making.

It is very noticeable that the voices of ordinary Africans are either missing or represented in a rather negative and stereotypical way. Examples of this have already been highlighted in previous sections of this report. There have been several reports on the South African Minister of Health contracting Covid-19, but there were no stories on the experiences of ordinary citizens in other African countries finding ways to cope with a Covid infection in the local health systems.

Concluding remarks

Africans learn about themselves and other Africans through the media. The news media is a big part of this. While there are constraints in African newsrooms, there is also much scope for growth in the diversity of news coverage. Based on the survey and interviews with media practitioners, there was an acknowledgement that stereotypical coverage and negative frames can appear even in publications that are supposedly of good quality.

The focus groups with practitioners indicated that coverage of a few countries tended to dominate. Given this, it appears that the relatively high number of stories about South Africa and Nigeria are not unusual.

Throughout all the different parts of the study, there is evidence that there is scope for more, better stories about other African countries and the discussions among media practitioners may mark a step towards greater consciousness about this lack.

We hope this study and associated activities will start discussions and spark interest, driving a desire to change current narratives.

Recommendations

Good journalism for Africa about African countries requires commitment, such commitment needs to rest in an awareness of shortcomings and the possibility of different coverage. While many editors may have acknowledged stereotypes in the content they published, others did not. Even where this was acknowledged, this did not impact practices. This may be partly because of resource

constraints and the availability of other content, but there is also a sense that considerations of stereotypical content are not always top of mind when selecting stories and story angles. Without awareness that there is a possibility of nuanced, diverse content and commitment to improve coverage, nothing will change.

Secondly, good journalism requires investment. There is a need for resources for African journalism and African stories in order for the content to be available. Such content would include more diverse topics and stories as well as the voices of more people, not only the authorities. Should stories be made available they need to be easy to access

Finally, there is a need for greater collaboration between media practitioners and editors in different countries. By developing networks, making content available and pooling it, the greatest return on investment in good, diverse African stories can be realised.

About Africa No Filter

ANF is a donor collaborative funded by Ford Foundation, Bloomberg, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Luminate, Open Society Foundation, Comic Relief, British Council and the Hilton Foundation. We support the development of nuanced stories that shift existing, stereotypical narratives about Africa through research, grant-making, and advocacy. ANF's goal over time is to leave an empowered narrative change ecosystem and an informed community of storytellers who work more deliberately to change harmful narratives about Africa.

