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# EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF BUSINESS JOURNALISM IN TANZANIA'S NEWSPAPERS (2012)

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STUDY COMMISSIONED BY BEST-AC

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## 1. Introduction

In May 2008, BEST-AC commissioned a preliminary analysis of the media sector in Tanzania to identify the key constraints to media playing a more effective role in business environment reform. It found the following weaknesses within the three main actors in the reform process: media, private sector and government.

1. **Weaknesses within the media sector:** There was a lack of business coverage, particularly within the Kiswahili-language media. What coverage exists tended to focus on economics and corporate and international business. It also found that there was also a lack of skills, innovation and understanding of business coverage among journalists, media managers and media owners.
2. **Weaknesses of the private sector associations to interact with the media:** Private sector organisations (PSOs) lacked skills and structures to undertake effective media relations and use the media in information dissemination and lobbying.
3. **Weaknesses of the ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to interact with the media:** Despite the establishment of information, education and communications units within the MDAs, the government lacked the skills and commitment to effectively interact with the media.

BEST-AC then set out to support the capacity of private sector organisations (PSOs) and the media to communicate effectively on private sector issues. To measure progress and impact of its interventions, BEST-AC commissioned the independent review of the quality of business coverage in Tanzania's leading daily newspapers on an annual basis since 2009. This 2012 report is the fourth in the series of the evaluation reports.

## 2. Methodology

In 2009 Serengeti Advisers Limited (SAL) developed an original tool to analyze the quality of newspaper articles so as to assist BEST-AC to annually monitor developments by evaluating the quality of business coverage in Tanzania's print media. The tool uses both quantitative and qualitative metrics and the articles have been reviewed consistently based on the following six criteria (see Annexes 1 and 2):

1. ***Number of sources used.*** One point is awarded for each distinct source used in the article up to a maximum of five (5) points.
2. ***Types of sources.*** These sources range from experts, officials, stakeholders and laypersons that merit a point each. Demonstrated effort to consult documents and secondary sources earns two points each. Primary investigation and analysis earns 3 points. A maximum of 11 points was achievable.
3. ***Length and placement of article.*** Feature articles earn three points, editorials and opinion pieces earn two points, while regular stories and advertorials (PR pieces) earn one point. A maximum of three (3) points was achievable.
4. ***Depth of article.*** This examined whether the article provided social, economic or political context (one mark each, for a sub-total of three marks if all were present), delved into the historical background on the issue (two points), and explored any future implications of the subject matter (three points).
5. ***Bias.*** Any discernible bias scored zero, while neutrality scored two points for the article. Bias was defined as an article written entirely from the point of view of just

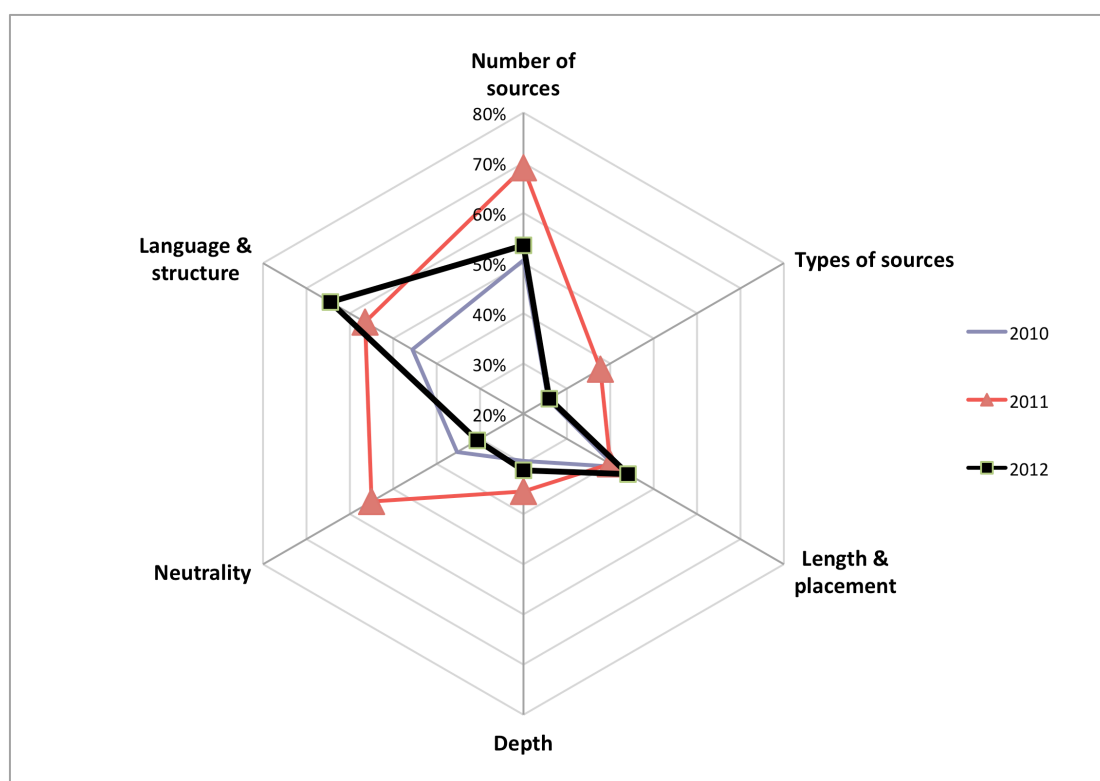
one of the parties in the issue being reported on or analyzed, whether such a party was the government or a specific company or institution.

6. **Quality of information transfer.** This assessed the use of jargon, the logical structure of the article, spelling and grammatical mistakes and clarity of the article's conclusions. A maximum of ten (10) points was achievable.

Sixty-two articles (62) from four English newspapers (*Daily News, The Citizen, The Guardian, The East African*) and two Kiswahili newspapers (*Nipashe, Majira*) were sampled for the 2012 review. This was a three-fold increase in the sample size compared to the 20 articles reviewed in 2011 and 17 articles reviewed in 2010 and 2009. It should be noted that, for the first time, the 2012 sample included articles from the Kiswahili press. These articles covered business stories and were selected from newspaper clippings provided by BEST-AC, with the only criterion being that the newspapers be broadly represented in the sample. The articles were randomly selected so as to ensure as much objectivity as possible.

### 3. Key Results

Figure 1. Trends in six quality indicators of print business journalism (2010-12)



Source: Serengeti Advisers' analysis

Figure 1 above shows the trends in six quality indicators of the print business articles that were reviewed between 2010 and 2012. It shows that between 2010 and 2011, there was a marked improvement across five of the six indicators, the only exception being 'length and placement' which deteriorated slightly. However, between 2011 and 2012, four indicators showed a decline. Specific trends are outlined below:

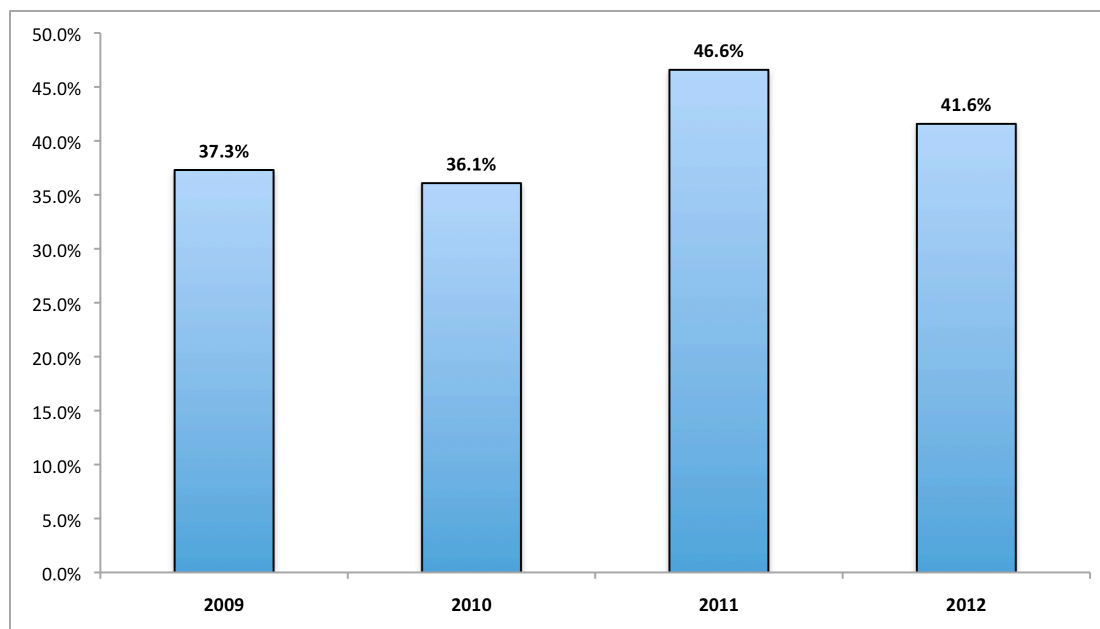
- a. The articles' '**Language and Structure**' indicator score was 64.5% in 2012. This is a marked improvement from 56.5% in 2011 and 45.6% in 2010.

- b. The **‘Length and placement’** score was 44.1% in 2012, which is also an improvement from 40% in 2011 and 41.2% in 2010.
- c. However, the **‘Number of Sources’** indicator score fell to 53.5% in 2012 from 69% in 2011. Similarly, the **‘Types of Sources’** score deteriorated from 37.7% in 2011 to 26% in 2012, which is roughly the same score as that achieved in 2010.
- d. The average **‘Depth’** score in 2012 was 31.3%, down slightly from 35.5% in 2011 and marginally better than 29.4% in 2010.
- e. **‘Neutrality’** scored 30.6%, which was a significant 25-point drop from 55% in 2011 and even lower than the 35.3% achieved in 2010.
- f. The overall articles score was 41.6%, which is judged as ‘Average.’ This was however a deterioration from the 46.6% achieved in 2011, although it was an improvement from 37.6% in 2009 and 36.1% in 2010 (see Figure 2 below).

It was interesting to note the significant improvement in the **‘Language and Structure’** score as well as in the **‘Length and Placement’** score in 2012, two indicators that perhaps the writers and editors are paying greater attention to than to the basics of article writing.

However, after an improvement in 2011, the **‘Neutrality’** score dropped very significantly this year to a low of 30.6%. **‘Depth’** also dropped slightly from last year. This suggests that while the form of the articles has improved, their function – to inform, and provide some insight and analysis about the subject – seems to have deteriorated. In other words, the business articles’ **style** has improved but their **substance** – depth, neutrality, number and types of sources - remains problematic.

Figure 2. Trends in overall article scores (2009-12)



Source: Serengeti Advisers’ analysis

## 4. Discussion

In 2012's much expanded sample size of 62 articles, which for the first time included two leading Kiswahili newspapers, nine (9) articles were categorized as 'Good', twenty nine (29) were considered 'Average' and twenty four (24) were 'Poor'. None of the articles were considered 'Very Good' or 'Excellent' and none were a 'Waste of Newsprint', though one came close to the latter. The lowest scoring article - **'New ferry for Lake Nyasa to cost 16 bn'** (*Daily News*, 15/11/11) – secured 7.5 points. The piece was poor, merely summarizing a Minister's speech with minimal depth or analysis of any description.

The highest scoring article - **'Blacklisted cotton ginnerers hinder industry's development'** (*The Guardian*, 30/4/12) – scored a 30 points, a mere point below 'Very Good' category. The report is well-written it incorporates multiple sources (7 in total) and leaves the reader with a solid understanding of the relevant issues. Its only downfall is the overall discernible, slightly negative bias.

The overall mean score was 17.06 points against an average paragraph length of 14.98, down from 18.35 paragraphs in 2011.

Thirteen (13) of the sixty-two (62) articles subject to this exercise relied exclusively on quotes from officials. Eighteen (18) incorporated 3 or more sources of information, and seventeen (17) referred to documents. Only five (5) articles employed primary or secondary investigation and analysis, two of them attaining the 'Good' category while the others showed other weaknesses that reduced them to 'Average'.

The sample included eight (8) 'Feature' articles, two (2) 'Editorials', two 'Opinion' pieces and two (2) 'Advertorials'. The rest were 'News' stories. Seventeen (17) articles scored five (5) points or higher on the maximum ten-point measure of depth, with one (1) article scoring seven, **'Blacklisted cotton ginnerers hinder industry's development'** (*The Guardian*, 30/4/12). This piece also received the highest score in the entire sample, 30.

Only nineteen (19) of the articles sampled were free of glaringly obvious bias. This represents a mere 30.6% of the total articles. The majority of the articles reviewed showed obvious bias, with 18 exhibiting 'negative' bias and 25 showing 'positive' bias. An example of positive bias can be found in **'Privatisation policy boosts Tanzania's economy'** (*The EastAfrican* 12/12/2011) in which the only point of view expressed was that of the manager of publicity and documentation at Consolidated Holdings Corporation, the entity charged with managing the privatization process itself. Another example is the largely pro-government piece **'Cashew farmers start receiving their payments'** (*Daily News* 3/5/2012) in which no farmer views are expressed to verify the story's main claim.

The use of jargon was very limited in the samples covered, with only two (2) of examples of articles in which the use of jargon impeded comprehension on the part of the reader. One example was the article, **'Over 5,000 residential licenses in offing discloses MKURABITA'** (*Guardian* 15/7/2011) had several paragraphs of fairly terse official speak such as 'Basically, Mkurabita's main objective is to step up strategic reforms and fast track formalization of properties and businesses countrywide, hence enabling Tanzanians access capital' Fortunately, this was just one of the two exceptions. The majority of the articles reviewed were commendably free of jargon. Whether this is a result of a deliberate effort on the part of the editorial staff remains an open question.

Thirty nine (39) articles had an 'Average' structure to their narratives, with twenty two (22) 'Good' and only one 'Poor.'

Nine (9) articles ended with confusing or unclear conclusions. For example, the final paragraph in **'Dar meet lays accent on support for informal sector (Guardian 28/6/12)**, states that 'This [symbolic relation between the growth of the economy, MSMEs and poverty reduction] requires African governments and their international development partners to graduate from the talk-the-talk to walk-the-talk by recognising and formalizing the operations of MSMEs.' It clearly assumes, and leaves the curious but uninformed reader thinking, that all MSMEs are informal.

Thirty-six articles (36) had clear or strong conclusions. One example is from the highest scoring article in this year's sample **'Blacklisted cotton ginners hinder industry's development (Guardian 2012)**. The author concludes strongly that 'continuing inclusion of these defaulting ginners in Tanzania's cotton sector may be detrimental to the sales efforts of Tanzania's non-defaulting ginners among international cotton buyers. Failure of government to uphold the rules of contract farming will result in significant hardship for Tanzanian farmers.' It is a rich final paragraph, which lays out unambiguously the negative implications for ginners, farmers and ultimately the country, of the government's inaction in enforcing the laws that govern the cotton sector.

The seventeen (17) remaining articles ended with deliberately open conclusions.

## 5. Observations

1. **The very marked increase in biased reporting in the sample is particularly noteworthy and bears investigation.** The apparent polarization of opinion in the press, or the lack of objectivity in reporting business news is a cause for concern. While there has been some improvement in 'form' (as represented by 'Language and Structure'), there has been a deterioration in 'substance' as evidenced by the decreased scores in 'Neutrality', number and types of sources and (less markedly) in 'Depth'.
2. **Increased sample size validates previous results.** The significantly increased sample size and representation, specifically the inclusion of two leading Kiswahili newspapers, in this year's exercise makes for a particularly interesting comparison with previous reports. The overall average score reduction from 2011 was not very significant, suggesting sample size may not have been as problematic as was previously feared. Put another way, the overall state of Tanzanian business journalism appears to be bunched around a mean without significant overall variance.
3. **Business reporting in the Kiswahili-language press is of a lower quality than that in the English-language press.** The average score for the Kiswahili press was 14.13 ('Poor'), while that for the English press was 17.82 ('Average'). The Kiswahili press had nine articles, or 70% of the Kiswahili articles sample, that were marked 'poor' and only four articles (30% of the sample) managed an 'average' score. This is in sharp contrast to the English newspapers where just 29% of the articles scored 'poor' and 71% scored 'average' or 'good.' The best performing newspaper was The **EastAfrican**, with an overall average score of 19.88, while **Majira** performed worst with a score of 13.13. This is consistent with the widely shared view that the Kiswahili press tends to focus much more on coverage of politics and does a relatively poor job of covering business news. To the extent that the vast majority of the readership in Tanzania gets its news from the Kiswahili press, this represents a serious challenge.

**Annex 1: Newspaper Article Qualitative Evaluation Tool**

Article (title, publication, date): \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Article topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Analyst: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of analysis (D/M/Y): \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**1. Number of Sources Used in the Article:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Types of Sources:**

- ☐ Quote from official
- ☐ Interview with topic expert
- ☐ Interview with official
- ☐ Interview with stakeholder/affected
- ☐ Interview with layperson
- ☐ Quoting of documents and reports
- ☐ Secondary investigation and analysis (number crunching)
- ☐ Primary Investigation and analysis

**3. Length and Placement of Article**

1. Number of paragraphs: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Page number of article: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Section of newspaper article appears in: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Type of article:

- ☐ News article
- ☐ Feature article
- ☐ Editorial
- ☐ Opinion piece
- ☐ Advertorial

**4. Depth of article:**

- ☐ Social context
- ☐ Economic context
- ☐ Political context
- ☐ Historical context
- ☐ Root of conflict (if any)
- ☐ Future implications

**5. Bias:**

☐ Positive bias discernible: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No bias discernible: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Negative bias discernible: \_\_\_\_\_

Comment on nature of bias and targets of bias:

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## 6. Quality of Information transfer:

### *Reader Comprehension:*

Use of jargon impedes layperson comprehension:

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ No discernible use of jargon

Article structure and flow:

☐ Good      ☐ Average      ☐ Poor

Number of spelling and grammar mistakes:

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Article conclusion is:

☐ Clear/strong message      ☐ Confusing/unclear message

☐ Deliberately open

### *Writer/Editor Competence:*

Writer discernibly familiar with topic:

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Unclear

*Additional Comments:*

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Final Score: \_\_\_\_\_

Final Category: \_\_\_\_\_



**Annex 2: Newspaper Article Qualitative Evaluation Tool Score Sheet**

**1. Number of sources used in article:** Range 0 to 5 points

No sources identified= 0, add one mark per source to a maximum of 5 marks for 5+ sources identified.

**2. Types of sources:** Range 0 to 11 points

No source= no marks, expert= 1 mark, official =1 mark, stakeholder= 1 mark, layperson= 1 mark, documents/reports= 2 marks, secondary analysis= 2 marks, Primary investigation and analysis= 3 marks

**3. Length and placement of article:** Range 1 to 3 points

Only score item number 4. Regular article= 1 mark, feature article= 3 marks, editorial = 2 marks, opinion piece = 2 marks, advertorial= 1 mark

**4. Depth of Article:** Range 0 to 10 points

No context= 0, social context= 1 mark, economic context= 1 mark, political context= 1 mark, historical background= 2 marks, root of conflict= 2 marks, future implications= 3 marks.

**5. Bias:** Range 0 to 2 points

0 marks for discernible bias whether negative or positive. Neutrality scores 2 marks.

**6. Quality of Information Transfer:** -ve2 to 10

Jargon is an impediment= 0 marks, jargon is not an impediment = 2 marks, no use of jargon= 1 mark, good article structure= 2 marks, average structure= 1 mark, poor structure= 0 marks, spelling mistakes: penalize 0.1 marks per mistake to a maximum of -2 marks, clear conclusion= 2 marks, unclear conclusion= 0 marks, open-ended conclusion= 3 marks, competence= 3 marks, unclear 1.5 and incompetence= 0 marks.

**Final Score:** Minus 1 through to 41 points

**Categories:**

Negative 1 to 6 = Waste of newsprint

7 to 14 = Poor quality article

15 to 22 = Average article

23 to 30 = Good article

31 to 38= Very good article

39 and above= Excellent article.