

PRESENTATION AT THE INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDER FORUM AND THE 2026 WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY DAY

BROAD THEME: REFLECTIONS ON REGULATION, INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE OF GHANA'S COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY.

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TITLE: PRIVATE BROADCASTING IN GHANA: EVOLUTION, CONTRIBUTION, THE IMPACT OF REGULATION AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE FUTURE

Good morning, Director General of the NCA, Rev Edmund Fianko, and congratulations on the NCA's thirtieth anniversary celebration, thank you for inviting GIBA to be part of today's session. Good morning distinguished ladies and gentlemen, all protocols duly observed.

We have been given 10 minutes to reflect on the evolution of private broadcasting in Ghana, its contribution to the nation, how regulation has impacted its fortunes and our expectations for the future, we will try to do it in less than that, we need to leave some airtime for commercials, very important, that's the life blood of broadcasting.

THE EVOLUTION

The evolution of Ghana's broadcasting industry over the past three decades represents one of the most significant democratic and institutional transformations in the country's history. From a broadcasting environment once dominated entirely by state-owned media, Ghana has developed into one of Africa's most vibrant and pluralistic media ecosystems. This transformation has strengthened democratic governance, expanded freedom of expression, increased public access to information, and contributed significantly to national development and the growth of Ghana's digital economy.

At the center of this transformation has been the National Communications Authority (NCA), established in 1996 under Act 524 and now operating under Act 769 to regulate and supervise Ghana's rapidly expanding communications sector. Over the last 30 years, the NCA has played a central role in spectrum allocation, licensing, technical supervision, compliance monitoring, and the broader development of Ghana's broadcasting industry. As the Authority commemorates its 30th anniversary under the theme "*30 Years of Communication Regulation-Celebrating Impact, Advancing a more Inclusive Digital Future*" it presents an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of private broadcasting in Ghana, the contribution of independent broadcasters to democracy and national development, the role of regulation in the broadcasting ecosystem, and the future direction of Ghana's communications industry in an increasingly complex digital world.

Before the liberalisation reforms of the 1990s, broadcasting in Ghana was predominantly a tool of the governing power, colonial or otherwise, to control and shape national discourse, this started in 1935 when a BBC relay station in Accra code-named Radio ZOY was introduced during the British Colonial rule, broadcasting remained mainly radio until 1965 when Black and White television service was introduced by the state broadcaster. Access to the airwaves was centralised, editorial diversity was limited, and opportunities for independent broadcasting were almost nonexistent.

The return to constitutional rule under the 1992 Constitution fundamentally changed the broadcasting landscape by guaranteeing freedom of expression and media freedom, with the establishment of the National Media Commission in 1993 pursuant to Chapter 12, to promote and ensure the freedom and independence of the media for mass communication and information. This democratic transition, coupled with broader economic liberalisation reforms, created the foundation for private participation within the broadcasting sector.

107 organisations quickly applied for authorisations with only 36 granted by the then **Ghana Frequency Registration and Control Board (GFRCB)**. Those granted were required to pay huge sums as non-refundable commitment fee and this gave birth to an idea to form a group or association to advocate for reduced fees. Convened by Chief Crystal-Djirackor of Crystal TV, together with five others (the late Kofi Bucknor, then late James Appiah (who escalated the idea), Kwame Kludjeson of the then Videomart operations at Osu - Accra, the late Sefa of Cinemax, and Alhaji Rasheed of Nayak; the group initially comprised six members. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Kwame Mpianim of Newsworth and Kwaw Ansah of Film Africa were brought onboard within the same period as influential voices to help shape the direction and agenda of the applicants, particularly in pushing for the reduction of the GFRCB licensing fees in 1995, from ₵40 million to ₵20 million for television, and from ₵20 million to ₵10 million for radio; the **Association of Private Broadcasting Companies (APBC)** was formed as the vehicle for achieving that goal. APBC today, is what we know as the **Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA)**.

Let me take a moment to acknowledge some of the pioneers - Charles Wereko Brobby, Chief Crystal-Djirackor, Kwasi Twum, Kwaw Ansah, Alhaji Nayak, Talal Fatal, Kwame Despite and others, whose invaluable roles played significantly in paving the way for other broadcasters today.

The establishment of the NCA and its predecessor, institutionalised this transition by creating a formal regulatory framework for licensing broadcasters, allocating frequencies, managing spectrum, supervising technical operations, and ensuring compliance within the industry. The opening of the airwaves led to the rapid emergence of private FM radio and television stations across the country, transforming public discourse and decentralising access to information.

The constitutional entrenchment of the National Media Commission, the explicit prohibition of censorship, and the repeal of criminal libel laws in 2001 which removed the threat of criminal prosecution for journalists, collectively positioned Ghana as a regional exemplar of press freedom and media pluralism.

Today, Ghana possesses one of the largest broadcasting ecosystems in West Africa. According to recent NCA data, as of the fourth quarter of 2025, Ghana had 784 authorised FM radio stations, with 563 operational stations nationwide, while the television sector had 178 authorised television operators, with 132 actively broadcasting. The broadcasting environment has evolved from a single state broadcaster into a highly diversified ecosystem.

However, despite the significant growth of the broadcasting industry, structural disparities remain evident. Research captured in *The State of the Ghanaian Media Report 2023* shows that approximately 46% of radio frequencies are concentrated within only four regions — Greater Accra, Ashanti, Western, and Bono Regions. The report further highlights concerns regarding ownership concentration, lack of transparency in frequency allocation, and inequalities in regional access to broadcasting services. These developments demonstrate that while liberalisation has expanded the industry, challenges relating to inclusivity, equitable distribution, and market concentration continue to shape the communications environment.

Beyond numerical growth, technological advancement has fundamentally transformed broadcasting operations in Ghana. The industry has moved beyond traditional analogue transmission systems into a converged multimedia ecosystem driven by digital migration, mobile-first content consumption, social media integration, internet broadcasting, streaming platforms, and data-driven audience engagement. The modern broadcaster no longer operates solely through conventional radio and television transmission, but increasingly functions across digital, mobile, online, and social media platforms simultaneously.

OUR CONTRIBUTION

The contribution of independent broadcasters to Ghana’s democracy and public discourse has been profound. Liberalisation transformed Ghana’s media environment from a centralised state-dominated information system into a pluralistic and participatory communications ecosystem. Independent broadcasters introduced multiple editorial voices, political perspectives, local-language programming, and region-specific content into national discourse. This diversification reduced state dominance over information dissemination and strengthened freedom of expression within Ghana’s democratic system.

Radio, in particular, became Ghana’s most accessible democratic platform because of its affordability, wide geographical reach, and extensive use of local languages. Through political talk shows, phone-in programmes, community discussions, and interactive current affairs programming, citizens gained direct access to national conversations and governance processes. Especially huge swathes of the population who

could only communicate in local languages. The *State of the Ghanaian Media Report* notes that broadcasting liberalisation created the “necessary condition for freedom of expression in a democracy.”

Independent broadcasters have also emerged as critical accountability institutions within Ghana’s democratic framework. Through the immersive coverage of national elections, investigative journalism, documentaries, and public affairs programming, broadcasters have exposed corruption, investigated governance failures, questioned public policy decisions, amplified citizen concerns, and influenced public debate. Over the years, broadcasters have played major roles in national discussions surrounding elections, corruption investigations, illegal mining, healthcare delivery, economic policy, education reforms, and governance transparency. The report specifically highlights how broadcasters critically examined major government initiatives such as Free SHS, Planting for Food and Jobs, and One Village One Dam.

In addition to strengthening accountability and democratic participation, independent broadcasters have increasingly embraced development-oriented journalism focused on health, education, agriculture, civic education, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment. Research within *The State of the Ghanaian Media Report 2023* demonstrates that many Ghanaian media institutions increasingly see themselves not merely as commercial enterprises, but as instruments of national development. Ask any commercial broadcaster and they will tell you how these critical national development issues are often not commercially rewarding and come with huge risks to their commercial interest and the safety of their employees and businesses. One will then ask the question, why do we do it? We do it because this developmental role aligns with the constitutional vision of the media under Ghana’s Fourth Republic. The framers of the 1992 Constitution envisioned a media environment where “objective information is disseminated, different and opposed views are presented and shared, enlightened public opinion is formed and political consensus mobilised and achieved.”

Broadcasters have also played critical roles during national emergencies and public health crises. During periods such as Ebola and COVID-19, media organizations dedicated substantial airtime toward health education, preventive communication, and public awareness campaigns. Several media institutions established dedicated health desks and institutionalised health reporting within mainstream programming. Community broadcasters similarly used local-language programming to promote sanitation awareness, HIV/AIDS education, and preventive healthcare within underserved communities.

The broadcasting sector has equally become an important contributor to Ghana’s economy and creative industry ecosystem. The industry supports employment for journalists, producers, editors, engineers, presenters, digital content creators, marketers, and technical professionals, while simultaneously stimulating growth within advertising, music, film production, event management, digital entrepreneurship,

and social media content creation. Broadcasting today is therefore not simply a media sector, but a major pillar within Ghana's broader digital economy.

REGULATION AND ITS IMPACT

Regulation has played a central role in maintaining stability, technical quality, competition, and public-interest protection within Ghana's broadcasting ecosystem. Over the past three decades, the NCA has facilitated the expansion of broadcasting services, increased private sector participation, improved infrastructure investment, supervised digital migration, and enhanced communications access nationwide.

However, these regulations have also created operational and financial challenges for commercial broadcasters. Licensing fees, compliance costs, and restrictions such as the limited FM coverage radius have reduced advertising reach and increased infrastructure expenses, especially for smaller stations. Increased competition from the large number of licensed stations has further reduced profit margins, forcing some broadcasters to considerably reduce their focus on national development and diversify their revenue sources through airtime lease to religious organisations, events, digital content monetization and in some cases anyone who can pay.

The communications environment has become increasingly complex due to technological convergence and digital disruption. Broadcasting now operates within a rapidly evolving global digital ecosystem shaped by streaming platforms, podcasts, mobile content consumption, artificial intelligence, social media broadcasting, and algorithm-driven content distribution. This evolving environment presents significant regulatory challenges, including misinformation, disinformation, harmful content, ownership concentration, financial sustainability pressures, declining professional standards, AI-generated content, deepfake technologies, and cross-border digital broadcasting.

The *State of the Ghanaian Media Report* specifically identifies concerns regarding lack of transparency in frequency allocation, cross-ownership patterns, and the absence of a comprehensive broadcasting law. These developments demonstrate that future regulation can no longer focus solely on traditional broadcasting models. Regulation must increasingly evolve toward technology-neutral frameworks, innovation-friendly policies, platform accountability, digital governance, and consumer protection within the digital era. Future regulation must therefore balance freedom of expression, public-interest protection, innovation, industry sustainability, consumer rights, and national security considerations simultaneously.

Overall, while NCA regulations have strengthened the broadcasting sector, they have also placed considerable commercial pressure on media organizations in Ghana.

On another hand, we believe the bifurcated mandate of the NMC and NCA requires a strategic reform approach although Article 3(d) of the NCA Act establishes a cooperation between the two. The most fundamental reform required is the transfer of broadcast licensing authority from the NCA to the NMC with the NCA as a technical backbone for spectrum management. Giving the NMC licensing authority would **align its constitutional mandate with the operational tools** needed to fulfil it. Consolidating licensing and OTT oversight within a properly resourced and statutorily empowered NMC would bring Ghana's regulatory practice into alignment with its constitutional values, regional best practice, and the demands of a rapidly evolving digital media environment.

REGULATORY FRAGMENTATION: OTHER REGULATORS IN-THE-MIX

Ghana's broadcasting ecosystem is not only regulated by the two primary regulators, i.e. NCA and NMC but in other ways by other Regulatory bodies, like the Food and Drugs Authority, Ghana Standards Authority, Securities and Exchange Commission, Ghana Revenue Authority, GHAMRO, National Film Authority, Electoral Commission, Gaming Commission, and others creating a Regulatory Fragmentation. This occurs when such multiple bodies with overlapping or adjacent jurisdictions issue directives, guidelines, and requirements that affect the same regulated entity, in this case broadcasters, without adequate coordination mechanisms to ensure coherence, consistency, or proportionality.

Each individual regulatory requirement imposed on a broadcaster may appear reasonable in isolation, however, their cumulative effect on a broadcaster's operational capacity, financial resources, and management attention creates a compliance burden that is disproportionate to the regulatory benefit delivered by any individual requirement and potentially existential for smaller broadcasters operating on thin margins.

THE FUTURE

As Ghana enters the next phase of communications development, the future of broadcasting will increasingly be shaped by digital transformation, artificial intelligence, convergence, and changing audience behavior. The future broadcaster will no longer operate solely as a radio or television station. Broadcasting institutions are increasingly becoming integrated multimedia organizations operating across radio, television, websites, streaming platforms, podcasts, mobile applications, and social media ecosystems. Technological adaptability and innovation will therefore determine the long-term sustainability of broadcasting institutions.

At the same time, the future broadcasting landscape must prioritize stronger professional standards and public trust. There is growing concern about misinformation, sensationalism, unethical broadcasting practices, and declining credibility within sections of the media. The future communications environment

must therefore promote ethical journalism, fact-checking, investigative reporting, editorial accountability, development journalism, and public-interest programming.

The industry must also prepare for the growing influence of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. AI will increasingly shape content production, audience analytics, personalised content distribution, automated journalism, and deepfake technologies. Broadcasters and regulators must therefore prepare for the ethical, legal, and operational implications of AI within the communications industry.

Furthermore, Ghana's future communications ecosystem must prioritise inclusivity and equitable access. Future policy direction should focus on rural connectivity, affordable digital access, disability inclusion, youth participation, women's representation, local-language broadcasting, and underserved communities. The next phase of communications development must therefore not only expand technologically, but also deepen inclusion, accessibility, and national participation.

Thirty years after the establishment of the National Communications Authority, Ghana's broadcasting industry stands as one of the country's most important democratic and developmental institutions. The liberalisation of broadcasting transformed Ghana from a centralised state-controlled media environment into a vibrant and pluralistic communications ecosystem that supports democracy, accountability, innovation, public education, and national development.

Independent broadcasters have expanded media pluralism, deepened democratic participation, promoted development communication, and strengthened public access to information. At the same time, regulation has played a critical role in ensuring technical quality, industry growth, competition, and public-interest protection within the broadcasting ecosystem.

However, the future of broadcasting will increasingly be shaped by digital disruption, artificial intelligence, misinformation, platform convergence, economic sustainability pressures, and changing audience behavior. The next chapter of Ghana's communications industry must therefore be anchored on responsible regulation, innovation, professional standards, inclusivity, sustainability, and strategic collaboration between regulators, broadcasters, policymakers, and citizens.

Ultimately, the objective should not simply be to regulate broadcasting, but to build a resilient, credible, competitive, future-ready, and development-oriented communications ecosystem capable of supporting Ghana's democratic and digital future.

Thank you.