



# Ethiopian Media Council Strategic Plan

**2021-2026**

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## 1. Introduction

Media are regarded as the Fourth Estate of government for their implicit and explicit role in shaping and influencing political, economic, and social issues in a given country by wielding direct and indirect influence. To carry out this responsibility, the media should be free and independent from external influence whatsoever, among other conditions. At the same time, it takes media to be professional and self-governing. Ethiopia needs a strong media that can function as a fourth Estate. Because the country is in the midst of political transitions, the role of media becomes even more important. Strong media institutions play paramount role in democratization. The national election which is proposed to take place in the coming June requires media at its best so that the process and outcome of the election is democratic and peaceful. The enormous role media can contribute for the diplomatic endeavors of the country is also another area to be harnessed by having competent and professional journalists. One particular case here is the role media can play towards the realization of GERD. We are in a time where the world, Ethiopia included, is facing several manmade and natural disasters including covid-19 pandemic, environmental degradation, conflicts within and between countries, human trafficking and migration, just to mention some. The roles media can play to overcome these and related problems are enormous. Poverty reduction, education, tourism and culture are also other fertile grounds that need a great work of journalism and communication.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) recognizes the freedom of the press and freedom of access to government information. Oftentimes, there have been complaints from the journalistic circles that there have been government interferences which have hindered media from enjoying the freedom stipulated in the constitution. On particular legal framework often critiqued is proclamation 590/2008: the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation. While it is acclaimed for improved legal conditions compared to the previous media law, many see it as a tool for government interference in the functions of the media. Another proclamation Broadcasting Service Proclamation 533/2007 which was issued by the government to license and regulate Radio and Television Stations and to provide for the licensing of Television sets. The proclamation included some clauses to protect the malpractice of journalism; however, it is seen by many as an instrument to dwarf the freedom of expression and freedom of the media as well. Another proclamation is the infamous anti-terrorism proclamation 652/2009 which is seen by many

observers as proclamation to limit and penalize media functions in the country. It should also be noted here that journalists and media have been blamed for lack of professionalism in their jobs.

For the media to play the roles stipulated in the constitution, they have to be free and independent in the first place. To this end, media should be free from external interference. Establishing an internal system for check and balance of journalistic efforts in a country requires the establishment of professional associations, media, and press councils and an ombudsman, where complaints and conflicts are addressed. At the same time, through continuous training and professional development efforts, journalists' professional capacities should be built. It is based on this rationale that the Ethiopian Media Council was established. As one of the self-regulatory mechanisms, the media council is responsible for adjudicating complaints and upholding freedom of expression through ensuring compliance with ethics and reviewing the freedom of the media in general. The council envisages a free, independent, and thriving media operating to the highest professional and ethical standard to safeguard and promote professional and ethical standards within the Ethiopian mass media. To this end, there is a need to design a strategic plan that is both achievable and realistic.

### **1.1 Procedures Followed to Design the Strategic Plan**

This strategic plan is designed based on the following procedures. The team tasked with preparing the strategic plan first discussed with the members of EMC leadership and discussed what the strategic plan should look like, the procedures to be followed and what is expected. Following this, the team accessed important documents including codes of conduct, the guidelines of EMC, and the list and contact address of member media houses and associations. The first step to designing the plan was to assess and analyze different documents pertinent to the mission and goals of EMC. As such, the team carefully analyzed the research papers, articles, and reports about media council and journalistic practices in the country. Similarly, laws and proclamations governing the practice were also analyzed. These and the documents from EMC (the guidelines and the code of conduct) were carefully studied. The team has also reviewed media and press councils of other countries from the African continent and abroad.

Secondly, preliminary interviews with member media houses and professional associations were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with randomly selected representatives from professional associations, Radio, Radio and TV, TV, and Print media houses. In the case of

Radio and TV organizations and Print media, interviewees from private and public media houses were selected.

The documents, research works and interviews were used to conduct the SWOT analysis. Based on the preliminary findings of the document assessment and the preliminary interviews, the draft strategic plan was composed. The draft document was then sent to the stakeholders of EMC for comments and feedback.

After addressing the comments and incorporating the feedback, the team then conducted Focus Group Discussion was to enrich and finalize the draft strategic plan. Representatives from member media houses and professional associations were invited to take part in the discussion. The team presented the document to the participants and invited them to provide comments and feedback. Major questions regarding the goals and roles of EMC and its mission, mandate, and strategies were forwarded to the participants. The participants of the FGD engaged in deeper deliberations and discussion on the issues persistent to EMC and the strategic plan and forwarded synthesized points to the team. They were also invited to provide written feedback on the draft document. Using the input from the FGD and the feedback from the FGD participants, EMC leadership, and stakeholders like UNESCO, this final version of the five years strategic plan has been designed.

## **1.2 The mission of EMC**

Whereas EMC has been established for an undefined period of time as per the civil society proclamation number 621/2001, it commits to shoulder the duties stipulated in the proclamation. As recognized in the Ethiopian constitution, by establishing a strong and independent media council, enabling for the accountability and freedom of the media by ensuring that its members maintain the highest professional ethical standards in accordance with the Media Council's Code of Conduct.

## **1.3 The Goals of EMC**

As stipulated in the guidelines, the council envisages achieving the following goals.

- Working to ensure mass media enjoy the freedom guaranteed by the Ethiopian constitution and ensuring that the codes of practice are respected in due process.

- Independently investigating complaints concerning media houses' information gathering, news presentation ,and advertising
- Carrying out capacity building activities to encourage and develop professional standards and journalism ethics
- Establishing fair and open dispute resolution and arbitration mechanisms when complaints are raised against media houses
- Serving as one channel of communication between the citizens and media houses
- Working towards improving the public view towards the council
- Encouraging editors, journalists, and journalism schools to understand and comment on ways to improve the council's goals, regulations, and functions

#### 1.4 SWOT Analysis

The assessment of the current internal and external environments of the EMC was done using the SWOT Analysis. A SWOT Analysis (also known as TOWS Matrix) is a strategic planning technique used to help an organization identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to the implementation and exercise of its agendas. It is intended to specify the objectives of the organization and identify the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving those objectives. In a typical analysis, identifying strengths helps overcome threats and identifying opportunities helps overcome weaknesses. The resulting knowledge is often used to devise a defensive strategy to overcome threats and weaknesses. The SWOT Analysis for EMC revealed the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>
A strong political will for the growth of the media industry	Media services have taken off and are playing an important role as sources of information
Strong desire for media outlets, particularly for regional news	Strong desire for regional media outlets, particularly to cover regional news
Sound infrastructure in place to support local media	The political reform and will to support media from the government
	Technology offers fresh avenues for the media industry to reinvent itself

<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p>Saturated media market offering limited growth prospects</p> <p>Internal friction among members and leadership</p> <p>Lack of democratic exercise culture within the council</p> <p>Gap in understanding its role and responsibility among stakeholders</p> <p>Media houses and publications are influenced by ethnic politics</p> <p>Social media taking over the mainstream media</p> <p>Representation( Inclusiveness) the councils credibility</p> <p>Lack of awareness creation on its roles and responsibilities</p> <p>Limited commitment among members</p> <p>Lack of engagement in media literacy activities</p>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <p>Danger of financial sustainability issue weakening the media industry</p> <p>Decline in the use of print media services could have a negative impact on its growth</p> <p>Growth in the use of social media could adversely affect the mainstream media</p> <p>Absence of self governing ethical media</p>
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### 1.5 Principles of Ethiopian Media Council (EMC)

The general assembly is the highest authority of the council. As such, setting guidelines, codes of conduct and other guidelines and amending, rejecting, or replacing other guidelines that emanate from the working guideline are the mandate of the general assembly.

## **1.6 Mandates of EMC**

The jurisdiction of the power of the council is limited to only permanent/regular member mass media namely, print and broadcast media and their online contents.

## **2 Key Strategic Areas (2021-2026)**

This Five years strategic plan has the following key priority areas.

### **2.1 Institutional capacity and image**

#### **2.1.1 Strengthen institutional capacity**

Several specific activities will be carried out to strengthen institutional capacity of EMC. Priority will be given to promoting the mission, vision, code of conduct and goals of EMC among all media houses in the country. Increasing the number of regular, honorable and associate members is vital. The members' size in terms of number and diversity is a crucial area of work. More than just securing a mere membership, the council envisages working with all towards achieving its mission and goals stipulated in the introductory part of this document.

#### **2.1.2 Improve institutional visibility**

By facilitating different promotional and awareness creation activities and forums, the strategic plan sets out to improve institutional visibility. Since EMC believes its acceptance among the stakeholders and the public at large is crucial for it to achieve its goal, increasing its visibility through integrated efforts of public relations and promotion is vital area of work in the coming five years.

#### **2.1.3 Improve members' professional capacity**

EMC believes its success also emanates from the strength of its members. Hence, improving members' professional capacity is a key area of work. By soliciting the members professional capacity development projects and conducting research works, training, internship, scholarship, and exchange programs for young journalists, EMC seeks to improve the professional capacity of practitioners, thereby contributing to the betterment of capacity level of media houses which in turn would contribute to the institutional capacity of EMC in one way or another.

#### **2.1.4 Improve organizational structure of EMC**

The internal arrangement and working practices and procedures of an institution determine its effectiveness. However, EMC's current working arrangement and both human resources and financing have limitations. Improving the human resource in their capacity and number will definitely contribute to achieving the aspired goals. What is more, the revision of the organizational structure also opens up potential ways of income generation. Thus, EMC has to revise the secretariat's workforce and management approaches.

## **2.2 Policy and legal framework**

### **2.2.1 Improving legal framework that affects journalistic practice**

Improving the legal framework that affects journalistic practice is central to the mission of EMC. Reviewing the normative issues in the country that affect journalistic endeavors is an important area. EMC will be tasked with working towards creating conditions to promote the freedom and rights of journalists, including safeguarding them. In other words, EMC will be committed to working towards the development of copyright and Plagiarism acts as well as developing accreditation and certification parameters.

### **2.2.2 Develop mediation and dispute resolution framework**

Developing guidelines and procedures for resolution and arbitration of disputes that may arise among different member media houses or journalists, thereby ensuring the establishment of effective complaint handling mechanisms are central to the mission of the council.

### **2.2.3 Establish Media monitoring and evaluation framework**

To regulate and curtail harmful practices that might potentially or actually affect the safety of citizens, EMC will be tasked with formulating clear guidelines and procedures to monitor and evaluate media outlets' contents. At the same time, EMC will monitor audience confidence on media products including news, entertainment and advertisement and do the needful as per the codes of conduct.

## **2.3 Media development**

### **2.3.1 Improve access to information**

Another key priority issue for EMC in the coming five years is to work towards media development by improving access to information by running media literacy campaign, and supporting the democratization of public information.

### **2.3.2 Enhance media development**

EMC will work to enhance media development in the country by taking an active part in the development and implementation of appropriate curricula, training approaches, guidelines, standards, and tools for training, education, and practice of journalism in the country.

#### **Improving media freedom**

By establishing and maintaining mutual collaboration and engagement to develop and strengthen the media market, thereby improving competition and protecting media users' interest, EMC works towards improving freedom of the media. EMC will relentlessly work to uphold public expectations for high standards of the profession. By conducting awareness creation forums at different levels, EMC will work towards helping the media sector to adapt to the growing demands of society. As indicated in the introduction, it is the vision of EMC to see journalistic enjoy professional freedom.

### 3 Strategic Issues, Objectives, Activities and Indicators

No.	Strategic issues	objectives	Activities	indicators
1.	Institutional capacity and image	Strengthen institutional capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of regular members who share the goal</li> <li>• Diversify members in the form of honourable and associate members.</li> <li>• Secure and promote network and partnership</li> <li>• Develop income-generating mechanism</li> <li>• Increase participation of members in the development and amendment of mandates and guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of member media houses</li> <li>• Instituted honourable and associate membership guideline</li> <li>• Established Professionals network</li> <li>• Support gained from Donors and associations</li> <li>• Participation in national, regional, and international media dialogue forums</li> <li>• Created exchange opportunities</li> </ul>
		Improve institutional visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct strong public relationship</li> <li>• Engage members in promoting and creating awareness about the institution to the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted workshops and seminars</li> <li>• Increased visibility and trust in the community</li> </ul>
		Improve members professional capacity	<p>solicit members professional capacity development projects</p> <p>Conduct research and training</p> <p>Organize internship, exchange and scholarship programs for young practitioners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided professional capacities to members</li> <li>• Conducted Researches</li> <li>• Provided hand on trainings</li> <li>• Created internship, experience sharing activities and scholarship opportunities</li> </ul>
		Improve organizational structure of EMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the organizational structure of EMC stipulated in the establishment document</li> <li>• Building financial capacity through members' contribution, trainings, accreditation fees and fundraising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including regional states in the structure</li> <li>• Optimal staff numbers per the structure</li> <li>• Give opportunities for qualified and competent professionals</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilling infrastructure</li> <li>• Establishing performance evaluation and monitoring parameters</li> <li>• Attract and retain qualified and competent staff</li> <li>• Conduction of M &amp; E of the activities of EMC every six months</li> <li>• Provide continuous professional development training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including public relations and communication organ</li> <li>• The right(competent) person for the right position</li> <li>• Financial independence</li> <li>• Facilitated and suitable working environment for the workforce of the council</li> <li>• Motivated staff</li> </ul>
2.	Policy and legal framework	Improving legal framework that affects journalistic practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the legal frameworks and aware members</li> <li>• Contribute to the development and review of legal frameworks that affect journalistic practices</li> <li>• Create conditions for the freedom and rights of journalists including safeguarding them.</li> <li>• Support development of Copy right and plagiarism acts.</li> <li>• Support the accreditation and certification parameter development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased members awareness of the legal frameworks</li> <li>• Took part in legal framework development and review</li> <li>• developed journalistic practice safeguarding manual</li> <li>• developed copyright and plagiarism manual</li> <li>• Developed regulatory frameworks to accredit and certify journalists and media houses</li> <li>• Developed criteria for accreditation and certification of journalists</li> </ul>
		Develop mediation and dispute resolution framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop guidelines and procedures for resolution and arbitration of disputes</li> <li>• develop and ensure effective complaint handling mechanisms</li> <li>• Promote fair and just dispute resolution</li> <li>• Expand access to mediation and dispute resolutions</li> <li>• Ensure enforcement of the arbitrators verdicts</li> <li>• Strengthen the institutional capacity of the arbitration Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approved guidelines and procedures for dispute resolution and arbitrations</li> <li>• created secure complaint handling mechanism</li> <li>• transparent and educative dispute resolutions</li> <li>• developed trust on the neutrality of the arbitrators</li> <li>• support the capacity development of the</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate dialog and mediation processes between stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>arbitrators</li> <li>increased dialogue among stakeholders including the government</li> </ul>
		Establish Media monitoring and evaluation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>design clear guidelines and procedures to monitor and evaluate media outlets' content</li> <li>Develop frameworks to regulate and curtail harmful practices that might affect the safety of citizens</li> <li>Monitor audience confidence on media products including news, entertainment and advertisement.</li> <li>Support and facilitate media monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed Guidelines and procedures of media monitoring and evaluations</li> <li>Developed regulatory framework on media good practice</li> <li>Ensured audience confidences</li> <li>Rate medias using agreed upon guidelines and tools</li> </ul>
3.	Media development	Improve access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop media literacy campaign</li> <li>Support the democratization of public information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaged members in planned media literacy campaign</li> <li>Partnered with the public to ensure the right to information</li> </ul>

		<p>Enhance media development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participate in the development and implementation of appropriate curricula, training approaches and tools in the sector;</li> <li>• Develop and set standards, thematic reporting guidelines.</li> <li>• Develop, promote and ensure implementation of media accreditation guidelines</li> <li>• Enhance professionalism of independent content generators and social media users</li> <li>• Develop feedback mechanism on monitoring and evaluation outcome for improvement</li> <li>• Create a working relationship with different stakeholders including members of the council, journalists, people from the academic circles, regulators and government</li> <li>• Enhance the skills of the practitioners at the different levels through continuous professional development trainings</li> <li>• Create (send and host) exchange opportunities for journalist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participations in media related curriculum reviews and training programs</li> <li>• Developed reporting guidelines</li> <li>• Participate in media accreditations</li> <li>• Training and support offered for independent content developers</li> <li>• Provided feedback for improvement for monitored and evaluated medias</li> <li>• Created working relationship with the academia, regulators and the government</li> <li>• Provided continuous professional developments</li> <li>• Developed guideline for social media actors</li> <li>• Number of journalists sent and hosted on exchange programs</li> </ul>
		<p>Improving media freedom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and maintain mutual collaboration and engagement to develop and strengthen the media market, improve competition and protect media users interest</li> <li>• Uphold public expectation for high standards of the profession</li> <li>• Help the media sector to adapt to the growing demands of the society</li> <li>• Hold awareness creation forums with the citizens to help them understand the roles of media for the social, political and economic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed code of conduct</li> <li>• Conducted media awareness campaigns</li> <li>• Developed public trust</li> <li>• Practitioners respect for code of conduct and professionalism</li> <li>• Provided media freedom and public education</li> <li>• Increased access for Information</li> <li>• Increased journalist protections</li> <li>• Developed standards for</li> </ul>

			<p>lives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• aware practitioners of the legal frameworks governing the profession</li><li>• strengthen media freedom through advocacy and public education</li><li>• facilitate self regulation through development of code of conduct</li><li>• Enhance journalists protection</li></ul>	<p>advertisement for improved competition and audience protections</p>
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#### 4 Timeline for Strategic priorities

No.	Strategic activities	years
1	Strengthen institutional capacity	2021-22
2	Improve organizational structure of EMC	2021-22
3	Improve institutional visibility	2021-22
4	Improve members professional capacity	2022-23
5	Improve legal framework that affects journalistic practice	2022
6	Develop mediation and dispute resolution framework	2022
7	Establish Media monitoring and evaluation framework	2022-23
8	Improve access to information	2022
9	Enhance media development	2023-24
10	Improving media freedom	2023-2026

#### 5 Institutional Capacity

To achieve the institutional objectives and attract more members and partners, the Ethiopian Media Council is expected to address the following human resource and finance-related issues. Achieving the objectives outlined in this strategic plan and going according to the strategic priorities set, demands a skillful, dedicated, and professional workforce. Thus, EMC has to capacitate itself with professionals who can transform the strategies into reality. Since it is an institution established by members who have a common cause, and who strive to establish a strong and independent media context in the country, EMC requires having full-time staff members that can create and enhance a context where all members can benefit from. Thus the council has to:

- Improve the organizational structure of EMC stipulated in the establishment document by including regional media houses
- Has to develop an institutional structure having an executive head, research and development head, communication and organizational relations head, finance and administration head. Staff the council with dedicated professionals in media studies, institutional development and communication
- Create opportunities for internship where young and talented would be graduates can serve the Council and learn from the process

The secretariat office needs to consider at least but not limited to the following

A. Chief executive officer

- Manage the overall activities of the council
- Represent the council in all routines as per the delegation power given to by the Council head
- Develop annual plan and financial statements for the council
- Support and manage the research and development, communication and organizational development and finance and administration

B. Research and development head

- Develop capacity building programs and activities
- Work to secure additional financing to provide capacity building for stakeholders
- Partner with donors, academic institutions and civil service organizations

C. Communication and organizational development head

- Develop and implement communication and image building activities
- Represent the council on communication and visibility

D. Finance and Administration head

- Manage the offices finance and other resources
- Ensure the provision of all administrative services in accordance with the standards of quality, efficiency and transparency

Another area where the EMC has to address is to strengthen its financial capacity. Having a strong financial basis in place for a council being financed by its members in the Ethiopian context can be very difficult. On the other hand, getting support from potential partners and development agents might potentially challenge media freedom. However, there are possible ways of being financially competent by:

- Working with all members to dedicate a certain amount of their income as a social contribution
- Developing clear partnership agendas with organizations that have the interest to support the council, and

- Developing a capacity building trainings and accreditation where beneficiaries pay.

Thus, Council has to find creative ways of income generating without compromising its freedom and neutrality.

## **6 Prerequisites for the implementation of the Strategic Plan**

The Council must

- Develop budgeted activity yearly plan.
- Improve the human resource capacity for the Secretariat and the Council in terms of skills acquisition and development.
- Improve the physical resource capacity for the secretariat in terms of acquisition of appropriate equipment and office space.
- Improve the income generation capacity of the council to move towards achieving financial sustainability.
- Improve the technological capacity of the Council to enable it deliver its services efficiently and effectively; at least, it has to get internet connection.
- Improve the administration and personnel of the secretariat in the way it conducts its day to day activities.
- Engage all members in different activities so that all share responsibility.