

Media regulators and development partners from East Africa region have called for stronger regional cooperation to address challenges facing the media industry, safeguard press freedom and strengthen the sustainability of media enterprises in an increasingly digital environment.

These were among the key issues discussed during a regional retreat convened by the East African Press Councils (EAPC) in Arusha, Tanzania.

The meeting brought together representatives from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to assess the region's media landscape and review progress under the EAPC Strategic Plan 2024-2027, with support from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) Kenya.

The engagement provided a platform to examine media freedom, regulatory frameworks, technological transformation, media viability, content development and opportunities for cross-border collaboration. It also formed part of an evidence-based mid-term review of the EAPC Strategic Plan.

David Omwoyo, Chairperson of EAPC and CEO of the Media Council of Kenya, opened the session by highlighting the importance of institutional collaboration and strategic reflection in advancing media development.

"The retreat provides an important opportunity for regional institutions to take stock of progress, identify gaps in the implementation of the EAPC Strategic Plan, and agree on practical interventions to strengthen the media sector and the institutions that support its growth," Omwoyo noted.

Paulo Ekochu, Chairman of the Media Council of Uganda, emphasised the value of cooperation among media institutions in addressing shared challenges and advancing common priorities.

"There is an urgent need to build practical partnerships that can strengthen professional standards, support journalists and promote a more enabling media environment across the region," Ekochu said.

Ernest Sungura, Executive Director of the Media Council of Tanzania, reiterated that collective engagement among media institutions is essential to advancing the regional media agenda.

Judie Kaberia of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Kenya shone a spotlight on the role of partnerships in advancing media freedom, institutional development and regional cooperation.

“The Foundation’s support provides an important platform for bringing together regional stakeholders to examine shared challenges and develop recommendations informed by country-level evidence and collective experience,” Kaberia noted.

Victor Bwire, MCK’s Director of Media Training and Development, observed that coordinated regional action is imperative in responding to the rapidly changing media environment. He stressed the need for media institutions to strengthen cooperation, exchange knowledge and develop common approaches to challenges that transcend national borders, particularly those arising from technological change, digital content distribution and evolving regulatory practices.

Country presentations highlighted a media landscape undergoing significant transformation, with expanding digital platforms and new opportunities for innovation. They also underscored persistent challenges related to media viability, press freedom, regulation and institutional sustainability.

The country papers brought out the basis for identifying opportunities to harmonise professional standards, strengthen regulatory cooperation and promote responsible journalism across traditional and digital media environments.

Participants examined how differences in national regulatory frameworks, media ownership structures, technological capacity and economic conditions affect the ability of media organisations to fulfil their public-interest mandate.

A key component of the retreat was engagement with the East Africa Law Society on potential collaboration between media institutions and the legal fraternity.

Discussions explored the possibility of a Memorandum of Understanding to support joint advocacy, strengthen engagement with regional justice mechanisms, and promote dialogue on media freedom, digital governance and the rule of law.

The proposed partnership is intended to create opportunities for coordinated action on issues affecting journalists and media organisations, including the protection of fundamental freedoms and appropriate responses to emerging challenges in the digital information environment.

The retreat also explored possible joint accreditation arrangements for journalists covering the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON 2027). The proposal seeks to examine how regional institutions could collaborate to facilitate professional coverage of major sporting events while supporting appropriate accreditation processes.