

# The silent press and the silent siege

By Segun Adediran

Within the next several years, the invisible architecture of Nigeria's democracy faces a quiet but existential threat. For decades, the local press served as the bedrock of our national identity, but today, that foundation is being hollowed out by unregulated global digital gatekeepers. Led by Lady Maiden Alex-Ibru, the President of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria, the Press is opening up. On the platform of the Nigerian Press Organization, NPO, which represents the collective weight of the NPAN, the Nigeria Guild of Editors, Broadcasting Organizations of Nigeria, Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Guild of Corporate Online Publishers, it broke the "ungolden" silence. Last Tuesday, it issued a stark warning on a major threat: Nigeria's social cohesion, national security, and democratic governance are being surreptitiously surrendered to algorithms controlled from outside our borders. It gladdens my heart. Silently, the Big Tech firms, under the guise of technological innovation, have been killing the global media one bit at a time. But it appears the Nigerian press can no longer bear the pains of where their "shoe pinches" like their peers elsewhere. They have rightly identified the specific point where troubles, difficulties and stresses for their survival originate: Big Tech's thieving technology. They have also highlighted a more insidious vulnerability. In an era where foreign-coded narratives can dictate public discourse and relegate professional journalism to the margins, the "information sovereignty" of the republic is no longer a theoretical concern. It is an active crisis. And the message is crystal clear: A new commitment to establishing terms of engagement with these global platforms will be needed to ensure that Nigeria's national conversation is not quietly outsourced to opaque commercial interests beyond our control. The Nigerian government should be worried. As the world pivots toward a digital-first existence, the structural pillars of the Nigerian Fourth Estate are being dismantled by global forces that owe no allegiance to our national borders, our social cohesion, or our democratic survival.

Yet, amid this mounting disruption, our policy response remains dangerously dormant. While the Presidency and the National Assembly grapple with immediate crises of security and currency, a more insidious vulnerability is being coded into our daily lives: the surrender of Nigeria's public square to unregulated, transnational digital gatekeepers. There is no precedent for the complexity of the current digital era. The era of the "town crier" or the monopolistic state broadcaster has given way to a fragmented reality where foreign-owned algorithms determine what a citizen in Kano, Lagos, or Enugu sees, believes, or ignores. They, "the big boys", smile at the banks while our news organizations gnash their teeth. Today, Nigeria's total advertising spend is estimated to be nearing \$1 billion, yet a staggering \$340 million of that is being swallowed by digital platforms—primarily Search and Social Media. By 2025, Social Media alone is projected to command \$131 million in Nigerian ad spend, while online video and banner ads—territories dominated by Google and Meta—will siphon off another \$269 million. Recent reporting from Business Day (February 2026) highlights that the digital ad sector is projected to grow to \$148 million in social media alone by the end of this year. Meta's total 2024 revenue was approximately \$134 billion, and Alphabet (Google) exceeded \$307 billion.

This is not merely a market disruption; it is a strategic decapitation of the local press. While these global behemoths reported 2024 revenues as high as \$164.5 billion globally, their Nigerian operations operate in a financial "black box," extracting local

capital while returning almost zero reinvestment into the newsrooms that provide the very content their users discuss. When professional journalism collapses, the vacuum is not filled by silence; it is filled by chaos. The other answer lies in the global history of democratic resilience. When nations in the 20th century realized that certain industries—telecommunications, banking, energy—were vital to national security, they created robust frameworks to ensure they remained indigenous and accountable. Journalism is no different. It is strategic civic infrastructure, as essential to the health of the republic as the judiciary. Yet, we are currently treating it as a disposable commodity in a lopsided global auction where foreign entities pay billions in taxes to the Federal Government—N3.85 trillion in the first nine months of 2024 alone—yet provide no direct compensation to the industry whose intellectual property they monetize. The Nigerian press does not come to the government seeking a handout. We come with a warning: a democracy of Nigeria's scale cannot afford to outsource its information sovereignty. And this is not just Nigeria's trouble; it's a global movement. Leading democracies have already concluded that non-intervention is a recipe for the institutional collapse of their trusted news industries. The European Union has moved to curb gatekeeper dominance; Australia has implemented a bargaining framework that forces tech giants to remunerate local newsrooms; and Canada has enacted legislation to secure long-term funding for domestic journalism. These nations recognized a fundamental truth: press freedom requires economic viability. A journalist who cannot afford to eat cannot afford to be brave. A newsroom that cannot fund a legal team cannot challenge corruption.

Today, the Nigerian safety net for truth is frayed. The good news is that it can be re-stitched. As a first step, the Federal Government should empower the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) and the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) to establish a mandatory bargaining code. This would ensure that when global platforms monetize Nigerian news content, a fair portion of that value is reinvested back into the newsrooms that produced it. Finally, we must insist on transparency in algorithmic distribution, ensuring that local, credible news is not buried under a mountain of sensationalist, offshore-driven "engagement." Democracy rarely prevents the emergence of new technologies, but it must serve as a check on their excesses. Citizens need to exert their influence now, demanding that their representatives protect the integrity of the news they consume. We should not allow the next generation of Nigerians to inherit a world where they cannot distinguish between a verified fact and a manufactured lie, or where their national discourse is merely a data point for a foreign corporation's profit margin. The decisions made in the hallowed chambers of the National Assembly and the offices of the Presidency over the next two years will define the digital sovereignty of this nation. We can either act to secure a professional, independent, and viable press, or we can watch as the "last major treaty" between the truth and the public is allowed to expire. This is the time when silence is not golden.

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# Media Rights Agenda Trains Journalists, CSOs On FOI Act

To properly arm journalists to report accurately and authoritatively, Media Rights Agenda (MRA) has organized a two-day Freedom of Information (FOI) training workshop for journalists and Civil Society Organizations' (CSOs) representatives drawn from states in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones. The workshop, which took place at Bridge Waters Hotel, Enugu, on 11-12 February, 2026 was supported by funding from a group, Luminare. It aimed at strengthening the capacity of participants to effectively utilize the FOI Act as a tool for promoting transparency, demanding accountability, as well as enhancing investigative journalism and evidence-based advocacy in the two zones and at the federal level. The workshop featured expert presentations, practical sessions, group discussions, and experience-sharing exercises on the use of the FOI Act as a tool for investigative reporting, civic engagement and monitoring democratic governance. It also deliberated extensively on the state of implementation of the FOI Act since its enactment in the last 15 years; implementation challenges faced by the Law; and the opportunities it presents for journalism practice in the country as well as to other sectors of the society to advance their interests. In a communique issued at the end of the training, read by Executive Director, MRA, Mr. Edetaen Ojo, the body stated that participants noted that access to information is a fundamental human right which all Nigerians should be able to exercise and enjoy as well as an essential pillar of transparency, accountability, and democratic governance. They recognized the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 as an important legal framework through which ordinary citizens, journalists, and civil society actors should be able to exercise their right to information by demanding and obtaining information from public institutions and other entities to which the Act applies.

They expressed concern that nearly 15 years after its enactment, compliance with the FOI Act remains weak, inconsistent, and often obstructive as a deep-seated culture of secrecy remains prevalent within public institutions at Federal and State levels, including in States in the South-East and South-South, with many such institutions continuing to conceal information, delay responses to requests for information, or deny requests outright without any lawful or legitimate justification. The participants also observed that although the Supreme Court had settled the issue of the applicability of the FOI Act to all tiers of government, many state governments, including in the South East and South South geo-political zones, continue to resist its implementation, including by relying on the untenable excuse of not having domesticated the Act as a pretext for denying requests for information. They acknowledged the critical role of journalists and CSOs in promoting open governance and holding public institutions accountable, but conceded that many journalists and CSO actors lack the awareness as well as sufficient technical and legal knowledge required to effectively deploy the Act, with the result that they are unable to exercise the rights bestowed on them by the Act or enjoy its full benefits. The participants noted that media ownership in Nigeria continues to exert significant negative influence over journalism practice, including in the usage of the FOI Act by constraining the ability of media professionals to operate and report freely and independently as a large number of media outlets are owned by governments, political actors, individuals with strong partisan affiliations, or business interests closely aligned with government authorities. The situation, they stressed, creates a minefield for journalists who sometimes face subtle or overt pressure to shape their coverage in ways that protect the owner's political, business or social interests. The participating journalists and CSO representatives committed to making more active use of the FOI Act to seek and obtain information, records and official data, among others, for investigative reporting, public interest advocacy and other initiatives.

They agreed to engage in monitoring and documenting patterns of compliance and non-compliance by public institutions and make

such findings publicly available through the issuance of periodic reports and journalistic coverage. They, however, pledged to engage state and local governments in the different States in the zones through advocacy, dialogue, and public enlightenment campaigns to improve their awareness of their duties under the FOI Act as well as their compliance with those obligations and responsiveness to FOI requests. They agreed to share resources among themselves, provide peer support to one another where needed, collaborate in enhancing the impact of their individual and joint efforts aimed at engendering transparency in government, and jointly challenge efforts by public institutions to obstruct the free flow of information. The participants called for the provision of continuous training and mentorship for journalists and CSOs on the effective use of the FOI Act to improve their knowledge of the Law and build their capacity to utilize it for both journalistic activities and public interest advocacy. Furthermore, they urged MRA and other CSOs to continue to provide technical support, legal and litigation assistance and other forms of support to journalists to enhance their skills and ensure more effective utilization of the FOI Act in media practice. The participants called on Federal, State, and Local Governments to ensure the full implementation of the FOI Act and fulfilment of their duties and obligations under the Act, including the establishment of functional FOI desks, proactive disclosure of the various types of information which the Law requires public institutions to proactively publish, the diligent submission of their annual implementation reports and the training of their officials on the public's right of access to information held by them and for the effective implementation of the Act. They urged public institutions at all levels of government to adopt a culture of openness rather than secrecy and respond to FOI requests within the timelines stipulated in the Law as these would improve efficiency in the respective public institutions, bring about greater public trust in government, and significantly contribute to the delivery of democracy dividends to Nigerians. The participants enjoined the Judiciary to expedite the hearing and determination of FOI-related cases as part of efforts to strengthen enforcement mechanisms provided in the Law as well as to ensure effective access to justice and accountability.

They urged media houses and CSOs to mainstream the use of the FOI Act into their routine work and advocacy strategies and strive to remain in the forefront of public enlightenment and sensitization. The participants also called on journalists and civil society actors to strengthen their use of the FOI Act by strategically leveraging technology at every stage of the process, from making requests for information to publishing the information obtained, as technology can help them to draft and make better requests, track compliance more easily, analyze information speedily, collaborate more effectively, share findings widely and ultimately strengthen accountability. They called on the media community in Nigeria to take urgent measures to promote greater transparency in media ownership; insulate professional journalists and editors from ownership influence and interference in editorial matters and processes; and strengthen regulatory safeguards for editorial independence in order to engender a free, independent and more professional media environment in the country. In conclusion, participants expressed appreciation to the organizers and their partners for providing a platform to enable them refresh and sharpen their skills. They reaffirmed their conviction that the FOI Act remains a potent tool for fighting corruption and ensuring that the resources of the South-East and South-South States are used for the benefit of the people. They therefore pledged to improve their usage of the FOI Act in their work while also striving to ensure its effective implementation.