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BURKINA FASO

# B

Burkina Faso gained independence in 1960. After years of political unrest that started in the middle of that decade, the adoption of the Fourth Republic Constitution on June 2, 1991 brought some stability to the country, and guaranteed the freedom of the press. A more open environment followed for the media, and soon private radio stations proliferated.

The current media landscape in Burkina Faso is shaped heavily by the government's 1993 adoption of an information code—criticized widely by the media for granting the government considerable power over the media sector. Specifically, the Conseil Supérieur de la Communication<sup>1</sup> (CSC), made up largely of government-appointed members, plays a strong role as the main media regulatory agency. Despite that criticism, the code helped in the founding of many private radio stations, newspapers, and television channels.

However, the December 1998 murder of Norbert Zongo, a well-known journalist and the director of the weekly *L'Indépendant*, remains a stain that Burkina Faso's journalists and citizens alike have not forgotten. An independent international committee implicated members of the presidential guard as suspects. But the judiciary—strongly suspected of obeying the orders of the political regime—dismissed the case for lack of evidence. The unresolved case continues to be a source of discontent.

This year's MSI describes several changes in the media. The media community cheered the 2009 signing of the long-awaited journalists' Collective Contract, and journalists received their first press cards. Radio continues to be the dominant medium, but it is beginning to embrace the use of the Internet in its operations, and growing citizen awareness of new media tools is awakening public interest in the news. ONATEL, Burkina Faso's telecommunications operator, established Internet access in the late 1990s, but for some time afterward, the Internet was essentially a luxury for the urban elite. Now, the growth of Internet cafés is helping to change that imbalance.<sup>2</sup> Although the government does not restrict Internet access, cost is still a prohibitive factor—along with Burkina Faso's high illiteracy rate.

Burkina Faso's overall MSI score for 2009 reflects a steady increase since the study began in 2006–2007. This positive evolution is consistent across the scores of the different objectives, reflecting clear-cut improvement of Burkina Faso's media situation. No objective scored beneath the near-sustainability range. Objective 5, concerning the supporting institutions, returned the highest score—boosted by the strong showing of supporting institutions in helping to draft, negotiate, and pass the Collective Contract.

<sup>1</sup> Higher Communication Council

<sup>2</sup> The Panos Institute: West Africa Radio and ICT Connectivity and Use in West Africa; October, 2008: p. 44.

# BURKINA FASO AT A GLANCE

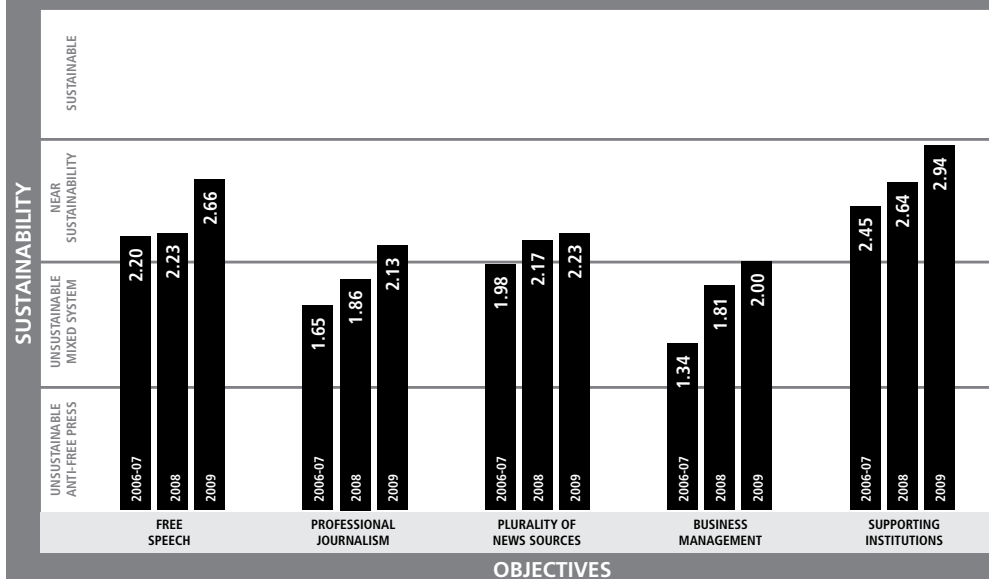
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 15,746,232 (2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Ouagadougou
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Mossi 40%, other approximately 60% (includes Gurunsi, Senufo, Lobi, Bobo, Mande, and Fulani) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 50%, indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), native African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$8.036 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$1,170 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 21.8% (male 29.4%, female 15.2%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Blaise Compaore (since October 15, 1987)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**  
Print: 4 daily newspapers, 8 weekly publications, 17 newspapers in the national languages; Radio Stations: 12 public, 19 commercial, 23 community, 19 religious, 4 international; TV: 1 public, 3 private (CSC report 2006)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top daily newspapers: *Sidwaya* (state-run), *L'Observateur Paalga* (private), *Le Pays* (private), *L'Express du Faso* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** N/A
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 140,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BURKINA FASO



### Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

### Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

### Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

### Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.66

In general, the panelists assigned Objective 1 scores that reflect positive developments, with all indicators receiving scores within the near-sustainability range or higher, even if some problems linger. Most indicators scored within a half point of the overall objective score, although indicators 5 (legal independence of state broadcasting) and 6 (libel laws) lagged by slightly more than half a point.

Although the Burkinabè Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, and the information code states that journalists may carry out their work independently, these laws are full of contradictions and loopholes. According to Evariste Zongo, program coordinator of the Association des Éditeurs et Pubicateurs des Journaux en Langues Nationales,<sup>3</sup> “There is a gap between legal provisions and practice. The application of laws and their legal interpretations are insufficiently protective of journalists.” This situation remains the same as in the past, in the opinion of the panelists, since the law in question has not been revised yet.

Kassoum Kambou, a magistrate and member of the Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l’Homme et des Peuples<sup>4</sup> (MBDHP), agreed that the government is not supportive of journalists. “I believe that journalists do not enjoy enough

<sup>3</sup> Association of Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages

<sup>4</sup> Movement for Human and Peoples’ Rights in Burkina Faso

#### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

*Eric Sibiri Kam, chair of Ligue pour la Défense de la Liberté de la Presse, commented, “As long as it is up to a public authority to grant licenses in the particular context of our country, there will be suspicion.”*

legal protection in our country,” he said. “The relative lack of independence of the judicial system reinforces and makes this situation worse.”

The CSC is an agency created in 1995 to regulate communication and information in Burkina Faso. CSC grants frequencies for private and public radio stations and television channels. CSC has a board of 12 members, with four appointed by the president, three by the president of the National Assembly, one by the president of the Constitutional Council, and four by communication and broadcast professional associations. The president appoints the chair.

CSC’s independence continues to be a controversial subject. Some panelists said that they believe that CSC is structurally and politically dependent upon the authorities. Eric Sibiri Kam, chair of Ligue pour la Défense de la Liberté de la Presse,<sup>5</sup> commented, “As long as it is up to a public authority to grant licenses in the particular context of our country, there will be suspicion. Further, I am not well placed to say that the process is transparent, since people submit applications and some get the frequencies and others do not. As a citizen, I have no idea about the criteria that led to someone getting a license and someone else not getting it. I have seen people who were granted frequencies, and five years later, they were still not broadcasting. I wonder if the decisions were objective in those cases.”

One panelist was emphatic: “Most of the CSC members are appointed by high officials of the regime! Therefore, the choice of the appointees is more or less influenced by their political affinities.” Justin Coulibaly, journalist and secretary general of Syndicat Autonome des Travailleurs de l’Information et de la Culture<sup>6</sup> (SYNATIC), shared this viewpoint: “The CSC is not an independent agency. It is controlled by the government. At first, we did not work together; we denounced them.”

Kambou agreed, saying, “In the experience of the MBDHP, the independence of the agency is questionable. In addition, once an application is rejected, there is no possibility of

<sup>5</sup> Press Freedom Defense League

<sup>6</sup> Independent Union of Information and Culture Workers

*However, Kambou countered, "I believe that journalists are not persecuted in Burkina Faso; there are very few threats, and we do not know who makes them. I do not think such criminals are known but not prosecuted."*

appeal. And then there are so many restrictions... It is true that the MBDHP was finally granted the frequency, but the agreement protocol that was signed presented some rather curious clauses; for example, it is forbidden to comment on court decisions... which I find quite dangerous."

Others said that they consider CSC to be quite objective. According to Germain Nama, publication manager at *L'Événement*, "The license granting process involves the submission of a dossier. Several board members examine it just like we are doing now. This is an objective process, unless there are proven cases of political obstruction with respect to a particular candidate. One could say that granting licenses to the broadcast media is just, competitive, and apolitical."

Pierre Dabiré, secretary general of the Association des Journalistes du Burkina<sup>7</sup> (AJB), said that he believes the agency has evolved positively. "Before the creation of the CSC, the AJB had never been called upon to appoint representatives in such an institution. Now, it happened in 2008, 2009, and today the AJB even has two representatives in the CSC. I believe this is a step forward."

In the past couple of years, the government unveiled plans to improve the situation of press companies lacking a specific tax status in Burkina Faso. The measures are designed to facilitate the tax-free purchase of equipment. Media companies are still subject to taxes and mandatory social contributions, just like any other business enterprise, noted the panelists.

The panelists reported that a few journalists were threatened on the job in 2009, but said that the number is lower than in previous years and that the cases are isolated. According to Coulibaly, among the few cases reported in 2009, *Le Reporter* received death threats by email<sup>8</sup> and has filed complaints. In a published communiqué, AJB questioned the authorities about the death threats, but no legal consequences resulted.

Hervé Taoko, editor-in-chief of *Le Reporter*, noted that the case is not resolved. "Nothing happened, although there were details that could have allowed us to trace the message back to its origin and perhaps find its author," he

said. "Yahoo France responded to our requests, but said the judicial authorities in Burkina Faso were supposed to file an official request for explanations with them. The Burkina Faso police were also alerted but did nothing. So if we take this aspect into account, there really was no strong reaction to the threats made against a journalist." The panelists pointed out that a single case is enough to intimidate all journalists and compromise each one's sense of safety.

Hortense Tiéba, with Munyu Radio, described another case in which a camera and telephone were snatched from a journalist with the private television station Canal 3 in the middle of a news report. Others noted that a particular traditional leader from Ouahigouya constantly persecutes journalists, without consequences. Bakary Koné, with Gaoua Radio, said that provincial authorities put pressure on press correspondents, who are frequently not professionally trained, taking advantage of the correspondents' lack of awareness of their rights.

However, Kambou countered, "I believe that journalists are not persecuted in Burkina Faso; there are very few threats, and we do not know who makes them. I do not think such criminals are known but not prosecuted. In addition, even journalists may commit crimes without being prosecuted. I think journalists are even treated kindly."

Regarding restraints on the public media, Nama pointed out that in practice, "freedom is restricted if there is sensitive information—that is to say, potentially harmful for the government or other officials. The public media are cautious about political topics, and unfortunately, there are not enough open debates in the broadcast media."

Under Burkina Faso laws, libel is considered a criminal offense, and the burden of proof rests with the accused. However, the panelists reported that in 2008 and 2009, no legal action for libel was brought against Burkina Faso newspapers, even though CSC questioned media managers in several cases of professional ethics breaches.

The panelists pointed out that access to information continues to be difficult, despite the fact that twice the prime minister has ordered public officials to release information to the press. Dabiré said that "legal provisions are available, but insufficient—articles 48 and 49 of the information code provide access to information, albeit in a very brief fashion." The Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo<sup>9</sup> petitioned for this, he continued, "In 2009, the prime minister issued a memo inviting all the public agencies to release information to journalists. As far as we are concerned, even if our fight for the public's increased access to information is not yet won,

<sup>7</sup> Association of Journalists of Burkina Faso

<sup>8</sup> The editor-in-chief of *Le Reporter* received an email threat while investigating a case.

<sup>9</sup> Norbert Zongo National Press Center

it is a commendable start. Do all journalists have the same kind of access to information? My answer is 'yes.' There is no discrimination to the best of my knowledge. Are there rules blocking the access to information for some media? I am not aware of that." He added that he believes that independent journalists approach the issue of the access to information in an organized and coherent manner.

Kam had a more negative perspective. "I believe that the prime minister felt obligated to reissue that memo because it did not produce any effect the first time," he said. "So, from this point of view, I believe we have a problem with access to information. Also, our plea more or less relied upon the Ministry for the Promotion of Human Rights, with absolutely no results so far. And I think that when working in a ministry or other public agency, it is a tall order to obtain certain documents... and there is no law regulating access. I do not think that all journalists searching for information have equal opportunities, because sometimes the authorities favor the public media when they wish to release a particular piece of information."

Other panelists pointed to the creation of the Service d'Information du Gouvernement<sup>10</sup> (SIG), which provides news in the form of communiqués to all the media without restrictions and aims to facilitate journalists' access to information. The service also organizes meetings to discuss specific issues, and invites all journalists. Often, ministers show up at such press conferences next to the government's spokesperson. According to Franceline Oubda Naré, a journalist and member of CSC, "no case of censorship has ever been reported with respect to the questions asked by the journalists." She added, "For two years, I've noticed that efforts are being made, thanks to SIG, for journalists to have access to information. And I believe we are here to make this service work, and when we feel that there are issues that might be sensitive to the public and can create problems, we are the ones who grab the attention of those in charge and call for a press conference. As we invite the journalists to participate, we have never imposed any restrictions. We contact all the media outlets and try to inform each and every one of them so they can fully cover the event."

In Burkina Faso, most media outlets use the Internet and have unrestricted access to international news. The main difficulty is the cost. For example, many publications use news agency reports without quoting the agencies as sources, for fear they might have to pay for usage, panelists said.

The government places no restrictions on practicing journalism. "Anyone is free to become a journalist. There is so much freedom that literally anyone can end up working in

<sup>10</sup> Government Information Service

a newsroom," according to Kani Mountamou, editor-in-chief of *L'Express du Faso*, the only regional daily newspaper published in Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second-largest city.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.13

Generally, the panelists believe that the working conditions of Burkina Faso journalists are unfavorable, and must be addressed in order for professionalism to improve significantly. While most indicators scored close to the overall score, indicator 5 (pay levels of media professionals) lagged noticeably by about three-quarters of a point.

Kam argued, however, that reporting has improved. "Journalists are better trained; professional seminars as well as exchange meetings between specialized journalists are being organized," he said. The panelists credited several training initiatives in 2009 that helped to build up professional standards. Most of the training opportunities involve support or exchanges with international sponsors, but the Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo and the media development department of the Ministry of Communication have worked to improve reporting also.

Panelists noted also that in 2009, Burkinabè journalists once again earned national distinctions in the Ministry of Communication's Galian awards competition, celebrating excellence in journalism. At the international level, Viviane Tiendrébéogo, with the national television station, was awarded the CNN Multichoice African Journalist Award 2008

#### JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

##### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

*Nama commented, "Some journalists lack a sense of ethics and professionalism when dealing with politics and money."*

in the category "Francophone News Television." These are all signs of journalists' progress in work quality.

Although journalist associations, such as AJB, have drafted ethical standards, journalists do not always observe the guiding principles. As noted in last year's MSI, a frequent ethical lapse is the practice of accepting money or gifts for favorable coverage. Nama commented, "Some journalists lack a sense of ethics and professionalism when dealing with politics and money." She cited a 2008 CSC report that called for increased professional training in ethics, in response to numerous breaches.

Self-censorship continues to be a problem as well.

"Self-censorship is constantly present in the press, simply due to the journalists' contacts with political or economic milieus," according to Mountamou. "This situation is much more widespread in the provinces, where journalists, politicians, and economic operators rub elbows with each other every day... most of these journalists try to uphold the ethical standards as best they can."

The media—particularly print—do tackle sensitive issues, according to Réseau National de Lutte Contre la Corruption (RENLAC).<sup>11</sup> According to a RENLAC report covering 2007 and 2008, "Our network, the press, and other 'supervisory and control agencies' have unveiled many cases of corruption and embezzlement in the governmental and para-governmental services." RENLAC has acknowledged with appreciation the media's contributions to the fight against corruption, pointing out that "the press reported on the activities of governmental and non-governmental institutions fighting corruption. The press has also presented facts and practices—either as a witness or victim." RENLAC showed also that the number of journalists and publications registered for the Anti-Corruption Fight Award competition is constantly going up: 32 articles in 2006 versus 55 proposed by seven publications in 2007.

Scores for the indicator concerning salaries did not change significantly from 2008; again this year, it was the lowest-scoring indicator for Objective 2. As noted in the 2008 MSI, many private commercial, religious, and associative radio stations offer meager salaries—or none at all—and that prevents journalists from meeting the required professional quality standards. Salaries have not increased, despite the Collective Contract finally signed between the press owners

<sup>11</sup> National Network for the Fight Against Corruption

and journalists in 2009. Media Foundation West Africa's Burkina Faso report for 2009 confirmed the link between poor payment and sliding ethical standards, tempting journalists to accept pay for favorable coverage. "Salaries, which were rather pathetic, were beefed up with allowances from 'billed articles.'"<sup>12</sup>

However, Pierre Kaboré, manager of Edifice McCann Erikson Communication Agency, commented that the private daily newspapers manage to provide regular salaries—small salaries, but in accordance to the domestic average.

All the panelists agreed that broadcasters air more entertainment programs than newscasts. A poll about the media, conducted by Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo,<sup>13</sup> confirmed this imbalance. "People watch television mostly for entertainment. So the television screen is not a major news source for citizens. This could be explained by the scarceness of the news offered on television, and the fact that the few newscasts are in French. The population watches television to have fun... Given the increasing difficulties of daily life, the population drowns their sorrows in syrupy soap operas." According to those polled, 30 percent watch television mainly to have fun; general information on current events came in second at 13 percent.

Regarding the state of technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news, Mountamou said, "We must also recognize that most newsrooms and radio studios are quite ill equipped. Equipment is often obsolete and does not always meet the requirements of quality media production." Nama said that the lack of equipment and material resources leads to third-rate productions. A 2008 CSC report, issued following a country-wide inspection, substantiates these panelists' viewpoints, stating, "...radio stations have obsolete, analog equipment, not adapted for the digital era."

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.23

The individual indicator scores for this objective clustered close to the overall objective score, although indicator 2 (citizen access to media) stood out with a score three-quarters of a point higher. Largely, the panelists said that Burkinabè media offer a plurality of sources for news, providing citizens with objective and reliable information.

<sup>12</sup> "Burkina Faso-2009 General Overview." Media Foundation West Africa; July 28, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> "Results of a poll about the media in the four main cities of Burkina Faso: Ouagadougou, Koudougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, and Ouahigouya," Norbert Zongo National Press Center, April 2009.

Mountamou said, “In Burkina Faso, there are multiple news sources. There are four daily newspapers and some 20 weekly publications, plus about 100 commercial, community, and religious radio stations. The main problem is related to the financial means: Very few people in Burkina Faso can afford to regularly buy the four daily publications to compare news perspectives.”

Access to the Internet is unrestricted, and the foreign press is available to anyone who can afford it. Kaboré noted, “In Burkina Faso, there is free access to international news sources such as RFI, BBC, and VOA. International publications such as *Jeune Afrique* and *Africa International* are also available without restrictions. The Internet is also an important news source.”

Regarding the degree to which state or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum and serve the public interest, some panelists claimed that the public or state-run media are increasingly independent, and include all the country’s social and political sensibilities—although so far, the government enjoys privileged coverage by the public outlets. According to most of the panelists, since the first MSI study in 2006/2007, the public press in Burkina Faso has worked hard to reflect the diversity of opinions—although it faces some resistance here and there. This assessment is validated by the results of a 2009 Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo study on media influence. The study quoted prominent academics in Burkina Faso praising the state-run daily *Sidwaya* for its efforts to adapt to the new democratic environment, and give space to anti-government opinions. However, Bénéwendé Sankara, a member of parliament and

*Kam said emphatically, “The public media are not independent from the government. By this I mean that they are not open to the entire spectrum of opinions and alternative comments. When you speak with journalists from the public media, some of them tell you they cannot do their job because there are things they are not allowed to do.”*

official leader of the opposition, participated in the study and said, “For the public media, the influence of the government is so great that they look more like information channels of governmental actions.” He added that “we can say that the press does a good job denouncing scandals in which top-ranking politicians are often involved.”

Taoko provided a slightly different perspective. He said that “state-run press outlets are public service media, so they belong to the Burkina Faso people. That means they live off of our taxes. The legislation governing television, for example, includes the notion of public service and the law of the three thirds. Thus, on really particular and important issues, the executive power, the opposition, and the civil society organizations should all be given the opportunity to express an opinion. In practice, however, we realize that the executive power has more ample airtime available than the other organizations. It is true that theoretically, during electoral campaigns, the CSC assigns airtime to each party in a regulated and balanced fashion, but the executive power takes most of the radio or television news bulletins, while the others are somewhat pushed aside.”

Kam said emphatically, “The public media are not independent from the government. By this I mean that they are not open to the entire spectrum of opinions and alternative comments. When you speak with journalists from the public media, some of them tell you they cannot do their job because there are things they are not allowed to do. Some others simply defend their editorial policy because they believe it is the right thing. So they mistake the public interest for the government’s interest. But these are two different things, and from this point of view, I say they are not apolitical.”

As an example, he added, “In 2008 the Center [National de Presse Norbert Zongo] organized, just like every year, the commemoration of the December 13 assassination of the journalist Norbert Zongo. National Television refused to air

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.



*Mountamou said, "Media ownership? The public has no specific idea, by any measure, about who owns the various media outlets. All we know is that every media outlet has a publication manager and meets the requirements for news publication and distribution."*

the video clip promoting the event—which included a panel on the Norbert Zongo case followed by film projections. The center wanted to pay for the clip to be aired, but National Television refused—not for the first time. That must have been the fourth or fifth time that Norbert Zongo-related video clips were not broadcast. This can be indicative of the actual political influence on the media.”

Regarding whether politicians appoint public media managers, Kam said that the answer is yes, and the civil servants that ministers appoint owe the government their loyalty. “When you listen to the national radio station or watch the national television channel, you know who runs the country... news is biased,” he said. “There is a problem when the public is interested in a subject, and the television channel will not address it... The managers of the state-run media outlets believe that addressing such issues is tantamount to criticizing the government or the ruling party.”

Bakary Koné described an example of political interference at the regional level as well. “Even Radio Gaoua, which is a regional state-run radio, there was a problem with news about the MBDHP. When we received a press release from MBDHP, the station chief said he contacted his superiors, and apparently he could not run the story. Self-censorship is also a common practice, given that most of our bosses are appointed.”

Burkina Faso has no independent national press agency to collect and distribute news. The only one existing is the state-run agency linked to the *Sidwaya* publishing house, which has correspondents in the country's 45 provinces. However, international agencies such as AFP, the Pan-African News Agency (Panapress), Reuters, and the Francophone News Agency (SYFIA) do have correspondents in Burkina Faso.

Usually, private radio stations produce original shows, although some programs may be the result of cooperation with other partners, such as foreign radio stations or media-supporting organizations (Panos Institute or SYFIA, for example). In its 2008 report, CSC pointed out that “the

amount of domestic media products continues to be much lower than foreign products.”

Burkina Faso has two independent written press groups: Les Éditions Le Pays, which publishes several titles (including the daily *Le Pays*, the weekly *L'Évasion*, and the monthly *Votre Santé*) and owns a radio station broadcasting from a regional capital; and the Observateur Paalga group, which publishes the eponymous daily newspapers and the weekly *L'Observateur Dimanche*. In addition to *Sidwaya*, the state-run daily newspaper, Les Éditions Sidwaya publishes several other titles appearing more or less regularly (*Sidwaya Plus*, *Carrefour Africain*, *Sidwaya Magazine*, *Sidwaya Sports*, and *Sidwaya B.D.*).

As noted in last year's MSI, media ownership is opaque largely. Mountamou said, “Media ownership? The public has no specific idea, by any measure, about who owns the various media outlets. All we know is that every media outlet has a publication manager and meets the requirements for news publication and distribution.” Kam added, “We know who the publication managers are, but sometimes we do not know who the real sponsor [owner] is.”

Scores for the indicator regarding minority coverage dipped a little further this year. As noted in last year's MSI, the perception is that the media neglects coverage of minority groups, and as a result, the populace has very little awareness of them—although the country has around 60 ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup>

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

### **Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.00**

Except for indicator 6 (market research) and indicator 7 (broadcast ratings and circulation monitoring), the Objective 4 indicators scored in the near-sustainability range and overall showed modest improvement compared to last year's score of 1.81.

According to Nama, “The independent media are relatively well managed, but most of them lack a business plan and survive on a day-to-day basis.” However, she said, “There are many weaknesses that hold back Burkina Faso media outlets: the underdeveloped advertising sector; the uneven distribution of advertising; the lack of data on the life, functioning, and impact of the media.”

Panelists in addition to Nama said that media houses could be more comfortable financially with improved management.

<sup>14</sup> “Burkina Faso-2009 General Overview.” Media Foundation West Africa; July 28, 2010.

Mountamou said, “It is hard to say that media outlets are ill managed, since they do manage to survive: that means they are well-managed. However, we must point out that most of them just barely survive... they are far from generating the substantial profits that could result in their economic independence.” Pierre Kaboré noted, “There are well-managed press companies, but they are very rare.” As an example, he cited the handful of private dailies that have managed to provide relatively decent salaries for their journalists. Kam said, “In comparison to other, obviously profitable media, many others just limp along.”

CSC confirmed the panelists’ viewpoint on the frailty of the private press companies in its latest published report. The report states, “The functioning of the private written press is satisfactory. However most of them still face financial problems related to the economic precariousness of the press companies.”

The situation of the state-run media—public institutions with relatively independent management—has not changed. Their revenues go directly into the public treasury, and often, state outlets have trouble paying their operational charges.

Regarding sources of income for the media, Mountamou said, “For most media, advertising is the main revenue source. Unfortunately, it is very unevenly distributed in the capital versus the provinces—which affects us in Bobo-Dioulasso. The publicists, communication agencies, and other advertisers never see far beyond Ouagadougou—so much so that the regional media are often forgotten.” He added that this is true even when the government (still one of the largest advertisers) supplies the advertising.

**INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.**

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:**

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

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Additional panelists pointed out the disparities within the advertising market. Nama commented, “The advertising sector in Burkina Faso is underdeveloped. The advertising allotted to the media is ridiculous—and most of it goes to three publications and two television channels.” Firmin Gouba, a professor in the Department of Journalism at the University of Ouagadougou, explained, “When we talk about advertising, we are dealing with the business world. Advertising only works in consumer societies. This is indeed why, in a city like Abidjan or Dakar, the salaries generated by advertising are higher than what we have here. Since there are no consumers in Gaoua, advertisers will not spend resources to advertise in Gaoua.” The panelists also noted that advertising often influences editorial policy.

As noted in last year’s MSI, many advertising companies are actually branches; they depend much more on international groups. Burkina Faso has more than 40 advertising agencies, but how many are truly engaged in supporting an advertising market is unclear.

The Burkinabè government offers subsidies to private newspapers—without influencing content, according to the panelists. Nama emphasized, “This subsidy does not lead to the loss of journalistic independence. The recipient media are responsible and work together for the distribution of this financial aid.”

The government’s annual aid to the press increased from XOF 150 million (\$338,100) in 2007 granted to 100 media to some XOF 200 million (\$450, 775) in 2009 granted to 59 radio stations and newspapers. The subsidies for individual outlets did not vary greatly between the highest amount (XOF 3,643,105, or \$8,200) and the lowest amount (XOF 1,907,128, or \$4,300).

As reported in last year’s MSI, Burkinabè media outlets conduct very little market research or audience measurement, beyond some call-in shows. While the panelists were not aware of any studies rating different media outlets within a given sector, for its April 2009 report, Centre National de

Presse Norbert Zongo commissioned an impact and rating research study on the Burkina Faso media that compared the popularity of various media sectors. According to the findings, which stemmed from polls in Burkina Faso's four main cities (Ouagadougou, Koudougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, and Ouahigouya), about 90 percent of respondents get their news mainly from the radio. Television comes in second, at 87 percent, while only 39 percent of the respondents claimed that they get their news from the written press.

Burkina Faso does not have independent institutions publishing statistical data on newspaper print runs or circulation. According to Nama, "There is no independent agency that measures the ratings, and despite the legal obligation to publish print runs, the print media never does so."

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.94

Objective 5 received the highest score of the five objectives in this year's MSI, reflecting the panelists' beliefs that the Burkinabè journalists can rely on strong professional organizations and unions, and that the civil society is supportive of the media. All indicators scored within a quarter-point of the overall objective score.

These predominantly positive scores can be explained also by the signing of the journalists' Collective Contract in 2009. The subsequent issuance of the first press cards marks the end of the negotiations in which media professionals were backed by their base organizations—media groups such as AJB,

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

SYNATIC, and Société des Éditeurs de la Presse<sup>15</sup> (SEP) as well as more general civil society organizations.

Burkina Faso has several general or specialized associations and media groups; the major ones are SEP, Union Nationale de l'Audiovisuel libre du Faso<sup>16</sup> (UNALFA) of Burkina Faso, l'Association des Radios communautaires,<sup>17</sup> Association des Médias Communautaires<sup>18</sup>, Réseau des Radios et Revues Rurales<sup>19</sup>, Réseau Informel des Journalistes.<sup>20</sup>

As noted in last year's MSI, many of these associations lobby actively for improved rights to access public information and to decriminalize press offenses, and protest regularly against violations of freedom of the press. Justin Coulibaly noted that some of these associations played prominent roles in the work to pass the Collective Contract. "It took us a year to draft and pass the text of the Collective Contract, with the help of UNALFA and SEP. That was a major effort," he said.

Of course, these organizations have their critics. Nama pointed out, "There is no shortage of actions in support of the media, but how effective are they? Many associations do not go beyond theoretical support or a press statement, which has limited benefits."

Burkina Faso's universities offer degree-level programs and professional training in journalism, and panelists have noted improvements in the quality of academic programs. The University of Ouagadougou's Department of Journalism offers graduate programs and a certificate course. The Vocational Training Center of Information, run by the Ministry of Information, also offers journalism courses. Students study journalism commonly in other African countries (Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire), and in Europe.

The Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo organized training sessions in 2009 for radio and newspaper journalists and has developed a three-year journalism training program. Additionally, journalists take short-term training classes to help develop their skills, sometimes in the form of exchanges with European donors. A French city supported trainings in journalistic techniques for media professionals in Bobo-Dioulasso. Mountamou explained: "The Regional Press Union organizes trainings as well. The city of Bobo-Dioulasso set up a partnership with the Rhône-Alpes region of France, which made this training possible. Journalists from France came here in 2009 for a 10-day training with local journalists, and they will return in 2010. This is a three-year partnership

<sup>15</sup> Society of Publishers Press

<sup>16</sup> National Union of Independent Broadcast Media

<sup>17</sup> Community Radio Association

<sup>18</sup> Community Media Association

<sup>19</sup> Rural Radio Stations and Publications Network

<sup>20</sup> Informal Journalists' Network

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aimed at organizing regular training sessions for journalists of Bobo-Dioulasso.”

The Ministry of Communication, through its media development department, has organized other training sessions for the media in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.

Pierre T. Dabiré had a less positive view of training opportunities for Burkinabè journalists. “We must also point out that no formal in-house training program has been developed. Trainings become available strictly dependent upon situations, financings, and sponsors. A newspaper may wish to train its journalists, but lack the resources, so one must wait until a sponsor decides to offer training in a given field and then rush for it. This is not a good situation. Every press outlet should offer training programs.”

Burkina Faso is still without a national distribution service. Each newspaper outlet distributes through its own sales network and is concentrated in the capital.

## List of Panel Participants

**Hervé Taoko**, editor-in-chief, *Le Reporter*, Ouagadougou

**Hortense Zida**, journalist, *Editions Sidwaya*, Ouagadougou

**Hortense Tieba**, journalist, Radio Munyu, Banfora

**Bakari Koné**, journalist, Gaoua Radio, Poni province

**Kani Moutamou**, editor-in-chief, *L'Express du Faso*, Bobo Dioulasso

**Germain Nama**, publication manager, *L'Événement*, Ouagadougou

**Kassoum Kambou**, magistrate; member of the Burkinabè Movement for Human Rights and People, Ouagadougou

**Eric Sibiri Kam**, chair, Press Freedom Defense League, Ouagadougou

**Firmin Gouba**, chief, Department of Journalism and Communication of the University of Ouagadougou, Ouagadougou

**Pierre Dabiré**, secretary general, Association of Journalists, Ouagadougou

**Justin Coulibaly**, journalist; secretary general, Independent Union of Information and Culture Workers, Ouagadougou

**Franceline Oubda Naré**, journalist; member, High Council for Communication, Ouagadougou

**Evariste Zongo**, chair, Association of Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages, Ouagadougou

**Pierre Kaboré**, director, Edifice McCann Erikson Communication Agency, Ouagadougou

## Moderator and Author

**Abdoulaye Diallo**, coordinator, Norbert Zongo Press Center, Ouagadougou

## Assistant Moderator

**Sié Offi Some**, consultant, Norbert Zongo Press Center, Ouagadougou