

**MEDIA**

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**INDEX**

**2004**



**IREX**

LIDIA ISAMOVA, DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR WAR AND PEACE REPORTING (IWPR) PROJECT IN TAJIKISTAN, NOTED: "UNFORTUNATELY, ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT LAWS OF TAJIKISTAN, JOURNALISTS HAVE MORE DUTIES THAN RIGHTS. THEY ALSO HAVE A LOT OF RESTRICTIONS."

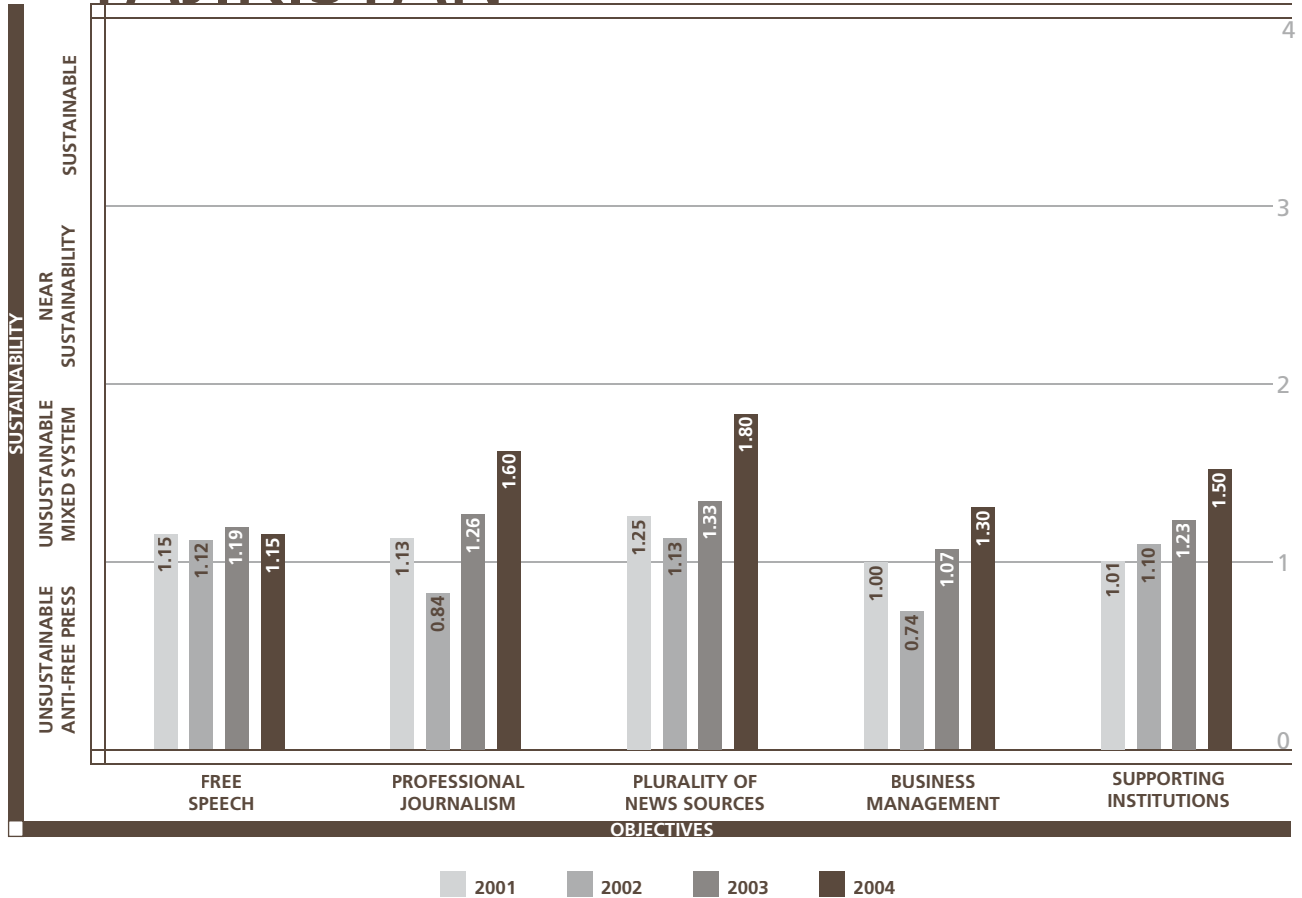


**F**or several years, independent newspapers, television channels, and radio stations appeared in Tajikistan, and journalists' reporting became more courageous. However, in 2004 the situation changed significantly for the worse. The government increased its pressure on the media and controlled the private press more openly. Two major factors contributed to this: insufficiencies in legislation regulating the operation of media outlets and the withholding of information at many levels of public institutions that became increasingly ubiquitous even though it is banned by the Constitution. Journalists explain this increased government control of the media as preparation for the parliamentary elections held early in 2005.

Social and economic hardships also slowed the development of media in the country. The lack of financing made survival unrealistic for many independent outlets, only a few of which were able to draw in advertising income. The advertising market itself is underdeveloped due to a shortage of advertising professionals, little trust in the products advertised, and an agrarian economy with relatively few industries. In addition, many companies export their products and do not see any need to advertise within Tajikistan. Based on the poor purchasing power of the people, newspapers and magazines in Tajikistan are seldom distributed outside urban areas. Although Internet cafés are opening in urban areas, the cost puts them out of reach for many city residents. For the most part, rural people do not have any opportunity for access at all. According to estimates by members of the 2004 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel, as few as 11,000 of 6 million Tajikistanis use the Internet.

# MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

## TAJIKISTAN



**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.

Laws related to media in Tajikistan are out of date, and they are routinely violated by the civil servants who are charged with overseeing them, the MSI panelists said. For example, in advance of elections, the government of Tajikistan did its best to restrict journalists' access to important public information. Self-censorship, common in Tajikistan in the years of civil war during the 1990s, again became prevalent. Low salaries pushed journalists to write made-to-order articles or forced them to leave the profession for other careers. Reporting in Tajikistan has not yet met international standards, but the MSI panelists said that some representatives of the media, particularly those working with international organizations and as well as some information agencies, were making progress in this regard.

Almost all printing presses are in the hands of the government, and both the state and a few private examples are often under government order or pressure not to publish some independent newspapers. In addition, they can periodically and arbitrarily refuse printing services. Electronic media, the most accessible means for distributing information in Tajikistan, also face serious problems. Among the most sensitive issues for broadcasters are procuring licenses, poorly developed professional skills, the drastic need to upgrade technical facilities, and government interference in editorial policies.

Access to information is a difficult hurdle for journalists. Compared with 2003, access to important information about government activity that should be available to citizens has become even more restricted. This followed the May 2004 introduction of a new protocol on Information Security by President Anomaly Rakhmonov. In the document, which was promulgated secretly, the ministries and state agencies increased their list of prohibitions on material that can be accessed. According to MSI panelists, journalists can be held responsible for articles that violate the prohibitions even though the protocol's content is unknown.

The media overall offers an abundance of music and entertainment programs, but there is an acute shortage of analytical programs devoted to the country's political, economic, and social concerns. There are few opportunities to improve the technical or financial standing of the media, or to improve the skills of journalists, managers, and other media-industry professionals. Compared with 2003, the media-distribution system has not improved. In many areas of the country, there is an information vacuum that has not been resolved.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.15 / 4.00**

The 2004 MSI panelists were concerned about the deteriorating situation regarding free speech and access to information. They said the laws on media and other statutes purportedly offering legal rights and fair regulation were often simply declarations with no force in practice. In the lead-up to the early 2005 elections, the government increased pressure on media, limiting the ability of independent print and broadcast outlets to provide quality coverage. State-run media continued to have special privileges compared with independent outlets, especially in regard to acquiring licenses. They also had more opportunities to receive important public information.

Current legislation is insufficient in guaranteeing and regulating the professional media sector, and hinders the establishment of independent media in Tajikistan, the panelists concluded. The Law on Press and Other Mass Media was passed by the parliament

**Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.**

**FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:**

- > Legal/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 the offended party 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.

in 1990, followed by the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting in 1996, and the Information Law and the Law on Printing Matters. However, the MSI panelists viewed these statutes as out of tune with democratic trends and international standards. Lidia Isamova, director of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) project in Tajikistan, noted: "Unfortunately, according to the current laws of Tajikistan, journalists have more duties than rights. They also have a lot of restrictions."

Newspapers opened during the period of July to December 2004 but were quickly closed. Newspapers such as *Ruzi Nav*, *Olamu Odam*, *Nerui Suhan*, and *Najob*, some based in the capital Dushanbe and

***Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the Pamir Mass Media Center, said: "The government is afraid to issue any licenses for new media on the eve of the elections."***

others in the regions, have not published for periods during the year because of investigations and prosecutions by various authorities, particularly the tax inspectors. But MSI panelists also

said it was noteworthy that community leaders and university groups have not arranged public protests or campaigns to protect these newspapers.

Recently the procedures for issuing broadcast licenses became much tighter and laborious, and the process ground to a virtual halt during 2004. Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the Pamir Mass Media Center, said: "The government is afraid to issue any licenses for new media on the eve of the elections." Radio stations in Isfara, Khujand, and Khatlon oblast were promised licenses by the State Committee of Tajikistan for Television and Radio Broadcasting—but only after the elections. The State Committee is a government body including only one journalist; this individual was not delegated by the media but rather appointed by government authorities. In the view of the MSI panel, this has resulted in unequal treatment of state and independent broadcasting companies. For example, panelists said, Russkoye Radio received a license in three days, whereas the independent Asia Plus has been waiting for two years for a television license and three years in the case of their radio-station application. In these cases, the authorities are using different standards for issuing or denying licenses.

Issuing licenses does not guarantee use of the broadcasting channels, however. As Rustam Buriyev,

director of Mavji Ozod TV, said: "A licensee can be required to share one channel between two television stations. One station will broadcast on even days and the other one on odd days. This happened in the Vose rayon of Khatlon oblast with the first channel, the Mavji Ozod TV station, and the Batir TV station."

The only positive feedback on licensing was that the annual cost, \$800, has spread over three years.

Television programs have also come under licensing requirements prior to production, said Masur Abdulloyev, training coordinator for the international media-support organization Internews. "Recently programs for broadcasting have been subjected to licensing (by the Committee of Tajikistan for Television and Radio Broadcasting). In this way, the government now has the capacity to control and censor the content of our radio and television programs. Therefore, producers of radio and television programs are under pressure."

Taxation for the media is equal to other commercial entities, although almost all the panelists agreed that the current tax code creates a real burden for media outlets. An amendment to the tax code, recently introduced by a presidential initiative, removes some tax burden from newspapers, but this has not satisfied the industry because the exemption applies only to relatively minor taxes. MSI panelists said the state tax agencies could be used by the government as a tool for harassing media outlets. Some also expressed the view that the tax authorities do not pressure media because a resolution can always be reached through the use of bribes.

During the civil war years of 1992 through 1997, media workers were beaten and abused. Today, they are threatened and subjected to harassment instead, but this has been sufficient to drive some from the profession. Investigative reporters are particularly vulnerable. In July 2004, Radjaba Mirzo, editor of the independent newspaper *Ruzi Nav*, was attacked by a man carrying a crowbar as he returned to work, an attack the MSI panelists said was an attempt to silence him. He suffered trauma to the skull but survived. Mavluda Sultonzoda, a journalist at the *Nerui Suhan* newspaper, was hounded by the government press after she wrote an article about the president and his staff. In the August 2004 article, the journalist simply questioned the president's income. Although the article did not condemn the president directly, Sultonzoda still lost her job and her husband was fired from his position as an assistant to the first deputy prime minister.

Not a single Tajik official who has offended a journalist in any way has been punished. Only a few journalists whose rights were violated or abused actually brought

their case to the courts because many feel that the process is useless. However, Tukhva Akhmadova, a correspondent at the independent weekly *Charkhi Gardun* and staff member at the Gamkhori Press Center, was able to relate an unusual case from 2004: "A journalist at the city television station in Kurgan-Tyube won a case in the court related to her firing from her job. In six months she was rehabilitated, and she was paid all the necessary compensation."

There is no legal difference in access-to-information rights for state and independent media. However, the situation is different in practice, with the state media having much better access to government officials and materials. Sometimes foreign media also do better than local non-state outlets in obtaining information. In late 2004, the president issued a decree giving the national news agency Khovar exclusive distribution rights for official information. The president's new Information Security protocol of July 2004 contains a list of prohibited and permitted topics, including data related to the extraction of precious stones, silver, and aluminum, as well as information on suicide cases. Journalists voiced concern that oil and natural gas might be added to the list. However, the details of the Information Security rules have not been distributed to journalists. Lidia Isamova, director of the IWPR office in Tajikistan, said: "This is discrimination against journalists. According to this concept, any newspaper can be sued and punished by the law. The authorities have simply created another lash to suppress us."

Restricted access affects the quality of the content. Indeed, most panelists believed that media content is based more on rumors rather than on facts. To get information, journalists normally have individually paid sources. Some informal alliances occur when public journalists share news with colleagues from private media outlets.

Many newspapers, including independent outlets, are pressured by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party of Tajikistan to publish what amounts to publicity material about the party. The ruling political party appoints the editors-in-chief of the state media.

Defamation cases were very rare in Tajikistan until recently. However, three court cases were filed against newspapers during 2004: *Vecherny Dushanbe* was sued by the deputy prosecutor of Dushanbe, *Odamu Olam* by the management of the national railway agency, and *Tajikistan* by the Ministry of Defense. Judges supported the government authorities in all three trials, with penalties ranging up to \$2,000. Corruption is endemic in the Tajik court system, panelists agreed, but

the lack of professionalism also makes media vulnerable to suits. Lidia Isamova, director of the IWPR office in Tajikistan, said: "Journalists at the aforementioned newspapers did not comply with some legal norms in the preparation of their articles, which then resulted in these trials. Or they did not provide at least two viewpoints and expert comments that would comply with international reporting standards. As a result, the articles appear to be libelous."

Access to international news and information has improved because of the Internet. There are four Internet providers, and if three years ago there was only one Internet café in Dushanbe, there now are about 50. However, access to the Web is still too expensive for many media professionals. International agencies operating in Tajikistan have been helpful in supplying Internet access for local journalists.

However, media in other areas of the country have limited access because of technical constraints such as sporadic power outages and poor telephone connections.

Entry into the journalism profession is free in Tajikistan. In addition, all those who work at any media outlet can freely call themselves "journalists," and there is no licensing.

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## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.60 / 4.00

MSI panel members agreed that journalism in Tajikistan does not meet international professional standards for a range of reasons. Too much information is subjective.

***“Some independent journalists and staff of international information agencies and publications comply with international standards of journalism,” said Rustam Buriyev.***

A code of conduct for journalists does not exist, and as a result, journalists violate ethical norms. The political situation surrounding the upcoming elections has led to increased self-censorship.

In some extreme cases, sensitive topics have been banned. Low salaries for media employees often force professionals either to change jobs, or to write made-to-order articles for politicians or businessmen. For these reasons, as well as poor technical facilities, many media professionals cannot produce and distribute high-quality news programs. There is an acute shortage of news

programs. There is a shortage of trained journalists in every oblast, and a lack of specialized coverage.

According to the panelists, reporting is not always fair, objective, or well-sourced. Therefore, articles are subjective and become an issue for the courts, as in the cases brought against *Vecherny Dushanbe*, *Odamu Olam*, and *Tajikistane*. Mamadat Bakhtiyorov, executive secretary of *Paemi Rushon* newspaper, said, “Reports and other media content are basically one-sided. The opinions of a wide range of people are not used.”

Media content is subjective and lacking in balance because of the restricted access to information and the low professional skills of the journalists. “Some independent journalists and staff of international information agencies and publications comply with international standards of journalism,” said Rustam Buriyev, director of *Mavji Ozod* newspaper.

A few editorial offices have established some internal codes of conduct, but there is no widely accepted ethical standard in Tajikistan, and panelists said journalists often provide editors-in-chief a cut of the fee they receive for writing articles that amount to public relations for the source.

Self-censorship has become a deeply rooted practice. “At this point, this is one of the ways to survive,” said Lidia Isamova, director of the IWPR office in Tajikistan. Journalists are afraid of the authorities, the pressure that can be brought by prominent people, the risk of losing their jobs, and the potential of being condemned in the government press. For their part, owners and managers of media holdings fear that printing-press companies will refuse to publish their newspapers at any time.

Editors and journalists know the taboo topics: the president, the parliament, security bodies, narcotics trade and abuse, border issues, suicide, the oligarchs, and more. Certain restrictions apply when covering official issues and topics related to national security. As a rule, important events taking place in the country are more objectively and more rapidly covered by the international media. Many independent and local media reprint official information from sources such as foreign information agencies, including Russian media.

Masrur Abdulloyev, training coordinator at Internews in Tajikistan, noted: “Pay levels of journalists in Tajikistan are very low, especially at the government press.” Other panelists agreed. In many cases, journalists are attracted by higher wages at international outlets or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Salaries at government outlets may be \$5 to \$12 a month, while

### 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).



at private outlets, salaries range from \$100 to \$300 per month. Salaries generally are somewhat higher at broadcast outlets. However, many journalists work at several jobs at the same time to increase their income.

Entertainment and news programming are not balanced. The daily newscasts on national television make up no more than 5 percent of the entire broadcasting schedule. The municipal television channels Poitakht and Somoniyon broadcast more entertainment programs and commercials. "In this situation there is a huge need for objective news, which is insufficient now," said Rano Bobojanova, an independent journalist and staff member at the Center for Gender Studies NGO. Lidia Isamova, director of IWPR in Tajikistan, recalled a major breakdown in the capital's sewer system during spring 2004: "This event was not covered by television for the whole day, and people did not know that they were drinking dirty water. Often there is no news on major events like when the water or natural-gas supply is cut off."

The dominance of entertainment programming results in part because outlets want to gain financial benefits and increase their broadcasting time by attracting more commercials. On the other hand, a shortage of news programming results from insufficient technical facilities and human resources. "The production of news is quite expensive. Poor technical facilities, a lack of telephone lines, a shortage of journalists, and transportation issues do not allow for the production of relevant news," said Kurbon Alamshoev, director of Pamir Mass Media Center.

The technical facilities and equipment at many regional radio stations leave much to be desired. Not all media outlets have enough computers, mobile phones, and modern recording equipment. Media also lack fax machines necessary to transmit information as well as the proper editing equipment. All these factors impede the gathering, production, and distribution of news. "In Gorno-Badakhshan they use equipment from the 1960s," said Kurbon Alamshoev. Nevertheless, some improvements are evident throughout the country. Thanks to technical support from international donors, 20 independent television and radio stations have received up-to-date equipment.

Journalism in Tajikistan has suffered from low-quality niche reporting. This is due to a shortage of creative personnel, a lack of professional training, and little opportunity for specialization. Panelists noted that this hurts the quality of the content. "A rare exception is the state oblast television station, which has specialization, and every journalist does his or her job," said Saidumron Saidov, journalist and chairman of the

Association of Professional Journalists in Sogd Oblast. International agencies such as Cimera, IWPR, IREX, and others conduct workshops contributing to the gradual development of niche reporting, mainly on social issues, at the local level.

Investigative reporting, however, is largely precluded by the many pressures on the media, as well as the lack of financial resources to support sustained reporting.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.80 / 4.00

There is a plurality of news sources in Tajikistan through newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet. Citizens have open access to local and international media, especially those who have satellite television and access to the Internet. At the same time, neither state nor independent media reflect the broad spectrum of political views in the country. Often news coverage is biased, especially when it is related to internal political issues. Some media in Tajikistan use information agencies, but independent television and radio stations produce few news programs, and these

#### 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.

often lack professionalism. On the rare occasions when issues of social concern are reported, this coverage stirs up considerable public interest. Media owners frequently influence the coverage in their outlets.

In Tajikistan, not everyone has equal access to the media available, and the problem is particularly acute for those living in rural and more remote areas. Only an estimated one-third of Tajikistanis can afford to buy local print media. "People with minimal salaries

**"People with minimal salaries of 5 somoni per month (\$1.60) cannot afford to buy newspapers at a price that is equal to a loaf of bread," said Lidia Isamova.**

of 5 somoni per month (\$1.60) cannot afford to buy newspapers at a price that is equal to a loaf of bread," said Lidia Isamova, director of IWPR in Tajikistan. "Pensioners and rural people

found a solution:

They buy one newspaper for everyone." This year, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initiated posting newspapers on special boards set in public places around Dushanbe and Khujand, and these have become very popular.

The main source of information for rural citizens is television and radio, but even these sources can be limited due to an unreliable power supply. Internet access is a luxury for most Tajikistanis and is available in about a dozen cities. Rustam Buriev, director of Mavdji Ozod TV, also noted that "the authorities have direct and hidden ways of limiting access to information." For two years, there has been no access in Tajikistan to the opposition newspaper *Charogi Ruz* website and to the news site *Times Ru*, according to panelists.

Even the access to media common among urban populations does not equate to a wide range of information being available. The only widely accessible national television channel—which covers only 80 percent of the population—gives news priority to coverage of the activities of the president and his Cabinet. Local channels focus mostly on the activities of local authorities. Other electronic and state print media reflect the interests of government authorities. Most independent media also report on issues related to the president at the behest of the authorities. Due to the absence of daily newspapers, all of the print news in Tajikistan is dated when it becomes available.

Panelists believe that access to international media is not restricted. There is a wide selection of Russian

newspapers, although not everyone can afford them. For example, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* costs roughly \$1, but that price is equal to two-thirds of the minimum salary. Local television often re-broadcasts Russian channels and programming. Many people in the cities have satellite dishes that allow them to watch foreign television channels such as Euronews. Even though 84 percent of all Tajikistanis live below the poverty line, nearly every city house has a satellite dish. Radio stations broadcast Voice of America. Cable television is gradually reaching more villages and currently carries about a dozen stations, but so far very few can afford it.

Most panelists agreed that state media do not provide alternative viewpoints or include expert opinions when preparing news programs. Kurbon Alamshoev, director of the Pamir Mass Media Center, said, "Print media and radio and television programs do not reflect a broad spectrum of political views. State media reflect only the opinions of the government and the Peoples Democratic Party, leaving no space for the opposition." Most political parties by law have the right to publish newspapers, but not all can. The Peoples Democratic Party has *Tribuna Naroda*, and the Islamic Revival Party runs *Nadjot*.

Only a few independent media and international media projects prepare news according to international standards. As panelists reported, public media are not interested in producing educational and cultural programs. This void is often filled by NGOs that provide media with such programming.

Currently there are five information agencies, of which one is state-owned. Agencies are in high demand by the print media, whereas broadcast media seek official news only. The panelists disagreed about subscription fees. Most believe that they are too high, especially for local media, while some thought that any media outlet should be able to afford \$20 per month for an electronic version. Panelists agreed that the existing agencies are not adequate, and therefore media outlets reprint information from Russian and foreign news agencies. This is particularly true in the Sogd oblast, which has only one news agency.

There are not enough independent news programs produced by Tajikistani media. This is because most outlets use outdated equipment, are limited by the professional inadequacies of their staff, and have poor access to information. Saidumron Saidov, chairman of the Association of Professional Journalists of the Sogd oblast, stated: "Programs produced by independent media are much more interesting, whereas government electronic media work by old Soviet standards and only

praise government authorities.” There is use of material from CNN, Russian TV, and state television news to produce programs.

Information regarding media ownership is open to the public but is not transparent. It is well known that four large media holdings—*Charkhi Gardun*, *Tojikiston* and *Asia Plus* in Dushanbe, and *Varorud* in Khujand—are owned by former journalists. It is not a secret that the founders of some electronic media such as Radio SM-1 in Khujand and Radio Asia in Dushanbe are businessmen. However, media owners hide information regarding their holdings, information on the number of copies printed, and corporate income.

Tajikistani media pay attention to ethnic minorities, in part with the support of international organizations. Minority-language publications are allowed in accordance with the law. Newspapers are printed in Russian and Uzbek, and most electronic media in the Sogd oblast are published in Russian. A Kyrgyz-language newspaper is published in the Gorno-Badakhshan and Murgab rayons, and one page of the Badakhshan newspaper is published in Russian for Russian border guards.

**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.

**OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.30 / 4.00**

The business development of independent media in Tajikistan is hindered by the weak economy, outdated equipment, an underdeveloped advertising market, inefficient distribution channels, and the lack of market research that would enhance the quality of media content and attract advertising. At the same time, the state exerts its control over independent media. These factors combined in 2004 to make the situation almost impossible for managers of independent media outlets.

Printing presses in Tajikistan are considered profitable, as there is little competition in this market. A new printer, Polygraphgroup, was established in Tajikistan during 2004 with state-of-the-art equipment, but the state’s Sharki Ozod press still dominates. Most publishers are forced to look for lower prices over higher quality and use printers whose presses are outdated. “There are no private printing houses in Tajikistan that could be independent from government pressure,” said Masrur Abdulloev from Internews. There have been cases in which printing houses have refused to print private newspapers, as was the case with *Ruzi Nav* and *Nerui Sukhan*.

In late 2004, the bureaucracy faced by media managers got even more complicated. “Printing houses would not print anything without special permits issued by the Committee on State Secrets or from the State Standard Agency. Sometimes the local Hukumat of a city or a region’s local authorities would have to approve,” said Rano Bobodjanova, an independent journalist and member of the NGO Center of Gender Research. “This allows the government enough control to censor print media.”

Distribution networks deteriorated during 2004. Well-used state-run sales kiosks were moved by order of the mayor from the center of Dushanbe to the outskirts, although the reasoning for this change was not known by the MSI

***Rano Bobodjanova, an independent journalist and member of the Center of Gender Research, said, “There are certain cases of conducting professional research, but not on a regular basis, since they are supported by international organizations. Media outlets need reliable market analyses for the development of fair competition.”***

panelists. This move significantly reduced the number of potential buyers and forced private media outlets to rely on state-run distributors.

Print media generate revenue from commercial advertising and grants from international organizations, decreasing print runs to conserve resources as necessary. There is intense competition for advertising clients, most of which are international organizations that can guarantee payment. It is more difficult to attract small businesses as advertisers, and there are very few larger local businesses that could buy ads domestically. In addition, businessmen are afraid that newspaper ads will attract the tax authorities. Furthermore, not all potential advertisers realize the effectiveness of their ads because of the lack of market research.

Nevertheless, some print outlets have attracted reasonable income from advertising and have expanded their advertising space. For example, *Asia Plus* in Dushanbe has become a leader in the information market and now attracts the lion's share of advertising revenue.

Overall, print media are far ahead of electronic media in terms of advertising. Television stations get income from selling personal greetings and video services, as well as grants from international organizations. According to the law, advertising should not make up more than 10 percent of each hour.

The advertising market is developed in Dushanbe and Khujand only. There are few production services that produce and promote advertising, and few professionals in the field. *Asia Plus* is one of the few outlets to have its own advertising agency. As a result, there are almost no locally produced ads in Tajik, and most ads are of Russian or Ukrainian origin; some of them are translated into Tajik.

Subscriptions in Tajikistan are a source of income only for state-owned print media, and this is because people are forced to subscribe. Government support to media has occurred in the south of Tajikistan to stem the flow of information from northern Uzbekistan.

To date, no serious market research has been done. Rano Bobodjanova, an independent journalist and member of the Center of Gender Research, said, "There are certain cases of conducting professional research, but not on a regular basis, since they are supported by international organizations. Media outlets need reliable market analyses for the development of fair competition."

There are no organizations that determine broadcast ratings or identify reliable circulation figures, with

the exception of the Center of Sociological Research Zerkalo, supported by the Ebert Foundation. However, the results of this research have not been popular, and media outlets often disagree with the data. Some newspapers attempted to conduct rating surveys themselves, but the data were far from reliable and also criticized. The independent newspaper *Sur* conducts weekly ratings of certain state-owned and independent media, but outlets and advertisers ignore their results.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Tajikistan Objective Score: 1.50 / 4.00

Media-support institutions are not highly developed. Those that exist generally provide advisory services and training but do not offer journalists protection of any kind. Educational programs at the journalism faculties need serious improvement, with the gap only partially filled by international organizations and NGOs. Newsprint distributors and printing facilities are considered independent, but in fact they are controlled by state-owned media. The media-distribution channels are not well coordinated and have been used as political tools.

Several associations such as the National Association of Independent Media (NANSMIT), the Association of

### 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 private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

Journalists of Tajikistan (AJT), the Union of Tajik Journalists (UTJ), the Association of Professional Journalists in the Sogd Oblast, and the Tajik Association of Independent Electronic Media (TAJANESMI) aim to protect journalists' rights. Most panelists considered their work to be insufficient. The organizations generally do not lobby the government in the interests of their members, as they lack the authority to do so. Several attempts to protect journalists during the past three years by sending appeals to the authorities have yielded no results. Some supporting organizations are ineffective because their leadership has remained the same for years. The Union of Journalists, for example, is barely visible. It has lost the ability to organize its members and, panelists said, does not want to change to meet the new needs of Tajik journalists.

NANSMIT attempts to protect journalists through monitoring and providing counsel, but panelists noted that journalists have few rights. "We have many cases in which print journalists work without contracts and are often subject to publishers' despotism. This can leave journalists without pay, or they can be fired with no explanation," said Lidia Isamova, director of IWPR in Tajikistan. Rano Babojanova, an independent journalist and member of the Center of Gender Research, told the panel: "Rajabi Mirzo, chief editor of *Ruzi Nav* newspaper, was beaten up. Farruh Ahrorov, journalist at *Leninabad Pravda*, was fired in 2004. But in both cases no explanation followed."

There are about 15 NGOs working on free speech and media support. The Pamir Mass Media Center, supported by IREX, is among the regional NGOs that provide journalists with free Internet access, training, and other services. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and CIMERA provide training and work on media-law reform.

The journalism faculties at the state and private universities are not providing very high-quality training, the panel members said. Lidia Isamova attributed this to "a lack of high-quality practical training in accordance with international standards...The fact that most professors were trained in the old Soviet school of journalism just adds to the problem. Overall, Tajikistani media professionals are not pleased with [the] level of

journalism training of these graduates."

Only the elite and wealthy can afford an education abroad, and this option is further limited by the need to speak a foreign language. Those who study abroad rarely return to find work at an appropriate pay scale.

Even graduates of local universities are reluctant to work in the media because of the low salaries. Panelists said that more than 80 percent of journalism-faculty graduates do not work in their field.

At the same time, journalists have opportunities to improve their skills through short-term trainings or retraining programs organized by international organizations and NGOs such as Internews, OSCE, IREX, the Soros Foundation, IWPR, the School of 21st Century Journalism established by Asia Plus, NANSMIT, CIMERA, and other popular groups. However, not all media managers encourage their staff to improve their qualifications, or let them take the time to attend training workshops.

All but one printing house, Polygraphgroup, depend on government funding. Other private printers such as Jienhon were shut down and forced into bankruptcy for printing opposition newspapers. As a rule, all printing houses favor state-owned newspapers. Government and private newspapers are sold exclusively through kiosks and street vendors since the inefficient postal service makes subscriptions useless. In some rayons, there are no newspapers at all. "The only newspaper kiosk in Khorog was recently sold to a businessman, and now people do not know where to get papers," said Kurbon Alamshoev, director of Pamir Mass Media Center. It is rare that newspapers from the capital are sold in the rural regions, or vice versa.

The Ministry of Communications controls the issuing of licenses and the frequencies of radio and television transmitters. The state can control the Internet by technical means. "I am well aware of the fact that messages sent or received through a local provider can be intercepted," said Lidia Isamova, director of IWPR in Tajikistan.

***"We have many cases in which print journalists work without contracts and are often subject to publishers' despotism. This can leave journalists without pay, or they can be fired with no explanation," said Lidia Isamova.***

## Panel Participants

**Saidumron Saidov**, chairman, Association of professional journalists of Sogd oblast, Khujand

**Masur Abdulloev**, Internews training coordinator, Tajikistan

**Rustam Buriev**, director, Mavdji Ozod TV, Vose rayon

**Makhmadali Bakhtierov**, executive secretary of *Paemi Rushon* newspaper, Khorog

**Lidia Isamova**, director, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in Tajikistan, Dushanbe

**Kurbon Alamshoev**, director, Pamir Mass Media Center, Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous oblast

**Tuhva Akhmadova**, journalist, independent weekly newspaper *Charkhi Gardun*; member, NGO Press Center Gamkhori, Khatlon oblast, Kurgan Tyube town

**Rano Bobodjanova**, independent journalist, member, NGO Center of Gender Research, Khujand

## Moderator

**Elena Buldakova**, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

## Observer

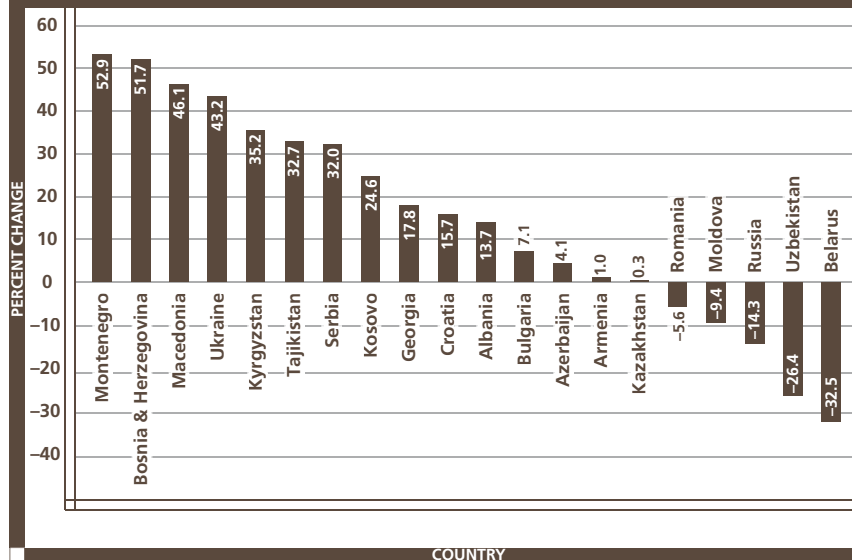
**Abdurakhim Mukhidov**, USAID project, Tajikistan

# TAJIKISTAN AT A GLANCE

**GENERAL** (data from CIA World Factbook)

- **Population:** 7,011,556 (est. July 2004)
- **Capital city:** Dushanbe
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Tajiks 64.9%, Uzbeks 25%, Russians 3.5% (declining because of emigration), other 6.6%
- **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shi'a Muslim 5%, other 10% (est. 2003)
- **Languages (% of population):** Tajik is the state language of the republic. Russian remains the language of interethnic communication in northern, central, and southwestern regions of the country.
- **GDP:** purchasing power parity: US\$6.812 billion (est. 2003)
- **Literacy level (% of population)** 92%
- **President or top authority:** President Emomali Rakhmonov
- **Next scheduled elections:** Parliamentary 2005, presidential November 2006

**MSI AVERAGE SCORES—PERCENT CHANGE 2001–2004**



**MEDIA-SPECIFIC:**

- **Existing newspapers:** There are 270 registered print media. The largest are *Asia Plus*, *Tochikiston*, *Nerui Sukhan*, and *Vecherniy Dushanbe*.
- **Broadcast ratings:** The most popular in Dushanbe are Radio Vatan, *Asia Plus*, SM-1, and Tiroz in Hudjent.
- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** There are about 20 print outlets, more than 20 television stations, and seven radio stations.

- **Number of Internet users:** Approximately 10% of the population uses the Internet.
- **Names of news agencies:** *Asia Plus*, *Mison*, State Information Agency Hobar, Varorud, *Avesta*

**MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: TAJIKISTAN**

