

BURKINA FASO

Media Sustainability Index 2006-2007

Introduction

Overall Country Score: 1.95

Burkina Faso is a 274,000 square kilometer country landlocked in the heart of Western Africa, having common borders with Mali to the North and West, Niger to the North-East, Benin to the South-East, and Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire to the South. As the sea is at more than 1,000 km away, Burkina Faso uses the ports of Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Lome (Togo), Cotonou (Benin), Accra and Tema (Ghana) for its trade activities.

Burkina Faso is a secular State that gained its independence on August 5, 1960. After repeated political unrest between 1966 and 1987, the adoption of the Fourth Republic Constitution on June 2, 1991 provided the country a source of stability. The president is elected by universal suffrage.

The current chief of state, Blaise Compaoré, a military man who rose to power in 1987, was elected president in 1991 when the rule of law was instituted, then reelected in 1998. Article 37, which allowed for two 7-year presidential terms, was modified so that the term's limitation was eliminated. Blaise Compaoré's term of office was renewed a third time in the 2006 presidential elections.

Burkina Faso is divided into 13 administrative regions led by Governors and 45 provinces led by High Commissioners.

The country's ruling institutions are:

- National Assembly of 111 representatives. It was created in 1991. Legislative elections took place in 1991, 1998 and 2006.
- An independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) responsible for organizing and supervising elections.
- Higher Communication Council (HCC) created in 1995 and put in charge with regulating the media landscape in Burkina Faso. It is made of a board of 12 councilors appointed by the President of Burkina Faso (4), the President of the National Assembly (3), the President of the Constitutional Council (1) and the communications and audiovisual professional associations (4). The President of the HCC is appointed by presidential decree.¹
- Social and Economic Council (SEC), which is an advisory organism consisting of representatives of the various socio-professional categories of Burkina Faso.

¹ Law n°28-2005/AN passed on June 14, 2005 concerning the creation, line-up, remit and functioning of the Higher Communication Council.

- Burkina Faso Mediator, which is an intercessor between the public administration and the administered. The Burkina Faso Mediator receives the complaints filed by the citizens against the State, the territorial collectivities, the public institutions and any other public service.

The country also created structures such as the Higher Authority for the Coordination of the Fight Against Corruption (HACFAC).

In 1998, immediately following the presidential elections, Burkina Faso was shattered by a great political crisis generated particularly by the assassination of a well-known journalist – a first for this country, - Norbert Zongo, the director of the weekly publication *L'Indépendant*. A group of political, media, human rights organizations and various associations demanded full disclosure in what would become the Norbert Zongo affair. An independently created international investigation committee concluded that the journalist was killed because he was leading an investigation concerning the death of President Compaoré's youngest son's driver. The Committee indicated members of the presidential guard as serious suspects.

As a result of the crisis generated by this assassination the authorities constituted an Assembly of the Wise which was supposed to give recommendations on how to overcome the crisis. One of these recommendations was the modification of article 37 of the Constitution, in 2000. Thus the unlimited 7-year presidential term was reduced to a 5-year term, renewable once. In 2006 a new twist was given to the Norbert Zongo affair when the case was dismissed for lack of evidence, which made the media, the Group and some Burkina Faso chancelleries very angry.

The current media landscape in Burkina Faso owes a lot to the democratization of the national political life that happened, just as in most of the Francophone States on the African Continent, at the beginning of the 90s, particularly after the Fourth Republic Constitution was passed on June 2, 1991.

Thanks to this democratization, accompanied by the liberalization of audio channels and newspapers all over Africa, Burkina Faso passed a new Information Code in December, 1993 replacing the 1992 Code which was dependent upon the politically exceptional times dominated by military coups, namely between 1980 and 1987. The Code passed on December 30, 1993, much criticized by information professionals, is still effective. This fundamental text on information is joined on August 1, 1995 by another one instituting the Higher Communication Council (HCC), a regulatory organism concerning news and communication.

This legal tools allowed for the boom of several private radio stations, newspapers and a few television stations.

Objective 1: Freedom of Speech

Score: 2.20

The legislation of Burkina Faso (the Constitution, the Information Code) generally guarantees the freedom of speech, as the MSI panel members state. Their regret is that these texts are not put into practice as they should be and some dispositions of the Information Code are sometimes insufficient, even contradictory. There is no topic that is taboo; however the journalists practice

self-censorship in terms of choosing and processing news. The public media is controlled by the authorities, whereas the civil society and the political parties of the opposition have virtually no access to them during the electoral campaigns. The efforts of the Higher Communication Council seem to be limited since its 2005 report states that “Since the beginning of the democratic process in Burkina Faso and the adoption of the fundamental law in June, 1991, the situation of the media has constantly improved. While the freedom of the press has become much more considerable, it must be noted that there is still socio-political, economic and institutional inertia that is slowing down this sector’s development”.

As noted by the MSI panelists, in 2006 the public media – particularly the audio-visual – were not always equitable in terms of news processing, constantly refusing to reflect the claims of the civil society and unions. The Norbert Zongo² affair is still news in the Burkina Faso media and in 2006 the examining judge closed the case for lack of evidence. The private newspapers that denounced this outcome started having trouble with the justice system. Access to information is not easy for journalists who wish to investigate beyond rumors.

Nevertheless, the panelists believe that the press in Burkina Faso is able to address sensitive topics, as reported by the National Network for the Fight against Corruption (NANEFAC). In its 2005 report, this association mentions several cases of corruption appearing in the Burkina Faso media.

All the panelists agree that Burkina Faso has complete legal armory protecting the freedom of the press. However, they believe – as, for example, Evariste Zongo, program coordinator with the Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages Association (EPNNLA) – that “there is a gap between the legal dispositions and their practical application. When put into practice, the texts and their legal interpretations are not protective enough for journalists. In 2006, newspapers that used their right to free expression were sued for defamation”. Newton Ahmed Barry, editor in chief of the bi-weekly publication *L’Événement*, a specialist of investigation journalism, adds that “the law of the press in Burkina Faso is a reflection of the political regime. It is somewhat sensitive on the topic of liberties. Liberties are granted, but they are channeled”.

² Based on the name of the journalist from the weekly publication *L’Indépendant*, assassinated in December 1998 while investigating the disappearance of François Compaoré’s driver, the youngest son of the President of Burkina Faso. The journalist’s death generated a shock wave throughout the country and a Group of associations, political parties and unions, led by the Burkina Faso Movement for Human and Peoples’ Rights (BFMHPR) has held regular demonstrations ever since 1998 asking for full disclosure in this case. The affair has alerted the international organizations that support journalists, particularly Reporters without borders (Reporters sans frontières), part of an independent investigation Committee that found the fact how members of the presidential guard had been involved in the assassination of Norbert Zongo. The journalist’s assassination determined important political changes such as the constitution of an Assembly of the wise. Some of the recommendations of this Assembly led to a further development of the democratic process. For example, the Constitution setting the presidential term to 7 years renewable once (article 37), modified by the ruling party in the sense that the limitation had been eliminated, was revised. Now the 5-year presidential term is, once again, renewable only once. This crisis also allowed the opposition to become represented in the national assembly and the 2005 elections made it widely noticed.

While the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the Information Code (Law 56-93/AN) openly declares the independence of the journalist in the exercise of his/her profession, but in fact this turns out to be full of contradictions and insufficiencies as the panelists found:

- Submission to the regime of simple declarations for written press and prior authorization from the Higher Communication Council for audio-visual;
- The access to sources is stipulated as a right of the journalist; at the same time, there is no disposition as to how one should use it or what the ways to appeal might be in case this right is infringed.
- The law regulating State employees criminalizes the act of giving public information without the approval of the State employee's superior.
- The journalist's status is not clear. The law mentions a conscience clause but does not specify how to apply it.
- "The access to public information is guaranteed by the Information Code. But it does not specify the proceedings that the journalist must follow in case this information is denied to him", Ramata Soré says. She is a journalist with *L'Événement* and winner of numerous journalism awards including the CNN Africa Award in 2006.

Ramata Soré, a journalist with *L'Événement*, believes that "access to public information is a problem. Very often people in charge refuse to speak when they are contacted because they wait or ask for the approval of their minister before granting access to sources to the journalists. No text allows the journalists to protest or appeal to a court of law in order to be granted access to information." Her statement is backed by the leader of the Freedom of the Press Defense League (FPDL), Sibiri Eric Kam, who says that "The law is explicit but access is not regulated. No specific action renders the right to access effective. A disposition in the Information Code (article 50) says that any State employee must provide the journalists with the public information that they request whereas in reality there are no proceedings about how this information should be obtained. There is a general silence. The journalist is sent from one superior to another and that's it".

Danielle Bougaïré, professor in the Department of Journalism at the University of Ouagadougou: "The judicial and social standards protect the freedom of speech. But in real life the texts are not put into practice and journalists are often threatened and brought to justice. For example, *L'Événement* in the Norbert Zongo and François Compaoré affair.³"

The Higher Communication Council (HCC), is an organism created in 1995 to regulate communication and information in Burkina Faso. The HCC delivers the radio and television frequencies according to specifications determined based on the category of applicant – private as well as public – radio and television stations. The best applications are officially accepted after a call for tender. The independence of the HCC is disputed by the journalists who believe that it is structurally and politically dependent on the public authorities.⁴

³ In 2006, after the articles about the dismissal of the Norbert Zongo case (See previous footnote, page 1)

⁴ The HCC is made of 12 members appointed as follows: 4 by the President of Burkina Faso, 4 by the President of the National Assembly, 1 by the President of the Constitutional Council and 3 by the professional associations for Communication and the audio-visual (law n° 28-2005/AN on the creation of the HCC)

“Just like almost everywhere else in the sub-region, in Burkina Faso the constitutional and legislative dispositions guarantee the freedom of speech”, Justin Coulibaly notices. He is the secretary-general of the News and Communication Workers’ National Union (NCWNU). However, he believes that “in reality, it is hard to enjoy it. For instance, it has been years since the Burkina Faso Movement for Human and Peoples’ Rights (BFMHPR) applied for a frequency at the Higher Communication Council with no result”.⁵

In Burkina Faso the press organizations enjoy no special status –the same tax system applies to them as to any other commercial activity. They do enjoy a modest annual contribution from the State (150 million CFA F in 2006 for approximately 100 private media) if requested. The press owners would rather get a tax exemption in the entire sector.

Apart from this subvention, the media – either private or public – receive limited contributions from the public administration, public institutions in Burkina Faso or international organizations. These contributions are used in the training and improvement of journalists or the technical endowment of the media. They can be provided for specific events: legislative and presidential elections; and important political, cultural or social reunions (chief of State summets), International Cinema Festivals (FESPACO), arts and crafts festivals (SIAO) and cultural festivals (SNC).⁶

Contributions also can come from abroad through the foreign embassies in Burkina Faso. As is the case of Germany, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the United States, France, and the Netherlands who have supported and continue to support the private and public media offering training aid (seminars, scholarships, technical support), materials (paper, computers, audio-visual equipment...). International organizations such as UNICEF, UNFPA, the International Organization of the Francophone countries (OIF) also provide financial aid or other equipment. In 1999, for instance, the OIF provided almost 28 million CFA F to the Burkina Faso press, representing, among others, subventions to projects submitted by newspapers such as *Le Pays*, *L’Observateur Paalga*, *Bendré* and *Le Journal du Soir* (no longer appearing).

The public media are public institutions that are somewhat autonomously managed but, as noted by Joachim Baky, a panelist and manager of “Edifice” advertising agency, “their income is redirected towards the public treasury as they are receipt makers for the State”.

The tax charge (an 18% VAT) of the private media is a disadvantage in terms of their advertising performance with respect to the State media, which are VAT exempt and can use lower advertising rates than their private counterparts. Rémis Dandjinou, program director with the private network Canal 3 concludes that “the public media enjoy a preferential treatment in terms of taxes as they are tax exempt unlike the private media”.

⁵ Le BFMHPR was a central piece of the Group that was constituted to shed light on the assassination of the journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998.

⁶ The Pan-African Cinema and Television Festival of Ouagadougou taking place every two years at the beginning of the year in the capital of Burkina Faso, the International Arts and Crafts Salon of Ouagadougou, also every two years at the end of the year and the National Cultural Week in Bobo-Dioulasso that takes place after FESPACO.

In 2006, many journalists were mistreated on their reporting sites by security forces, sometimes their work equipment was confiscated, although the panelists admit these are isolated acts. However, their authors have never been investigated and the protest actions of the journalist defense organizations have generated no reaction. Ramata Soré, who participated in the panel, was a victim of threats and violence in the Place de la Nation in December, 2006 because she was investigating the situation of homosexuals in Burkina Faso. Jean Victor Ouédraogo from the associative radio station “La Voix du Paysan” and a contributor to the State daily newspaper *Sidwaya*, an MSI panelist, recounted his troubles with the Governor⁷ who did not appreciate the journalist’s report on the presence of arsenic in his region’s water wells.

Rémis Dandjinou, program director at the private network Canal 3: “The HCC law regulates the specifications for the public media but in reality nothing was decided in 2006 regarding them, whereas the private radio and television organizations must observe very strict specifications and mission statements.”

“Defamation is an offense. As a matter of principle, the accuser must provide the evidence. But in case of defamation the journalists must prove that they did not slander”. This is the regret of the magistrate Eric Sibiri Kam, member of the Freedom of the Press Defense League. The magistrate Kassoum Kambou, a member of the BFMHPR, adds: “I believe that journalists do not enjoy appropriate legal protection in our country. The small amount of independence of the magistrates exacerbates, worsens this situation”.

Most media in Burkina Faso use the Internet and have free access to the information circulated by the international media. The main difficulty, the panelists state, is its cost. For instance, many newspapers print news they take from news agencies without properly quoting them as sources for fear they might have to pay for it.

There is no restriction in the practice of journalism in Burkina Faso and the panelists simply noted that the professional journalist card stipulated by the law (article 47 of the Information Code passed in 1993) is still not effective.

Objective 2: Professional Journalism

Score: 1.65

The panelists have different approaches with respect to this objective. While some say that Burkina Faso has competent journalists, trained in schools of journalism in Burkina (CFPI, the Department of journalism at the University of Ouagadougou), Africa (Senegal, Togo, Côte d’Ivoire) and Europe, others say the opposite. They believe that the competence level of active journalists – which is the majority of journalists – is low. In reality, many experienced journalists, most of them trained abroad, left the media – particularly the State media – to enter more administrative sectors (ministry press directors).

In a report on the monitoring of shows from 4 commercial stations in Ouagadougou, the HCC – the regulating organism for news and communication – came to the following conclusion: “The irregularities noticed particularly in the show schedule show a high dose of amateurism in terms

⁷ Burkina Faso is divided in 13 regions led by Governors.

of managing the radio stations as well as the actual exercise of the profession. It is essential to make an effort for the training of the managing personnel and journalists of the radio stations.”⁸

“The journalists’ level of training is insufficient. Many working journalists have never had appropriate training and have never studied journalism. Professional and corporate integration for journalists are non-existent or very limited. The numerous journalist structures function more or less well”, Ahmed Newton Barry from *L’Événement* says.

“Journalism meets the quality standards in Burkina Faso: there are trained professionals, training school, a university program of journalism and trainers. However, due to the media explosion in these recent years, the creation of community newspapers and radio stations, many young DJs and journalists start working without any kind of training” Evariste Zongo – a panelist and program coordinator at EPNL – notices and admits that “the working conditions do not guarantee that journalists will process news with objectivity. There are quite a few well-known cases of corruption.”

“In Burkina Faso, journalism does not always meet the professional quality standards. Basically some journalists – despite their good will – are deficient when it comes to processing news due to their lack of training. The large number of lawsuits against journalists coming particularly from among the written press is a proof of this”, Nathalie Somé believes.

“Granted, newspapers such as *L’Événement* and *Sidwaya* occasionally publish good reports but there is no reason to generalize”, Danielle Bougaïré warns. As a three-time member of the Galian Awards judge committee that rewards every year the best journalists in Burkina Faso, she warns that the level of knowledge and practice of journalistic genres is low. The media settle for seminar reports, reports of officially sponsored events, letters from readers, whereas their employed journalists do not produce many articles.

Eric Sibiri Kam with the Freedom of the Press Defense League (FPDL) explains: “With respect to the indicator, the dominant practice, equity and objectivity do not preoccupy the journalists in Burkina Faso. Rumor has a privileged place in the written press various sections: “Bad Pop”, “A letter for Laye”, “Week-end secrets”, “Kantigui”. Interviewing experts is an exceptional practice and contradiction is not encouraged in their articles. Censorship and self-censorship for the sake of pleasing the dominant classes are practiced particularly in the public audio-visual where commercials and news that are considered “inconvenient” can be forbidden.

Monitoring the political or State current situation is a sensitive endeavor exposing the journalists to abusive questionings, as proved in the case of the *L’Événement* or *Bendré* editors in the matter of the case dismissal in the Norbert Zongo affair.

Justin Coulibaly, a panelist and representative of the News and Communication Workers’ National Union (NCWNU) notices that “Journalists, particularly some of those working for the State-run press, are the spokespersons of the authorities. They almost never check those sources that are not favorable to the government’s activities and are do not do professional interviews.

⁸ HCC 2005 Report (www.cc.bf)

Many demonstrations organized by the civil society are concealed or presented in a highly subjective fashion designed to please the people in power”.

In its report for the year 2005, having monitored the shows from 4 commercial radio stations⁹ the HCC came to the following conclusions¹⁰: “None of the monitored radio stations abides by the principle of plurality and balance of information. In their talk-shows or newscasts all radio stations tend to favor the civil society at the expense of the government or the political majority”.

“The journalists in Burkina Faso make serious efforts to observe the deontological standards in their daily work”, Newton Ahmed Barry says. He is the editor in chief of L’Événement. In 1990 an ethics chart was adopted by the Burkina Faso Journalist Association during a national reunion. A media self-regulating body called NPMS (National Press Monitoring Service) was created in 2000. However, Eric Sibiri Kam counts “a few breaches of ethics here and there and the fact that complacent articles occur frequently particularly in the written press”. “The insufficient training triggers breaches of ethics sometimes unconsciously”, Nathalie Somé with the National Television says, taking the sting out of the previous remark.

Selfcensorship exists and is widely practiced, as Ramata Soré, a reporter with L’Événement, noted: “I talked with journalists who fear that if they use such and such piece of information they will get in trouble in their activities; so they would rather not mention it”.

Newton Ahmed Barry, the editor in chief of L’Événement, would rather “talk about the journalist’s social responsibility that makes him not publish certain information”. “One does not write everything one hears, he adds. Take for instance the case of Korogo Issaka and the State markets¹¹ that we investigated in 2006. It is not easy to find reliable sources in our country. As someone who has led many investigations, I can tell you that many people see things with their ears, and no one sees things with their eyes. If you ask someone, they will tell you that things are like this or that. When you insist, they say no, I didn’t see anything, I just heard about it. It’s a rumor.”

Eric Sibiri Kam mentions a case of selfcensorship at the National Television of Burkina Faso (NTBF) in 2006: “On occasion of the collapse of a building wall belonging to a company called Tan-Aliz¹², a collapse that left 3 or 4 dead, the national television never attached too much importance to it. But when the wall of a football club building collapsed, the NTBF sent a team. A child had been killed.”

For Rémis Dandjinou, program coordinator at the private network Canal 3: “There is a tendency towards balanced, objective, fair reports. Moreover, most journalists abide by the ethical

⁹ Ouaga FM Radio, Horizon FM Radio, Pulsar Radio, Savane FM Radio.

¹⁰ www.csc.bf

¹⁴ This case that was the talk of the town in 2006 is about the actions of a businessman who declared having forged the signature of the Minister of Finance in order to get a bank loan for the implementation of a public market – which he did not get or implement. The State never started any investigation against the honorable Mr. Korogo, which is anything but surprising given the tradition of the country’s legal decisions.

¹² A tannery company belonging to the mother of François Compaoré, the young brother of the President of Burkina Faso.

standards. However, salary problems, pressure from various interest groups and fear of losing the advertising markets bring about corruption and self-censorship that limit the processing of events and key topics”.

As a general rule, despite the above-mentioned constraints, the panelists agree that in 2006 the media in Burkina Faso addressed nationally important topics, although, as *L'Événement's* Ramata Soré says: “they do address key subjects but frequently in a superficial manner, without digging deeper”.¹³ “There is no taboo topic”, *L'Événement's* Ahmed Newton Barry says, while other panelists admit that there are sensitive subjects exposing journalists to abusive questionings.

There is a lack of transparency in terms of salaries except for the journalists working for the State, who are on the public services payroll and are paid according to their respective degrees and seniority at the job. Conversely, salaries in the private sector are unknown. However, both in the public and private sector, the media uses many freelancers who work in poor conditions, and most of them have done so for many years.

Danielle Bougaïré, a professor in the Department of journalism at the University of Ouagadougou, continues: “Since not all the people working in the media are properly trained, the news processing activity is poor. On the other hand, she adds, the working conditions are not good. There are not enough live broadcasting vehicles or salaries but the vote-catching is highly developed, and the consequences are permanent corruption and constant self-censorship.”

Ramata Soré, a reporter with the bi-monthly *L'Événement* states: “Salaries are unsatisfactory. I had the opportunity to investigate this subject. There are journalists who don't get paid at all. They take advantage of the opportunity for a report to make some money thanks to the “gombo” (expenses paid to the journalist at the report site by the organism that requested the media coverage).

I had to confront the words of a journalist with those of his employer. When he was hired, the owner offered him 70,000 CFA F a month. He had a master's degree. And the owner added: “There's “gombo” available when you do field work, so you'll be able to increase your salary with it”. “Journalists in the private sector who don't have a collective convention are subject to the arbitrary decisions of the press owners”, as confirmed by Ahmed Newton Barry, the editor in chief of *L'Événement*.

On the subject of poor salaries another panelist, Joachim Baky, manager of “Edifice” advertising agency and of Ouaga FM Radio, adds that “there are mainly financial reasons why they sometimes stop being objective in their investigation”.

All the panelists agree that entertainment in Burkina Faso is largely better represented in the audio-visual landscape of Burkina Faso. However they distinguish between radio or television stations with different status – which can help or not with the news processing. Rémis Dandjinou, program director at the private network Canal 3, notes that most of the audio-visual

¹³ The NANEFIC (National Network of the Fight against Corruption) states in its various annual reports that the press has regularly informed citizens about corruption cases, facts or allegations in Burkina Faso. (www.renlac.bf)

media are “commercial, generalist radio stations”. It’s nothing like the state-run daily newspaper *Sidwaya*. Actually I think that in the case of these radio stations broadcasting news can run against their interests as that could draw some partners away.”

The HCC reveals that the radio stations monitored in its report on the year 2005 essentially broadcast musical shows, with a 60-70% musical component. The HCC believes that this large amount of airtime dedicated to music, particularly foreign music, prevents from airing other kinds of shows, potentially useful to listeners.

By and large the media has relatively satisfactory means to collect and produce, the panelists believe. Most newspapers appearing regularly are equipped with microedition capabilities and can be accessed online, while many radio stations are equipped for digital media. However, some media are still lagging – there are places where journalists don’t have access to computers or the Internet.

Objective 3: Plurality of News

Score: 1.98

According to the panelists, in Burkina Faso journalists do not ordinarily consult more than one news source when they process information, often settling for the official versions. The already mentioned obstacles blocking access to local news sources, as well as the restricted Internet access for journalists working in inappropriately equipped editorial rooms can explain this. Some panelists also find that the public media is not open to all political and social sensibilities in Burkina Faso, while others simply note that despite the criticism the state-run media have made real efforts to act as public services in the latter years.

Danielle Bougaïré, professor in the Department of journalism at the University of Ouagadougou: “Local news sources are often formal and inaccessible. On the other hand, journalists have access to foreign media”.

“There is a certain amount of freedom in terms of choosing the media. Nevertheless, costs are high for the ordinary citizen in Burkina Faso”, Enoch Kinhon Da observes. Enoch works for the local confessional radio station of Gaoua. Newton Barry adds that “Formally the citizens of Burkina Faso have the right to access news sources. The State will not prohibit it. However, we notice that the urban areas are more advantaged than the rural areas. As far as the written press is concerned, spatially limited personal initiatives offer information in the local national languages. But these are marginal cases. The daily newspapers and the most visible titles are all published in French and distributed in the capital. They are not very much accessible because of the language used. They are also usually published in limited editions”, *L’Événement*’s Ahmed Newton Barry believes.

“The public media is still far from properly reflecting the diversity of opinions in the country”, notes Eric Sibiri Kam with the Freedom of the Press Defense League.

The panelists pointed out the efforts made by the public media in the latter years. The state-run daily newspaper *Sidwaya* reached out to its readers by opening up, more than before, to various political sensibilities. Similar efforts were noticed at the national radio station while the

television remains oriented towards the government's activities and mostly inaccessible to parties of the opposition or civil society. Access to state-run media really opened up during the electoral campaigns, as in 2005 and 2006 for instance, when the presidential, legislative and municipal elections took place. At that time, the Higher Communication Council organized the media coverage of the activities of various candidates that had entered the lists¹⁴.

Justin Coulibaly, secretary-general of the ICWNS is firm: "The public media are not independent. Just an example: after the case dismissal in the Norbert Zongo affair in 2006, the state-run media failed to report the numerous reactions from the civil society against this dismissal. The national television did not cover the union demonstrations against the high cost of life in 2006. While the union workers were marching, the national television filmed a naturally empty Jobcentre".

"Many journalists settle for echoing the official news coming from one source, says Ramata Soré, a reporter with *L'Événement*. She gives an example: during the meningitis epidemic outbreak in 2006, the minister of health transmitted a number of untruths through the media and not many journalists actually tried to check the veracity of his words".

Pierre Dabiré, the secretary-general of the Burkina Faso Journalist Association (BFJA) believes that: "In the context of a democratic transition it is difficult to have balanced and quality news. The electoral periods also show how unbalanced the news can be to the benefit of the ruling party and/or the financial forces. Under these circumstances, many journalists do not abide by the deontological rules, all the while taking into account the low salaries in the public as well as private sector."

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

Private radio stations usually produce their own shows although some of them may be the result of their cooperation with other partners such as foreign radio stations or media supporting organisms, like the Panos Institute or the Francophone news agency SYFIA.

There are two independent press groups in Burkina Faso: Le Pays Publishing House which publishes 4 titles (the daily newspaper *Le Pays*, the weekly magazine *Evasion* and the monthly *Votre Santé*) and the *Observateur Paalga* group which publishes the eponymous daily newspapers and the weekly *L'Observateur Dimanche*. In addition to the state-run daily newspaper of the same name, *Sidwaya* publishes several other titles appearing more or less regularly (*Sidwaya Plus*, *Carrefour Africain*, *Sidwaya Magazine*, *Sidwaya Sports*, *Sidwaya B.D.*).

¹⁴ HCC Reports on the years 2005 and 2006 concerning the media coverage of the elections. (www.csc.bf)

“The media are aware of linguistic diversity”, Evariste Zongo says. He is a journalist and program coordinator with the Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages Association and he adds: “but news consist of reruns and translations. What is missing is the appropriate news processing in the various languages for most of the population.”

In the panelists’ opinion, there are newscasts in the various national languages on the private community, associative or confessional radio stations as well as the local stations run by the national radio station. They point out that shows are often limited to government-controlled news on the national radio and television.

Objective 4: Business Management

Score: 1.47

Panelists are unanimous on this point: media management is opaque; the press companies do not fully disclose their financing sources; in order to access the state subventions for the private media, first they must pay all of their taxes and other fiscal debt; the State gives with one hand and takes away with the other, that is how Evariste Zongo sees things. He is journalist and program coordinator with the Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages Association. There are several different opinions concerning the profitability of press companies: some panelists believe that, based on their lifestyle, media owners are prosperous; others doubt that their media activities are profitable.

The information collected from the media by the ministry of information give an idea about what sustainable press in Burkina Faso means and who can apply for support. Thus in 2006 the 150 million CFA F was granted to 40 private media consisting of 11 written press organs, 26 radio stations and 3 television stations¹⁵. From the data provided in the applications we conclude that only Le Pays Publishing House claims more than 50 employees.

The few existing media companies are the result of personal initiatives of journalists or businessmen. In the case of radio stations, in addition to the business structures proper, there are many stations created by associations, communities and religious confessions. Very little information exists concerning their financing sources, their ratings or their functioning.

“This is the less developed objective in the case of Burkina Faso”, believes Ahmed Newton Barry, editor in chief of the bi-monthly *L’Événement* and his opinion is shared by the other panelists. He goes on explaining his statement: “The press companies still suffer from a lack of status. There is no messaging service. The printing service is not well organized. There is only one rotary press that has just been installed (in 2006).”

Ramata Soré, with the bi-monthly *L’Événement*: “There is no press company in Burkina Faso, and worse than that there is no business culture. There is just personal and family property and there is a Manager, the founding chairman who manages his company all by himself, and some of these managers have sworn allegiance to the government”. The other panelists made their own comments on this objective, somewhat running contrary to the previous one:

¹⁵ Report on the subvention distribution among the private media, Ministry of Information, 2006

- Danielle Bougairé, professor in the Department of Journalism at the University of Ouagadougou: “Private media are profitable enterprises. They receive aid from the State. Also the advertising sector has developed in the recent years and brought additional income sources to the media”.
- Pierre Dabiré, secretary-general of the BFJA: “Most media owners are also realtors and their lifestyle may make us think that their press companies are profitable. Moreover, the State offers support and subventions”.
- Justin Coulibaly with the ICWNU: “In most cases, the independent media management is deficient. It’s like flying without instruments with poorly trained personnel that, on top of it, is not even registered with the social security agency. The advertising sector is even more rudimentary as it is limited to the large cities if not to the capital alone, where everything is.”
- Sibiri Eric Kam with the FPDL: “The printing houses are not subventioned and there is no distribution company. Selling as many copies as possible and advertising are the main financing sources of the media. We must add to that an annual State subvention which varies every year.”
- -Kassoum Kambou with the BFMHPR: “The financial independence of the media is limited. The press industry is not very profitable. As a result: commercials cover a lot of space”.

Judging from these different reactions, it is hard to say that the media companies are indeed profitable given that we lack so much reliable information about their income sources and the very management of this income. It is not certain that rigorous and transparent management methods are enforced in the case of those that seem to have good financial receipts.

“Even the management of advertising is a problem. There is no set rule for avoiding monopolies. Some newspapers dedicate up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of their editorial space to advertising. Some others, even those with high ratings, do not print commercials because of their editorial policy”. *L’Événement’s* Ahmed Newton Barry says. In reality, there is no independent service measuring the ratings or the circulation of newspapers, which makes any appreciation of the subject all the more difficult.

The magistrate Kassoum Kambou, member of the BFMHPR, thinks that in the advertising sector “there are things that are left unsaid. The State will never direct any advertising to some private media, whereas some others are specifically chosen for this kind of support. [This is to say that distributing commercials to some particular media is considered as support offered to that media]. The State’s omnipresence – going far beyond the politization of administration – is so much impregnated in the private sector that the fear of being labeled will prevent it from distributing commercials to a particular medium. Private companies avoid advertising in some private media.”

In Burkina Faso, the State offers its support by subventioning the private newspapers. However, the conditions to benefit from it are not equitable. For example, the fact that the newspaper is published regularly does not seem to be a satisfactory criterium. Moreover, the newspapers that get more advertising also receive, paradoxically, the larger part of the State’s subvention. Yet

this subvention does not fulfill its function which is to make sure that a diversity of opinions is represented”, believes Newton Barry, editor in chief of the bi-monthly *L'Événement*.

Evariste Zongo, journalist and program coordinator with the Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages Association adds that, “The written press in national languages receive insignificant subvention from the State. They have no access to advertising.” For example, in 2006 *L'Observateur Paalga* received 6,221,789 CFA F from the State and, in the same year, paid taxes to the State amounting to approximately 12 million CFA F. The private television station SMTV paid 2,400,00 CFA F to the Telecommunication Control Authority (TECOA) and received 6,221,789 CFA F¹⁶. The panelists strongly believe that subsidies do not influence the editorial content of the beneficiary media.

Associative or community radio stations have developed partnerships allowing them to access other financing sources than advertising – which is undeveloped. One of the panelists, Victor Ouédraogo, a journalist, gives the example of his radio station: “La Voix du Paysan has financing sources spreading on three and four years at an international level with Radio Suisse Romande and at a domestic level with Unicef, CNLPE”.

There is no real market research available. Rémis Dandjinou says: “We at Canal 3 do our market research through phone text messages that we receive during the shows, or by telephone. If within one hour we receive 200 telephone calls, this becomes an indicator for the number of listeners of our radio station”. He adds that as part of the press support fundraiser held in 2005 Canal France International performed a detailed market research concerning the television stations in Burkina Faso.”

In Burkina Faso, there is no reliable source capable of providing information about newspaper runs, and listening and viewer figures. The written media themselves communicate their print runs and there is no possibility of real independent control.

Objective 5: Supporting Institutions

Score: 2.45

All the panelists agree that journalists in Burkina Faso can rely on a number of professional and union organizations and that the civil society is on the media's side. However, their opinions seem to diverge when it comes to the efficiency of the actions initiated by the media actors. Speaking about training, the panelists find that the practical side of it is deficient in the existing network.

The News and Communication Workers' National Union (NCWNU) of Burkina Faso protects the financial interests of journalists, while the Journalist Association, consisting of media professionals, has set for itself the goal to protect the freedom of the press, the journalist ethics and to guarantee the proper training and the professional and cultural development of journalists.

The various media of Burkina Faso participate in associations trying to protect their members' interests. The most important of them are the Press Publishers Society (PPS), the Burkina Faso

¹⁶ Situation of payable amounts towards elected press organs, Ministry of Information, 2006 and Real costs of press organs applying for subvention in 2006, Ministry of Information, 2006.

Free Audio-Visual National Union, the Community Radio Association (CRA), the Community Media Association (CMA), and the Rural Radio and Magazine Network (RRMN).

“In Burkina Faso, the civil society is very active in protecting the freedom of the press”, Evariste Zongo guarantees. He is a journalist and program coordinator with the Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in the National Languages Association. *L'Événement*'s Newton Barry adds: “The civil society in Burkina Faso has a good tradition of high-spiritedness. The current press law, which is relatively favorable to the press, is the result of the pressure made by this civil society¹⁷. The journalist professional organizations (PPS, BJA, NCWNU) have come together under the auspices of a state independent body called “The Norbert Zongo Press Centre”, which receives support from the government as well as from international press associations”.

Danielle Bougaïré: The role of the media professional organizations is to increase sensitivity and provide training. Short-term trainings for radio and written press were organized by the NZ-NPC in 2006. The Department of journalism of the University of Ouagadougou offers graduate programs and a certificate course”.

The journalist profession is a dynamic and well-organized sector protected by a number of associations and NGOs”, Joachim Baky admits. He works for “Edifice” advertising agency and Ouaga FM Radio and adds: “however, this profession needs more real professionals who would help to develop this profession”.

Rémis Dandjinou, Canal 3: “The support coming from the state’s institutions has provided a better framework in which the journalists express themselves. However, there are still difficulties regarding problems such as professional training. Diplomas do not take into account the journalists’ specialization needs. Short-term trainings are not relevant enough and sometimes non-existent, which leads to more difficulties in the practice of the profession and sometimes to unethical and un-deontological attitudes”.

Sibiri Eric Kam: There are many professional associations but they haven’t been of tremendous help to their members so far. Nevertheless, they do try to make their claims known before the authorities”.

“The media professionals are better protected and backed by the NGOs (unions, human rights defense NGOs, etc.) than by the State”, the magistrate Kassoum Kambou with the BFMHPR believes. “The BJA, the NZ-NPC, the AMDS (African Media Development Society, section of Burkina Faso), the IJN (Informal Journalist Network) are just a few organizations offering requalification opportunities to journalists. There are also training schools (universities, a Training Centre for News Professionals). There are journalists who become well-known internationally thanks to the quality of their productions and the awards they win”, points out Ramata Soré, a graduate of the University of Ouagadougou and winner of the CNN Africa 2006 award for written press.

¹⁷ A la veille du vote par l'Assemblée nationale en 1991, le MBDHP avait réuni des milliers de signatures au sujet du Code de l'information et mené des actions de sensibilisation de l'opinion publique.

In 2006, the NZ-NPC organized short-term trainings for the written press and radio and gathered some twenty journalists every time. Danielle Bougaïré, professor in the Department of journalism at the University of Ouagadougou and one of the trainers in the NZ-NPC program regrets that “the media managers don’t send their journalists to the NZ-NPC trainings even though they don’t have to pay for it. On the occasion of these trainings we realize better how unprepared the working journalists are”.

“The RTBF has a 20 million CFA F annual training budget but they don’t use these funds. In fact, journalists weren’t even aware of this opportunity until 2006” Nathalie Somé, a reporter with the national television, bitterly notes.

“The CFPI of the Ministry of Information is more of a school for public administration agents. I know many of those who were trained there but I don’t see how they can improve their work as journalists. However, from a financial point of view, it’s a good thing. It’s a progress. A person goes from Level I to Level II, that is from the public office income category C to B”, says Ahmed Newton Barry, panelist and editor in chief of *L’Événement*.

For lack of a messaging service, each newspaper in Burkina Faso is distributed through its own seller network concentrating in the capital. In the audio-visual sector, three private companies distributed international television shows in 2006. They are ISEC, CFAO and Neerwaya Multivision. Their subscribers have access to approximately fifty channels, depending on the subscription package.