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BENIN

In 1990, Benin made a complete break with its Marxist-Leninist past and took the road to pluralist democracy based on the rule of law where freedom of expression, and thereby freedom of the press, is a constitutional right.

A boom of newspapers followed this opening, and the elimination of the government monopoly of the airwaves allowed private broadcasting to flourish. Since 1997 there is virtually no place where the population does not have access to at least one radio station; television has also become more diverse. There are now 73 radio stations, more than 20 regular daily newspapers, dozens of periodicals, and four television channels informing and entertaining the Beninese. New frequencies are in the process of being granted by the Higher Audio-Visual and Communications Authority (HAVCA), the regulatory body for the media sector.

In its fifth worldwide press freedom index, conducted in October 2006, Reporters Without Borders ranked Benin 23rd, thus becoming the top African country in terms of freedom of the press, even outranking countries with old democratic traditions such as France, the United States, and Italy. Benin owes this flattering result to its legislation, state institutions, good organization of professional media associations, and its robust civil society. Each does their part to protect journalists and citizens from any abuse of freedom of the press.

However, this pretty picture is tarnished in a few places. Working conditions for journalists do not always guarantee a professional approach to news. Some rural populations have no access to any media beside radio. Finally, the economic environment is not very favorable to the creation, growth, and profitability of press companies.

In line with these developments, the MSI panelists scored Objective 1, freedom of speech, relatively well, with a 2.45. Even better scores were given to Objective 3 and 5, plurality of news (2.70) and supporting institutions (3.02). However, Objectives 2 and 4, professional journalism and business management dragged the average down somewhat, with scores of 1.95 and 1.29, respectively.

BENIN AT A GLANCE

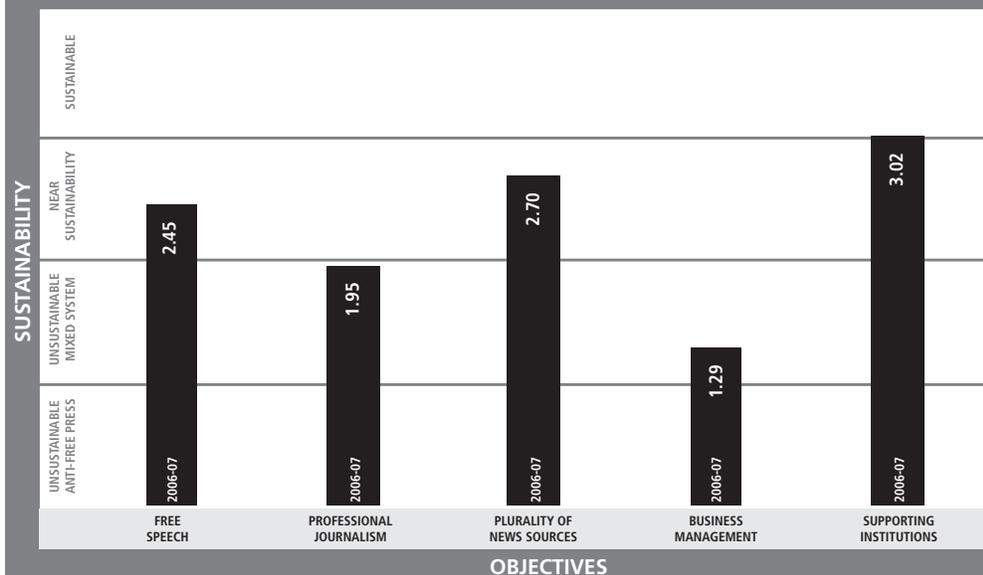
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 8,078,314 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Porto-Novo
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Fon and related 39.2%, Adja and related 15.2%, Yoruba and related 12.3%, Bariba and related 9.2%, Peulh and related 7%, Ottamari and related 6.1%, Yoa-Lokpa and related 4%, Dendi and related 2.5%, other 1.6%, unspecified 2.9% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 42.8% (Catholic 27.1%, Celestial 5%, Methodist 3.2%, other Protestant 2.2%, other 5.3%), Muslim 24.4%, Vodoun 17.3%, other 15.5% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), Fon and Yoruba (most common vernaculars in south), tribal languages (at least six major ones in north) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$4.665 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,160 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 34.7% (male 47.9%, female 23.3%) (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Thomas Yayi Boni (since April 6, 2006)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 28 daily newspapers, 25 periodicals; Radio: 73; Television stations: 5, including one public channel
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *La Nation* (governmental daily newspaper), *Le Matinal* (privately-owned), *Fraternité* (privately-owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: National Radio (state-owned), Golfe Fm (privately-owned), Capp Fm; Top three TV stations: National television (public channel), Canal3 (private channel), Golfe TV (private channel)
- > **News agencies:** Agence Bénin Presse (state-owned), Agence de presse Médiane Afrique (private), Agence Proximités (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 700,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BENIN



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Benin Objective Score: 2.45

Indicators in this objective were spread fairly widely, with only Indicator 8, media access to international news sources, within a half point of the average. Indicators 1, 2, 4, and 9 were in the high group, representing strengths in protection of free speech, broadcast licensing, crimes against journalists (this indicator scored the highest, over a point ahead of the average), and free entry into the journalism profession. On the low side were Indicators 3, 5, 6, and 7, market entry and tax structure, preferential treatment of public media, libel laws, and access to information; this last indicator scored more than a point-and-a-half lower than the average.

Article 23 of the 1991 Constitution recognizes, among other things, the right of every person to freedom of thought, opinion, and expression within the confines of public order under the law and its regulations. According to article 24, freedom of the press is recognized and guaranteed by the government and protected by HAVCA. However, the media, which are the instruments exercising this freedom, operate in an environment marked by a restrictive legal framework.

While the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression, other laws and regulations further define the framework in which this freedom may be exercised. These laws make provisions for prison sentences and set limits on the freedom of speech through such notions as public order, infringement of the moral code, and offenses against the head of state. In Benin, journalists who publish documents from the state administration may be sentenced to jail time for possession of administrative documents.

These laws no longer suit the realities of modern media practice. "These laws are obsolete and confusing," according to Joseph Perzo Anango, director of Media House.

HAVCA grants and manages frequencies and issues public calls for applications for new radio or television frequency licenses. It then evaluates the applications and selects the candidates that best meet the specified requirements. However, the panel participants doubted, without producing evidence, that HAVCA treats the applications for obtaining frequencies with transparency and equity. They believe that the composition of HAVCA creates uncertainty about its independence: out of the nine members of HAVCA, only three are elected by media professionals, while the other six are appointed by the National Assembly and the president, both, naturally, political institutions.

Noël Allagbada, former vice-president of HAVCA testified, "When deliberating, contradictory positions are bound to

appear. The submissive position of HAVCA is not due to the fact that its president is appointed by the head of state. No decision is made without deliberation. The public hearings of HAVCA¹, the recent wrestling with the government over the appointment of the directors of public broadcasting² are elements that do not justify the doubt cast over this regulatory body..."

As to the possibility of appealing HAVCA decisions, participants acknowledged that most citizens are unaware of its existence, even if, as stated by François Awoudo, journalist and former president of HAVCA, "people have filed for appeal against the decisions of HAVCA."

In light of economic difficulties confronting the media in Benin, the participants felt that media companies should be exempt from taxes. The media are taxed as if they are ordinary businesses. Although owners have repeatedly requested it, nothing has been done to create a specific status for media companies. Inputs and press equipment are subject to the same taxes as other materials.

Urbain Amégbédji, from the NGO Africa Obota Center, said, "Taxation is a major impediment to the development of the media. The news organizations do not currently have the facilities to enable their free development. While the powers that be [the government] may at any time use taxes to shut journalists up; and they do it, too, whenever they think it's profitable for them..."

The participants point out how there is an incompatibility between wishing to have journalists that exercise their profession freely while doing nothing to create sustainable press companies.

No murders are committed against journalists. While there are no laws for the exclusive protection of journalists, "Of course, the law protects all citizens against murder and other common law offenses, but it would be good to have specific dispositions concerning journalists," said Awoudo. Amégbédji

¹ In the public hearings HAVCA publicly discusses citizens' complaints against the contents of press articles. The implicated journalist is publicly questioned and sanctioned if found guilty. The direct reference here involves a public hearing about a particular show on public television (ORTB TV). During this show, in the middle of an electoral campaign, a technical adviser for the president strongly took on the candidates opposing the president. Not only was the adviser blamed for his words, but the show was temporarily suspended.

² According to the procedure for appointment of ORTB's managers, on the recommendation of the president HAVCA advances three candidate names based on merit. On the occasion of the last appointments, the call for candidates would not have been successful even though HAVCA had only advanced one name. Seeing that HAVCA left him with no choice, the president supported a candidate that the HAVCA had eliminated for not meeting the pre-selection criteria. The affair was brought before the Constitutional Court. A similar incident has already happened between HAVCA and the government of former president Mathieu Kérékou, who chose not to appoint the best candidate.

felt that, "These actions [murders of journalists] are rare in our country... But the national public opinion does not tolerate crime." A good example occurred in April, 2003. Journalists with the newspaper *Le Télégramme* were brutally beaten by the general director of the police because they had published a series of articles on the national police. Apart from numerous protests by citizens in the press, a peaceful protest march was organized by professional organizations a few days later. It was a powerful rally of the unionized journalists and activists from human rights NGOs.

There is no law placing the managers of public media under the control of government officials. Yet they are not completely independent from them, or the influence of the government and the political parties supporting the president. Some media are forced to pledge allegiance to the authorities because they are appointed by the government based on HAVCA's recommendation. The public media managers know that their appointment and firing depends on the goodwill of the president.

There is a kind of silent agreement between the government and the public media, with the first offering facilities to the latter, while obtaining extensive coverage of governmental activities. "Not all the media have access to, for example, the Palace of the Republic, but the public media do," Awoudo said.

Sometimes, the participants in debates on public television (ORTB TV) are imposed by people outside the editorial team. To ensure media coverage of their activities, some ministries

even insist on the specific reporter and the format to be used in the broadcast.

In Benin, it is the defendant who must produce evidence that they are not guilty of defamation and not the plaintiff. Journalists who wish to prove that the allegedly defamatory facts are true have seven days to notify the attorney general or the plaintiff of the facts they intend to use as proof; a copy of all documents, including names and addresses of witnesses that will back the case must be provided. Failure to meet these requirements invariably leads to losing the case and the journalist is only left with an opportunity to plead lack of malice. Journalists are often sentenced to pay fines and even serve time in prison if they fail to prove their innocence.

The principle of access to information is established by Law No. 92-021. It states: "Any person has the right to access information. Access to information cannot be restricted or forbidden or in any way disturbed provided that while exercising their profession media professionals are in full observance of this law." However, the reality is quite different. The legislature has never defined the term "information sources." No details with respect to the obligations and responsibilities of the official being asked for information are provided. Moreover, journalists who *succeed* in accessing information or documents pompously labeled as "Confidential" run the risk of being sentenced by a court for stealing or possession of administrative documents. All this makes the journalists' job very difficult.

The law also forbids publication of certain information, even known facts, that concern the private life of individuals or any fact that led to a pardoned or voided criminal sentence.

There is no restriction concerning access to international news. The Beninese media may surf the Internet for news and use these sources in their outlets. Some of them fill up the main body of their newscasts or papers with news gathered from the Internet, press agencies, or program distributors based on a partnership agreement with almost no financial compensation. However, there are international press agencies charging subscription fees that are prohibitive to the Beninese media.

The participants recognized that access to the journalistic profession is not subject to governmental restriction. In 2005, HAVCA made a decision that defines more accurately the criteria for one to be considered a journalist, but did this in collaboration with the professional media associations. This decision is only an administrative document and cannot be considered law. The participants believe that the government influences neither the admission to journalism schools (there is none in Benin) nor the recruitment of journalists by the media.

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

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Benin Objective Score: 1.95

Half of the indicator scores are clustered near the objective average. Indicators 6 and 7, balance of entertainment and news and modern facilities and equipment, finished modestly ahead of the average. However, scores near 1 in Indicators 3 and 5, self-censorship and pay levels for journalists, prevented a higher overall score.

The major problem of the Beninese press is that of its professional quality. Although knowing and mastering the technical and ethical principles of the profession, the large majority of Beninese journalists allow themselves to slip into sloppy work. However, the participants agreed that it is hard to throw stones at these professionals whose working conditions are deplorable and who owe their survival to generous donors, and who nonetheless perform the miracle of offering, on the whole, quality, diverse reporting.

"It has been a while since reporting stopped being equitable since all outlets, particularly the broadcast ones, only relay one side: that of the government," according to Thérèse Issèki, a PANAPRESS correspondent. Noël Allagbada said that, "The professional practice is degrading every day. The public wants quality newspapers." This happens for several reasons: the hunt for sensational stories, time pressure, and articles written to order. All these factors make it difficult to observe the principles of correctness and impartiality when reporting.

The Beninese Ethics Code, which is consistent with international standards, was adopted consensually by all media professionals in 1999. A self-regulatory organization, the Observatory for Deontology and Ethics in the Media (ODEM), was established to enforce its provisions. Unfortunately, this code is regularly violated by frequent cases of defamation, false accusations, distribution of false information, and mixtures of facts and comments.

The participants admitted that self-censorship is practiced within media outlets. They mentioned various reasons for this practice: some believe that not all truths should be told as there are sensitive topics that the media prefer to avoid. Others think that some media practice self-censorship on the sort of topics that might upset their partners, protectors, or political friends, or hamper their advertising contracts. When big financial or commercial profits are at stake the media owner issues specific guidelines, and even orders, pertaining to the angle of approach to a related topic.

In reality, there is no taboo subject. All key topics are covered in the media. But some subjects are so sensitive that their publication could be damaging to the respective press

company. The legislation and the code forbid the media to approach topics related to national defense and security before taking some precautions. Guy Constant Ehoumi, journalist and secretary-general of the Union of the Media Professionals of Benin points out that "One cannot write freely and in depth about security. Even when journalists possess leaked information on a coup, they still cannot write about it because no one will provide reliable information to back up their statements and they will be questioned in no time."

Salary levels in the private media automatically encourage corruption. In the public sector, the financial situation of media professionals is better; even though salaries are not very high, at least they come regularly. Despite the disparities, the attitude toward corruption is similar in both public and private media. Some press outlets accept, and even require, that event organizers pay for the transportation and per diem expenses of reporters. Journalists have come to write favorably about political personalities or parties, thereby sullying their writing in exchange for fat compensation. "The question of wages in the press is crucial... The collective bargaining agreements drawn up and approved in 2004 are still not effective today," Noël Allagbada regretted.

Programs offered by the media cover diverse subjects. All the media focus on news: there is a news flash every hour and two main newscasts throughout the day (at 1 pm and 8 pm). Entertainment weighs increasingly more in media scheduling.

Today the written press possesses average quality editing equipment. However, in the case of radio and television, equipment is still analog, while the modern tendency, if not the norm, is digital. Difficulties related to this lack of equipment are visible at many levels: sound elements are of

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).

bad quality, which affects the overall quality of broadcasts. There is a time management problem since radio stations or television channels are unable to receive, over cable or the Internet, content in due time from their correspondents. Besides, as far as the Internet is concerned, apart from difficulties with acquiring and maintaining technical equipment, there is also the issue of managing electricity, which is not yet available in some rural areas.

All participants acknowledged the notable effort made to produce quality shows. The written press focuses on field reports and investigations. However these efforts are insufficient for many reasons: first, there are not enough personnel doing both production and field work; then, there are not enough resources to finance production; and finally, technical equipment is not available in sufficient quantity and quality.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Benin Objective Score: 2.70

Indicator 2, citizen access to media is not restricted, received a score more than a point higher than the average. However, two indicators finished well behind the average: Indicator 3, public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, and Indicator 6, transparency of media ownership. The latter indicator lagged behind the average by nearly a full point.

Some 20 regular daily newspapers and three times more periodic publications provide diverse information. The only problem is that there is still no company to ensure their distribution in due time. The most fortunate areas are the large cities. The smaller cities complain about one-week delays for newspapers. The citizens in rural areas can only rarely rely on the written press to provide their news. The main news source for rural populations is the radio; community radio has become the most popular media. The four television stations do not cover the entire national territory.

Access to national and international media is not restricted by the government. The only limits are of a technical and financial nature: access to the media is subject to subscription or the acquisition of appropriate technical equipment. In the rural areas, electricity is an additional constraint.

François Awoudo offered his point of view on the matter: "The media are independent. They create and produce their own shows. But the economic difficulties induce some media owners to leave their press outlets at the disposal of political coteries. When this happens, the news is biased."

Despite pressure, some journalists in the public media fight for equal representation of everyone's interests. The effort is visible with respect to national languages, widely spoken on radio and television in various cultural shows. However, in order to please those who gave them their jobs, the heads of these media sometimes force their personnel to focus on governmental activities.

In Benin there is practically no public news agency. The national agency, Agence Bénin Presse, is no longer functional due to a paucity of funding and lack of initiative by its management. Fortunately there are two private agencies: Médiane Afrique and Proximités. But they had to diversify their activities because their traditional service, providing articles to newspapers, is no longer profitable. No Beninese media today will pay for such service. They would rather use the news generously provided by the Internet.

The wish to be original leads privately-owned radio stations to undertake community-based production efforts. These productions are interesting to the populations living in the covered areas, despite their sometimes faulty quality. These radio stations are hosted by people lacking the required professional training. The productions of the ORTB Radio are good, but they target a wider, national audience.

All participants agreed that media ownership in Benin is blurry. When financing sources are not identifiable and real managers hide behind puppet managers, the public does not know who they are dealing with. Often, the interests of big businessmen are represented in media companies by journalists. They accept putting their names on the corporate charters of press companies in order to put a smokescreen in

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.

front of the real media ownership. Thus the public is not able to identify the various editorial policies.

Efforts are being made for the media to reflect the social and political interests in the country. However, some social groups prefer not being talked about in certain ways in the press due to the sacred and/or secret nature of their rituals. For example, followers of the *Zangbéto* fetish, or “Night Guardian,” have protested several times against certain articles. The army is another subject that must be approached carefully in order “not to undermine the morale of the troops.” Panelists noted that it is hard to distinguish between military secrecy and secrecy of the military. Except for these restrictions, most social interests are represented in the media. Apart from the local radio stations (cultural, religious, etc.) there are specialized written outlets (business papers, student papers, sports, and cultural press, etc.) cultivating different interests.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Benin Objective Score: 1.29

The relative strength of two indicators pulled up the average in this objective. Indicators 2 and 5, multiple sources of revenue and government subsidies for private media finished stronger than the average, with the latter nearly a point-and-a-half higher. Three indicators, however, finished notably lower than the average. Indicator 4, ratio of advertising revenue to other income sources, finished a bit more than a half-point lower. Indicators 6 and 7, market research and audience and circulation measurement, finished even lower.

Beninese media are very loosely called companies and still in an embryonic state. Media of all nature face profitability problems and therefore lack resources. Being ill managed, they generate very little revenue in an environment where advertising—more or less a godsend—is also ill distributed. The Beninese media operate without forward planning, without direction, in spite of the various grants regularly made available to them. In short, one cannot yet speak of profitability regarding the press companies in Benin.

The media receive revenue from several sources: advertising and other communication services and, for print, copies sold. An important revenue stream, panelists said, comes from politicians who then interfere directly with the editorial policy or are the subjects of favorable media coverage in return.

The participants unanimously criticized the existing situation in advertising. “In the absence of an advertising sales division, it’s organized chaos,” according to Eugène Djigbénu, manager

of the Modern Distribution Company of Benin. The advertising sector is not organized; 90 percent of the advertising opportunities are concentrated in Cotonou, the main city in Benin. No laws regulate this advertising. The door is open to all manner of blunders. “Advertising is distributed to the media not based on merit or in an equitable manner, but rather arbitrarily. This generates complicity between journalists and businessmen or politicians,” continued Awoudo.

The main source of income for the media is advertising. Sales and subscriptions reach at best 20 percent of newspaper receipts. The only exception is the publicly owned daily newspaper *La Nation*, a record breaker in terms of sales and advertising. All the government’s central services subscribe to it. Therefore *La Nation* automatically publishes all the government’s legal announcements and calls for tenders.

The media have high expectations from advertising which, unfortunately, is used as bait. The government uses its power of granting contracts to influence the contents of the media and the work of journalists. If under contract with a ministry and a newspaper starts criticizing the government, they risk losing that contract. Any media that criticizes the government or certain large companies will simply not be allowed to cover their activities and will not benefit from their advertising contracts. “Advertisements are used to manipulate the press. It’s a jungle where only those who conform to the official line are favored,” according to Amégbédji.

Since 1997 the Beninese private media receive CFAF 300 million in financing from the government. This subsidy is managed by HAVCA in such a way that the media are protected from government interference. In time, as the number of media outlets increased and the subsidy amount

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.

remained the same, the amount reaching each outlet has become so insignificant that it would not grant the government any influence. Amégbédji summarized the financing situation: "State support to the press exists but does not allow the government to influence the press. This support is managed by the regulatory authority in independent collaboration with professional media associations. Any media may get support as long as they meet the requirements. But this support is not backed by any law. The government may cancel it at any time."

The media does not undertake strategic planning to improve their performance. As Allagbada pointed out, "Rarely does real market research precede the creation of a press outlet. The media bosses never appeal to managerial strategies to ensure that their companies are on a positive track. Thus there are no fiscal statistics to help us measure the performance of the media..." Most of the announced print runs are either over-inflated to attract advertisers or played down to avoid taxes. Currently research is being conducted to set up an advertising control agency and reorganize the sector.

The National Institute of Economic Statistics and Analysis, within the Ministry of Economy and Planning, is the only structure producing statistical studies that might help researchers, decision makers, and other players in the business sector. Up until today, the reliability of its research is notable and its numbers have never been contested. The only problem is that the Institute collects no statistical data on the media.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Benin Objective Score: 3.02

Most indicators in this objective scored similarly as strong as the overall score; Indicator 5, short-term training opportunities, scored well over half a point higher. However, Indicator 4, academic journalism programs, scored much more modestly, slightly more than a 2.

In Benin, the media is one of the rare sectors with well structured and organized associations. Press owners' associations existed even before 2004. Following the Congress of the Benin media in 2002, which decided on the merger of the associations of publishers and media owners, there is only one association currently: the National Council of the Beninese Press and Broadcast Owners (NCPA-Benin). This association has organized several training sessions for the managers of press companies. NCPA-Benin has been fighting for the reduction of frequency operation fees. Furthermore, it commissioned many studies that should soon lead to the establishment of bulk purchasing of media inputs, the establishment of an

advertising sales agency, and a law on advertising. These projects are meant to reduce financial dependency and improve the performance of media enterprises.

Media professionals have created the Union of Media Professionals of Benin (UMPB), which functions independently from owners and the government. It has specialized departments, each in charge of a specific section of the press. To become a member of UMPB, one must provide evidence of one's professional experience and publications. Before 2004, there were a number of active journalist associations, each following its own path. But the 2002 convention of the Beninese press decided that all these associations must come together so as to better address the grievances of journalists and defend their interests with one voice. After winning the war for the signing of the collective bargaining agreement by all parties, this association is working for the agreement to come into force.

Civil society is very active in defending the freedom of the media. It is now frequent to see civil society organizations come out to defend their freedom of expression and therefore demand greater freedom for the media which enables them to exercise their right to free speech. This support is fitting, as it is a well known fact that most civil society leaders had the help of the media in promoting their work and professional success.

In the schools of communication there are journalism specializations, although there is no formal school of journalism. However, the curriculum is not practice-oriented. The graduates of these programs are not ready to work as journalists, because practical training is so important. Beninese do attend foreign schools to obtain journalism degrees. The biggest foreign provider of graduates to the

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

Beninese media is the Centre d'Etude des Sciences, des Techniques de l'Information (CESTI) in Dakar, Senegal. These graduates are employed by the ORTB Radio and Television, where they work as interns before studying at CESTI. Given the quality of their work, they are assigned as reporters, news anchors, editors-in-chief, etc.

To compensate for the lack of a dedicated academic program, since 1997 the government has used part of the annual CFAF 300 million media subsidy to support in-service training for media personnel. This initiative strengthens the actions of the Benin-based institutions and foundations which, ever since 1990, has been making an appreciable contribution to the professionalism of the media.

As well, there are centers that offer short-term practical training, financed by donors. These are Médiante Afrique and Proximités. For the validation of its certificates, Médiante Afrique collaborates with the African Office of Radio Nederland as well as both the Centre de Formation et de Perfectionnement des Journalistes de Paris, and the Higher School of Journalism of Lille, in France.

A French-Beninese support project for the media ran from 2001 to 2004 and trained some 150 media professionals in editorial techniques, specialized coverage, and management. Today, most beneficiaries of this project are still very active in the field. Other more recent opportunities have included on-site training project for the personnel of 10 newspapers initiated by the UNDP and Belgium and training of radio journalists on economic coverage by Deutsche Welle with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. A biennial training program for media professionals is on-going, financed by the government's subsidy to the private press. This program is managed by HAVCA in collaboration with professional media associations.

The printing industry is free and independent. Apart from the public daily newspaper *La Nation*, all other newspapers are printed by private presses. The existing print distribution networks belong to the private sector, but, as previously mentioned, printed press distribution is not well organized in the rural areas. Research is being conducted to help to reorganize press distribution. In Benin the Internet is not controlled by a business or government-owned holding, and cyber-café are open and individually-managed with the sole purpose of making profit.

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