

---

---

*The current media landscape in Burkina Faso is heavily influenced by the widely criticized Information Code of 1993. Despite the criticism, the Code has allowed for the liberalization and proliferation of private radio stations, newspapers, and television stations. Further, the Higher Communication Council (HCC), composed of mostly political appointees, plays a dominant role as the main regulatory body governing and monitoring the media.*



BURKINA FASO

# B

Burkina Faso gained its independence in 1960. After decades of political unrest beginning in the mid-1960s, the adoption of the Fourth Republic Constitution in 1991 provided the country a source of stability.

The current chief of state, Blaise Compaoré, a military man who rose to power in a 1987 coup, became president in 1991 in an election boycotted by the opposition. Compaoré was reelected in 2006 and is currently serving his third term.

Immediately following the presidential elections in 1998, Burkina Faso was hit by a political crisis caused by the assassination of a well-known journalist, Norbert Zongo, the editor of the weekly publication *L'Indépendant*. A group of political, media, human rights, and other organizations demanded full disclosure of the circumstances surrounding the murder. An independent international investigation concluded that the journalist was killed because he was leading an investigation into the death of the chauffeur of President Compaoré's brother. The investigation implicated members of the presidential guard as suspects in Zongo's killing.

Public outrage in the forms of strikes and demonstrations resulted from the linkage of government officials to Zongo's murder. In an effort to stem public unrest, the Constitution was amended to limit the president to two five-year terms, repealing an earlier amendment instituted by Compaoré that had done away with presidential terms limits. In 2006 the case against the suspects in the Norbert Zongo affair was dismissed for lack of evidence, prompting condemnation from local and international media and human rights groups.

The current media landscape in Burkina Faso is heavily influenced by the Information Code of 1993, which has been widely criticized by media professionals. Despite the criticism, the Code has allowed for the liberalization and proliferation of private radio stations, newspapers, and television stations. Further, the Higher Communication Council (HCC), composed of mostly political appointees, plays a dominant role as the main regulatory body governing and monitoring the media.

Burkina Faso's overall score was determined in large part by relatively low scores in Objectives 2 and 4, professional journalism and business management; these came in at 1.65 and 1.34, respectively. Only Objective 5, supporting institutions, received a significantly higher score, coming in at 2.45. These scores generally reflect the findings of a 2005 HCC report, that stated, "With the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, the media situation has changed considerably. While the freedom of the press has greatly expanded, it must be noted that there is still socio-political, economic, and institutional inertia that is slowing down this sector's development."

# BURKINA FASO AT A GLANCE

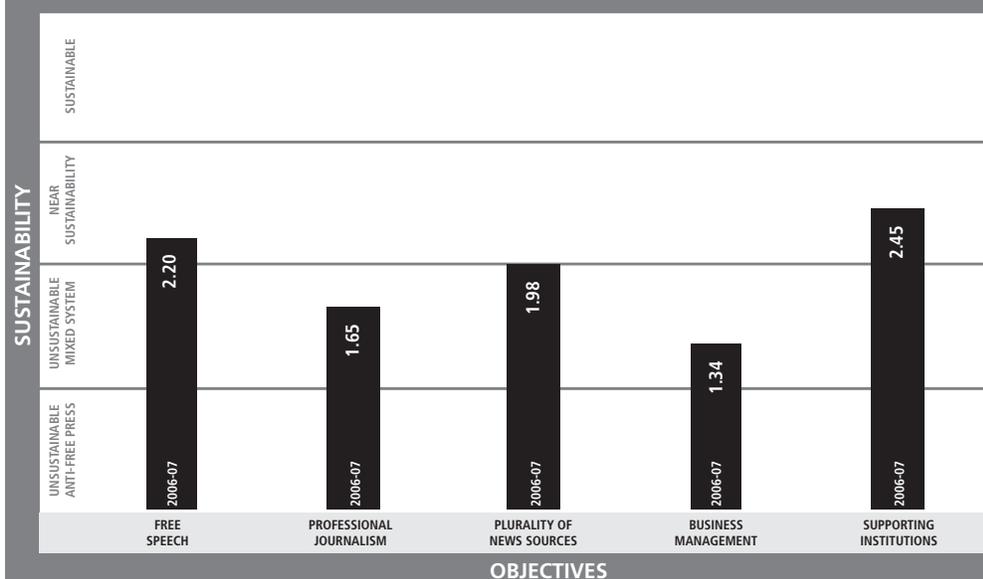
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 14,326,203 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Ouagadougou
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Mossi over 40%, other approximately 60% (includes Gurunsi, Senoufo, Lobi, Bobo, Mande, and Fulani) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 50%, indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian (mainly Roman Catholic) 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), native African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$6.311 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,330 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 21.8% (male 29.4%, female 15.2%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Blaise Compaore (since October 15, 1987)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**  
Print: 4 daily newspapers, 7 weekly publications, 12 newspapers in the national languages; Radio: 4 international and 57 private; TV: 3 private (HCC Public report 2005)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three daily newspapers: *Sidwaya* (state-run), *L'Observateur Paalga* (private), *Le Pays* (private), *L'Express du Faso* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top four radio stations: RFI, VOA, BBC, Africa n°1; Top 3 TV stations: Canal 3, SMTV, CVK
- > **News agencies:** N/A
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 80,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BURKINA FASO



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

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

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

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

### Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

### Sustainable (3-4):

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

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.20

Only a few indicators wound up close to the overall average in Objective 1. Panelists did give high marks for Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news sources and lack of restrictions on joining the journalism profession. However, Indicators 4, 5, 6, and 7 all scored more than half a point lower than the average, reflecting panelists' opinions that Burkina Faso still has a lot of progress to make in the areas of preventing and prosecuting crimes against journalists, ending preferential treatment for state media, eliminating criminal libel laws, and allowing access to public information.

While the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, and the Information Code openly affirms the independence of the journalist in the exercise of his/her profession, there are numerous contradictions and inadequacies in these laws. In the words of Evariste Zongo, program coordinator with the Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages Association (EPNLA), "there is a gap between the letter of the law and its 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*, which specializes in investigative journalism, added that "the law of the press in Burkina Faso is a reflection of the political regime. It is somewhat sensitive

#### 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.

on the topic of liberties. Liberties are granted, but they are narrowly defined." Danielle Bougaïré, professor in the Department of Journalism at the University of Ouagadougou, said, "But in reality, the laws 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."

The HCC, created in 1995, is charged with regulating communication and information and monitoring the media in Burkina Faso. It has a board of 12 councilors appointed by the president (four), the president of the National Assembly (three), the president of the Constitutional Council (one), and the communications and broadcast professional associations (four). The president of the HCC is appointed by presidential decree. The HCC issues radio and television frequencies to private as well as public stations.

The independence of the HCC was disputed by the panelists, who believe that it is structurally and politically dependent on the government. Justin Coulibaly, secretary-general of the News and Communication Worker's National Union noted, "For instance, the Burkina Faso Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights (BFMHPR) applied for a broadcast license at the Higher Communication Council many years ago, and they have not heard anything."<sup>1</sup>

In Burkina Faso, media outlets enjoy no special tax status. The same tax system applies to them as to any other commercial activity. They do receive a modest annual contribution from the state (CFAF 150 million in 2006 for approximately 100 private media) if requested; however, owners would rather get a full tax exemption.

In addition to this subsidy, the media, private and public, receive limited contributions from the Burkina Faso government and international organizations. These contributions are used in the training and improvement of journalists or for technology upgrade needs. Funding may be provided for specific events such as coverage of legislative and presidential elections, important political, cultural or social events (like chief of state summits), international film festivals, arts and crafts festivals, and cultural festivals.

The state 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 revenue sources for the state."

Private media are subject to the 18 percent VAT on advertising, which puts them at a disadvantage with respect to the state

<sup>1</sup> BFMHPR was a central part of the group that was constituted to investigate the assassination of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998.

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 concluded that “the public media enjoy preferential treatment in terms of taxes as they are tax exempt unlike the private media.”

In 2006, many journalists were mistreated by security forces while covering events, and sometimes their equipment was confiscated. The panelists admit these are isolated incidents. However, none of these events have been investigated and the protests of the journalist defense organizations have generated no reaction. Ramata Soré 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 non-profit radio station La Voix du Paysan and a contributor to the state daily newspaper *Sidwaya*, recounted his troubles with a governor who did not appreciate the journalist’s report on the presence of arsenic in his region’s water wells.

The state media is controlled by the government. Panelists noted that since 2006, particularly the state broadcast media have not always been equitable in terms of news processing and reporting, constantly refusing to reflect the viewpoints of the civil society and unions. This is particularly true near elections, panelists said.

Rémis Dandjinou observed, “The HCC law regulates the operating parameters 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.”

Eric Sibiri Kam, member of the Freedom of the Press Defense League described another legal issue journalists face from private media face, “Defamation is a [criminal] offense. As a matter of principle, the accuser must provide the evidence. But in defamation cases, the journalists must prove that they did not defame [the plaintiff].” Magistrate Kassoum Kambou, a member of the BFMHPR, added: “I believe that journalists do not enjoy appropriate legal protection in our country. The small amount of independence allowed to magistrates exacerbates this situation.”

In general, the panel noted, access to information is not easy for journalists who wish to investigate beyond rumors. Ramata Soré, an award-winning journalist with *L’Événement* summed up the situation by saying, “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.” Soré also said 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.”

Her statement was supported by the leader of the Freedom of the Press Defense League (FPDL), Sibiri Eric Kam, who said that “The law is explicit but access is not regulated. No specific action renders the right to access effective. A provision 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 provisions for how this information should be obtained. There is a general silence. The journalist is sent from one superior to another and that’s it.”

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 stated, is cost. The result is that 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 on 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 and journalists’ status is not clear. The law also includes a conscience clause for journalists to help them avoid being pressured into reporting unethically, but does not specify how to apply it.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 1.65

All indicators came relatively close to the objective average, with the notable exception of Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, which panelists scored a full point lower.

#### 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).

The panelists had differing opinions on the ability of journalists to fairly and objectively report, and to properly source articles. Some said that Burkina Faso has competent journalists trained in schools of journalism in Burkina Faso, elsewhere in Africa, and Europe. Others felt differently and shared their opinion that the competence level of journalists is low. In reality, many experienced journalists, most of them trained abroad, left the media—particularly the state media—to enter government service as ministry press directors and similar positions.

Naysayers on the panel pointed to a 2005 report on the monitoring of shows from four commercial stations in Ouagadougou, the HCC came to the following conclusion: “The irregularities noticed, particularly in the show schedule, show a high dose of amateurism in terms of managing the radio stations as well as the actual exercise of the profession. It is essential to make an effort for training the management and journalists of radio stations.”<sup>2</sup> “The journalists’ level of training is insufficient. Many working journalists have never had appropriate training and have never studied journalism,” Ahmed Newton Barry from *L’Événement* said.

“Journalism meets quality standards in Burkina Faso: there are trained professionals, training schools, 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 observed. Zongo added that “the working conditions do not guarantee that journalists will report 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 reporting news due to their lack of training. The large number of lawsuits against journalists coming particularly from among the print media is a proof of this,” Nathalie Somé added.

“Granted, newspapers such as *L’Événement* and *Sidwaya* occasionally publish good reports but it doesn’t happen that often,” Danielle Bougaïré warned. As a three-time member of the Galian Awards committee that presents awards to the best journalists in Burkina Faso annually, she warned that the level of knowledge and practice in all forms of media is low. The media settle for seminar reports, reports of officially sponsored events, and letters from readers. Journalists produce few original articles.

Eric Sibiri Kam with the Freedom of the Press Defense League (FPDL) explained: “Balance and objectivity do not preoccupy the journalists in Burkina Faso. Rumor has a privileged place in the print media’s various sections.” He cited various media features such as “Bad Pop,” “A letter for Laye,” “Week-end secrets,” and “Kantigui” as examples of the proliferation of rumors in the media. Interviewing experts is not a common practice and counterpoint is not encouraged in articles. Censorship and self-censorship are practiced for the sake of pleasing society’s elite, particularly in public broadcasting, where commercials and news considered “inconvenient” may be forbidden.

Justin Coulibaly observed that “Journalists, particularly some of those working for the state-run press, are the spokespersons of the government. They almost never check those sources that are not favorable to the government’s activities and do not do professional interviews. 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 2005 report, which monitored the shows from four commercial radio stations (Ouaga FM Radio, Horizon FM Radio, Pulsar Radio, and Savane FM Radio), the HCC concluded, “None of the monitored radio stations abide 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.”

Although previously criticizing levels of training, Newton Ahmed Barry said, “Journalists in Burkina Faso make serious efforts to observe the deontological standards in their daily work.” In 1990, an ethics charter was adopted by the Burkina Faso Journalist Association during a national convention. A media self-regulating body, National Press Monitoring Service (NPMS), was created in 2000. However, Eric Sibiri Kam counted “a few breaches of ethics here and there and the fact that lazily prepared articles are published frequently, particularly in the print media.” “Insufficient training triggers breaches of ethics sometimes unconsciously,” Nathalie Somé said.

Although no topic is explicitly taboo, self-censorship exists and is widely practiced, as Ramata Soré noted: “I talked with journalists who fear that if they use such and such piece of information they will get in trouble; so they would rather not mention it.” Monitoring the current political situation is a sensitive endeavor exposing journalists to abusive questioning, as proved in the case of the *L’Événement* or

<sup>2</sup> HCC 2005 Report (www.cc.bf)

*Bendré* editors who reported critically on the case dismissal in the Norbert Zongo affair.

Newton Ahmed Barr said he would rather “talk about the journalist’s social responsibility that makes him not publish certain information.” “One does not write everything one hears,” he added. “Take for instance the case of Korogo Issaka and the state markets<sup>3</sup> 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 mentioned a case of self-censorship at the National Television of Burkina Faso (NTBF) in 2006: “When a building wall belonging to a company [owned by the president’s brother] collapsed, it left three or four dead, and the national television didn’t pay much attention to it. But when the wall of a football club building collapsed, the NTBF sent a team. A child had been killed.”

Nevertheless, many panelists believed that the press in Burkina Faso is able to address sensitive topics, such as reports by the National Network for the Fight against Corruption. In its 2005 report, this association mentioned several cases of corruption appearing in the Burkina Faso media. Furthermore, the panelists agreed that the media in Burkina Faso address all nationally important topics. Ramata Soré noted, however, “they do address key subjects but frequently in a superficial manner, without digging deeper.”

There is a lack of transparency in terms of salaries in private media (public sector journalists are paid according to a published government scale). For many years, both the public and private sector have used many freelancers who work in poor conditions. For Rémis Dandjinou, “There is a tendency towards balanced, objective, fair reports. Moreover, most journalists abide by the ethical 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 reporting of events and key topics.” Ramata Soré stated, “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 reporters by event organizers in order to promote media coverage].”

<sup>3</sup> This was a famous case in 2006, involving a businessman who was accused of having forged the signature of the Minister of Finance in order to get a bank loan for the development of a public market. The state never launched an investigation.

“I had to confirm the words of a journalist with those of his employer. When he was hired, the owner offered him CFAF 70,000 [\$160] per 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 are not protected by a collective bargaining agreement are subject to the arbitrary decisions of the press owners,” Ahmed Newton Barry added. Joachim Baky added that “it is mainly for financial reasons that journalists sometimes stop being objective in their reporting.”

All the panelists agreed that entertainment in Burkina Faso generally gets more broadcast time. However, they distinguished between radio or television stations with different formats. Rémis Dandjinou noted that, “most of the broadcast 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 revealed that the radio stations monitored in its 2005 report essentially broadcast 60 to 70 percent musical programming. The HCC believes that this large amount of airtime dedicated to music, particularly foreign music, prevents the airing other kinds of shows that are potentially useful to listeners.

By and large, the media have relatively satisfactory means to collect and produce the news, the panelists believed. Most newspapers that appear 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 do not have access to computers or the Internet.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 1.98

Panelists rated several indicators rather differently than the final average. On the high side, panelists gave Indicators 2 and 5, citizen access to news sources and private media produce their own news, ratings approaching a score of 3. However, Indicators 3 and 4, state media reflect the views of the political spectrum and independent news agencies, scores well below the average.

According to the panelists, journalists do not ordinarily consult more than one news source when they process information. This limits plurality of points of view in the news despite a plurality of news sources. “Many journalists settle for echoing the official news coming from one source,” said

Ramata Soré. For example she said, “During the meningitis 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.”

Regarding the ability of average Burkinabes to obtain news, Danielle Bougairé said, “Local news sources are often formal and inaccessible.” “There is a certain amount of freedom in terms of choosing the media. Nevertheless, costs are high for the ordinary citizen in Burkina Faso,” observed Enoch Kinho Da, program manager at Radio Evangile du Sud Ouest.

Ahmed Newton Barry added 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 print media is concerned, small newsletters produced as 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.”

“The public media is still far from properly reflecting the diversity of opinions in the country,” noted Eric Sibiri Kam, echoing panelists’ views that the public media is not open to all political and social viewpoints in Burkina Faso. Justin Coulibaly said, “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 living in 2006. While the union workers were marching, the national television filmed a naturally empty job center.”

Other panelists noted that the state-run media have made real efforts to act in the public interest in recent years. The state-run daily newspaper *Sidwaya* reached out to its readers by opening up, more than before, to various political viewpoints. Similar efforts were noted at the national radio station. State-run television, however, remains oriented towards the government’s activities and mostly inaccessible to parties of the opposition or civil society. Access to state-run media opened up significantly during the electoral campaigns in 2005 and 2006 when the presidential, legislative, and municipal elections took place. At that time, the HCC coordinated the media coverage of the activities of various candidates.

Pierre Dabiré, the secretary-general of the Burkina Faso Journalist Association (BFJA) noted 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 in favor 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*, which has correspondents in the country’s 45 provinces. However, international agencies such as AFP, the Pan-African News Agency, Reuters, and the Francophone News Agency (SYFIA) do have correspondents in Burkina Faso.

Private radio stations usually produce their own shows, although some of them are produced in cooperation with other partners such as foreign radio stations or media support outlets, like the Panos Institute or SYFIA.

There are two independent press companies in Burkina Faso: Le Pays Publishing House, which publishes four titles (including the daily newspaper *Le Pays*, the weekly magazine *Evasion* and the monthly *Votre Santé*) and the Observateur Paalga Group which publishes the eponymous daily newspaper 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 (including *Sidwaya Plus*, *Carrefour Africain*, *Sidwaya Magazine*, *Sidwaya Sports*, and *Sidwaya B.D.*).

In the opinion of panelists, there are newscasts in the various national languages on the private community, non-profit, and

**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.

Catholic 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. "The media are aware of linguistic diversity," Evariste Zongo said, adding, "but news consists of reruns and translations. What is missing is the appropriate news reporting in the languages spoken by most of the population."

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 1.34

Panelists scored most indicators near the overall objective average. Two notable exceptions were Indicator 2, media receive revenue from multiple sources, which scored higher, and Indicator 7, circulation figures and audience ratings, which scored well below the average. Panelists were in unanimous agreement with Evariste Zongo's assessment of business management in media: "1) media management is opaque; 2) media companies do not fully disclose their financing sources; 3) in order to access the state subsidies for the private media, first they must pay all of their taxes and other fiscal debt, and; 4) the state gives with one hand and takes away with the other."

There were several different opinions concerning the profitability of media companies. Some panelists believed that, based on their lifestyle, media owners are prosperous. Other panelists doubted that their own media outlet is profitable.

Some media companies are the result of personal initiatives of journalists or businessmen. In the case of radio stations, in addition to for-profit outlets, there are many stations created

## 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.

by associations, communities, and religious organizations. Very little information exists concerning their financing sources, their ratings, or their operations.

Ramata Soré observed, "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 had somewhat conflicting opinions on the matter of business management in media. Danielle Bougairé said, "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 disagreed, noting, "Most media owners are also realtors and their lifestyle may make us think that their media companies are profitable. Moreover, the state offers support and subsidies."

Justin Coulibaly observed, "In most cases, the independent media management is deficient. It's like flying without instruments with poorly trained personnel that, on top of it, are not even registered with the social security agency."

Judging from these different reactions, it is hard to say that the media companies are indeed profitable given the lack of reliable information about their income sources and financial management capacity. Further, it is not certain that rigorous and transparent management methods are enforced, even in the case of those that appear on the surface to have good financial management practices.

Sibiri Erica Kam discussed cash flow issues by saying, "The printing houses are not subsidized 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 subsidy which varies every year."

Kassoum Kambou added, "The financial independence of the media is limited. The press industry is not very profitable. As a result: commercials cover a lot of space." "Even the management of advertising is a problem. There is no set rule for avoiding monopolies. Some newspapers dedicate up to three-fourths of their editorial space to advertising. Still others, including those with high readership, do not print advertisements because of their editorial policy," Ahmed Newton Barry said. But Justin Coulibaly observed, "The advertising sector is even more rudimentary as it is limited to the large cities if not to the capital alone, where everything is."

Kassoum Kambou felt that in the advertising sector "there are things that are left unsaid. The state will never direct advertising to some private media, whereas some others are specifically given state advertising expenditures. The state is

so intertwined with the private sector that the fear of being labeled [opposition sympathizers] will prevent companies from distributing commercials to a particular outlet.”

Non-profit or community radio stations have developed partnerships allowing them to access other financing sources than advertising, which is undeveloped in this sector. One of the panelists, Victor Ouédraogo, a journalist, gave the example of his radio station: “La Voix du Paysan has financing sources for three to four years at an international level with Radio Suisse Romande and at a domestic level with UNICEF, CNLPE.”

Panelists noted that international sources of aid also come from the foreign embassies in Burkina Faso. Germany, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the United States, France, and the Netherlands have supported and continue to support the private and public media, offering aid for training and equipment. International organizations such as UNICEF, UNFPA, and the International Organization of the Francophone countries (OIF) also provide financial aid or other equipment. In 1999, the OIF provided almost CFAF 28 million to the Burkina Faso media, including subsidies to projects submitted by newspapers such as *Le Pays*, *L'Observateur Paalga*, *Bendré* and *Le Journal du Soir* (no longer published).

In Burkina Faso, the state offers its support by subsidizing private newspapers. However, the conditions to benefit from the subsidy are not applied evenly. Newspapers that receive a greater share of the state’s advertising spend also tend to receive larger subsidies. “The subsidy does not fulfill its function, which is to make sure that a diversity of opinions is represented,” observed Ahmed Newton Barry. Evariste Zongo added, “The print media in national languages receive insignificant subsidies from the state. [And] they have no access to advertising.”

Information collected from the media by the Ministry of Information gives an idea about what sustainable press in Burkina Faso means and who can apply for support. In 2006, CFAF 150 million was granted to 40 private media consisting of 11 print media, 26 radio stations, and three television stations.<sup>4</sup> *L'Observateur Paalga* received CFAF 6,221,789 from the state and, in the same year, paid taxes amounting to approximately CFAF 12 million. The private television station SMTV paid CFAF 2,400,000 to the Telecommunication Control Authority and received CFAF 6,221,789.<sup>5</sup> However, despite the iniquities, the panelists strongly believed that subsidies do not influence the editorial content of the media outlets benefiting from them.

<sup>4</sup> Report on the subsidy distribution among the private media, Ministry of Information, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Information, 2006 reports.

“In reality, there is no independent service measuring the ratings or the circulation of newspapers,” Ahmed Newton Barry said. The print media themselves publish their own figures and there is no possibility of real independent control. Rémis Dandjinou said: “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 added that as part of the press support fundraiser held in 2005, Canal France International performed detailed market research concerning the television stations in Burkina Faso.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.45

In this objective, panelists rated none of the indicators much differently than the final average. All the panelists agreed 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. Indicator 3, NGO support to media advocacy issues, was the leading indicator, and Indicator 2, professional associations, also scored highly. In terms of training, the panelists found that supporting institutions in the country did not provide sufficient practical training. Therefore Indicator 5 was the lowest, though still within half a point.

The News and Communication Workers’ National Union protects the financial interests of journalists. The mission of the Journalists Association of Burkina Faso (BJA), consisting of media professionals, is to protect the freedom of the press, promote journalistic ethics, and to guarantee 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.

---

---

proper training and professional development of journalists. "The journalist profession is dynamic and well-organized. It is protected by a number of associations and NGOs," Joachim Bakay said. Sibiri Eric Kam dissented on the point about member services, saying, "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 government."

The various media outlets in Burkina Faso participate in associations trying to protect their members' interests. The most important of them are the Press Publishers Society, the Burkina Faso Free Broadcast National Union, the Community Radio Association, the Community Media Association, and the Rural Radio and Magazine Network.

"In Burkina Faso, the civil society is very active in protecting the freedom of the press," Evariste Zongo asserted. Ahmed Newton Barry added: "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 society. The professional organizations have come together under the auspices of an independent body called The Norbert Zongo Press Center, which receives support from the government as well as from international press organizations."

The Department of Journalism of the University of Ouagadougou offers graduate programs and a certificate course. The Vocational Training Center of Information (CFPI), run by the Ministry of Information, also offers academic training in journalism. Students also learn journalism elsewhere in Africa (e.g., Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire) and in Europe. Despite formal training, however, some panelists believe that the competence level of many graduates is low.

In discussing short-term training, Rémis Dandjinou noted, "The support coming from state institutions has provided a better framework in which the journalists can express themselves. However, there are still difficulties regarding problems such as professional training. Diplomas do not take into account the journalists' specialized 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 attitudes."

Not all panelists agreed. "The media professionals are better protected and backed by the NGOs (unions, human rights defense NGOs, etc.) than by the state," argued Kassoum Kambou. "The BJA, the NZ-NPC [Norbert Zongo Press Center], the AMDS [African Media Development Society], and the IJN [Informal Journalist Network] are just a few organizations offering retraining opportunities to journalists. There are also training schools. There are journalists who become well-known internationally thanks to the quality of their productions and the awards they win," pointed out Ramata Soré, a graduate of the University of Ouagadougou and winner of the CNN Africa 2006 award for print media.

"The RTBF [Radio-Television Burkina Faso] has a CFAF 80 million annual training budget but they don't use these funds. In fact, journalists weren't even aware of this opportunity until 2006," Nathalie Somé noted. "The CFPI of the Ministry of Information is more of a school for public administration officials. 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 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.

In 2006, the NZ-NPC organized short-term trainings for the print media and radio and gathered some 20 journalists at each event. Danielle Bougaïré, who was one of the trainers in the program, complained that "the media managers don't send their journalists to the NZ-NPC trainings even though they don't have to pay for it. During these trainings we realize better how unprepared the working journalists are."

Due to the lack of a distribution service, each newspaper in Burkina Faso is distributed through its own sales network concentrated in the capital. Ahmed Newton Barry described printing services thusly: "The printing service is not well organized. There is only one rotary press that has just been installed [in 2006]." In the broadcast sector, three private companies (ISEC, CFAO and Neerwaya Multivision) distributed international television channels in 2006. Subscribers have access to approximately 50 channels, depending on the subscription package.

---

---

## List of Panel Participants

**Newton Ahmed Barry**, editor-in-chief, *L'Événement*, Ouagadougou

**Ramata Sore**, journalist, *L'Événement*, Ouagadougou

**Danielle Bougaïré**, assistant professor, the University of Ouagadougou, Ouagadougou

**Joachim Baky**, manager, Edifice Mc Caan Ericsson and Ouaga FM Radio, Ouagadougou

**Evariste Zongo**, coordinator, Editors and Publishers of Newspapers in National Languages Association, Ouagadougou

**Justin Coulibaly**, chairman, the News and Communication Workers' National Union, Ouagadougou

**Rémis Djandjinou**, program director, Canal 3 TV Station, Ouagadougou

**Eric Sibiri Kam**, chairman, Freedom of the Press Defense League, Ouagadougou

**Nathalie Some**, journalist, Radio-Television of Burkina Faso, Bobo Dioulasso

**Kihon Enoch Da**, program manager, Radio Evangile du Sud Ouest, Gaoua

**Jean Victor Ouedraogo**, journalist, La Voix du Paysan Radio, Ouahigouya

**Tiergus Pierre Dabire**, secretary-general, Burkina Faso Journalist Association, Ouagadougou

### Moderators:

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

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

The Burkina Faso study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, PANOS Institute West Africa, Dakar, Senegal.