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## CAMEROON

Cameroon became independent in 1960 and has been ruled since 1982 by President Paul Biya. In 1990 Biya restored a multi-party political system and now more than 160 political parties are registered. However, Biya's party, the Democratic Union of the People of Cameroon (RDPC), has enjoyed an absolute majority in the legislature since 1997. Nonetheless, RDPC shares executive power with two other parties.

Over the past year several political events captured public attention in Cameroon. The general and municipal elections of July 2007 resulted, as expected, in victory for the RDPC, although many opposition parties disputed these results. Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni's anti-corruption operation dubbed "Sparrowhawk," initiated at the behest of international donors, led to the conviction of, and harsh sentences for, a number of former managers of state-owned enterprises.

Despite progress in political freedom, the media operate in a context of legal uncertainty termed by the government as a "regime of tolerance," and relations between the media and the government remain strained. This is particularly true in the Anglophone provinces, many experiencing secessionist movements, where local authorities do not hesitate to pursue journalists who criticize their management. Many media outlets have fallen into self-censorship, and make a point to flatter the president and his wife.

On the whole, panelists pointed out that the press in Cameroon faces significant obstacles in its development and operations. Panelists summed up their views with several ideas on how to undertake these improvements. These included reinforcing ethics and training journalists in their rights and responsibilities; encouraging the growth of institutions improve professional standards and protect the rights of media; improving the socio-economic condition of journalists; adopting regulations supporting freedom of the press; creating profitable media companies and ending advertising market dumping, and; increasing public access to news media.

Panelists' scores, therefore, reflect a media sector with significant progress yet to be achieved. While all objectives scored fairly close to the overall country score, Objective 4, Business Management, stood out as the lowest, with a score of 1.29. On the high side, Objective 5, Supporting Institutions, was the only objective exceeding a 2, coming in at 2.11.

# CAMEROON AT A GLANCE

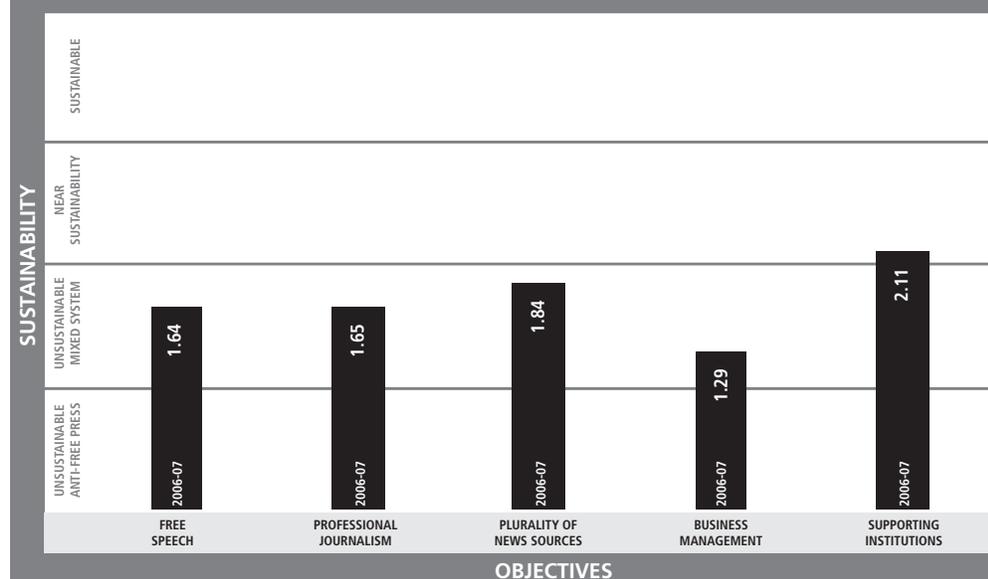
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 18,467,692 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Yaounde
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigrific 7%, other African 13%, non-African less than 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 40%, Muslim 20% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$18.06 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$2,060 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 77%, female 59.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Paul Biya (since November 6, 1982)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print : 5 daily newspapers; Radio: 3 main stations; Television stations: 3
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation : *Le Messager* (private), *Cameroon Tribune* (state-owned), *Mutations* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Cameroon Radio Television (state-owned), Radio Reine (Catholic) station, Radio Siantou (private)
- > **News agencies:** None
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 370,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

### MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: CAMEROON



#### 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.

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## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.64

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The score in this objective reflects varying scores for the several indicators. On the one hand panelists rated highly Indicators 8 and 9, media access to international news and free entry into the journalism profession, and each scored about a point higher than the average. However, panelists returned scores below 1 for Indicators 2 and 5, broadcast licensing and preferential treatment for state media.

The fundamental laws of Cameroon include numerous provisions guaranteeing the freedoms of speech and opinion. While the media do take advantage of this in practice, there are limitations. Until 1990, the media were regulated by an obsolete French legacy law that included provisions for prior censorship (and this provision lingered on until 1996). Plurality was absent in the media during single-party rule from 1966 to 1990. Although plurality returned in 1990, plurality in itself is not enough to guarantee sustainability of media or freedom of the press.

The general communication convention held in 1994 in Yaounde, with the support of UNESCO, promised to change the situation and implement a modern self-regulatory system in Cameroon. It was meant to tackle issues as diverse as: the legal and institutional environment, the ethics code and the structuring of the journalism profession, media content, the adaptation of technologies, training, advertising, and others. To this day, self-regulatory institutions have yet to become effective. The resolutions taken at the convention have been forgotten. The regulatory institutions created by the state work within an overly theoretical framework that reoriented their purpose toward protection of the regime against the media.

The media scene in Cameroon was shaken in 2006 by a renewed attempt by the government to solidify state control of the independent media. Minister of Communication Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo proposed to the National Assembly Bill No. 789/PJ/AN designed to modify and complete some provisions of Bill No. 90/052 from 1990 concerning the freedom of speech and the press. According to the minister's rationale, the 1990 law "triggered an impressive diversification and a considerable development of printed press titles."

Referring to "libertine journalism" that took over the news, but also to professional deficiencies, ethical failures, civil disobedience, and sedition of which the government now accused the media of being guilty, proposed law was intended to prevent all these "deviations." It would do so by punishing the press that had recently taken the liberty to question the personalities of the government and the civil society by associating them with some sordid affairs.

The proposed bill aimed to allow the government to avoid entrusting reprimanding power to institutions that might elude their control by holding the stick themselves and thus be able to strike without being subject to the law. It sought to reinforce the conditions for establishment of a press company, the daily control by the administrative authority on publications, and the tax requirements similar to those incurred by any other business.

As a result of the lobby organized by the heads of the National Union of Cameroon Journalists (SNJC), the project was several times returned for "reassessment" by the representatives of the National Assembly. The minister of communication, who defended it furiously, organized consultations with the professional organizations at his office in Yaounde, but his "pedagogical" project had to suffer a second rejection after Parliament's vote. This project is supposed to reappear in the next parliamentary session.

That controversial government bill came at a time when, after many announcements on the matter since last year, broadcast media in Cameroon finally began to obtain official broadcast licenses. In operation for seven years but with no license, the government allowed them to operate under a "regime of tolerance." The first audio-visual licenses were issued in late August 2007, overseen by the National Communications Council (NCC), which is staffed by presidential appointees.

Regarding the process used by the NCC to decide on license applications, journalist Olinga Ndoa Joseph pointed out, "A few months ago operation licenses were issued to two operators (STV and Canal 2) without prior solicitation of managerial specifications. The only indication of merit to the government is the payment of CFAF 100 million (\$240,000) for television channels and CFAF 50 million (\$120,000) for radio stations."

Panelists felt that it is necessary to build a better legal and institutional framework to guarantee the survival of press companies. This means adopting regulatory legislation acceptable to stakeholders, similar to those found in some West African countries. In contrast, while there is legislation in Cameroon on this subject, enforcement and implementation are incomplete.

Such laws should favor the creation and operation of the media. Panelists said market principles should be the underpinnings of press companies. They further thought that tax exemptions should be granted to newly created press companies, a consistent investment code is required, and consideration should be given to subsidizing the press.

Physical attacks on journalists are rare, but those that do happen do not receive serious attention from law enforcement. The US State Department, in its 2007 Report on Human Rights Practices, noted that no arrests have been made

in the case of an attack made in November 2006 on Agnes Taïle, a presenter for Sweet FM. Security forces have been reported manhandling journalists. In July 2007, Congolese NGO Journaliste en Danger reported that a reporter for private daily *Le Messenger*, Roland Tsapi, was beaten by riot police while covering a peaceful demonstration.

Douanla Kaze, with Dynamic FM, believes that one cannot objectively speak of persecution of journalists in Cameroon, but of a feeling of insecurity. Every day, many journalists are victims of intimidations or physical or verbal aggressions as soon as they reveal their profession. Threats, aggressions, and intimidations against journalists are not even tallied anymore, panelists said.

Speaking of preferential treatment for state media, Jean Marc Soboth, with the Union of Cameroon Journalists, said “In fact, the state media enjoy favorable treatment as they profit from the generosity of advertisers, and especially the government. Our fellow journalists working in the public sector always had the tendency to look at their private media counterparts as second-rate individuals. This attitude had an obvious influence on the judicial treatment of the latter’s press offenses. In reality, the legislative process in Cameroon has further converged on total protection of the members of the regime by means of an ever-tightened administrative and judicial control. For example, a government bill passed last year allowed administrative authorities to suspend a publication manager and thus halt publication in a discretionary manner.”

In courthouses, there are still summary trials against journalists. The US State Department’s 2007 Human Rights Practices Report

on Cameroon notes that criminal libel laws are in force, and that these are used to intimidate the media, particularly those seeking to expose corruption. The report also states that burden of proof is placed on the defendant, that the government may criminalize civil suits, and that both prison sentences and fines may be handed down as punishment.

The government prosecuted its critics in the print media through criminal libel laws. These laws authorize the government, at its discretion and the request of the plaintiff, to criminalize a civil libel suit or to initiate a criminal libel suit in cases of alleged libel against the president and other high government officials; such crimes are punishable by prison terms and heavy fines. The libel law places the burden of proof on the defendant. Local leaders in particular abused this law to keep local journalists from reporting on corruption and abusive behavior. In 2006 various government members and senior government officials filed nine libel suits against journalists.

Regarding freedom of information, Soboth noted: “Freedom of expression is, generally speaking, established by the current constitution of Cameroon. At the same time, access to public news sources is still a complex matter and the object of a debate that has not changed its terms since the adoption of the December 1990 law on the freedom of expression.” To illustrate cases of obstruction of the freedom of information, the panelists recalled the Freedom FM affair. In April 2003, the minister of communication deployed the military and sealed all equipment of this private radio station in order to prevent its opening.

## 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

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.65

The only outlying indicator in this objective was Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, which scored a point lower than the average.

Newsgathering is far from complying with professional quality standards. Stories are generally characterized by inequitable treatment, a phenomenon that hurts the reputation of the press in the eyes of public opinion. The presentation of partial facts, inability to travel to cover stories, production time management, insufficient personnel in the newsrooms, and the interference of the press owners or advertisers in the choice of news coverage all combine to diminish the quality of news in Cameroon.

The advertising environment and business objectives usually hinder free and objective news reporting. This comes as a result of the subjectivity of and pressure coming from business partners. Journalists are very close to certain quarters. It is

customary that sponsors, publication managers, channel executives, business managers, or other administrative executives give their “publishing order” to ensure that a piece of news is processed by the appropriate specialist.

Difficulty accessing official sources of information for journalists representing independent media also stifles the ability to report accurately. In most cases, only the state media are allowed in the close vicinity of government officials and given access to government information.

Certainly, however, a lack of requisite training harms the quality of news. “Four years ago the government published regulations on the issuance of press cards. Among the requirements there was the obligation of an initial or continuous training as a guarantee that the applicant is familiar with the rules of professional quality. Despite this regulatory mechanism there are still discrepancies,” regretted Dgimeli Tafopi, a teacher in the Department of Information and Communication of the Higher School of Management.

Cameroon’s media exist in an environment lacking specific social regulation. In April 2006, the ongoing work of a joint commission created by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security to negotiate and adopt the very first national collective bargaining agreement for journalists was suddenly halted. This unexpected halt was the result of a memorandum signed by the various commissioners requiring, as a precondition to signing the collective bargaining agreement, the enforcement in Cameroon of the Florence Agreement that calls for tax exemptions for newly created press companies and stipulates the distribution to all broadcast media of any national license fee. In Cameroon, only to the state broadcaster received the proceeds from this fee.

### 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 unions of working journalists, who had urged the government to create the commission, were the only ones requesting the resumption of the negotiations for the collective bargaining agreement. Pressure from the International Federation of Journalists and local unions helped the talks resume. While many private media owners threatened to boycott, talks successfully concluded in March 2008.

As a general rule, salaries in the media have stagnated far below the average of the tertiary sector to which the press is supposed to belong. In Bafoussam, in the Western province, the SNJC registered journalists who had been forced to volunteer, while others had salaries as low as CFAF 5,000 per month, which is less than the salary of the worst paid housekeepers. Journalists also complain of abusive layoffs and lack of social security benefits and medical coverage. In 2007 alone almost 100 layoffs occurred in the broadcast media, especially at Canal 2 and STV television channels.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.84

In this objective a majority of indicators were clustered near the average. However, Indicators 2 and 5, citizen access to media and private broadcasters produce their own news, finished much better; Indicator 2 had a score one point higher than the average. On the other hand, Indicator 4, news agencies, scored more than a point less than the average.

Political developments in the 1990s allowed for an opening up of the media in Cameroon and new sources of news 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.

information to be established in every medium. Though only recently licensed, private radio existed since 2000 and television since 2001. A handful of relatively well-regarded newspapers publish regularly. However, the liberalization also allowed unreliable sources to spring up and flood the market with content of questionable veracity. Hundreds of tabloid papers are available from media organizations with no real business structure or capital to ensure investment or employment security.

Due to a lack of reliable statistics, it is difficult to quantify and estimate public access to the news. The liberalization of the media sector has, of course, favored the appearance of many media, but access to these sources is still problematic. "Due to certain factors, the printed press in Cameroon is still quite expensive, CFAF 300, which creates a new species of readers: the "headlinologs," namely those who content themselves with reading the headlines and comment on them. The Internet is still a luxury as it is extremely expensive," Beumo Mengue Bernard, a journalist with CRTV, stated.

In the printed press, the political precariousness and selective distribution by the sole distributor, Messapresse, is the main determining element of its inaccessibility. In the broadcast sector, problems of access are just as worrying. Thus the large media offering in urban areas contrasts with the media voids created in smaller towns.

All the panelists pointed out that there is no longer a press agency in Cameroon after the disappearance of the public agency Camnews, which attempted to recapitalize the in 1993. The main consequence of this situation is that it is obviously difficult for the national media to cover the ten provinces that comprise Cameroon. The media only cover the larger cities and limit their subjects to issues related to structural adjustment, public administration, and politics. Due to their insufficient technical and financial means, the media companies are increasingly dependent on news collected on the Internet and through international agencies. More recently, especially with radio stations, they use tabloids as the main news source for their newscasts; panelists said that they are always careful *not* to quote them.

Minorities and minority issues do not receive particular attention in the media. A lack of resources on their part results in the inability to control the creative capital of the press. Further, panelists doubted that minority media would survive in the current political and financial landscape, and they pointed to hostility toward the idea of granting favors to specific ethnic groups that might be assumed should a specialized outlet appear.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.29

All indicators in this objective scored near the objective average, although one, Indicator 4, ratio of advertising to other revenue, slightly outperformed the other indicators.

The management of the large majority of the media, except for a very small number, leaves a lot to be desired. This is due to the fact that the only concern of many owners as businesspeople is profitability, which some panelists felt was a cause for their reluctance to alleviate the poor conditions under which journalists work.

The consensus of the panelists was that the current style of media management is not very different from grocery store management. Accounting is done by non-experts and the heads of companies use the funds as they wish without thinking about tomorrow. The result is that employees go many months without being paid and layoffs are very frequent. These factors block the independence of journalists since they need to make ends meet and therefore must fall back on unethical maneuvers such as "gombo," where stories are bought and sold, and what amounts to forms of blackmail. Falling newspaper sales since the 1990s has only made matters worse.

The advertising market is quite undeveloped, barely counting five large companies that advertise regularly. Advertising contracts are negotiated on an individual basis. Apart from advertising resources, some media also profit from "occult" financing provided by people in high places in business and politics.

### 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.

The state subsidy to the media amounts to CFAF 150 million per year for the entire communication sector (media, communication agencies, graphic industries, etc.). Some companies refuse the CFAF 2 million (\$4,800) that is allotted to each, not only because it is insignificant, but also because "this subsidy was not clearly regulated in terms of its distribution when it was voted for by the Parliament," Dgimeli Tafopi stated.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Cameroon Objective Score: 2.11

Only Indicator 1, trade associations, did not score near the objective average; panelists scored it nearly a point less.

The protection of professional interests by supporting institutions is undoubtedly the keystone of creating media sustainability in Cameroon. There are journalist unions and associations, but their activity is modest due to the lack of a legal framework and of the financial means that might give them the possibility to act in real time. However, the current media context can only improve as a result of strong corporate action. Journalists must do an even more convincing job rallying for the solution of their problems.

In Cameroon the union SNJC has been in existence since 2002. After that, many other media associations and, to a lesser degree, NGOs advocating for the protection of human rights appeared. But the action of these organizations remains marginal because of administrative problems and government antipathy. "This situation highlights the importance of solidarity among the supporting institutions protecting the interests

#### 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.

of the media professionals," said journalist Olinga Ndoa, a member of SNJC.

Panelists did not comment on training opportunities. However, according to the BBC World Service Trust's African Media Development Initiative 2006 report on Cameroon, a vocational school, the Advanced School of Mass Communication, and three universities with journalism departments offer students an opportunity to study journalism. The report also indicates that international NGOs provide training for journalists.

### Panelist List

**Mbog Pibasso Achile Prosper**, journalist, *La nouvelle Expression* Newspaper

**Bertran Aurélien Beumo**, journalist, CRTV

**Roland Tsapi**, journalist, *Le Messenger* Newspaper

**Guy Modeste Dzudié Ngamga**, journalist, *Le Messenger* Newspaper

**Bouddih M. Adams**, journalist, *The Sun* Newspaper

**Albert Djacba**, journalist, *L'Oeil du Sahel* Newspaper

**Pius Njawe**, owner, *Le Messenger* Newspaper

**Haman Mana**, director, *Mutations* Newspaper

**Mactar Silla**, director general, STV

**Joceline Nankam**, director, RTM

**Henriette Ekwe**, member, Journalists Union of Cameroon

**Madeleine Afite**, member, ACAT

**Abdel Nasser Njoya**, member, Palmarès

**Baba Wame**, teacher, School of Communication Sciences and Technology Information (ESSTIC)

### Moderator

**Jean Marc Soboth**, secretary, Cameroon Syndicate of Journalists

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