
Leading journalists pointed to the dispute between the executive branch and the Higher Audio-Visual and Communications Authority (HAVCA) as a particularly ominous sign that the government of Benin—viewed widely as one of Africa’s most stable democracies—was seeking to exert control over the broadcast media.



BENIN

Just two years after Beninese media were rated the freest in Africa by Reporters Without Borders, press freedom in the tiny West African country is on a downturn that shows little sign of reversing. Reporters Without Borders' 2008 rankings listed Benin 11th in press freedom among African nations, falling from its ninth-place ranking in 2007. Late in 2008, a Beninese media workers' union issued a statement documenting a host of rights infringements: imprisonments, beatings, and police interrogations of journalists; politically motivated transfers of journalists working for state media; the forming of non-aggression and propaganda agreements between the office of President Thomas Boni Yayi and the media; and the conflict between the executive branch and the agency that regulates media, regarding the granting of frequencies to new television and radio stations.

Leading journalists pointed to the dispute between the executive branch and the Higher Audio-Visual and Communications Authority (HAVCA) as a particularly ominous sign that the government of Benin—viewed widely as one of Africa's most stable democracies—was seeking to exert control over the broadcast media. The conflict, which came to be known as “the war of the frequencies,” highlighted the serious risks that arise when the institutions responsible for enforcing media law fight over interpretations.

The dispute began to unfold on January 30, 2008, when HAVCA granted new frequencies to the winners of a competition for the installation and operation of private radio and television stations. Three days later, the minister in charge of communications and information technology expressed disapproval of the procedures that led to the granting of the new frequencies, and the government asked the Benin Constitutional Court to overturn HAVCA's decision. The government claimed that HAVCA could not grant new frequencies without the ministry's technical approval, and said that the ministry “is clearly opposed to any new frequency granting for legal, technical, and security reasons.” Though HAVCA cited legislation dating to 1997 that granted the agency discretion to award frequencies, the court ruled in favor of the ministry at the end of February, saying that HAVCA had violated the constitution.

Troubling signs about the future of Beninese media have emerged from within the journalism profession as well. Journalists continue to work under deplorable conditions, and the quality of their work has suffered. Media advocates acknowledge that reporting is often incomplete or biased—a situation they attribute to low pay, poor management, and pressure from powerful individuals inside and outside of government.

Benin's overall MSI score is essentially unchanged compared to last year, although objective scores showed some movement. Objective 1, freedom of speech, and Objective 3, plurality of news sources, both received slightly lower scores; while the other three objectives remained more or less the same. The range of scores also remained similar to last year, with Objective 4, business management, receiving by far the worst score; and Objective 5, supporting institutions, receiving the best score. The other objectives fell in the lower half of the “near sustainability” range.

BENIN AT A GLANCE

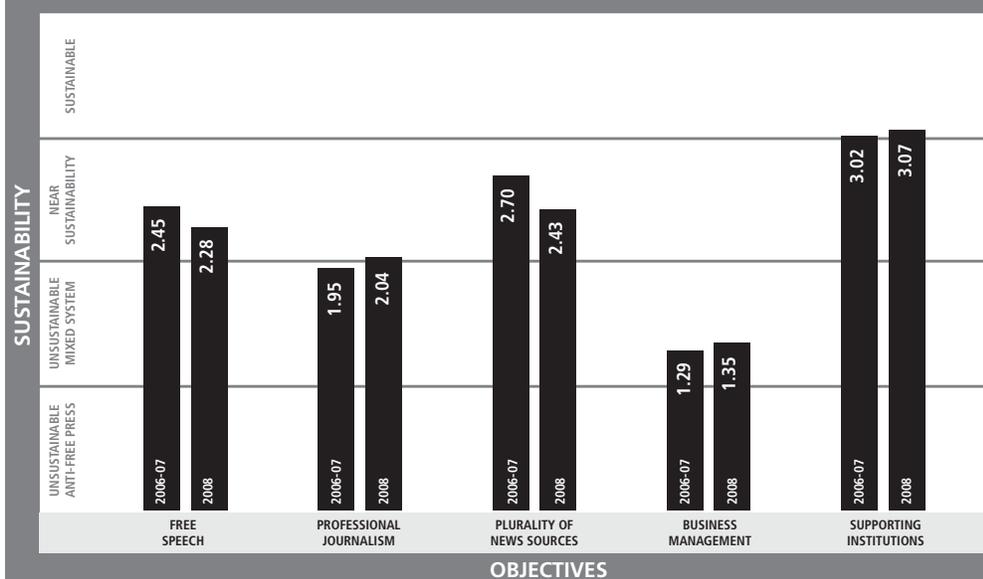
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 8,791,832 (14 May, 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Porto-Novo
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Fon 39.2%, Adja 15.2%, Yoruba 12.3%, Bariba 9.2%, Peulh 7%, Ottamari 6.1%, Yoa-Lokpa 4%, Dendi 2.5%, other 1.6%, unspecified 2.9% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 42.8%, 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 (2008-Atlas):** \$5.120 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, revised 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$1,310 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **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: 53 total (28 daily newspapers, 25 periodicals); Radio: 73; Television Stations: 5, including 1 public channel
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *La Nation* (state-owned), *Le Matinal* (private), *Fraternité* (privately owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: National Radio (state-owned), Golfe FM (state-owned), Capp FM
- > **Television channel ratings:** Top three: National television (public channel), Canal3 (privately-owned channel), Golfe TV (privately-owned).
- > **News agencies:** Agence Bénin Presse (state-owned), Agence de presse Médiane Afrique (private), Agence Proximités (privately owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 150,000 (2007 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: 2.28

Benin's freedom of speech score slipped slightly compared to last year, as the scores fell for a number of indicators. In particular, panelists decreased scores for Indicator 2 (broadcast licensing) and Indicator 5 (legal guarantees of editorial independence for state media). Indicator 1 (legal protections support free speech) and Indicator 4 (attacks on journalists) also experienced a decline. Despite its slide, Indicator 4 still managed to score about a point higher than the overall objective score, as did Indicator 8 (media access to foreign news sources) and Indicator 9 (free entry to the journalism profession). However, indicators 5, 6 (libel laws), and 7 (access to information) all scored about a point lower. One indicator increased its score: Indicator 3 (market entry and tax treatment).

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by Benin's 1991 constitution. Article 23 of the constitution recognizes the right of every person to freedom of thought, opinion, and expression within the legal bounds of public order. Article 24 states that freedom of the press is recognized and guaranteed by the state. In practice, however, the media must exercise these freedoms in a restrictive legal environment. "The constitution recognizes the freedom of speech, of which the press is a direct manifestation. But on the other hand, there are still liberty-killing and obsolete laws," said panelist Edouard Loko, director of the daily newspaper *Le Progres* and president of the Benin press management organization.

Many of the laws that affect the media and its operations date to the period before 1990, when Benin abandoned Marxist-Leninist central controls for multi-party democracy. For example, Law 60-12, passed in 1960, limits the freedom of the press and stipulates prison sentences for journalists convicted of press offenses. And Order No. 69-22 PR/MJL, from 1969, provides for the suppression of attacks on public order and bans the spread, publication, distribution, and reproduction of false news.

Licensing of broadcast media has been free and open since 1990, but the conflict between HAVCA and the government over the granting of frequencies suggests that the process is not as free as it appears. According to panelists, the government's annulment of the decision of HAVCA to grant new frequencies—even though HAVCA's equitable, competitive, and apolitical action was not questioned—is evidence that the government desires to control the broadcast media. Analyzing this conflict, panelists said that the frequency granting process was more transparent than the government's management of the controversy that sprang

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from the grants. "The administration even dispatched a team of public servants and policemen to cut the power and seal off the equipment of a newly licensed radio station,"¹ said panelist Abel Gbètoénonmon, a journalist and member of a platform reuniting civil society organizations. While recognizing that licensees and citizens have the option of challenging the decisions of HAVCA, panelists regretted that the constitutional court's decision cannot be appealed.

Taxation is the same for Benin's media as for other businesses—a situation long opposed by media owners, given the nature of the media and the role they play in society. Supplies and equipment involved in production are taxed in the same way as materials used by other types of companies. Nonetheless, when they are incorporated, media companies are subject to different financial and administrative obligations according to their medium: press, radio, or television. Thus, while all a newspaper owner must do is to file a statement, the other media are forced to complete full legal and financial paperwork. After that, all media companies are taxed equally, based on their sales figures.

The panelists agreed that journalists are not murdered in Benin. From time to time, however, journalists are roughed up by police officers, who go unpunished. This situation may be explained by the fact that Benin still has no laws designed to expressly protect journalists. Mobilizing by human rights organizations is the only response when the physical integrity of a journalist is violated by the police. No media company has ever been subjected to vandalism or sabotage, panelists said.

¹ On March 31, 2008, after the annulment of the decision of HAVCA by the constitutional court, a delegation of representatives of the ministry of communication, accompanied by a police squad, raided a newly licensed radio station while it was conducting tests. The group cut the station's power and sealed off its equipment. HAVCA denounced this intervention and submitted a complaint to the constitutional court, which ruled: "The measures taken cannot be construed as a government intervention sanctioning an unlicensed radio station, which is a prerogative of HAVCA, but rather as law enforcement against a radio station that broadcasts in violation of a decision of the Constitutional Court."

“Sometimes we have felt ashamed by the work of our fellow journalists,” said François Awoudo, a journalist and former president of the Observatory for Ethics and Responsibility in Media.

The law states clearly that all journalists should have access to news sources, but those working for state media generally enjoy exceptional favoritism, as long as they are not covering news that is damaging to the interests of the authorities. They also have greater access to news events involving the government. Such favoritism may explain why journalists from the state media and public broadcasters believe that they must ally themselves with members of the government or other politicians, who appoint their managers. The need for government advertising and other support discourages state media managers from upsetting their influential patrons.

In Benin, libel is considered a media offense if it allegedly is committed through the media, and a common law offense if by other means. Civil law cases place the burden of proof on the plaintiff, but when the media are involved, the defendant journalist must show that the alleged slander is true. Panelists said that it is difficult for a journalist to provide evidence because of the length of the process and the nature of the required documents. The journalist has seven days from the notification that a case has been submitted to the court to

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.

notify the attorney general or the plaintiff of the facts he or she intends to prove as true, as well as provide copies of all documents and names and addresses of witnesses. Journalists typically have difficulty obtaining the necessary copies, especially if the documents are in the hands of the government. Also, not many journalists dare to appear in court and testify against a well-known person.

The principle of free access to information is stated in Law No. 92-021, but no further regulations detail how such access works in practice. Journalists must find a way to acquire the information that they seek. Furthermore, any information that a journalist has that has been labeled as “confidential,” regardless of the necessity of keeping it secret, can result in a jail sentence.

Access to international news is not restricted. The Beninese media surf the Internet for news, and some use news from the Internet and broadcast news agencies based on a partnership agreement with almost no financial compensation. Dispatches from the international news agencies are rarely used by the Beninese media because of the extremely high subscription rates. Foreign publications, particularly from neighboring Nigeria, are widely distributed in the capital city of Cotonou without controls or restrictions, despite existing legal provisions to this effect.

Panelists recognized that no law restricts access to the journalistic profession. The government influences neither admission to journalism schools nor recruitment of journalists by media outlets. It has no influence on professional associations. However, by regulating the issuance of press cards, HAVCA has in effect set forth criteria determining who can be a journalist. In addition, special accreditation is required to cover certain events (heads of state meetings, national holidays, etc.) and is issued by the relevant government agencies. But “governmental control stops there, and such control within the event sites is simply for security reasons,” according to panelist Célestin Akpovo, a university professor, former journalist, and president of the private press union of Benin.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Benin Objective Score: 2.04

Although overall the score for this objective showed little change, the panelists did assess some of the indicators differently this year. Indicators 1 (reporting is fair and well-sourced), 3 (self-censorship), and 4 (journalists cover key events) showed improvement, while Indicator 6 (balance of entertainment and news) and Indicator 7 (modern equipment) ended up with lower scores. Most of the

indicators stayed within a half point of the overall score, with two exceptions: Indicator 4 scored about a point higher, while Indicator 5 (pay levels for journalists) was again the lowest-scoring indicator, coming in about a point lower than the overall objective score.

Beninese journalists' work is not rigorous. While panelists acknowledged that factors outside of newsrooms influence the quality of the journalists' work, they also recognized that journalists could hardly do better jobs because of their undesirable work and living conditions.

Journalists are most often accused of not checking and verifying information sufficiently. Many people complain that journalists do not work hard enough to get to know all sides of a story before reporting the story. Panelists said that it is awkward to see people who are granted a right of response lecturing journalists on journalism. "Sometimes we have felt ashamed by the work of our fellow journalists," said François Awoudo, a journalist and former president of the Observatory for Ethics and Responsibility in Media.

Some panelists said that journalists—particularly younger ones—are offered per diem allowances and other gifts in the hope that they will skew their articles in a certain direction. Clément Adéchain, managing editor of the daily newspaper *L'Informateur*, asked the participants, "How can you expect a paid report to be fair?" But Loko called that "a borderline, half-true excuse." According to him, money and gifts do not always explain the mistakes in the Beninese media.

The panelists said that another weakness of journalists is that they do not prepare sufficiently for broadcast debates or other discussions. Either the journalist has no command of the topic or the guest is oblivious to it. Panelist Urbain

Amégbédji, an NGO leader, said that there are a rare few journalists who do an admirable job leading a debate or conducting an interview.

The Beninese media adopted a code of ethics in September 1999. The code follows the example of other African countries and takes on the pivotal issues of the profession. Through training sessions, media professionals have been made aware of the contents of the code, although there are still some opponents to it. The code is regularly violated, often through the publication of false news, slander, false accusations, and mixtures of facts and hearsay.

Self-censorship, said Maurille Agbokou, managing director of the daily newspaper *Adjinakou*, "is part of the trade. Not everything is said out loud. But journalists often practice self-censorship because there is a threat from the outside."

Often, journalists do not discuss some topics for fear of ending up in court. But more frequently, they are afraid of upsetting business relations with certain companies by writing about certain topics that might be damaging to the companies—particularly advertisers. For example, there are publication managers who were not able to renew their contracts with a state-run company because they dared to expose the obsolete nature of its infrastructure. When big commercial and financial advantages are at play, the owner of the media outlet will give indications, or even orders, about how a topic must be covered, if at all. "If my journalist does not walk the line, I will sack him to protect the interests of the company," Adéchain concluded.

Self-censorship aside, panelists were unanimous that there is no outright taboo topic in the Beninese media. Some topics are addressed with caution, such as those subject to legal restrictions and those that can only be addressed with caution, such as national defense and safety, and pending court cases.

Salaries among Beninese media fall into two categories: journalists in the state media that are employed and paid regularly, and those in the private media who receive virtually no salary. In the private media, the poor salary structure favors corruption. Some outlets even ask event organizers to pay reporters' transportation and bed and board expenses. To survive, some journalists agree to write stories proposed by politicians in exchange for money.

To limit corruption in sensitive sectors such as justice and tax administration, the Beninese government substantially increased the magistrates' and tax agents' salaries, yet no such steps have ever been taken with journalists' salaries.

All the broadcast media have specific time slots for news but dedicate more airtime for entertainment programming

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 agreed that the state media do a great deal for cultural promotion. But they also said that the state media do not reflect the full spectrum of public opinion and are influenced by the government.

(interactive and reality shows). In a typical 24-hour period, only a third of the time is used for newscasts and the rest is entertainment.

Equipment quality in the written press has improved, but the broadcast sector has serious equipment problems. The image quality on television programs is an indicator the obsolete technical equipment (cameras and editing rooms) being used. Radio stations still use analog recorders, which affects the sound quality of reports and shows produced outside the studio.

All newspapers have correspondents throughout the country who send in field reports. The same is true for television stations, which have transmitters in the larger inland cities. But the production issue is tied to the availability of personnel and materials. Many panelists said that the state broadcast media address topics much more selectively and acknowledge all the country's ethnic groups. In contrast, all local (private, commercial, or community) radio stations produce shows that are potentially interesting to ethnic groups living only in their coverage area.

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.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Benin Objective Score: 2.43

This objective experienced a modest drop in score, from 2.70 to 2.43. The change was caused by lower scores in four indicators: 1 (plurality of news sources), 2 (citizen access to media), 3 (objectivity of state media), and 6 (transparency of media ownership). Indicators 3 and 6 represented the lowest-scoring indicators, coming in a point lower than the overall objective score. Indicator 2 and Indicator 7 (media coverage of minority issues) scored higher by a point and a half-point, respectively.

Despite a strong presence in urban areas, the written press still struggles to reach rural populations because of an undeveloped distribution system. This shortcoming is compensated by local radio stations, which relay the news published in newspapers in their news reports and press reviews.

Citizens' access to national and international, audio-visual, and written media is unlimited. Access to the Internet is free of restrictions, but panelists pointed out that the Internet is accessed only by a very few, due to lack of financial and technical means. The government has exempted all imported computers from customs tax.

The panelists agreed that the state media do a great deal for cultural promotion. But they also said that the state media do not reflect the full spectrum of public opinion and are influenced by the government. The state appoints media managers, and the airtime dedicated to the activities and viewpoints of members of government is much greater than the airtime allotted to opposition parties and apolitical organizations. However, within a hierarchy that aims to please the government, a few journalists are fighting so that the state media fulfill their public service obligations.

Benin has two private press agencies, Médiante Afrique and Proximités. Because they are having trouble making their services profitable, they also conduct such secondary activities as training, studies, and research. Limited revenues do not allow newspapers to use the services of a press agency. Instead, they use information they find on the Internet.

In a highly competitive environment, private radio stations provide programming targeted to the populations living in their coverage areas. But in terms of quality, these productions cannot be compared to the national radio stations' productions, which are dedicated to a larger audience.

Determining the financial sources of private media is difficult. The true owners hide behind dummy corporations, so the public cannot measure the degree of objectivity of the

news distributed by these outlets. Sometimes politicians or businesspeople try to use the media to protect their interests, seeking to influence editorial content. Panelists knew of no foreign investment in Beninese media at present.

Beninese media are subject to only a few (mostly socio-cultural) restrictions on certain topics. Most social interests are represented, through local radio stations with cultural or religious programming and press outlets specializing in areas such as finance, education and sports.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Benin Objective Score: 1.35

Panelists rated this objective about the same as last year, although four indicators did change notably. Panelists gave better scores to indicators 3 (advertising agencies) and 4 (proportion of advertising to other revenue sources), but the scores for indicators 1 (media are well-managed businesses) and 7 (audience and circulation measurement) both worsened. Indicator 4 scored about three-quarters of a point higher than the overall objective score, while Indicator 5 (government subsidies for private media) scored more than a point higher. Indicators 6 (market research) and 7 both scored more than a point lower.

Private media outlets are neither efficient nor profitable. All panelists agreed that media companies' revenues are insignificant compared to companies in other sectors. Accounting departments have no business plans, and their personnel are insufficiently qualified and often mixed with sales and administrative departments. With community

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 government also provides funding to media outlets, which HAVCA grants very selectively to outlets that meet certain criteria. "Yes, the media receive subsidies, but they do not allow themselves to be influenced by the subsidy distribution," Awoudo said, and other panelists agreed.

media, the situation is so difficult that sometimes municipal governments must provide financial support.

Media derive revenue from advertising and communication campaigns and, in the case of print media, circulation. The government also provides funding to media outlets, which HAVCA grants very selectively to outlets that meet certain criteria. "Yes, the media receive subsidies, but they do not allow themselves to be influenced by the subsidy distribution," Awoudo said, and other panelists agreed. Because funds are divided among an increasing number of media outlets every year, the subsidy received by each outlet is not significant enough to buy any kind of influence.

One panelist cited another aspect of media financing—"unorthodox sources"—that strongly and negatively influence editorial content.

Minus three or four daily newspapers that rely on sales and subscriptions, the most substantial source of income for the media is advertising. One other exception must be noted: *La Nation*, a government-owned daily. That newspaper has the best sales figures—all government departments buy at least one subscription—and is the unofficial publisher of all legal announcements. The overwhelming majority of advertisers are still concentrated in the large urban centers, particularly in Cotonou.

Despite its importance to Beninese media, "the advertising market is not formalized or regulated," Loko said. Panelists said that in a chaotic advertising market, each media company negotiates directly with advertisers. The small percentage of media outlets that take the lion's share of advertising do so not because of superior marketing skills or media products, but because of connections to the advertisers.

In some newspapers, advertising space crowds out copy to the extent that only a few pages address the news. Electronic media have a similar disproportion—much air time space is devoted to advertising, often to the detriment of the public. "If you take out advertising and all other operations acting as resource advertising, there is nothing left," said panelist Maurille Agbokou, manager of the daily newspaper *Adjinakou*.

Panelist Urbain Amégbédji, regional director of a pro-democracy NGO, spoke to the panel about his organization's defense of journalists in court. "We do not always have the necessary information and understanding of the facts," he said.

The media do not acknowledge the importance of market research. They prefer to trust their instincts and to micromanage without innovations or creative distinctions in terms of product presentation. Many newspapers are similar in terms of graphic layout. Also, programming hardly differs from one broadcaster to another. Newscasts are aired at the same time; interactive shows are similar; debate shows have the same format. Only the tone changes, or the image quality, due to outdated technical equipment.

There are no reliable statistics measuring the media sector. Circulation and sales figures are provided by each media company according to what the requestor intends to do with the figures.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Benin Objective Score: 3.07

The score for this objective remained essentially unchanged this year, and only a few indicators changed to any degree. Indicators 1 (trade associations) and 2 (professional associations) improved, while Indicator 5 (short-term training)

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.

received a lower score. Almost all indicators scored close to the overall objective average, with the exception of Indicator 4 (academic journalism programs), which again scored about a point below the objective score.

After the 2002 convention of Beninese media, the publishers' and owners' groups merged into one association that organizes training for its members. This association also fights to improve the economic context of the media by advocating for tax reductions, working toward the creation of a buying center for media resources, putting together an advertising regulatory institution, and lobbying for an advertising law. All these undertakings are meant to end economic dependency and make media companies more profitable.

Also after the convention, journalists organized themselves into a single union that functions independently from management and the government. New members are accepted based on the criteria adopted at the convention. The union has departments that focus on specific areas of coverage: economics, parliament, politics, and the environment. Representatives of the union have been put in place throughout all regions of the country. The union has become active in enforcing a collective bargaining agreement, and in recent years, it has mobilized to support journalists in danger—whether by imprisonment, from a judge, or at the hands of individuals.

Civil society organizations, which are present mostly in large urban areas, are very active in defending the professional associations that protect freedom of the press. However, their credibility and public image took a blow when some private organization leaders were appointed ministers in the government after the 2006 elections. The panel's discussion made it clear that the press and some civil society organizations now distrust each other. Nonetheless, some members of civil groups continue to be involved with the media. Panelist Urbain Amégbédji, regional director of a pro-democracy NGO, spoke to the panel about his organization's defense of journalists in court. "We do not always have the necessary information and understanding of the facts," he said. "This year, we have defended journalists from the national television [station] who were mistreated because they acted in a way that did not please the [station's] leadership."

Benin has schools that train journalists for different radio and television specialties, and even a master's degree in media management is being offered. The quality of the programs cannot yet be objectively judged, given that these schools are still in their early stages and turnout has been limited because of the high cost of training.

Many professional training opportunities are available to the media. The most common are writing technique

sessions and specialization modules, funded by international institutions and the Beninese government. In recent years, better-structured and organized HAVCA training sessions have been held based on the results of a study that led to a biennial program.

Newspapers are printed by independently managed printing houses and are not subject to any governmental restriction. The existing distribution networks are non-political and belong to the private sector. Distribution of the written press is still in a nascent stage. Large urban centers are well supplied with newspapers, but not rural areas. The same is true for the Internet, which is still foreign to residents of rural areas because of the lack of electrical power, computers, and telephone service. Internet access is provided by private companies.

List of Panel Participants

Clément Adechian, manager, *L'Informateur* daily newspaper, Cotonou

Maurille Agbokou, journalist, *Adjinakou* daily newspaper; former vice-president, Observatory for Deontology and Ethics in the Media, Porto-Novo

Pierre Claver Ahouansou, representative of the president, Social Watch Benin NGO, Cotonou

Célestin Akpovo, professor and legal expert; former editor-in-chief, *Le Point au Quotidien*; former president, the Media Professionals' Association, Cotonou

Urbain Amegbedji, regional manager, Centre Africa Obota NGO, Cotonou

François Awoudo, former president, the Observatory for Deontology and Ethics in the Media, Porto-Novo

Armand Coovi, manager, Benin Culture Community Radio, Porto-Novo

Edouard Loko, president, Beninese Media Management, director, *Le Progrès* daily newspaper, Cotonou

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The Benin study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Media Foundation West Africa, Accra, Ghana.