
The Burkinabe media have been at the forefront of the fight against corruption, according to a 2006 report by the National Anti-Corruption Network. “The contribution of the press was once again decisive in 2006. Many instances of corruption and corrupt practices would have been trivialized or simply forgotten if the media had not reported them,” the report states.



BURKINA FASO

The media landscape in Burkina Faso generally shows little change since the last MSI survey. The country's controversial information code of 1993 is still in place, despite a review process spurred by journalist associations. The code ushered in private media and grants the government considerable power over the media sector. The Higher Communications Council (HCC), a 12-person panel whose members are mostly appointed by the government, remains the main regulatory body governing and monitoring the media.

The Burkinabe media have been at the forefront of the fight against corruption, according to a 2006 report by the National Anti-Corruption Network. "The contribution of the press was once again decisive in 2006. Many instances of corruption and corrupt practices would have been trivialized or simply forgotten if the media had not reported them," the report states.

The same year, however, HCC issued a report warning of the precarious state of private media. "The current private media environment must be stabilized," the council found. "Because of their lack of transparency in management, how they are created, their legal status, their workers' situation, [and] the lack of development plans, they are but mere tools in the hands of one person who treats them as a personal business. As a result, hosts move around and there are episodic crises affecting their normal operation. None of these encourage the professionalism and durability of press companies."

In the report, the HCC called for "the creation of a collective contract for journalists in order to secure the status of media employees and employers and eliminate the poverty that affects the nobility of the profession." But efforts to establish a collective contract and a press card system have accomplished little, despite numerous negotiations and meetings among management, journalists, and state institutions.

In 2007, Burkina Faso made itself a focal point of African media by hosting three events that drew strong participation from French- and English-speaking journalists from around the continent. The events included the Festival of Free Press and Expression; the meeting of the Fédération of African Media Outlets and Press Centers; and a seminar on the decriminalization of press offenses, organized by the Norbert Zongo National Press center. (The Zongo center is named for the director of the weekly publication *L'Indépendant Burkinabe*, who was assassinated in 1998. An independent committee concluded that Zongo was killed because he was leading an investigation that implicated members of the Presidential Guard in the death of the driver of President Blaise Compaoré's youngest brother. Yet the case was dismissed in 2006 for lack of evidence. Today, 10 years after Zongo's assassination, the case is unresolved, and the people's discontent is still strong).

BURKINA FASO AT A GLANCE

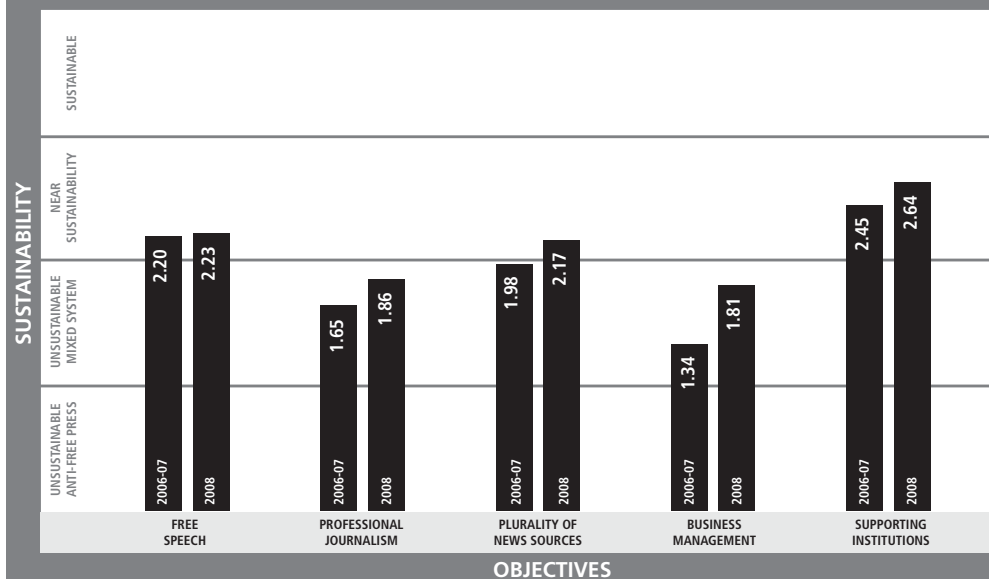
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 15,746,232 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Ouagadougou
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Mossi 40%, other approximately 60% (includes Gurunsi, Senufo, Lobi, Bobo, Mande, and Fulani) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 50%, indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 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 (2008-Atlas):** \$7.278 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$1,160 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **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, 8 weekly publications, 17 newspapers in the national languages; Radio: 12 public, 19 commercial, 23 community, 19 religious, 4 international; TV: 1 public, 3 private (CSC report 2006)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top daily newspapers: *Sidwaya* (state-run), *L'Observateur Paalga* (private), *Le Pays* (private), *L'Express du Faso* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **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: 2.23

The legal bases of free speech in Burkina Faso include the constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression; and the information code, which established private media for the first time in the country's history and affirms journalists' independence. "Even if the application of legal provisions is subject to caution, it is certain that the legal and social standards existing today in Burkina Faso encourage the freedom of speech and access to public information," said MSI panelist Victor Sanou, a member of the HCC.

Kassoum Kambou, a magistrate and member of the Burkina Faso Movement for Human and People's Rights, voiced a sentiment shared by the rest of the panel when he said, "Legislation is in conformity with the general principles governing the freedom of the press." He also said that the independence of the judiciary is "an open issue. Obviously, there is no political will guaranteeing the efficiency of the freedom of the press and information."

Regarding the licensing of broadcast media, Sanou said that efforts have been made to render the process more transparent. "Before, the institution used to grant licenses *in vitro*. Now we publish existing frequencies in advance [and] ask people to apply according to given criteria. [The applications] are graded by an ad-hoc committee, from which the deciding HCC members are excluded. At this point, specialists are called to participate, and they are the ones making the decisions."

Kambou, however, said that the makeup of the HCC "casts doubt with respect to transparency and fairness in granting frequencies. Leaving prejudices aside, out of its 12 members, 10 or 11 belong to one political party." Panelist Justin Coulibaly, secretary general of the Independent Union of Information and Communication Workers, said that the media professionals of the HCC do not represent professional associations.

One panelist said that the HCC sometimes breaks its own rules when granting licenses. "Even when subject to a regime of competition, the license granting process violates the rules of the calls for bidders," said Rémis Fulgance Dandjinou, deputy director of Canal 3, a private television station. "The Catholic Church and the Media 2000 communication agency received frequencies without a call for tenders. It was also the case of Africable, the cable television channel broadcasting from neighboring Mali. Moreover, terms and conditions are carelessly managed, significantly distorting competition between various institutions."

Panelists agreed that the process for establishing a media outlet is generally the same as the process for any other

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business. Eric Kam, president of the Press Freedom Defense League, said it was "not any more complicated than creating a bakery. So the regime is fair and legally comparable, and the market is free." Kam noted that newspapers do not need licenses. However, Boureima Diallo, editor in chief of the newspaper *L'Observateur Paalga*, said that since the media are "unlike a small shop or a bakery, they should receive more support in terms of taxes and others." Sanou agreed: "The lack of a tax regime specifically designed for the media is a huge handicap."

The panelists said journalists are attacked and threatened on a daily basis. "The most frequent criminal acts are threats made by security forces or decentralized community agents," said panelist Pierre Tiergou Dabiré, secretary general of the Association of Journalists of Burkina Faso. The panel noted in particular the case of Sam'sk Le Jah, a radio host with Ouaga FM who received death threats and had his car burned. Kam said that government did not ask Yahoo.fr to identify

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.

"We cannot say that most journalistic productions [reports, investigations, columns] are balanced," said Dabiré. "Either out of lack of means, time, or for subjective reasons, journalists let themselves go."

and provide information about an e-mail address used to send death threats against Le Jah. "They also refused to denounce and distance themselves from the threats made on behalf of the president of Burkina Faso by the same Internet user," Kam said. "Public authorities do not seem keen on strongly investigating offenses and crimes committed against journalists." Though Kam's Press Freedom Defense League filed a complaint, the case has not been resolved.

Panelists found serious shortcomings with Burkina Faso's slander laws, which stipulate that "slander is a criminal offense and it is up to journalists to prove that they did not [commit] libel. The evidence system is reversed, so this all scores bad points," Kam said.

Panelist noted the difficulties with access to information. Dabiré said that while the information code provides the free access to information in principle, "in reality, things are different due to administrative rules and conduct in a social environment." Dandjinou said: "Access to information is easy but far from being guaranteed by the government, which restricts investigations or quality news reports."

As reported last year, most media in Burkina Faso use the Internet and have free access to the information circulated by the international media. The main difficulty is cost. The result is that many newspapers print the news that they take from news agencies without properly quoting them as sources, for fear they might have to pay for the use of the stories.

There is no restriction on the practice of journalism in Burkina Faso. 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.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Burkina Faso Objective Score: 1.86

The panelists were very critical about the practice of journalism in Burkina Faso. However, panelists spoke highly of Burkinabe journalists as individuals, noting that some do high-quality work despite a perceived lack of experience. "I

believe that Burkina Faso has good journalists, well qualified journalists. But sometimes there is a gap between being well qualified and doing a good job," said Danielle Bougaïré, an assistant professor in the University of Ouagadougou's journalism department. "I would even say that the problem of qualification is false. Someone who decides to be a journalist can become a good journalist if they really want to. On the other hand, there are graduates of journalism schools who systematically violate ethics."

Kam also noted the corruption among new journalists. "The opening of the profession attracted many persons with no concern for objectivity and no respect for ethics," he said.

"We cannot say that most journalistic productions [reports, investigations, columns] are balanced," said Dabiré. "Either out of lack of means, time, or for subjective reasons, journalists let themselves go."

"Journalist associations such as AJB [Burkina Association of Journalists] have set up standards of ethics and obligations, but they are not observed," said panelist Djénèba Hortense Tiéba, journalist with Munyu Radio. She added that the practice of taking money or gifts in exchange for favorable coverage is on the increase. "Editors often practice self-censorship because they are afraid of losing their job or jeopardize their peace of mind," she said. "They are also afraid of upsetting politicians, and journalists and photographers would like to avoid pressure from editors-in-chief, which restricts journalists' capacity to produce a good report."

While other panelists agreed that self-censorship is widespread, some said that the country's pluralistic media prevents certain topics from going uncovered entirely. Kam

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).

noted that when a demonstration by interns at Yalgado Ouédraogo National University Hospital was broken up by police entering the hospital building and firing tear gas grenades, the event was not mentioned by state television. Dabiré, however, said that the print media reported the event. “No matter what the situation is, thanks to a plurality of press outlets, important events and issues cannot be ignored. I believe that our press today is a responsible press that in many cases brings the essential issues to the public eye.”

Dabiré’s assertion largely echoed the National Anti-Corruption Network’s 2006 report. “Just by regularly raising the alarm, articles, columns, and shows about corruption woke people up. For that, their place and role are unquestionable in this context, where silence, complacency, and indifference prepare the field for corruption,” the report stated.

During a public convention organized by the Journalists Network for Integrity and Transparency, the president of the HCC said, “to be efficient in the fight against corruption, the press itself must resist the temptation of evil. Journalists work and live in an uncomfortable situation that may compromise their mission, particularly their capacity to put corruption under an impartial spotlight.”¹

Self-censorship, however, has become a defining feature of state media, several panelists said. “The public media conceal information that they believe to be awkward for public authorities and their managers are appointed by the government,” Kam said. Dabiré agreed: “I think that, fundamentally, the national television and the public media only speak about news that does not bother anyone. I see this as a lack of independence; we all know that some clips will never be shown on [national television], and even then we are told that the clip is upsetting... Who does it upset? The people in power. I believe that the public and government-run media are largely under the influence of the authorities.”

Bakari Koné, a journalist with the Radio Gaoua regional station, cited what he called “a very simple example: in Gaoua, unions organized a rally, asked for media coverage, called the national radio. And they said if you go there, do it so that everything is not found out. And that was said clearly. The reporter who went out is a fellow journalist; he did his job correctly, came back, and aired his report on the national radio. Instead of making a summary or stopping his report, the Ouaga national radio reported there was no rally in Gaoua and that this was false news spread by Gaoua radio journalists. This was embarrassing for us Gaoua journalists. We had to call the central news desk in Ouaga and tell them: ‘Send us out where you do not have reporters. We are willing to go but you have to retract what you said at 1. Say it was

¹ RENLAC: 2006 Report

not true in your 7 p.m. news bulletin.’ They were forced to say that there had indeed been a union rally in Gaoua.”

On the other hand, Dabiré said that “especially in the private press, efforts are being made to approach all subjects, even the more delicate ones.”

Salaries in the media are low and sometimes leave journalists vulnerable to overtures by those seeking favorable coverage, in addition to exploitation by their own managers. “Many private commercial, religious, and associative radio stations offer meager salaries or none at all, relying on their employees’ commitment and activism,” Dabiré said. Kambou said that the salaries do not allow journalists “to meet the required professional quality standards.”

Regarding the issue of balancing entertainment and news in the media, Kam said that hardly any outlets report on news or education. “If you look at the programming of broadcast media—FM radio stations as well as public and private television channels—and if you compare the duration of entertainment shows against current events reports and educational documentaries, most of it is entertainment, with a special emphasis on music. This is so pervasive that even the national television is into it,” he said.

“News and entertainment are blatantly off balance,” Dabiré said. “One wonders whether this is not subject to political purposes.”

Equipment is a clear impediment to quality journalism, especially in the broadcast media, panelists agreed. “I believe that we do not even have the minimum that is needed to operate normally,” Bougaïré said. Added Dandjinou: “In rural areas, equipment is very scarce and revoltingly rudimentary, as opposed to the urban areas, where equipment is rather modern.”

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.17

The panelists found that multiple news sources provide Burkina Faso’s citizens with objective and reliable information. “I believe there is diversity,” Kambou said. “People have access to the Internet. Thanks to satellite, they also have access to radio news.”

Dandjinou noted that “access to the media is free, but it is only the urban population that enjoys it. The small number of broadcast media that cover news in rural areas and the poverty of rural populations limit the diversity of news sources that should be available to them.” Dabiré said, however, that community radio stations, though they are

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clustered in urban areas, "provide citizens with more news options. The same is true about newspapers in national languages, even though their publication is intermittent."

Panelists discussed the drawbacks of state media in reporting objectively or covering a wide range of political viewpoints. As reported last year, despite the drawbacks, state-run radio and print media have made progress to better serve the public interest. State-run television, however, remains oriented towards the government's activities and is mostly inaccessible to parties of the opposition or civil society.

"The only news agency is under the control of the state-run daily newspaper and it is not really a news agency," Dabiré said.

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Panelists complained that ownership of private media is largely opaque. "For most of the private media, it is difficult to know who owns what and who does what," Dabiré said.

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.

Coverage of minority groups has serious shortcomings, Kambou said: "I am interested in knowing if anyone is talking about these groups, if their interests are protected, emphasized, because some minority groups are in danger of disappearing not because someone wants to eliminate them, but because no one talks about them. We know absolutely nothing about many of them."

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Burkina Faso Objective Score: 1.81

The panelists said they did not believe that press companies are viable, professional and profitable businesses. Boureima Jérémié Sigué, publication manager of *Le Pays* publishing company, said that he believes that functioning as a profitable business "is not always easy for most of the media."

Kaboré had several comments regarding media business management. The biggest question, he said, is who actually leads the media company. "In general, journalists are in charge, as they progressively end up taking managing positions. The marketing and sales system has made progress, but it can be improved. The desirable objective is a modern management of media businesses; the journalistic profession and all who live off it must feel safe. When managers from another area get involved in the press, they tend to become impatient. They want quick and consistent financial results... Efforts are being made to manage local media, but modern management must be implemented, just like it is with large companies."

Income sources for the media are diverse, including a government subsidy for private media. Advertising is an

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.

important revenue source, according to the panelists. Kaboré said that the market “is vast, but many of our national companies are really branches. They depend much more on international groups and communicate more internationally than nationally.”

However, Kaboré said that the advertising aspect of media can be problematic. “Our advertising code is quite rigid. How many today are in the field of advertising? There are more than 40 advertising agencies in Ouaga. How many truly practice communication? That is the question, so businesses that are supposed to get more involved in communication can deal directly with their sponsors and reduce costs. So that’s a loss from the very start. Agencies that are supposed to offer official rates are forced to reduce the costs to reach a market. We are in a circle which makes it hard to survive in this area.”

Panelist pointed to several other problems stemming from the advertising market. “Advertising often influences editorial policy, and the state-run media are the most vulnerable. Advertising is unevenly developed, more so in urban than rural areas,” Tiéba said. Coulibaly agreed: “Sometimes [a paper has] 20 ad pages out of a total of 30. Take [national broadcasting]—sometimes they have nothing.”

“The media industry is incomplete,” said Dandjinou. “There is no real distribution. Communication agencies are disorganized—they behave at the same time as boards, campaign-makers, and advertising departments. The advertising market cannot rely on market studies, which are scarce anyway.

Kam concurred, saying: “Although there are a few success stories, in general, the Burkina Faso media do not allow journalist independence. The problems are the amateurish management, lack of proper working space, undeclared staff, unorganized advertising market monopolized by a few media, while print runs are not made public and program ratings unknown.”

The panelists expressed appreciation for the steadily increasing government subsidy for private media. The subsidy was XOF 150 million (\$285,000) in 2005, XOF 200 million (\$383,000) in 2006 and 2007, and XOF 250 million (\$560,000) in 2008.² The panelists said that the subsidy is a general fund that is not earmarked in any way by the government, and that the media themselves equitably divide up the funds. “The way in which the current state subsidy is distributed must not affect the newspaper independence,” Kam said. “But it would be ideal if the economic development of the media allowed them to survive without the government’s aid.”

² Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Communication: Press Aid Report 2008.

“The way in which the current state subsidy is distributed must not affect the newspaper independence,” Kam said. “But it would be ideal if the economic development of the media allowed them to survive without the government’s aid.”

Very little market research or audience measurement is conducted in Burkina Faso, beyond some call-in shows and other audience feedback that give a rough measure of audience size and demographics. No independent auditing of newspaper circulation is conducted.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Burkina Faso Objective Score: 2.64

Burkina Faso’s supporting institutions are “visibly militant,” according to Kam. “They are active in lobbying to decriminalize press offenses, behind the initiative for the right to access public information, regularly protesting against violations of the freedom of the press, etc,” he said. But their efforts are not always effective or efficient, he added.

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 proper training and professional development of journalists.

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.

Burkina Faso's schools do offer degree-level programs and professional training in journalism. "There are more and more journalism schools that provide better professional training in the media," said panelist Boureima Diallo, editor-in-chief of the daily L'Observateur Paalga.

Dandjinou noted that "journalist organizations take into account the diversity of the initial media, which is not the case of owners' organizations. They tend to remain generalist, and the written press has a dominating position."

Burkina Faso's schools do offer degree-level programs and professional training in journalism. "There are more and more journalism schools that provide better professional training in the media," said panelist Boureima Diallo, editor-in-chief of the daily *L'Observateur Paalga*. 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 journalism courses. Students also learn journalism elsewhere in Africa (e.g., Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire) and in Europe.

Due to the lack of a distribution service, each newspaper in Burkina Faso is distributed through its own sales network and concentrated in the capital.

List of Panel Participants

Boureima Diallo, editor-in-chief, *L'Observateur Paalga*, Ouagadougou

Rémis Fulgance Dandjinou, deputy director, Canal 3 TV, Ouagadougou

Bakari Koné, journalist, Gaoua Regional Radio, Gaoua

Djénéba Hortense Tiéba, journalist, Radio Munyu, Banfora

Albert Ouédraogo, correspondent, *L'Observateur Paalga*, Ouagadougou

Boureima Jérémie Sigué, editor, Le Pays Publishing House, Ouagadougou

Kassoum Kambou, member, Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights and Peoples, Ouagadougou

Eric Sibiri Kam, president, Press Freedom Defense League, Ouagadougou

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