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BURUNDI

Burundi experienced multiple events in 2008 that demonstrated growing threats to its civil and political rights. As a result, the Burundian media are forced to work in what panelists described as a politically hostile context.

Most local community and provincial officials are members of the ruling party, the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie—Forces de Défense de la Démocratie¹ (CNDD-FDD). They have been accused of harassing members of opposition parties, often under the authority of a state order that mandates groups to obtain authorization prior to organizing any public meeting.

The opposition party Mouvement pour la Sécurité et la Démocratie² (MSD), which the government refuses to recognize, has been targeted in particular. In late October, two MSD members were arrested in the Cankuzo province for carrying membership cards of their political parties. On November 3, political activist and former journalist Alexis Sinduhije was arrested along with 36 others at a meeting at MSD headquarters. Dozens of police officers armed with assault rifles entered the building, stating that they had information that an illegal meeting was taking place. A search warrant that supposedly authorized their entry was issued later that day. Sinduhije was questioned about the documents and his critical statements about President Pierre Nkurunziza's development policies. The police labeled the statements as "insulting to the president" and charged Sinduhije with "threats against state security."

The current repressive wave is similar to the one in November 2006, when four important Bujumbura journalists spent more than two months in prison after they reported that the army was preparing an attack on the presidential palace and the presidential party leader's residence.

Burundi's overall score was slightly lower this year, primarily due to lower scores for Objective 2 (professional journalism) and 5 (supporting institutions). Objective 4, business management, scored well below all other objectives with a 1.27, the sole objective scoring in the "unsustainable, mixed system" range.

¹ National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Democracy Defense Forces

² Movement for Security and Democracy

BURUNDI AT A GLANCE

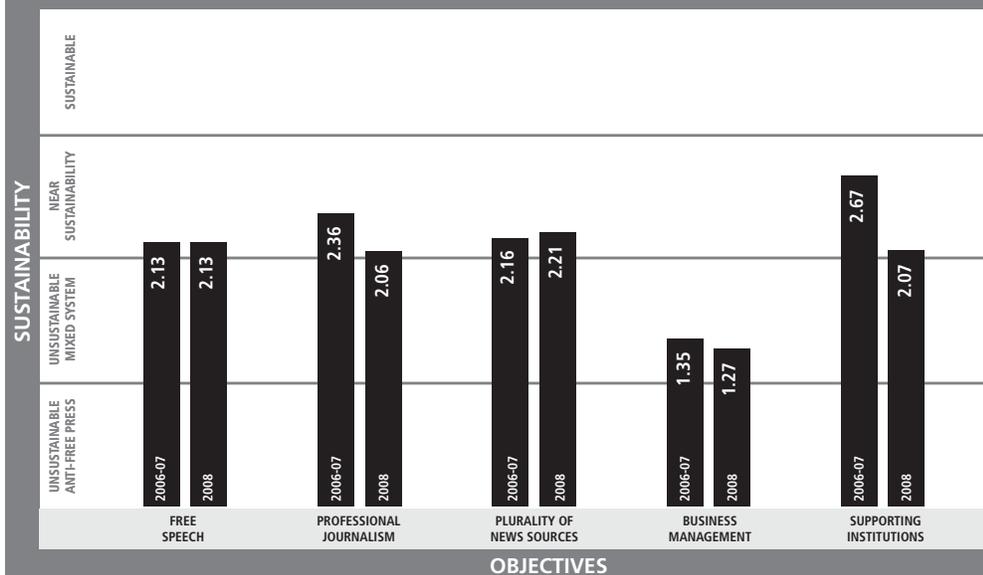
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 8,988,091 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bujumbura
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Hutu (Bantu) 85%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 14%, Twa (Pygmy) 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 67%, indigenous beliefs 23%, Muslim 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Kirundi (official), French (official), Swahili (along Lake Tanganyika and in the Bujumbura area) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$923 million (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$330 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 59.3% (male 67.3%, female 52.2%) (2000 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Pierre Nkurunziza (since August 26, 2005)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: regular newspapers include *Le Renouveau du Burundi* (state owned), *L'Avenir* (private), *Ubumwe* (state-owned), *Ndongezi y'Uburundi* (Catholic church owned bi-monthly); Radio: 7 main stations including Radio-Culture, Radio-Umwizero or Radio de l'Espoir, Radio-CCIB FM+, and African Public Radio; TV stations: 1, National Radio Television of Burundi
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Burundi Press Agency (public), Net Press Agency, Infop Agency, Expresso Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 60,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BURUNDI



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

Burundi Objective Score: 2.13

Article 31 of the 2005 Burundi constitution guarantees freedom of speech, and the 2003 press law also guarantees freedom of expression. But according to Athanase Ntiyanogeye, a journalist with Burundi Radio Télévision Nationale, Burundi has no specific law addressing the right of the public to freely express themselves within the boundaries of the law, and no mechanisms are in place to protect this right.

Multiple factors prevent pro-media legislation from being enforced properly. In most cases, implementation is sabotaged for political reasons, as some political figures and organizations do not appreciate the media's efforts to report on scandals stemming from the daily governance of the nation.

One example is the case of Jean-Claude Kavumbagu, director of the netpress.bi website. He was arrested on September 11 following the posting of an article stating that President Nkurunziza had spent BIF 100 million (\$100,000) on his trip to China to attend the Olympic Games opening ceremony. According to the article, the president's spending caused a delay in the payment of government salaries. Representatives of the office of the secretary general stated that the president was only assigned BIF 50 million, and it lodged complaints of "libel" and "diatribes" against the website.

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.

Nonetheless, the panelists pointed out that Burundi is quite advanced with regard to freedom of speech as compared to other countries in the sub-region. Burundian citizens value freedom of speech, and any violation of this freedom, wherever it may come from, generates collective protest.

The website has long been critical of the president's party, which won the August 2005 elections. Kavumbagu was also arrested multiple times under the previous government, and his site was suspended by order of the media regulating organization in 2005. At that time, the state was showing growing hostility towards human rights associations and some private media and local journalists.

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The Conseil National de la Communication has the responsibility of granting licenses, and the process has been quite fair to date. However, given the rather tense political context, some media are supervised closely by the *conseil* executive. The panelists were critical of the fact that licensing institution employees are appointed by presidential decree and therefore indebted to the executive power, and this often affects their work.

In addition to having to pay business taxes, press companies are subject to license fees charged by Agence de régulation et de contrôle des Télécommunications³ (ARCT). The fees vary from BIF 1 million (\$1,000) to BIF 5 million (\$5,000).

No fatal attacks on journalists have occurred in Burundi in the last few years. However, panelists believe that journalists are subject to a kind of "state terrorism"—frequent intimidation, aggression, and imprisonment of media professionals. These acts are usually committed by state officials—the police, the army, or security services—and go uninvestigated and unpunished, despite the public outcry and the coverage in local media.

Kabanyana Sprès Caritas, a journalist and producer with Radio Isanganiro in the province of Bubanza, said that private media journalists' access to public news sources is a real challenge,

³ Telecommunication Controlling Agency

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especially given that no law forces public agents to publish information of public interest. Félix Nzorubonanya, a journalist and RPA radio correspondent, said that unfortunately, the public media continue to be the government’s mouthpiece and the law does not guarantee the independence of journalists working in the public media sector.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Burundi Objective Score: 2.06

Burundian journalism is of rather modest professional quality. Most local journalists have learned on the job and are not well equipped to produce a high standard of reporting. Another factor is limited funding. Local media are often confronted with financial and logistical problems, and journalists are forced to work with insufficient resources.

At the same time, some private media show a definite desire to improve professionalism. Media are now hiring graduates from new local universities with communication programs,

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).

and journalists are being trained in the ethics of their profession. In the long term, these efforts should result in more professional reporting.

Despite their modest salaries, Burundi journalists are a positive example of resistance to corruption. Journalism is one of the best paid professions in Burundi, hence the very small number of journalists who leave the field for better-paying work, such as with international development organizations.

The panelists acknowledged that Burundi has a journalist ethics code, which is based on international codes such as the 1971 Munich Charter. But they said that the code is not disseminated enough and is often violated.

Newsroom editors and journalists regularly practice censorship and self-censorship. This is not the result of direct political threats or lobby pressure, but rather a desire to improve editorial content and reduce errors in order to protect their companies from retaliation. However, media outlets are well aware of the hot-button issues that will attract unwanted attention from the government and therefore approach such issues with great care. Without complete and verifiable information, therefore, many stories are not carried.

Some panelists said that local journalists adhere to old reporting habits such as covering political news rather than civil society issues. Even so, the political coverage is still less than ideal, given the multiple perspectives on each issue and the constantly changing political situation.

“Journalists do not cover major events and issues consistently because some political issues are too sensitive,” said panelist Spes Kabanyana. “If anyone covers cases of misappropriation, he or she can expect to be thrown into prison or fired.”

The panelists agreed that in Burundi, quality niche reporting is rare because of the lack of specialized journalists in important fields such as economics or rural development.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Burundi Objective Score: 2.21

Burundi has multiple media outlets, made up mostly of radio stations. Very few stations cover the entire national territory—only RTNB, Isanganiro, RPA, REMA FM, and RSF Bonesha FM. Bujumbura has only three regular weekly publications, and there is no written press outside of the city.

Panelists had different viewpoints regarding citizen access to media. Kabanyana said that access is limited. “Only urban residents use television or the Internet. Burundi citizens have

access to national media, but not so much to international media. For example, foreign newspapers are scarce, and very few foreign radio stations can be picked up in the provinces.”

But panelist Junior Biraronderwa, assistant professor at the Université Lumière of Bujumbura, had a more optimistic outlook. “People living in urban areas have ways to access information via different media and the Internet, which has broken through even in other provincial cities and in time has become affordable even for average citizens. Populations in rural areas are experiencing a slow breakthrough of community radio, such as the RPA Ngozi.”

Access to international news is free and not restricted in Burundi. People receive news directly from international channels such as RFI, BBC, and VOA captured live or rebroadcast by local radio or television stations. The government does not restrict access to news through the Internet, foreign newspapers, or cable television subscriptions.

Although they wish to practice professional and balanced journalism, the public media are often confronted with political pressure. As a result, most of the news they release is favorable to the government, and usually covers current events related to government activities. “The Burundi public media do not serve the public interest, and they are not completely apolitical,” Kabanyana said.

Local media indirectly use international news agencies. Burundi also has independent press agencies that collect and distribute information. The most active are Netpress and Syfia Grands Lacs.

All the panelists noted the weak presence of advertising in the Burundi media, and said that advertising revenues do not help the media to survive. In order to stay in operation, the public media are forced to appeal for public funding, while other media accept financing from international NGOs or churches.

The independent press has been trying for years to produce its own newscasts in order to differentiate itself from the public press. Radio stations such as Isanganiro, RPA, and RSF Bonesha FM produce shows on various current events and broadcast political debates, street interviews, school events, etc.

Majabuko Amiri, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Le Visionnaire*, said that private media is serving Burundians well in the absence of state objectivity. “If the public media mostly reflect the opinions of the governing politicians, the private radio and TV stations also give other members of the society—opposition parties, the civil society and the private sector—a chance to speak. The private media also addresses social issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexual violence against women, health, and school problems.”

Local media are generally funded from abroad, but the lack of transparency in ownership prevents the average consumer from easily evaluating the objectivity of news.

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 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Burundi Objective Score: 1.27

Most Burundi media are not businesses so much as associations, and are not designed for profit-making. Under these circumstances, the panelists pointed out, it is difficult to evaluate their capacity to comply with international standards.

“Press companies are not really profitable, self-sustaining businesses,” said panelist Désiré Ndaziza, executive secretary of the Burundi Women Journalists’ Association.

Despite the declared intentions of various governments to support the written press, government subsidies for private media are nowhere to be found. The state itself has a hard time funding or subsidizing the public media.

All the panelists noted the weak presence of advertising in the Burundi media, and said that advertising revenues do not help

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 media to survive. In order to stay in operation, the public media are forced to appeal for public funding, while other media accept financing from international NGOs or churches.

Biraronderwa said that media do not have access to market data. "In Burundi, there is no institution that specializes in market research focusing on media response measures. This may explain why there are no analyses that could define rating or implement strategic plans and improve or personalize the product according to the needs and interests of the public."

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Burundi Objective Score: 2.07

The panelists were satisfied with the professional associations working for the protection of the rights of journalists. They include the Association Burundaise des journalistes,⁴ Association Burundaise des radiodiffuseurs,⁵ journalist associations such as the Association des Femmes Journalistes,⁶ and powerful journalist unions such as the Syndicat des travailleurs de la Radio Télévision Nationale Burundaise.⁷ They work actively in multiple areas, including legal issues, training, and lobbying.

Burundian NGOs also work to protect freedom of speech and independent media. They include the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme,⁸ ITEKA, APRODH, Observatoire de l'Action

⁴ Telecommunication Controlling Agency

⁵ Radio-distributor Association of Burundi

⁶ Women Journalists' Association

⁷ Radio Television Nationale Burundaise Workers' Union

⁸ Human Rights League

Gouvernementale,⁹ and Observatoire pour la lutte contre les malversations économiques.¹⁰

The panelists also pointed out the activity of the foreign NGOs involved in this sector. Institut Panos Paris and Search for Common Ground, for example, help media professionals by providing short-term training sessions.

Désiré Ndaziza believes that media professional organizations are efficient in lobbying and advocating in defense of the rights of journalists, and are having a positive impact on Burundian society as well. For example, the Burundi Women Journalists' Association defends and promotes women's rights by strengthening female journalists' capabilities. The membership in this association is growing as new media are created, she said.

Biraronderwa noted the involvement of supporting institutions in the education of journalists. "For a long time, local journalists learned their trade in the workplace for lack of an institution habilitated to provide complete journalistic training. But in 2000, initiatives from the private sector, namely the Université Lumière de Bujumbura, made possible the introduction of university programs in communication in their curricula, with a specialization in audio-visual creation. But even then, the educational quality is not completely satisfactory, for lack of appropriate logistic means. Thus students do not have impeccable training, particularly when it comes to practice."

Local printing houses are managed by independent for-profit organizations and they are not political. Distribution is informal and newspapers are still sold on the street.

⁹ Observatory of the Government Activity

¹⁰ Observatory for the Fight Against Economic Malpractice

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.

List of Panel Participants

Athanase Ntiyanogeye, journalist, La Radio-Television Nationale du Burundi, Bujumbura

Ernest Nkurunziza, member, Ligue Iteka, Bujumbura

Fiacre Muhimpundu, journalist, *Le Visionnaire*, Bujumbura

Junior Biraronderwa, assistant professor, Université Lumière, Bujumbura

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Innocent Manirakiza, director, UMUCO FM, Ngozi

Ruston Uwimana, journalist, *Ndongezi*, Bujumbura

Adélaïde Ndabambarine, journalist, Burundi Press Agency, Ngozi

Linette Sindimwo, journalist, Bonesha Radio, Bujumbura

Désiré Ndzanza, executive secretary, Association of Women Journalists, Bujumbura

Kabanyana Sprès Caritas, journalist, Radio Isanganiro, Bubanza Provence

Félix Nzorubonanya, correspondent, Africa Public Radio, Bururi

Amiri Majabuko, editor-in-chief, *Le Visionnaire*, Bujumbura

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