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CAMEROON

The Republic of Cameroon is among the most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International. The resultant political and civil upheaval has had significant effects on the media sector, with tensions coming to a head in 2008.

Since 1982, Cameroon has been led by President Paul Biya, a member of the political party Rassemblement démocratique du peuple Camerounais (RDPC). In 2004, Biya was reelected to a new seven-year term, partially on the basis of a campaign promise to wage a relentless war against corruption. However, in one of his public speeches in 2008, Biya vowed to work for a constitutional amendment that would lift presidential term limits. Given the strong parliamentary majority of the RDPC, such a modification has every chance of passing.

This constitutional revision project provoked a wave of civil protest. Street rallies were held in Douala, the second-largest city in the country. Acting upon the January 15, 2008 prohibition of public rallies in the Littoral province, security forces clamped down. On February 25, Douala buried its first dead.

Radio Équinoxe and Équinoxe TV, Cameroon's most popular media outlets, openly opposed the revisions. On February 21, Cameroon's minister of communication shut down the stations for four months, offering as the official reason "an illegal exercise of the audio-visual broadcasting profession." A week later, on February 28, the show "Canal Presse" on Canal 2 International was interrupted in its 18th minute by the security department. The topic of the show was the "Albatros" case, in which two reporters from the daily newspaper *Le Messager* were summoned by police after reporting a story on the near-death of President Biya and his family aboard the Albatros presidential plane.

These civil and political convulsions were still fresh in the MSI panelists' memory as they gathered in Douala. They gave an overall country score of 1.55, a small drop compared to last year's score. Objective 3, plurality of news sources, received the highest rating at 1.91. Objective 1, freedom of speech, was rated the lowest at 1.31.

CAMEROON AT A GLANCE

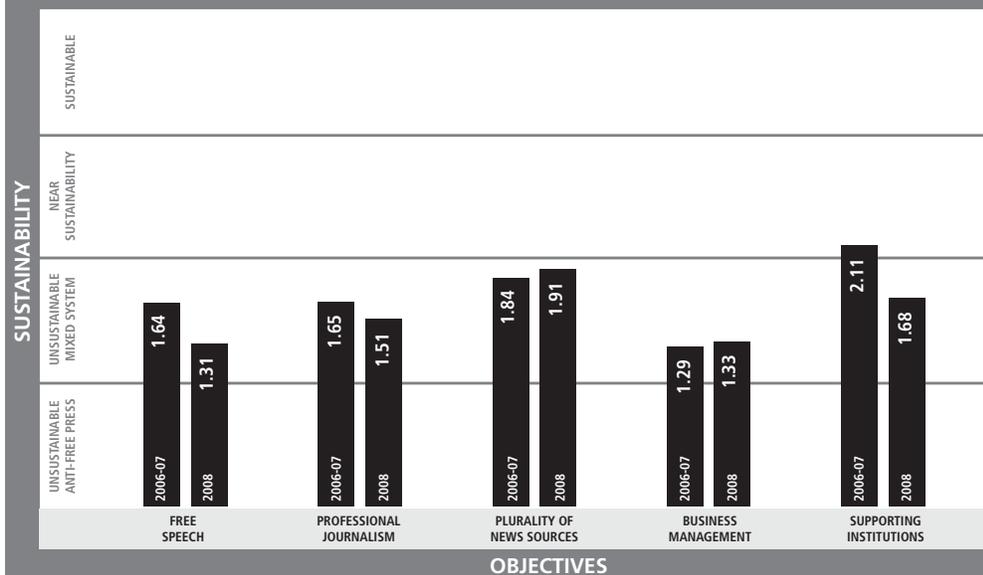
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 18,879,301 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Yaounde
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigrific 7%, other African 13%, non-African less than 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 40%, Muslim 20% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$19.49 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$2,120 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 77.0%, female 59.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Paul Biya (since November 6, 1982)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

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

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: CAMEROON



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

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

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

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

Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

Sustainable (3-4):

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

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.31

The panelists agreed that Cameroon has the constitutional framework to enforce free speech. Media laws include No. 52 from December 19, 1990 on communication, and the decree passed on April 3, 2000 addressing the liberalization of the broadcast sector. Some panelists saw some reason for optimism and said that the existence of media freedom laws in Cameroon is significant in itself. But most felt that the overriding reality is the government's control of the media sector and abuse of constitutional law.

"It is undeniable that legal and social texts do not protect or encourage freedom of speech and access to public information in Cameroon. The state is the first obstacle in achieving this Number 1 objective," said panelist Foimoukom Honoré.

Olinga Ndoa Joseph agreed. "Applying legal and social standards to the practice of the journalism profession in Cameroon seems to be difficult," he said. "This situation could be solved if the authorities cared about creating an environment capable of guaranteeing the sustainability of press companies."

Several panelists referred to the cases of Magic FM, Radio Équinoxe, and Équinoxe Télévision as examples of the state's maltreatment of the media. All three outlets were shut down in February, 2008. According to panelist Jean-Marc Soboth, the stations were closed for allegedly failing to pay a high license fee of XAF 100 million (\$200,000). The state reopened the outlets after they paid half of the required fee, but an informal mission statement was forced upon the group owner, Séverin Tchounken, with the intention of limiting the freedom of expression of the outlets.

Panelist Djimeli Alexandre named several other events from 2008 in which the government sought to silence freedom of speech. They included an interdiction against the rally in Douala and the Littoral district in January; the muzzling of artists Joe la Conscience and Lapiro de Mbanga, who took a stand against the modification of the constitution; the dismissal of the RTS TV manager; the investigation of *Le Front* deputy editor Jean Bosco Talla and one of his reporters; and the jailing of journalist Lewis Medjo. Panelist Dzudie Nganga Guy Modeste also mentioned the attack on Blaise Nzuphiop, a correspondent for the daily newspaper *La Nouvelle Expression*.

Some panelists expressed willingness to take in stride the current state of the media. Mumba N'Gandwe Mireille said that freedom of expression in the media is increasing "despite a few dark spots here and there." Ambang Ndjock Mireille Grâce emphasized that freedom of speech still is guaranteed

by law, and called upon the government to "allow journalists a small amount of freedom so that they can do their jobs."

Panelists noted major flaws with the licensing of broadcast media. Mireille said that licensing is "draconic and selective," and Roland Tsapi said that the ministry of communication is overwhelmed by applications. The government has no formal criteria for issuance, he said, and the government prefers the media to operate under a "tolerance regime," which allows it to shut down media outlets at will.

The panelists indicated that Cameroonian media do not receive tax breaks and are subject to common law and multiple taxes. Grâce gave the example of producing a public show on entertainment; that outlet would owe OTVP tax in addition to its quarterly taxes. "The state should reconsider its position in the matter of taxes," he said. "A distinction must be made between broadcast and other companies."

Tsapi said that the state media, CRTV and *Cameroon Tribune*, enjoy preferential treatment in the form of license fees and subsidies. As a result, the information processing work of state media journalists depends on the will of the government.

Journalists in Cameroon are subject to violence and criminal acts, and are targeted by the military and other authorities, according to the panelists. Usually these events do not cause a public outcry nor do they register with the private sector.

"Professional journalists sometimes have to pay a hefty price, as the police inflict heinous acts on them," panelist Ngo Bissohon Saphelie Minouche said. "For instance, it is not an

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.

easy thing to cover a political event in Cameroon. Many of our fellow journalists suffered physical violence during the legislative and municipal elections of July 22, 2007.”

Journalists are subject to prison terms for committing “press offenses,” including slander, which has been categorized as a criminal offense. In most cases, the court requires that the journalists produce evidence that supports their writings.

Although no law denies the right of journalists to information, in daily practice private media journalists are at a disadvantage. Many requests for information from the government remain unanswered, Alexandre said. When it is available, official information is only released to the public media, which then share it in a discretionary manner. It is very difficult for media to obtain official comment during their investigations.

Access to news sources, the Internet, and international media is unrestricted by the government. Cameroonian journalists are gaining a wider perspective of world events through better access to international media. Foreign broadcast networks such as BBC, CNN, and RFI are well-established in Cameroon, and Internet and satellite availability is increasing.

Mireille said that to practice their profession, journalists are required to carry various identifying documents (press cards, accreditations, etc.) These materials must be issued by a public institution and are not always easily obtained, he said.

Otherwise, access to the journalism profession is open in Cameroon. However, many panelists said that the lack of control is having a negative effect on quality. “The importance of the journalistic profession is being diluted while the authorities have encouraged a sense of casualness. Anyone can wake up one morning and become a journalist,” panelist Michel Ferdinand said. “And this is not for lack of legislation—much to the contrary. In practice, leaders are being very slack on this matter.”

Panelist Tchomba Gilbert agreed. “Access to the trade must be regulated [by] a self-regulatory institution that is not dependent on the government,” he said.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.51

Panelists were highly concerned with the lack of professionalism among Cameroonian media members. “We are convinced that the Cameroon press is in a state of disaster,” panelist Douanla Kaze Reinnier said. “The most worrying issue is that of the precarious working conditions.”

Various factors appear to be affecting the level of professionalism of Cameroonian journalists. Limited access to sources, self-censorship, inadequate fact checking, and the demands of advertising clients all affect the veracity and objectivity of media output.

“It is difficult for journalists to meet professional quality standards,” Honoré said. “The inertia is overwhelming.”

Often, journalists are unable to address certain topics in any accurate way because they cannot find contact persons willing to provide information, Grâce said. However, Alexandre said that journalists are responsible for their omissions and errors. “The high number of rights of response, corrections, and rectifications shows that journalists are doing a poor job,” he said.

Mireille said that reporting is further compromised by poor ethics among many journalists. “Reports are not always fair because even at the level of information gathering, the event organizer hands the reporter an envelope [“gombo,” in press jargon]. This fundamentally influences the information analysis,” he said.

Panelist Modeste agreed that ethical standards are lacking. “The great majority of Cameroonian journalists do not even come close to respecting the ethics and deontology of the industry to the letter,” he said.

Even more telling, according to Tsapi, is the nonchalant attitude towards failing professionalism. “Ethics are old-fashioned,” he said. “Every day reporters get bribed to publish biased information, and this phenomenon has created so-called ‘street journalism.’”

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 Conseil camerounais des medias (CCM), a self-regulatory institution, has been campaigning in cooperation with the Canadian Freedom Network to promote ethical journalism, according to panelist Soboth. But he said that respect for deontological rules, particularly among print media, is not universal.

Panelist Olinga Ndoa Joseph said that professionalism is affected greatly by a media company's economic interests and its ties to "sociopolitical actors or pressure groups." In this way, self-censorship is implemented through the newsrooms—even among the more independent newspapers such as *La Nouvelle Expression* and *Le Messenger*. "Journalists are constantly reminded to write articles according to their respective editorial policy and the economic partners of their media," Minouche said.

Tsapi agreed. "The big advertisers can practically impose their views on the media," he said.

The low pay level for journalists is another major contributor to poor ethical practices. The panelists' statistics on pay were varied, but most said that monthly salaries are between XAF 50,000 and XAF 200,000 (\$105 to \$420). Modeste said that some journalists make only XAF 5,000 (\$10) per month. Reinnier said that such paltry wages are resulting in Cameroon is losing its journalists to other, more lucrative professions.

Reinnier said also that some journalists are owed back pay. "This is the case with Radio Équinoxe, one of the most popular radios in Douala," he said. "At Canal 2 Internationale, a much-watched local television channel, journalists were let go because they had dared to denounce publicly the lack of salaries. At that time, they had not been paid for six months."

According to panelist Minouche, journalists are not above bribery. "Ethical standards are not always observed in a context where journalists have to survive with no salary, so they often accept 'gifts,'" he said. In exchange, reporters will write stories from a certain angle or selectively omit information.

"All these [factors] do not in any way encourage the growth of garbage-free journalism," Honoré commented.

The broadcast media's programming choices are also reflective of Cameroon's issues with professionalism. "In terms of production, entertainment still trumps news. Under these circumstances, quality shows and reports are not being produced," Joseph said.

Modeste said that audience members mainly watch comedy shows and Brazilian soap operas, and Soboth said that advertisers prefer entertainment programming as well. But advertisers are showing interest in supporting economic reports, he said.

Minouche agreed. "Although advertisers push the media into producing even more entertainment programs, things seem to be changing slightly. The same advertisers are willing to provide advertising for newscasts," he said.

News broadcasting has also suffered due to subpar facilities for program production. Panelists agreed that most private stations are either functioning with obsolete technical equipment or have none at all. According to Joseph, print media journalists are working under the worst conditions, with no cameras and malfunctioning computers that date back more than 10 years. Minouche said that some television stations have no teleprompters and some radio stations have no tape recorders or even writing paper. Modeste said that Radio Star does not have an archiving system.

Reinnier and Gilbert said that more subsidies must be directed towards private written press and radio stations, to allow purchasing and upgrades of basic equipment.

Joseph said that public media outlets are improving their production systems, but programming is still heavily dominated by news related to the government and the leading party.

The panelists indicated that niche reporting and programming is rare. Minouche said that Cameroon lacks specialized print and broadcast journalists, and Mireille said that few journalists corroborate their reports with opinions from experts.

"The lack of expert input definitely makes it impossible to have in-depth investigations, particularly in the private daily newspapers," Modeste said.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.91

The panelists agreed that Cameroon has a plurality of public and private news sources. Citizens access news mainly through television and radio, with the city of Douala alone having 19 FM radio stations. "Since the broadcast communications sector was liberalized, private radio and television stations multiplied—particularly in the large cities," Reinnier said.

The Internet is accessible nationally, though only 2 percent of Cameroonians are connected.

Cable service provides access to foreign television channels such as CNN, TV5, TF1, France 2, and BBC. Tsapi said that foreign competition has forced CRTV to raise its quality standards in order to keep its audiences.

Panelists said that problems center around distribution of print media and national coverage of broadcast media. Rennie said that citizens' weak purchasing power along with the country's poor communication infrastructure prevent audience members from receiving news in real time.

"Because of signal trouble, only one part of the population can watch STV. Ariane TV is also virtually impossible to get," Gr ce said.

Gilbert said that distribution problems leave many citizens without regular access to print media. "Newspaper distribution in the remote rural areas leaves a lot to be desired, due to a lack of technical means among the press."

The government does not restrict citizens' access to domestic and international media. However, most Cameroonians cannot afford to buy print media. According to Alexandre, 51 percent of the population lives off less than \$2 per day.

"Access to national and international media is not available to everyone, if we consider the living standard of the average citizen," Minouche said. "It is really difficult to satisfy the populations in the less advanced areas of the country. Obtaining a newspaper in the town of Kumba, for example, can be extremely costly."

Foreign print publications are unaffordable also for most of the population, Gilbert said.

The panelists agreed that Cameroon's public media outlets are not independent, reporting almost exclusively on government activities and viewpoints and failing to fulfill their missions as public servants. According to Minouche,

"three-quarters or even almost all [state media] employees are activists of the leading party."

Gilbert said that the public media are mouthpieces of the government and often do not allow comments from opposing parties. However, Ferdinand said that this tendency is changing, and public media columnists have begun to include divergent viewpoints in their articles.

With regard to news agencies in Cameroon, all the panelists mentioned the government agency Camnews. But they could not seem to agree on whether it continues to function. Ferdinand and Tsapi said that it is functioning but is "dying," and provides stories of only minimal interest. Minouche said that Camnews "probably does not meet all expectations, but at least it exists and operates."

However, according to Modeste, Camnews went bankrupt. And Soboth said, "Camnews ... was refinanced by the CANAD UNESCO project. Unfortunately, the news produced by this press agency was only used in the regional pages of the governmental daily newspaper *Cameroon Tribune*. This agency has been gone for many years now."

Also, Soboth said that the lack of news agencies prevents the press from expanding coverage into rural areas.

"In the absence of an independent press agency worthy of this title, the media are forced to do the news gathering by themselves," Reinnier said. "However, some of the media pick up news distributed by foreign press agencies."

Independent media produce their own newscasts but they do not have the competence or the funding to produce quality programming, according to the panelists. Gilbert said that radio stations produce shows of interest to Cameroonians, but the scope of their work is limited due to the high cost of production.

The panelists agreed that transparency of media ownership is addressed by law, but that the true ownership of media companies is often hidden. "Media are managed more like private grocery stores, at the discretion of the owner—with total secrecy concerning financing, receipts, and expenses," Tsapi said.

"The media are often controlled by groups whose interests do not coincide with those of the public," Alexandre said.

According to Modeste, many media owners are members of RDPC. He gave the example of BoKon Mayor Wouton Siontou Lucien, who is the owner of the Radiot l vision Siontou in Yaounde. "There are known situations where he used his political position to put reporters back in their place," Modeste 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.

Cameroon has several regional newspapers with a minority readership, and some radio programs are broadcast in languages other than French or English. But the panelists said that more than 200 dialects are spoken in Cameroon, making production of news in all minority languages impossible.

According to Mireille, independent media in urban areas are not concerned with minority issues, although rural media often address topics of interest to minorities.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.33

The panelists agreed that the Cameroonian media sector does not operate under modern or ethical management standards. "Media outlets and supporting institutions are profitable, professional, and lucrative companies. The problem is that it is not the professionals who profit," Minouche said.

Reinnier agreed. "The business environment does not encourage the flourishing of independent media or managerial practices. Most media owners are opportunists in search of achieving personal objectives and are often on the payroll of politicians."

Alexandre provided details on the state of business management: "The independent media is poorly managed due to the difficult times that the written and electronic media are going through. Late worker payments and fiscal debt indicate that the companies are not doing well. Journalists are despondent and some of them are forced to compromise to make ends meet: a second job, corruption, favoritism, etc., and the content quality ends up suffering."

Soboth said that media companies are not modernizing partly because of the difficulty in securing bank loans. In general, banks do not trust the media, he said.

Cameroonian media are financed through multiple sources. According to Mireille, "There are numerous and various national or international sources of financing for the media. Financing may also take the shape as a partnership: South-South or North-South."

Advertisements are the principal source of income for the press and most media outlets. The largest advertisers are the ministry of finance, Orange Cameroun, South African mobile telephone provider MTN, local telecommunications company PMUC, and South African Broadcasting Corporation. The state media are also supported by revenues from broadcast licensing fees.

In general, the advertising market in Cameroon is still being developed and does not meet global standards, the panelists said. "Access to advertising follows subjective standards and hidden mechanisms, due to the disorganized nature of both press and advertising agencies," Joseph said.

Tsapi agreed. "Advertising agencies are still very poorly organized, which reflects on the advertising market. The latter is chaotic. Advertisers may pay different prices for the same ad space, depending on the title of the newspaper. The same page is XAF 325,000 in the *Cameroon Tribune* and XAF 215,000 in *Le Messenger*."

Mireille said that some media companies are too dependent on the whims of advertisers. "Some media sell off their air time to the detriment of others, and then suddenly find themselves without advertising when the particular advertiser deems it too expensive," he said.

Soboth mentioned another problem: advertiser debt. "The STV television channel had more than XAF 40 million (\$84,000) in recoverable debt from advertising agencies, while the Ketch group alone owed just as much to the Souther Media Corporation-SMC Group, the latter being already deep in financial trouble," he said.

Many panelists mentioned the government's subsidy program for the independent media. Although the subsidy was increased from XAF 100 million (\$210,000) to XAF 300 million (\$630,000), nearly all of them called that amount trivial at best.

"This subsidy brandished by the government as media support is ridiculous," Honoré said. "The government that subsidizes the independent media is also one of the institutions that makes efforts so that journalists are not independent. The

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.

government holds the media in its power by the very subsidy that it grants—often in a discretionary manner.”

Tsapi called upon the government to provide “legislated aid based on clear-cut criteria, similar to aid given to political parties, [to] help the media to develop positively. A monitoring mechanism should be implemented to make sure that this aid is justly used.”

Cameroon media do not have the funding to acquire or commission market research, according to the panelists. The market studies that exist were ordered by foreign institutions, Soboth said.

“Private newspapers such as *Le Messenger*, *Mutation*, *Le Jour*, and *La Nouvelle Expression* have no statistical data available that might help them understand how their products are marketed,” Modeste said. “The large broadcast media are in the same situation.”

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.68

Cameroonian media are supported by just a few institutions. The country’s professional media associations are either inactive or do not fight universally for the rights of all media members, panelists said.

“Very few supporting institutions work for the interests of the independent media. That is why we have rated them poorly,” Reinnier said. “There are associations of publishers but they are not very relevant.”

Joseph provided a picture of the overall situation. “The very notion of association is hard to interpret in Cameroon,” he said. “Associations function according to [government regulations], while unions are governed by the international labor agreement. Therefore, the latter work to protect the rights of the media workers despite the lack of funds and, sometimes, the lack of interest noticeable with some media workers.”

Honoré said that publishers’ associations are not active in protecting the professional interests of the independent media and that they fight only for the publishers’ personal interests.

Tsapi said that the journalists’ union, Union des éditeurs de presse d’Afrique centrale (UEPAC) exists on paper only, and that other journalist associations (SNJC, SJEC, UTC, CAMASEJ, CMO, and Médiations) do not operate at full capacity.

Some panelists said that media professionals themselves are not overly involved in defense of their rights. Soboth said that media members are timid about mobilizing. Tsapi said “Journalists who are fighting every day to survive have no time

to get involved in associations and unions.” Ferdinand added: “Radio station or newspaper owners do not normally gather round and talk things out. Each runs in his or her own lane.”

Mireille said that professional organizations maintain too low a profile to be effective. “These associations are not well known. Professional associations working to protect the rights of journalists are too discreet, and the public is not aware of their activities. Instead of protecting the interests of their members, these associations find a way to make some money by giving away prizes to public figures.”

Minouche said that associations misdirect their energies. “Professional associations do protect the rights of journalists, but only within certain limits. Some of them determined the creation of the committee that negotiated the journalists’ collective employment contract; but they spend their time giving out awards to the media instead of protecting the rights and the merits of professionals.”

Although NGOs are in place in Cameroon, they are not sufficiently active in their protection and defense of journalists, according to the panelists. Ferdinand named the German NGO Friedrich Ebert Foundation as “the in-place supporter of the media.”

Gilbert said, however, that some NGOs are active and just not openly public. “Their actions remain discreet due to lack of financial means. There are NGOs that excel at being silent in cases of violation of the rights of journalists.”

The panelists agreed that although Cameroon’s schools offer journalism degree programs, the quality of education is unsatisfactory or inadequate for a career in reporting.

Ferdinand and Modeste mentioned Ecole Supérieure des Sciences et Techniques de l’Information et de la Communication

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.

(ESSTIC), founded by the government. "As far as the quality of the degrees offered is concerned, we must point out that the program offered by ESSTIC has received positive reviews at least for its theoretical activity," Modeste said.

Grâce said that many of Cameroon's schools (ESG, Institut Siantu, and the Institut Ndi Samba) do not offer appropriate program content. Most of them offer programs in communication, not journalism, he said.

Mireille agreed. "We also must distinguish between communication and journalism. One thing is clear: most students out in the field have done communication studies, hence their relational adaptability."

Short-term training programs are available in Cameroon. They are often sponsored by international organizations and offered by some media companies to their employees. According to Reinnier, however, very few Cameroon media professionals have access to such opportunities.

Modeste agreed: "Continuous training of journalists very much depends on the press company owners' mood."

Cameroon has two functional printing houses, Macacos and Sopecom, and they regularly produce more than 100 publications. Macacos is owned by the Catholic Church and run independently. Sopecom, however, is run by the state and controls the content of private newspapers, according to the panelists.

The panelists said that channels of media distribution are privately owned but cannot be called apolitical. "Newspapers belong to the public and the private sector at the same time. The same is true about the media distribution channels: they belong both to apolitical managers and politically-involved operators," Joseph said.

Distribution can be problematic, especially in rural areas, Alexandre said. "Press distribution is hazardous. This results in an absence of newspapers in the villages."

Mireille said that the government has at times interfered with media distribution. "When the state labels some media as bothersome, television and radio transmitters are often shut down. The reason: offense against public authority or public disturbance."

List of Panel Participants

Djimeli Tafopi Alexandre, journalism teacher, Douala

Dzudie Nganga Guy Modeste, member, Journalists Union of Cameroon, Bafoussam

Gilbert Tchomba, economic report, *Les Afriques*, Douala

Roland Tsapi, journalist, *Le Messenger* newspaper, Douala

Joseph Ndoa Olinga, reporter, *Le Peuple*, Douala

Douanla Kazé Reinnier, former journalist, Dynamic FM, Douala

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