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CAMEROON

Corruption scandals dominated the headlines in Cameroon in 2009. “Ill-gotten wealth: the Cameroonian lead” was the title of a cover story published in the French daily newspaper *L’Express*. According to that newspaper, Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD), the French NGO that triggered a regional investigation, began to show interest in Cameroon along with other West African countries, questioning the wealth and spending of Cameroon’s president since 1982, Paul Biya, and his family.

In response, a newspaper close to the government, the *Cameroon Tribune*, denounced the report as biased and advanced the idea that the report was designed to discredit the government. Against this agitated and distrustful background, the president’s 33rd cabinet shuffle occurred on June 30, 2009, replacing the prime minister and the president’s defense representative. Many observers believe the reorganization was meant to distract from the turmoil caused by the publication of the international NGO reports on President Biya’s wealth. For others, these personalities, most of who come from the same southern area as Biya, paid the price for their 2011 presidential ambitions.

Corruption is a pervasive theme across the country. In 2009, Transparency International ranked Cameroon 146 out of 180 countries, and unfortunately, the media have not been untouched by this poisonous climate. However, Cameroonian media do enjoy relative freedom of speech. In particular, the media’s plurality and freedom of tone testify to such a breathing space. For many Cameroonians, the main accomplishment of President Paul Biya’s 27-year rule is precisely the freedom of speech that Cameroonians enjoy in general. However, that freedom can go only so far when the knowledge that press offenses are punishable under the criminal law—subject to the whims of a judicial system not known for independence—looms large above journalists’ heads. Journalists also continue to lament the lack of legislation to support access to information; without such assurances, private media are at a particular disadvantage.

Overall, the Cameroonian press shows many shortcomings and weaknesses in multiple areas. Furthermore, the private media are affected disproportionately by poor working conditions stemming from the lack of resources, the weak advertising industry, and preferential treatment for state media. Other obstacles to more sustainable private media outlets include poor professional standards, limited training opportunities, disorganization, and poor management practices. Given this state of affairs, many MSI panelists called for greater regulation and self-regulation of the media.

The MSI score improved modestly compared to last year, with Objectives 1 (free speech), 2 (professional journalism), and 5 (supporting institutions) showing improvement that reflects panelists’ sense that they do enjoy a certain amount of leeway in their work and that the media sector as a whole is improving.

CAMEROON AT A GLANCE

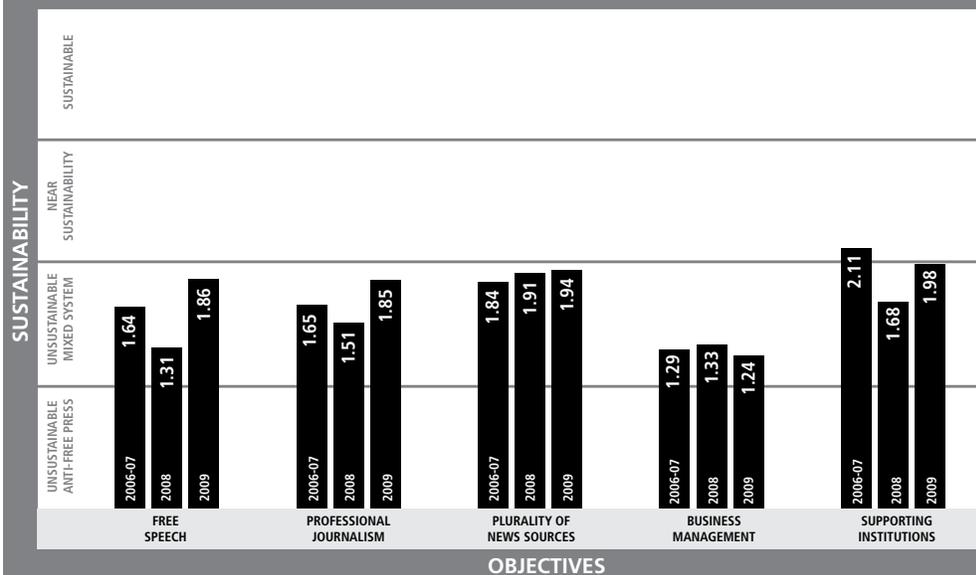
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 18,879,301 (July 2010 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:** 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$22.79 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$2,200 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 77%, female 59.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Paul Biya (since 6 November 1982)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 5 daily newspapers; Radio Stations: 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:** 725,000 (2008 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: 1.86

While all of the panelists acknowledge the existence of standards and laws regulating the freedom of speech, they were divided on the accountability of those responsible for failing to enforce the laws.

Alliance Nyoba, chief of the cultural desk of the *Cameroon Tribune*, said, "While the freedom of speech exists in strict legal terms, in real life one exercises it at one's own risk. Journalists must use it cautiously or run the risk of becoming targets of lawsuits or other attacks, depending upon the nature of their work." Mangala Jean Pierre, a journalist with *L'Hirondelle*, agreed that the social communication law of 1990 guarantees the freedom of the press—as does the constitution of Cameroon. But in reality this freedom is limited; journalists can be sent to prison on the grounds of an accusation in a country ruled by corruption. The economic precariousness, particularly regarding the private media, also acts as leverage for the authorities, allowing them to keep journalists on a leash while throwing them an occasional bread crumb. According to Nestor Nga Etoga, publication manager of *Gestion et Perspectives*, Cameroonian press in general suffers from legislation that does not encourage the development of journalists and press companies.

Charles Nwe, editor-in-chief of *La Nouvelle*, pointed out the various weaknesses of the press law that do not help

Bertin added, "There are also enormous difficulties with respect to information sources. The private press, rightfully or wrongly, is placed in opposition and must overcome a lot of obstacles to access information sources, particularly official ones."

in advancing the freedom of speech: "There is a law that grants journalists sufficient freedom but offers no provisions for many critical issues, thereby benefiting the government. Among these are the access to information sources, advertising, and the legal protection of journalists."

Nsigue Guy Bertin, chief of the African desk with the online news portal Comfoot.com, said that, granted, the press still has a long way to go in Cameroon. "The government is hazy on the issue of media licenses because it would like the media to rely only on what it wants." As noted in last year's MSI, there are serious questions about the licensing of broadcast media. Some of last year's panelists deemed the process "draconian and selective," following no formal criteria, while others said the ministry of communication is overwhelmed by applications. According to Freedom House, "The first private radio and television licenses were granted in 2007, though approximately 70 privately owned radio stations reportedly operate outside the law because of high licensing fees."¹

Also noted in last year's MSI, the media in Cameroon do not receive tax breaks and are subject to common law and multiple taxes. Meanwhile, the state media enjoy subsidies and preferential treatment regarding license fees (which is editorially compromising). The state or public media are not free; they work to look after the image of the government and the ruling party.

Cameroonian journalists endure harassment and intimidation, and as last year's MSI study noted, such incidents usually do not cause a public outcry. Journalists can be sent to prison seemingly on the whim of anyone with a claim to power. The June 3, 2009, five-year prison sentences handed to Jacques Blaise Mvie and Charles Nwe, publication manager and editor-in-chief, respectively, of the weekly *La Nouvelle*, illustrate this. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) explained that the reporters were punished by a military court for reports criticizing the defense minister. CPJ especially protested reports that the pair were not notified of the charges—and therefore not even present at their

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.

¹ Freedom House. *Freedom of the Press: Cameroon, 2009*.

Some of last year's panelists deemed the process "draconian and selective," following no formal criteria, while others said the ministry of communication is overwhelmed by applications.

own trial. According to CPJ, the journalists were convicted "by default of 'complicity of insult' and 'breaching national defense secrecy.'"²

According to Freedom House, "Journalists covering high-profile corruption cases were harassed, arrested, and in some cases jailed during the year. Between September and December, four newspaper editors were jailed in connection with critical coverage of government officials." CPJ rated Cameroon the second-ranked jailer of journalists in Africa.

Libel and defamation are treated as criminal offenses. Laurent Abah, deputy editor-in-chief of the *Cameroon Tribune*, noted, "The fact that press offenses are tried according to the criminal code does not encourage the freedom of the press and does not give the press a sense of responsibility."

Nga Etoga said the problem of information access is urgent. Bertin added, "There are also enormous difficulties with respect to information sources. The private press, rightfully or wrongly, is placed in opposition and must overcome a lot of obstacles to access information sources, particularly official ones. Sometimes even the public media serve as information-source impediments."

Jean Bosco Talla, publication manager of *Germinal*, also underlined access to information sources for journalists as a key problem. He said that in general, there are legal standards regulating the journalism profession in Cameroon. But access to information—even official information—is a challenge. As Nyoba said, "So-called public information tends to be available based on the whims of the information sources."

Abah expressed a more nuanced view: "Speaking of legal standards, we do have the 1990 social communication law, but it is regrettable that there is no law specifically applicable to the press. The access to public sources of information is relatively free, but it could be improved."

² "In Cameroon, Pattern of Press Freedom Abuses." Letter from Joel Simon, Executive Director of Committee to Protect Journalists, to H.E. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon. Committee to Protect Journalists, July 13, 2009. <http://cpj.org/2009/07/in-cameroon-pattern-of-press-freedom-abuses.php> (Accessed October 13, 2010)

Regarding the media's access to foreign and international news, the government does not restrict access to news sources, the Internet, or international media. Journalists in Cameroon are using this freedom to gain a wider perspective of world events. Foreign broadcast networks well-established in Cameroon include BBC, CNN, and RFI, while Internet and satellite availability is improving.

Journalists are required to carry identification documents, such as press cards and accreditation; such materials must be issued by a public institution and can be difficult to attain. However, some panelists expressed concern that standards for entry into the profession are too lax and called for better regulation to prevent further damage to the profession's reputation.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.85

Concerning the professional quality of Cameroon's media, the panelists pointed out that there is a higher school of journalism (Ecole Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication), part of the University of Yaounde, which garners praises for its high educational standards. But the quality of media production is far from a reflection of this school's aura and reputation. Always on the lookout for sensational news, the private press is characterized by a striking lack of professionalism. This weakness is compounded particularly as there seem to be no rules to speak of; sources are not cross-checked, and political topics are omnipresent while social, health, and environmental subjects are neglected.

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

The panelists also lamented the fact that the journalism profession has become a dumping ground where all the failures end up. They said these “black sheep,” with no training to speak of and no concern for professional ethics, cannot help but tarnish the profession’s reputation—and are helped along by the media community’s weak self-regulatory climate.

Many factors explain the bleak picture of Cameroonian professionalism. Junior Binyam, an independent journalist, shared his belief that the training deficit, combined with the fact that anyone can become a journalist, leads to poor-quality content and language problems that pollute the airwaves.

Eulalie Njitap, a journalist with Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV), said professional quality is the least of the worries for the Cameroonian independent press: “Journalists are obedient and hunt for sensational subjects, as proven by the recently published list of Cameroonian homosexuals. They don’t even try to check the information against the source anymore, especially if the latter belongs to a different political or ideological camp.”

Talla believes that the quality of reporting is determined at the newsroom level. Some journalists do their reporting according to professional standards and ethics. But most of them tend to trample on these codes and accept gifts and other payments. In general, blackmail, corruption, and harassing celebrities is the norm. This leads to self-censorship and biased or rigged news, which in turn leads to score-settling among celebrities through the media.

To combat corruption and stabilize journalism quality, the media must secure funding. Due to the pervasive lack of funding, reporters are forced to ask their sources to provide them with transportation or reimburse their reporting expenses. Quality reports are growing scarcer as a result.

While last year’s MSI noted that the Conseil Camerounais des Medias, a self-regulatory institution, has been campaigning in cooperation with the Canadian Freedom Network to promote more attention to ethics, respect for ethics is clearly not universal. Still, the panelists recognized that some outlets are getting closer to observing professional and ethical standards by working with underpaid journalists motivated purely by their love of the profession.

Nga Etoga also noted the impact of poor salaries on professional standards, describing the financial compensation of the Cameroonian journalists as unenviable at best. Salaries are low compared with the amount of work and the difficulty of the job.

To combat corruption and stabilize journalism quality, the media must secure funding. Due to the pervasive lack of funding, reporters are forced to ask their sources to provide them with transportation or reimburse their reporting expenses.

According to the panelists, entertainment and news shows are clearly balanced. However, from a technical standpoint, the sets and studios in the broadcast media may be acceptable, but there are still obstacles due to low-powered transmitters and poor working conditions. Some press outlets have the appropriate technical equipment to gather and process news, but most of them have no work space.

Additionally, it is still hard to practice specialized journalism, due to the lack of funding available to support it.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.94

Since the end of the state monopoly in the media sector, the number of private newspapers and radio-television stations has increased exponentially in Cameroon. Njitap agreed that the Cameroonian public enjoys many information sources and noted that the independent media provide a diverse array of

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.

Similarly, “nobody cuts off access to the foreign media, and the Internet is available to everyone,” Njitap said, but not everyone can afford access.

information from various sources. Furthermore, community media outlets have grown very popular, are readily available, and provide local information—including specific programs covering public-interest topics. Nga Etoga commented that the public always has a choice between the Internet and the public and/or private media.

However, while there are multiple information sources, the news is not always objective and diverse. Its rendering is usually biased, according to the contributors’ interests.

Media consumers are given some freedoms and choices to access both domestic and international media. In principle, access to news is free for all in Cameroon, although it is weighed down by financial, infrastructural, cultural, and sociological hardships. As François Bikoro, editor-in-chief of l’Anecdote/Vision 4 TV, said, “We cannot say that information is restricted, but the way in which it is processed is problematic.”

Geography is one obstacle; broadcast media coverage usually does not extend beyond the large urban centers. Furthermore, the newspaper price at XAF 400 (just under \$1) is not affordable for the average Cameroonian. Similarly, “nobody cuts off access to the foreign media, and the Internet is available to everyone,” Njitap said, but not everyone can afford access. Freedom House confirmed that the government does not restrict Internet access; however, it noted that “slow connections and high fees at Internet cafés helped to limit access to just 2 percent of the population in 2008.”³

Although pleased about the multiplicity of information sources, Talla pointed out regretfully that the state media are accustomed to glorifying the government and ruling party, rather than reflecting the views of the entire political spectrum. Njitap commented, “CRTV—the official radio-television station—focuses on information about the presidential inner circle and leaves the small fish to the opposition.

Bikoro sees it differently, however. For him, unfortunately, the Cameroonian public-service broadcasters are, by their very nature and purpose, the only media that can promote the objective sociological reality.

³ Freedom House. *Freedom of the Press: Cameroon, 2009.*

Although there used to be a state-run press agency (called Camnews), the country is now without a press agency—public or private. Bikoro claimed, however, that the lack of press agencies is made up for by the plurality of news sources—and noted that even if news agencies existed, they would not be free of charge.

Regarding the extent that independent broadcast media produce their own news programs, Nga Etoga and Bertin confirmed that most Cameroonian media outlets produce original content.

The panelists highlighted some concerns in the area of media ownership. Nga Etoga explained, “While it is easy to recognize or identify a media sponsor beforehand, it is harder to identify the financing sources.” Talla noted that although there is often a publicly known media owner, the real financiers prefer to remain in the shadows. A panelist from last year’s MSI went so far as to claim that most media owners are opportunists who are often on the payroll of politicians. Bikoro argued for government regulation of funding sources.

The liberalization of broadcast media, combined with the proliferation of community radio stations, has increased the supply and allowed the population to receive programs in local languages other than French and English. Bikoro said cable television and the Internet have helped to stimulate comparative debates, but it is still dangerous for journalists to approach issues related to tribal minorities for fear that the media might be suspected of working for certain groups or clans.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.24

All the panelists admitted that in general, the independent media in Cameroon do not operate as well-managed companies promoting journalistic independence. Unfortunately, media content reflects the poor shape of the Cameroonian media and journalists, perpetuated by an unorganized and highly politicized media market. The media have become the ideal vehicle that politicians use to drag their opponents through the dirt; financial gain, therefore, is not typically the primary goal of operating a media outlet.

Regarding the economic sustainability of media companies, Binyam said bitterly, “In most cases, we cannot speak of press companies in Cameroon. The private media, for instance, are generally unorganized, painfully lacking in resources.” According to Nyoba, there are very few relatively thriving press companies. With only a few exceptions, journalists are not paid well. Abah concluded, “Due to the economic

sustainability of the press companies, we cannot foresee their real autonomy in the short term. Few press companies are able to pay their bills.”

Nyoba said there are multiple financing sources, including sales and advertising, but also more or less clandestine resources, such as temporary or quasi-permanent shadow sponsors. However, it is currently impossible to rely on sales or subscriptions to keep a press company alive, as there are not enough sponsors to support the media sector. Nga Etoga also commented that the existence of state-controlled and other advertising agencies does not help the press companies struggling to maintain basic operations based on a slew of other problems, including low print runs, lack of statistical data, and a monopoly on distribution organizations.

The panelists argued for advertising regulation. Binyam said the advertising market “is on its knees and unregulated; it is a jungle where we try in vain to understand how advertisements are placed.” In his view, network-controlled advertising must be legislated to the benefit of the press. Njikam Mama Janvier, regional coordinator of the Syndicat des Journalistes Employés du Cameroun–Frontières d’Afrique, added that the advertising market is not organized. The press receives advertising based on affinities, and advertisers set the prices. Janvier advocated for creation of an independent advertising controlling entity and for the media to avoid agencies and state-run companies.

“Editorial independence is hardly conceivable without economic independence. Three quarters of the Cameroonian press organizations are not developed as viable companies. The advertising base is too narrow for the high number of media outlets. It is hard to fathom how journalists can be

Regarding the economic sustainability of media companies, Binyam said bitterly, “In most cases, we cannot speak of press companies in Cameroon. The private media, for instance, are generally unorganized, painfully lacking in resources.”

independent under these circumstances,” Abah concluded. Talla pointed out that media managers sometimes have unhealthy relationships with economic and political circles. That is why, he said, one should talk about relative independence since these media have multiple financing sources but do not receive government subsidies.

On the topic of government subsidies to the independent press, Nga Etoga said, “The Cameroonian government does not fund the media directly. But the government provides public aid based on hazy criteria. Nyoba added that the government does not actually fund the media except for a flat amount called “public aid to private communications,” which is hard to budget for. According to the panelists, public aid is provided to private media based on political or tribal affinities. Furthermore, Janvier pointed out that the annual public aid of XAF 250 million (\$560,000) to the media is insignificant when you consider that there are 700 applicants.

Emmanuel Atangana, a journalist with *L’Express*, warned, however, that public aid is more of a government trap. Not only is it negligible, he said, but the media share it with newspaper kiosks and street sellers, and it is essentially useless. He said that rather than public aid, the Cameroonian press deserves a government subsidy for all the work they take on.

Talla said there is no market research and even fewer accurate ratings or circulation figures. As last year’s panelists noted, Cameroon’s media lack the funding to commission or conduct market research; those that exist were ordered by foreign organizations.

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.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Cameroon Objective Score: 1.98

Talla best summarized the prevailing conditions surrounding the supporting institutions in the media sector: “In Cameroon, there are associations and union activists, but they are disorganized. The lack of structure and the absence of publishing organizations are hurting journalists. In general,

Njitap sees things differently. For him, union action in Cameroon is merely an illusion. The activities of the media unions reflect the situation of the media themselves: they are disorganized. Also, as there are too many, they step on each other's feet. The government thrives on this and has taken control.

journalists do not have professional protection, which is what press owners want and support. The lack of functional regulatory and self-regulatory bodies hurts the profession and puts journalists at risk.”

Janvier said the relatively small number of professional organizations is due to the journalists' lack of coordination and sense of structure. The Union des Journalistes du Cameroun is inactive, with just about 35 members. Only the Syndicat des Journalistes Employés du Cameroun (SJEC) stands out, followed sometimes by the Syndicat National des Journalistes du Cameroun. These two unions determined the signing of the collective work contract of journalists and social communication professionals in Cameroon. The SJEC is working with European Union assistance to make this document widely available. Additionally, some panelists believe that thanks to steps taken by these unions, the government has been alerted about the belief of many in Cameroon's media community of the necessity to provide real subsidies to the press to boost its efficiency.

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.

Njitap sees things differently. For him, union action in Cameroon is merely an illusion. The activities of the media unions reflect the situation of the media themselves: they are disorganized. Also, as there are too many, they step on each other's feet. The government thrives on this and has taken control.

Nyoba noted that the unions react when a journalist is arrested but said that generally the professional associations lack strength and are incapable of lobbying. Bertin explained that in Cameroon, unions for journalist are disorganized because the field lacks a union tradition. Furthermore, press managers prefer to recruit journalists who have little recourse and are not likely to place too many demands on their employers.

According to Nyoba, NGOs do not typically get involved in freedom-of-the-press cases. Last year's MSI study, however, noted that some NGOs might be active and just not openly public—or they lack the resources to amplify their voice in press matters.

Journalism degree programs exist, but the panelists gave lower marks on the practical training side—a critical shortcoming given the environment in which journalists are forced to work in. Nyoba argued that journalism degree programs exist but also noted that a degree is not required to practice journalism. Most Cameroonian journalists—particularly those working in the private press—are not the product of a school of journalism. They have received on-the-job training from much more experienced journalists. Also, as last year's MSI warned, most of Cameroon's schools offer programs in communications, not journalism—an important distinction that would-be journalists must be aware of.

There are other on-the-job or government-managed training programs, often sponsored by international organizations and offered by some media companies to their employees. However, as noted in last year's MSI, very few media professionals have access to such opportunities.

Nyoba said some printing houses are state-owned, while others belong to the private sector. The two major printing houses are Macacos (which is owned by the Catholic church and run independently) and Sopecom (run by the state and in control of the content of private newspapers).

Regarding the print media distribution system, the panelists called for diversification of the distribution organizations. Although media distribution channels are privately owned, they cannot be described as apolitical. Last year's MSI noted that the government has at times interfered, shutting down television and radio transmitters when an outlet has somehow run afoul of the government.

List of Panel Participants

Eulalie Njitap, journalist, Cameroon Radio Télévision, Yaounde

Nsigue Guy Bertin, journalist, Camfoot.com, Yaounde

Charles Nwe, editor-in-chief, *La Nouvelle*, Yaounde

Nyobia Alliance, chief of the cultural desk, *Cameroun Tribune*, Yaounde

Nestor Nga Etoga, publication manager, *Gestion et Perspectives*, Yaounde

Junior Binyam, manager, Cameroonian Football Federation, Yaounde

Mangala Jean-Pierre, journalist, *L'Hirondelle*, Douala

Jean-Bosco Talla, publication manager, *Germinal*, Yaounde

Laurent Abah, deputy editor-in-chief, *Cameroun Tribune*, Yaounde

François Bikoro Oba'a, journalist, Vision 4 TV, Yaounde

Emmanuel Atangana, journalist, *L'Express*, Douala

Njikam Mama Janvier, journalist, *Frontières d'Afrique*, Yaounde

Moderator and Author

Jean-Marc Soboth, national secretary, Journalists Syndicate of Cameroon, Douala

The Cameroon study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Journaliste en Danger, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.