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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

After years of military conflict, and despite the 2006 general elections, which brought democratic institutions to power, once again simmering ethnic conflicts have become time bombs in some provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In the eastern provinces (Nord and Sud-Kivu, Province Orientale), politicians stir up and often exploit cultural differences to serve their own purposes.

In this fragile environment, there are media outlets—most of which are controlled, directly or indirectly, by political forces—working very hard to be a vehicle of peace. Congolese politicians invest in the media not because they are passionate about sharing information, or even because they hope to make a profit, but because the media are a tool that helps them to gain or preserve their power. Additional pressures, including the constant threat of censorship, allegedly on behalf of protecting the national security and preserving public order, and self-censorship, compound this political interference. Violent crimes against journalists, including murder, physical attacks, and death threats, persist. The general climate has worsened since the Congolese and Rwandan armies jointly launched attacks in the eastern DRC against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (the Rwandan Hutu rebel forces who have lived as refugees in the DRC since 1994, and have been accused of driving the Rwandan genocide).

While freedom of the press is officially guaranteed by the constitution, and the specific clauses of this freedom are spelled out in the law, the government shows no political will to ensure freedom of the press may be exercised. To the contrary, it shows a clear intention to muzzle the independent press and stifle any opinion opposed to the government's view, according to the MSI panel. In one of the most overt examples seen in the past year, Lambert Mende Omalanga, the minister of communications and the media, and the attorney general warned the press not to release news or publish articles that might—in the government's opinion—demoralize the troops fighting the Rwandan Hutu rebels. A few weeks later, on July 26, 2009, the government accused the public French radio station, Radio France Internationale (RFI), of doing precisely that, and cut the station's signal throughout the entire country.

Still, there are organizations working to strengthen the press and raising awareness about the threats, various pressures, and the pervasive government censorship and self-censorship that undermine the credibility of the Congolese press. Human-rights advocates do react to violations against journalists; pressure from advocacy organizations has played a role in bringing some perpetrators to justice.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AT A GLANCE

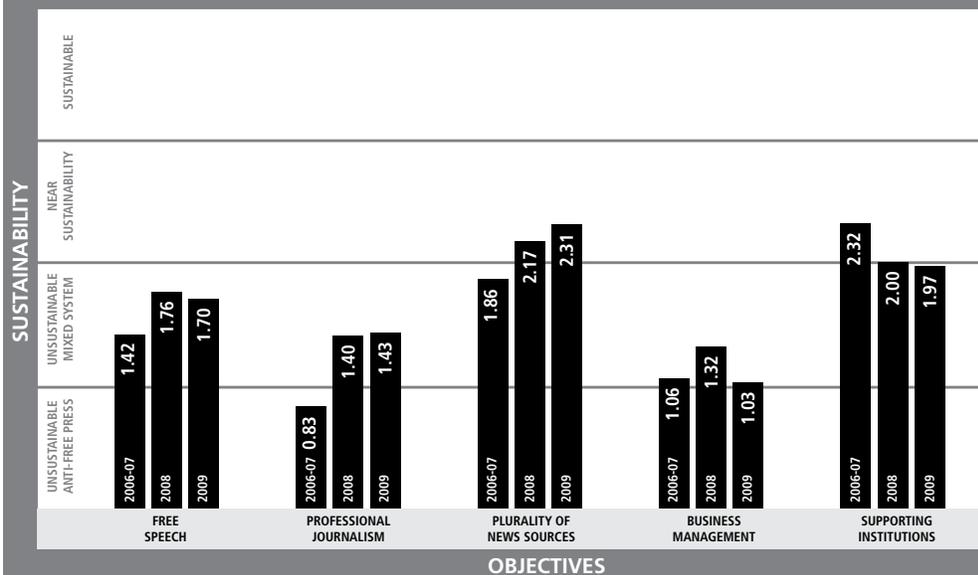
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 68,692,542 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Kinshasa
- > **Ethnic groups:** Over 200 African ethnic groups, of which the majority are Bantu; the four largest tribes—Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantu), and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) make up about 45% of the population (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguist 10%, Muslim 10%, other (includes syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs) 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Lingala (a lingua franca trade language), Kingwana (a dialect of Kiswahili or Swahili), Kikongo, Tshiluba (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$10.68 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$300 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.2% (male 80.9%, female, 54.1%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Joseph Kabila (since January 17, 2001)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 8 daily newspapers, more than 100 others; Radio Stations: 226; Television Stations: 60 (Source: GRET, 2005)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top three radio stations: National Radio (state-owned), Golfe FM (privately-owned), Capp FAM; Top three TV stations: National television (public channel), Canal3 (private channel), Golfe TV (private channel)
- > **News agencies:** Agence Congolaise de Presse (state-owned), Associate Press Agency (private), Syfia (private), Dia (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 290,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



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

DRC Objective Score: 1.70

All the panelists agreed that the DRC legally guarantees the freedom of speech (detailed in law number 002/96 of June 22, 1996) and establishes media pluralism. The DRC constitution, adopted on February 18, 2006, recognizes citizens' rights to freedom of speech and opinion. Panelists were also pleased to report that the 1996 law, which had survived Mobutu's dictatorship, was submitted to the parliament for modification, particularly with respect to the provisions defining and sanctioning slander and offenses against authorities.

Unfortunately, though, there is a large gap between the existing legislation and its enforcement. As a result, there have been many violations of the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech of opposition leaders or civil-society actors whenever their views did not coincide with those of the government.

The panelists believe the lack of political will by the public officials, who also enforce the law, is to blame for the disregard of the law. Michel Mukebaji Nkoso, director of the daily newspaper *Congo News*, was more categorical: "A lot of obstacles prevent the application of the press law. This is mainly due to the fact that the public authorities lack political will. A corrupt regime will not, by definition, encourage the freedom of speech. Another reason is the propensity of

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.

Edouard Mukendi, an attorney with the Kinshasa Bar association, believes that in the DRC, enforcing the legislation regarding the freedom of the press is a real challenge due to some very diverse difficulties: influence peddling, a dysfunctional judiciary system, corrupt judges on the payroll of the rich and powerful, etc.

the same public officials to resort to extrajudicial methods." Natasha Nzembe, head of the *Journaliste en Danger* (JED) legal defense office, also pointed to a lack of awareness on the part of journalists of the laws governing their profession, and the spreading phenomenon of journalists aligning with politicians. Furthermore, Nzembe underlined repressive aspects of the current press law. Many of its provisions refer to the criminal code, and imprisonment is the principal criminal sentence handed down for press offenses. Thus, the penalty involving personal confinement is more often than not considered a form of revenge meant to silence journalists.

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Two ministries are involved in the granting of broadcast licenses: the Ministry of the Post, Telephones, and Telecommunication, and the Ministry of Information, Press, and National Communication. Previous MSI studies have reported a lack of independence and transparency in the granting of licenses; Mukendi also noted that to be eligible for a media operation license, media outlets are forced to obtain a lot of approvals, including that of the information services.

Stanis Nkundiye, secretary-general of the *Syndicat National des Professionnels des Médias*¹, pointed out that in the DRC, the legal framework guarantees the press companies' free access to the market, but in reality the security and information services often interfere in the process of granting

¹ Media Professionals' National Union

Kinienzi pointed out that the government hides behind the excuses of “national security” and “defense secrets” to prevent the circulation of information that might hurt the government. As a result, the public is deprived of its right to be informed on issues that are labeled “taboo,” although they are of interest to the public.

operational licenses to the audio-visual media. He also noted that many newspapers operate illegally, as long as they have no capital, and thus do not pay taxes—despite functioning as private enterprises.

To illustrate the gap between legal protections on paper and the dangers for journalists on the ground, Patient Ligodi, research coordinator with JED, pointed to at least 35 free-speech violations on the record for the first quarter of 2009 alone, including the imprisonment of journalists, cuts to radio or television signals, and bans on certain television channels.

In one of the most serious cases, radio journalist Bruno Koko Chirambiza was murdered in Bukavu on August 23, 2009; the presenter for the private station Star Radio was attacked and killed by eight unidentified assailants. However, according to Star Radio Program Director Jilly Bianga, Chirambiza did not cover any sensitive topics and was not considered a likely target. Bianga reported that the Committee to Protect Journalists is investigating the circumstances of the case to determine whether the killing was work-related.

In a clear show of the government's intolerance of freedom of the press, in May and June 2009, the government cut RFI's FM relay in Bunia (Ituri) and Bukavu, in retaliation for reporting why certain ex-rebel members of the army were deserting to go back to Rwanda, which the government found embarrassing. While the signal has returned in Bunia, at the time the MSI was being prepared, RFI could still not be picked up on FM in Bukavu. The signal cutoff measure was extended to Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Matadi, and Kisangani as of Sunday, July 26, 2009, by the order of the minister of communications and the media.

Public media cannot be considered independent. Mukendi said, “There are of course privileged media—for instance, all the public media and some private newspapers are close to or belong to political leaders.” Many panelists believe that the time has come for the media regulatory agencies to call

for politicians to release their grip on the media—the public media in particular—and turn them into free zones, accessible by everyone and open to democratic debate.

As reported in last year's MSI, libel complaints are usually treated as criminal cases. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press 2009 report, which designated DRC as “Not Free,” noted the case of journalist Popol Ntula Vita, of *La Cite Africaine*. Charged with defamation in 2003, he remains in hiding.² It remains to be seen how any modifications to the 1996 law in parliament might affect the provisions defining and sanctioning slander and offenses against authorities, but for now, journalists continue to face prison sentences for libel cases.

As for journalists' access to information sources, Claudine Mbombo, a journalist with the daily newspaper *L'Observateur*, is categorical: “There is no law guaranteeing the access to information sources, especially the official ones. Even when they do have access to ‘sensitive’ information, journalists censor themselves for fear of reprisals and sometimes also out of leniency for the persons involved in cases of corruption or bad public-affairs management.”

Scott Mayemba, JED's head researcher, shared this view, and raised the issue of the media professionals' credibility: “Predators of freedom of speech are being recruited from among political decision makers or even the journalists themselves. The public information sources are ‘available’ only to journalists accredited by public institutions.”

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As reported in previous MSI studies, DRC media outlets are able to broadcast foreign media programs. A problem, though, is that some media houses balk at the expense of foreign subscriptions; they sometimes present foreign material and fail to credit the source.

Regarding entry into the journalism profession, Mayemba commented, “The doors of the Congolese press are open to anyone who wishes to become a journalist, but there should be safeguards in the gathering, processing, and reporting news process. In this profession, there are too many ‘black sheep’ operating outside of acceptable standards. News reporting continues to be far from professional. Good

² Freedom House. Congo, Democratic Republic of (Kinshasa) (2009). <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7739&year=2009> Accessed June 10, 2010.

legislation is not enough: a collective will to put it into practice should prevail.”

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

DRC Objective Score: 1.43

The panelists sharply criticized the lack of adherence to accepted standards of professional journalism in DRC. St. Augustin Kinienzi, with the daily newspaper *Le Potentiel*, pointed out, “Recruitment of personnel and the questionable quality of journalists who lack awareness of professional ethics are real problems. On the other hand, the Congolese journalists become lazy, particularly due to their contact with politicians; as a result, journalists content themselves with trying to sell the image of their sponsor or protector. They investigate much less and instead choose the easy way—going on location only if they are invited by a self-promoting politician or businessperson. Journalists wait for the news to come to them instead of going out after it.”

Objectivity is a rare commodity in the Congolese media as a whole, according to Dieudonné Ilunga, an independent journalist, who offered a few examples. “Once a reporter from the state-run radio station labeled a physicians’ strike as ‘illegal and savage;’ three days later, he retracted that as he announced the end of the strike as a victory for the minister. In another example, after the killings that followed the 2007 confrontations between the police and the Bundu Dia Kongo sect militants in the Bas-Congo province, a report on the public television channel only showed the bodies of the killed policemen, although there had also been quite a large number of civilian casualties.”

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).

Echoing the concerns over failures to uphold professional standards, Nkundiye said, “Reports are not well-documented, and journalists do not bother to consult with experts. A lot of information comes from the politicians’ headquarters. We have even seen the same exact article published—word for word—in four different daily newspapers on the same day, and signed by four different people.

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Nevertheless, a professional ethical code, created in 2004, exists to guide DRC journalists. However, many journalists simply disregard it, falling prey to corruption and poverty and accepting bribes from sources. Such practices are forbidden under the professional ethical code, yet they are nonetheless widespread. Hodant Bongambo, a journalist with Radio Ekanga, testified that the practice is common in the northeastern province of the Equateur as well, noting, “Each politician or industry owns their journalists.” Due to this practice, journalists are unable to provide fair reports and fail to conduct appropriate research before reporting, he lamented.

Joël Mbombo Badiambile, with the Océan Pacifique radio-television in the Kasaï Orientale province, said that journalists in his province lack not only awareness of the journalist’s professional ethical code but suffer from a dearth of training opportunities. “Professionalism is above all a personal attribute of a conscientious few. In Mbuji-Mayi, there are very few qualified journalists, but they do their job well thanks to the training teams from the capital.” Badiambile also commented that assignments are not fair; the older journalists receive most of the assignments, and rookie journalists are heavily underused in some press organizations.

Bongambo commented that open violations of the freedom of the press have now become less frequent. However, this is largely because journalists self-censor their own reports to

“With salaries so low (and sometimes non-existent), journalists strive to make money off each and every one of their pieces: this practice, called coupage, has become quasi-institutionalized,” according to Nkoso.

avoid being attacked, after seeing so many of their colleagues suffer. In particular, news related to the army, embezzlement, and corruption do not easily find their way into the press, and the government forbids the media to address such issues. In addition, the media often neglect crucial issues concerning the daily life of the populace, such as the cost of living, unemployment, water quality, electricity, health, public transportation, education, and taxes. When the media do raise these issues, they are addressed from the point of view of the media outlet’s financial backers—not that of the citizens.

Inextricably tied to the issue of professional standards and ethics is the question of pay. As a result of low salaries, journalists are reduced to living and working in poverty and utter destitution. To survive, penniless journalists focus all their energy toward finding their daily bread. Politicians or businesspeople recruit journalists with the lure of regular salaries and instruct them to make sure that no unpleasant information concerning them gets out in the press. “With salaries so low (and sometimes non-existent), journalists strive to make money off each and every one of their pieces: this practice, called *coupage*, has become quasi-institutionalized,” according to Nkoso.

In some cases, to make ends meet, journalists take positions as press attachés or communication advisors for politicians, on top of their jobs as journalists. This forces them to be both judges and committed parties when they have to report news involving their bosses. The credibility of the Congolese media is a growing problem, given the incompatibility between the responsibilities of a journalist in reporting news, and that of a press attaché or communication advisor, whose job is to promote their employer. The prevalence of journalists adopting such mixed roles also explains the dominance of promotional information over news in the Congolese media. Panel participants agreed unanimously that the media associations should formally forbid media professionals from working as journalists, reporters, or news directors while simultaneously serving as publicists, press attachés, or communication advisors for politicians or state-owned industries.

The panelists noticed that private media provide fewer and fewer news programs. Entertainment is winning out; the population clearly prefers it over newscasts and serious reporting. According to the panel, this is in part due to a sense of disgust for the politicians and the pomposity of the elite that has ruined the country. Ligodi pointed out that entertainment is unfortunately proliferating to the detriment of educational programs or productions addressing the country’s development. The television channels and radio stations broadcast music and sports all day long. Mayemba shares this view as well, noting, “The population is more interested in musical shows, whereas political shows only provide empty calories. You only have to turn on the television on Sundays to realize how many viewers are hooked on music shows. Local news is all but absent from virtually all television newscasts. However, a new show called “News in Easy Lingala,” addressing such issues, has become so popular that it is being rebroadcast multiple times by several television channels.

Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are far from modern and efficient. Technical equipment is largely obsolete and unsuitable. “The press outlets are so poor that they cannot afford the necessary equipment, especially computers, Internet connections, digital photo cameras, video cameras, etc. Some outlets cannot even afford a radio or television set,” according to Jean Mbay Katshingu, with the *Observatoire des médias congolais*.³

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

DRC Objective Score: 2.31

All the panelists recognized the pluralism of news sources in the DRC, and especially in the capital. However, widespread illiteracy hinders access to the print media for the majority of the Congolese, who cannot read or write. For this reason, radio is all the more important, and panelists noted that Radio Okapi (run by the United Nations) covers most of the vast territory of the DRC. However, according to Ilunga, in Kinshasa, news sources are more numerous and diverse than in the provinces, where, although access to the media is not limited, “cyber-illiteracy” blocks out a large part of potential media consumers. In the northeastern province of Equateur, according to Emmanuel Kottra with Radio Liberté, the local population enjoys easier access to broadcast media—but newspapers are a rare commodity.

Still, there are signs of progress on the plurality of news options outside the major cities. Michel Ntumba Efor, a

³ Congolese Media Observatory

journalist with the *Agence congolaise de presse* in the southern province of Bandundu, expressed optimism about the growing news options there, which have increased the public's chances to receive objective and reliable news. "The longtime marginalized rural population now finds that objective information is increasingly available. The opening of private radio stations and television channels in the country and the development of the Internet in the rural areas have generated a higher news inflow for the citizens in the towns and villages of the provinces." However, one panelist did express the concern that the Internet contributes to the "corruption of the younger generation."

Mayemba commented that despite the multitudes of options, plurality does not always imply diversity. He explained, "The sheer number of news sources does not necessarily provide generally objective news to the population. The bipolarization of the press (divided between pro-opposition and pro-government press) is evidence enough. For example, CCTV, owned by the opposition leader Jean Pierre Bemba, never provides objective news if it is favorable to President Kabila's regime. The same goes for the pro-government stations, such as Digital Congo or RTGA, where the opposition is viewed negatively." Nevertheless, the panelists pointed out that there are some outlets providing verified and even balanced news, including Radio Okapi, Syfia Agency, and the news reported by the Kinshasa-based correspondents of foreign channels.

Regarding citizens' access to the media, Tombe Kabiena, an instructor in a Kinshasa journalism school, noted that access may be free in theory, but it is limited by

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.

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the declining purchasing power of many citizens. In the provinces, particularly in Kasai Orientale, up to 10 percent of the channels broadcasting out of Kinshasa can be picked up via satellite. According to Ligodi, the residents of the Congolese capital and larger cities can access international news sources. However, access to international channels is expensive and only the wealthiest segment of society can afford it, according to Badiambile. Although there are no broad limitations or absolute restrictions, the news offered by the international media, particularly on such issues as human rights or national security, is tightly monitored. This is proven by the frequent signal cuts these media experience when they release news about such issues.

As reported in last year's MSI, state-run media in the DRC were liberalized in 1996 under Law No. 96/002, which describes state-run media as public services that cannot serve an individual or a group of individuals. Yet in practice, the panel said it is clear that the state-run media are single-minded; they broadcast only the majority's viewpoint—not the views of the entire political spectrum. Panelists said that in the public media sector, the Agence Congolaise de Presse (ACP)⁴ gives everyone the chance to express his or her opinion, including the opposition parties. In contrast, Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) broadcasts only the unilateral perspective of the Alliance de la Majorité Présidentielle.⁵ RTNC now operates as a propaganda machine for the ruling majority, all the while casting itself in a "village priest" role. The news relative to opposition political movements is assigned to tiny, if not negligible, airtime on the station. Instead, public television news bulletins are stuffed with government ministry meetings.

The DRC has four domestic news agencies. In addition to the state-run ACP, there are several independent news agencies,

⁴ Congolese Press Agency

⁵ Presidential Majority Alliance

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including a private agency created by former ACP journalists named the Associate Press Agency, and Dia, a Catholic news service. Syfia International and Agence France-Presse also offer services in DRC.

While acknowledging the abundance of news sources, Nkoso said, "All these media suffer from the same disease: the lack of original content. Most of them fill the airtime with music videos." Nkundiye said this is one positive attribute of RTNC; it produces its own news programming, in contrast with virtually all other stations. According to him, many others offer programs bought or, more often than not, stolen from foreign sources, such as RFI or Canal France International.

Although the population can easily guess the identity of a particular media, no law forces media owners to reveal their full identities. A panelist from the province of the Equateur said that the local population there knows the names of the media owners very well; owners are also divulged in various documents. However, Nkoso raised another issue regarding transparency of ownership: "It is not an overstatement to say that in the DRC, there is an abundance of news sources. But most of these media provide fronts that are meant to hide the real owners."

In terms of the spectrum of social interests reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language sources, the panel underlined several strengths and weaknesses. As mentioned earlier, crucial social and quality-of-life issues, such as unemployment, are not well-addressed in general. However, this is changing with the appearance of community radio stations. These stations have brought about a proliferation of programs covering social issues in the national language; and Nkundiye noted that there are many community media providing local news, sometimes in local languages. In contrast, in the politicized public or state-run media, the languages of the minorities are not taken into consideration.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

DRC Objective Score: 1.03

DRC media companies do not enjoy economic health. The panelists pointed out that the independent media are not real businesses; they tend to be small-scale, essentially family-sized enterprises. They cannot be described as well-managed or well-structured from a business perspective; most of the media do not keep books. As a result, the Congolese journalists do not typically receive salaries, only small remunerations, driving them to practice *coupage* (getting paid by their information sources). In general, the press sector is not profitable because small print runs or individual newspaper sales do not facilitate big returns. According to Nkoso, who manages a daily newspaper in Kinshasa, any discussion about profitability is useless as long as there is virtually no advertising and print runs are extremely low.

The Congolese media are still alive thanks to the opportunities provided by well-connected media investors who network on their behalf, or because of murky political funding. These cash-based connections are troubling, according to the panelists, because they often influence the editorial policy of the sponsored media.

Katshingu noted that press enterprises in the DRC get by out of sheer resourcefulness. "The newspaper run does not exceed 1,500 copies. Accounting is amateurish. Often, any revenue goes directly into the owner's pockets. Individual sales leave a lot to be desired, and there is no advertising.

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 two well-organized exceptions are enterprises with foreign capital and management [RAGA, Antenne A].”

Regarding the economic strength of publishing houses, Mukendi said, “There are printing houses and other press-supporting enterprises, but their profitability must be considered cautiously. These companies are not managed according to international standards. The accounts of these individual structures coincide with those of their owners.”

In Mukendi’s view, the media survive thanks to advertisers. Some of them resort to advertising agencies, and others contact the press companies directly. There are no other income sources with the exception of the political resources, which have enormous influence on the editorial policy of virtually every single press outlet in the DRC.

Bongambo noted the particularly precarious economic situation of media outlets in the provinces, noting that the media do not receive funding from the government and some of them are unable to access the already limited advertising markets.

In the Kasai Orientale province, swarming with businesspeople well versed in the diamond trade, press companies operate on economically shaky ground. Joël Mbombo described the situation in Kasai Orientale: “There is a kind of connection-based profitability; it depends on the particular dynamics of the marketing agents and the development of the public-relations arms of their respective organizations. In general, the media [there] are able to survive thanks to advertising. The broadcast sector relies on sponsored shows and reports, while newspapers live off the pages they manage to sell to businesspeople willing to pay for promotional or career-building pieces. Some media are funded by politicians who influence their editorial line.”

The number of advertising agencies is very limited in accordance with the small scale of the business and economic activities. Given these limitations, there is no proper advertising market to speak of. However, there is a \$3 million-a-year “advertising fund,” distributed to the media mostly by cellular telephone companies and breweries. Panelists said, though, that these funds are not distributed according to the professional rules of advertising. In many cases, it has become a hidden cash source for the media relying on a political clientele system. Katshingu said that the broadcast outlets do have access to advertising, albeit under the terms and rates of the community media advertisers.

The panelists cautioned that the independence of all media outlets should be viewed with caution. Some of the newspaper headlines and articles that look like breaking news are in fact underground advertising handsomely rewarded by politicians or economic agents. This is true also of some

Katshingu noted that press enterprises in the DRC get by out of sheer resourcefulness. “The newspaper run does not exceed 1,500 copies. Accounting is amateurish. Often, any revenue goes directly into the owner’s pockets. Individual sales leave a lot to be desired, and there is no advertising.”

prestigious current-event shows presented by broadcast media “consortiums.” In reality, the “guests” themselves sponsor such shows to advance their own propaganda.

While the government does not provide subsidies to journalists, the panelists believe that it should. Their view is that if the government made public funds available to the media, with fairness and transparency, it would give the private media the economic security they need to cease being easy targets for manipulation and corruption. In the 2008 state budget, the government had announced the allocation of \$2 million to the media, but this has turned out to be an empty promise, as the media have not received any funds, directly or indirectly.

Stanis Nkundiye confirmed that there are no market studies or reliable statistics concerning radio ratings or Internet usage. Again this year, it is not entirely clear whether the reason is that media outlets cannot afford to conduct formal research, or that owners are more interested in their political messages than measuring audience preferences. Furthermore, Nkundiye noted, the newspapers’ circulation and print-run numbers are kept secret precisely because they are so small.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

DRC Objective Score: 1.97

All the panel participants recognized the existence of media-supporting institutions, professional associations, and training agencies in DRC; however, they question their efficiency in protecting the interests of their members. Media owners’ associations include: Association des Editeurs du Congo⁶ (ANECO), Association Nationale des Entreprises de l’Audiovisuel Privé,⁷ and Association des Radios Télévisions Communautaires.⁸

⁶ Congolese Publishers’ Association

⁷ National Association of the Private Audio-Visual Companies

⁸ Community Radio-Television Stations’ Association

Kinienzi added, "Most Kinshasa journalists graduate from the sole higher school of journalism [Institut Facultaire des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication]. But the quality of this school is questionable, as is the entire Congolese educational system. Sometimes journalists are not even trained on-the-job."

Professional associations include the Syndicat National Professionnel de la Presse, Union Nationale de la Presse du Congo,⁹ and Union Congolaise des Femmes des Médias (UCOFEM),¹⁰ but the panel did not believe the actions of these organizations in support of their members are very effective or visible. Claudine Mbombo addressed the lack of leadership in conjunction with the journalists' reluctance to create associations that might help them claim their rights. ANECO asserts itself only on issues related to shareable funds or other cooperation programs, she noted, and disappears when it comes to protecting its members. The same goes for UCOFEM, which addresses the problems facing all women except those working in the media, even though this is its primary mission. Addressing the current situation in his native province of Kasai Orientale, Joël Mbombo says that although there are owners' and journalists' associations, they are more preoccupied with individuals than institutions.

In Mukendi's view, it is a widely known fact that the DRC press has essentially been placed on the politicians' payroll,

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.

⁹ Congolese Press National Union

¹⁰ Union of the Congolese Women in the Media

and there are no real professional associations that are dedicated to help the media. However, he pointed out that there are remarkable professional organizations and NGOs fighting for the protection of human rights and freedom of the press—a view seconded by Joël Mbombo, who gave a nod to their work despite the hostility of politicians toward this freedom. The panelists lauded JED's efficiency in protecting the freedom of the press and defending journalists who are prosecuted as a result of their professional activities. For example, on World Press Freedom Day, JED publicized its concerns about the threats, various pressures, and the pervasive government censorship and self-censorship that undermine the credibility of the Congolese press. The panelists credit JED for achievements including the noticeable decrease of various forms of attacks against the media and intimidation of journalists. However, the panelists expressed their wish for more organizations focused on protecting the collective interests of journalists.

The panelists also noted that the graduates of journalism training schools are not very well qualified, while postgraduate training is almost non-existent. Furthermore, noted Mukendi, "The private and public higher educational institutes offer degrees in information sciences. Unfortunately, not many individuals are interested in them, given that training or a degree in journalism is not a precondition to getting a job in the media." Kinienzi added, "Most Kinshasa journalists graduate from the sole higher school of journalism [Institut Facultaire des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication]. But the quality of this school is questionable, as is the entire Congolese educational system. Sometimes journalists are not even trained on-the-job." In Kinshasa, only the Institut Congolais de l'Audiovisuel,¹¹ linked to the RTNC and funded by the French, is equipped to train the technical personnel of the broadcast media.

Claudine Mbombo suggested reorganizing the training system to enhance the value of the degrees and improve the quality of the media professionals. Ilunga underlined the need to reform the journalism schools' curriculum, with a particular emphasis on developing speaking capabilities, foreign languages, computer knowledge, history, geography, and even geopolitics.

Kinienzi lamented the fact that most employers treat the remuneration and training of their journalists as a secondary responsibility, perhaps because of a prevailing attitude that nobody wants to waste time and money on training, as long as journalism is such a low-paying sector. In the meantime, professional quality suffers. However, Kabiena, an instructor of journalism, shared his view that despite all of the

¹¹ Congolese Audio-Visual Institute

challenges, the country's three training schools for the media professionals have managed to produce some fine journalists.

Printing houses are privately held and are apolitical but selective. As reported in last year's MSI, some newspapers, such as *L'Observateur*, have their own printing press, and they allow other newspapers to use it. However, the existing printing houses are technically limited in terms of capacity and the quality of printing. Furthermore, only Kinshasa offers adequate printing facilities. Papers far from the capital must find printers in neighboring countries, which is not economically sustainable. In terms of distribution systems, this is still a neglected area. Newspapers are sold in the street in the absence of a proper distribution system.

List of Panel Participants

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Stanis Angalikiyana Nkundiye, secretary-general, *Syndicat National des Professionnels de la Presse*, Kinshasa

Hodant Bongambo, journalist, *Radio Ekanga*, Mbandaka

Michel Nkoso Mukebayi, director, *Congo News*, Kinshasa

Patient Ligodi, research coordinator, *Journaliste en Danger*, Kinshasa

Claudine Mbombo, journalist, *L'Observateur*, Kinshasa

Dieudonné Ilunga Kazadi, independent journalist, Kinshasa

Joël Badiambile Mbombo, journalist, *Radio Télé Océan Pacifique*, Mbuji-May

Emmanuel Kottra, journalist, *Radio Liberté*, Gemena

Michel Efor-Kabong Ntumba, journalist, *Agence Congolaise de Presse*, Bandundu

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Moderator

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