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MALI

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Mali lies in the heart of Africa's Sahel zone. The country was led from 1968 to 1991 by Moussa Traoré, who rose to power in a coup that ended the so-called socialist regime of Modibo Keita. After Traoré was overthrown, on March 26, 1991, a democratic regime emerged and free elections have been organized regularly—the latest in April 2009.

The legislation that regulates the media sector is favorable theoretically. Some media observers, however, believe that in reality a favorable freedom of speech environment is subject to changes in political will, which are unpredictable. This potentially leaves the media vulnerable to the whims of the government of the day.

Today, Mali has more than 200 private newspapers, only about 60 of which appear with any regularity. With the notable exception of *L'Essor*, which has national coverage, 90 percent of newspapers are distributed in the Bamako vicinity only. The rural areas where Bambara or other languages are spoken have local newspapers in these languages.

Mali has 224 FM radio stations in operation. The Bamako district alone has 16 radio stations, while the regions of Kayes and Sikasso are the best equipped in terms of radio stations, with 38 and 45 stations, respectively. Seven stations of the Office of Radio-Television Mali (ORTM)—the national channel—broadcast in the regional capitals. Urban Malians also have access to almost 150 cable channels.

Despite the proliferation of media, Mali still has problems with the strained economy and diminishing human resources. Those factors influence greatly the quality of newspapers and radio programs, which tend to favor entertainment over news.

MALI AT A GLANCE

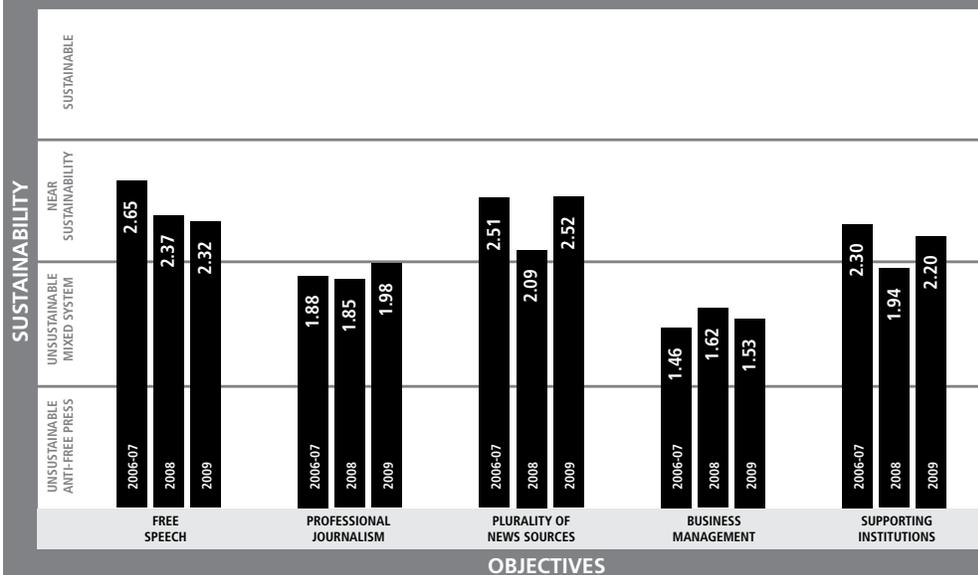
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 13,796,354 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bamako
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Mande 50% (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke), Peul 17%, Voltaic 12%, Songhai 6%, Tuareg and Moor 10%, other 5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 90%, Christian 1%, indigenous beliefs 9% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Bambara 80%, numerous African languages (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$8.862 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$1,190 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 46.4% (male 53.5%, female 39.6%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Amadou Toumani Toure (since June 8, 2002)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 8 daily newspapers, 50 periodicals; Radio Stations: 233; Television Stations: 2 including the public channel and Africable
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** The Malian Press and Advertisement Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 200,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MALI



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

Mali Objective Score: 2.32

Mali's constitution guarantees the freedom of expression, including freedom of the press. According to Article 4, "Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, belief, opinion, speech, and creation within the confines of the law." Additionally, Article 7 stipulates: "The freedom of the press is recognized and guaranteed. It is exercised under the conditions provided by the law. An independent institution regulated by organic law ensures equal access for all to the state media."

Maliens exercise these freedoms within certain limits set by other legislation and regulations. For instance, Law Number 00-46/AN-RM, passed in 2000, limits speech inciting racial, national, or religious hatred or murder.

However, the MSI panelists noted that commitment has dampened regarding ensuring the legal support for freedom of the press. Mahamane Cissé, publication manager of the independent *Le Scorpion*, commented, "The social and legal standards do not go far enough to protect press freedom and access to information—especially when these notions are put into practice, as the independence of the judicial system has wavered on the issue." Social and cultural prohibitions continue to inhibit free speech as well.

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.

"Frequencies are granted according to a planning logic that creates four frequencies for each Malian commune. But everyone wants to be located in the larger cities," according to Isaïe Somboro, executive secretary of the Union of Independent Radio and Television Stations of Mali.

More than 220 radio stations broadcast throughout the country. The commission that grants frequencies has a relatively diverse composition. Among the requirements to receive a frequency, applicants must be Malian nationals and pledge to use the license within the national territory according to a set of terms and conditions. "Frequencies are granted according to a planning logic that creates four frequencies for each Malian commune. But everyone wants to be located in the larger cities," according to Isaïe Somboro, executive secretary of the Union of Independent Radio and Television Stations of Mali (known by its French acronym, URTEL). Last year's MSI found that the committee meets to judge applications only twice a year, leaving many applicants hanging—and encouraging politically well-connected applicants to find alternative routes to approval. Furthermore, many find the terms of the planning logic inscrutable.

Last year's MSI noted that the government had acknowledged that broadcast licensing laws need to be revised. This year's panelists confirmed that the National Assembly is working on a new project concerning the broadcast media, but the changes that might take place are not yet clear.

Officially, the media enjoy no specific tax advantage, but legislation is not restrictive, either. Although the government imposes no tax restrictions on the creation of a press company, importers pass along customs duties and other taxes for equipment to the media outlets that purchase them. Last year's MSI study noted that sometimes, authorities use taxation to penalize newspapers that they consider too critical.

Journalists generally work and live in a safe environment where they can feel relatively confident, but they are not free from aggression. Furthermore, according to Sékouba Samaké, editor-in-chief of the independent daily *Info Matin*, reactions to journalist harassment are not very firm. The publication manager of *Les Echos*, Alexis Kalambry, mentioned the case of one of his journalists, Sidiki Doumbia, whom the police held for questioning at their Kita headquarters for two days, simply because he witnessed security agents bullying the

According to Haby Diallo Touré, director of the Belekan community radio station in Kati, “The press is a mere refuge for young job-seeking degree-holders—just a stop on the way in search of a better tomorrow. As a result, news reporting is unprofessional.”

passengers of a bus. The authorities have yet to explain the matter. However, the panelists acknowledged that to date no one has committed a crime, in the strict sense of the term, against a journalist.

ORTM and the Agence Malienne de Presse et de Publicité (Malian Agency for Press and Publicity, or AMAP) are the two government-created press organizations. The public service media are relatively free from excessive political interference, as their founding statutes allow them some managerial autonomy, but no law guarantees their economic independence. The public media receive government subsidies, and their board of trustees chair is the minister of communications—a defender of certain political interests. Public media directors receive appointments by government decree upon the recommendation of the minister of communications. These media have privileged access to public information.

Libel is a punishable criminal offense. The burden is on the journalist to prove that he or she did not libel the plaintiff. However, it is rare for Malian journalists to go to prison for libel, because they do not usually come before a judge. Even if the case makes it to a judge, normally the parties settle disputes through social conflict appeasement methods.

The government places no official restrictions on access to public information. Documents such as files, reports, studies, statistical reports, guidelines, or fliers that may be interpreted as public documents are accessible freely. Access is granted through a law that regulates relations between the administration and the public. But the law also limits the types of information that can be accessed and certain documents cannot be made public. They include documents that might damage secret governmental proceedings, national defense or foreign policy secrets, state security and public safety, secrets of private individuals, medical files, or information protected by law. According to Cissé, “[The public information] law does not apply to the media, and its enforcement leaves a lot to be desired—even though we should admit that the Institutional Development Program

[a government effort to reform public service] tries to make it operational.”

Journalists are free to access and use international news. The Malian media have access to the Internet, which today has become an important source for news. The Internet remains largely an urban phenomenon, however.

The law regulating the Malian press defines a journalist as “a person who has a university degree in journalism or other field in addition to at least one year of professional experience and whose main paid activity is news gathering, processing and reporting as part of a public or private, written or audio-visual media outlet.” In reality, many practitioners fail to meet these requirements. The government does not influence anyone wishing to become a journalist, and journalists are free to organize themselves to protect their interests.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Mali Objective Score: 1.98

In general, journalists do not systematically fact-check the news that they report. “Information is often hard to find. Journalists—even those working in the public media—lack the necessary resources and expertise to process it,” according to Ténèfing Traoré, a journalist with ORTM rural radio.

According to Bréhima Touré, a journalist with *L’Essor*, less than 10 percent of active journalists have graduated from a journalism school, and this affects the quality of their work. Likewise, due to certain affinities, many journalists can be manipulated by politicians and others.

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).

Another detriment to professionalism is that some graduates entering the field consider it merely a starting point for other careers. According to Haby Diallo Touré, director of the Belekan community radio station in Kati, “The press is a mere refuge for young job-seeking degree-holders—just a stop on the way in search of a better tomorrow. As a result, news reporting is unprofessional.”

A budding Malian press created a professional ethics code in 1991, during the first information and communication convention ever organized in Bamako. The Observatory for Deontology and Ethics in the Press was established in 2002 for self-regulating purposes, and the media created a plethora of ethics committees and associations that address the topic, such as URTEL. Nevertheless, many journalists do not observe the professional ethics code mainly because they have no knowledge of it.

Malian journalists practice self-censorship for social, cultural, and economic reasons and therefore avoid publishing certain types of news. Publishers will censor information that they deem to be noncompliant with their editorial policies.

Even though no taboo subjects exist, journalists avoid certain social issues. Some information is protected from publication by law as well. According to Cissé, press coverage still largely depends on politicians and proximity to a large city. “Rural and community radio stations put up a good fight but they lack professionalism,” he said.

With salaries low in comparison to the cost of living, and social and cultural practices as serious as sedition in the balance, journalism has proven fertile ground for corruption. Ibrahim Famakan Coulibaly, president of the Journalists Union of West Africa believes that the solution is unionization. But, according to Haby Diallo Touré, the problem is not merely money. “One can have a large salary and still give in to corruption,” she said.

The balance of entertainment and news is not the same at all Malian radio stations. While community radio stations offer cultural entertainment for 80 percent of their programming schedule, the national radio station offers more diverse programs, with little regard to the requests of listeners. Despite the scarceness of qualified speakers, some media work hard and host political debates and address other topics of public interest.

The Malian media are behind technologically, and often depend upon obsolete equipment. With the exception of the national radio and a handful of private stations in the capital that enjoy state-of-the-art gear, community radio stations continue to work with rudimentary analog equipment, which affects production quality and efficiency.

AMAP is the only existing press agency in Mali. It is a public agency and the main provider of domestic news for various publications, and covers the entire country. “This is the only sector that lacks competition. And the local correspondents are the prefects’ press attachés,” according to Sadou Yattara, coordinator of the Institute for Democracy and Media Education.

The media try to address niche issues. A small number of journalists produce good work in an environment in which the concerns of the minority can be diluted or overshadowed by the majority. Malian journalists tend to work for general news organizations, though the sector has an increasing number of specialized journalists.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Mali Objective Score: 2.52

Mali’s large cities have a variety of news sources. In the rural areas, however, the main news source remains radio. A total of 224 private radio stations, plus national radio with its seven regional stations, blanket the Malian territory. The written press in French is an urban phenomenon with some

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.

No market research guides the creation of press outlets or programming decisions. Founders of media outlets are often attracted by the prestige that comes with media ownership, or simply to a desire to settle scores or peddle influence.

60 newspapers, including the national daily newspaper. Other publications in local languages (Bambara, Peul, Soninke, etc.) target rural areas.

Africable, a private cable television channel, has broken the government television monopoly. Three companies (Canal Plus, Malivision, and Canal Sat) rebroadcast some 150 encrypted foreign television channels. The Internet is used among urban populations mostly, and although it is booming, it remains relatively inaccessible. News sources are freely available and diverse.

Three foreign radio stations (Radio France Internationale, BBC, and Deutsche Welle) are fully or partially relayed. Access to domestic and international media is not limited to the cities; however, lack of electrical power is a major impediment to media penetration in rural areas.

Officially, the public media are open to alternative points of view. The national committee for free access to state-run media is charged with ensuring diversity of opinion. ORTM terms and conditions force the national radio station to fulfill its public service mission. The panelists acknowledged the public media's efforts to broaden its purview to reflect the broad range of social and political issues confronting the nation, but nonetheless accused the public media of favoring governmental information. Coulibaly estimated that 70 percent of the ORTM news bulletin is dedicated to the activities of the president and the government.

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Newspapers and radio stations can access international news sources—such as Panapress, Agence France-Presse, Reuters, or Associated Press—via the Internet.

Lacking well-qualified personnel, community radio stations have trouble producing local content, but somehow they manage to address the concerns of indigenous populations.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, professionals working with the national radio station produce national programs of relatively good quality.

The press law does not force media owners to reveal their identities, but according to Cissé, generally media owners are known publicly and they do not try to hide. Malian law does not allow media sponsors. The media sector has radio networks or press holdings here and there, but they are not part of larger financial conglomerates.

Malian media cover a large spectrum of public issues, the panelists said. Community radio programming reflects various local social, economic, and cultural realities and often is broadcast in local languages. ORTM programs are broadcast in the local and national languages also. Kassim Traoré, a journalist with Radio Klédu and secretary-general of the Organization of Young Reporters of Mali, pointed out, "In order to meet the needs of the minorities, shows are broadcast in several local languages. The national radio station and television channel have assigned time slots for 13 local languages. The private radio stations of every region use the dominant languages mainly, but they always reserve time slots for the minorities."

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Mali Objective Score: 1.53

Generally, media outlets are not sustainable, and function more like small-scale, traditional businesses rather than efficient professional companies. For the most part, private individuals with limited resources have created media

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.

outlets. Many lack qualified personnel and keep their accounting books poorly. With no external funding and very slim financial power, they can hardly pay even predictable expenses. Underperforming distribution networks are a bottleneck and print runs are insignificant. Printing schedules are in some cases arbitrary, as publishers do not always have the necessary means to pay that expense.

The Malian government provides direct but scant public support to the media. Street sales and advertising provide additional funding, but they are not as profitable as in other countries. Despite contributions from technical and financial partners, revenues remain insufficient.

AMAP is a state institution holding an advertising monopoly. It promotes the functioning of private communication and advertising agencies, though it does not provide consistent support to the media. Today, the Malian advertising market relies on personal contacts. There are cases in which representatives of the government—the richest and most important advertiser—negotiate individually with media outlets to influence their editorial policies. The media seldom employ sales agents to find advertisers.

The national daily *L'Essor* (a subsidiary of AMAP) scoops up most advertising, legal advertisements, and subscription monies. All government offices must subscribe to *L'Essor*, and all their announcements and advertisements are published automatically in the columns of the state-run newspaper. Private outlets get the leanest share of advertising—just 10 percent of their revenues, according to estimates.

Although the panelists did not delve into a discussion of whether this leads to undue influence, the Malian government grants the press direct annual aid of XOF 200 million (\$434,000). To be eligible for this subsidy, media outlets must meet certain legal requirements. The government evaluates all media using the same criteria. Ironically, the public outlets (ORTM and AMAP), with a billion dollars in subscriptions, are entitled to a share of this sum. With outlets increasing in number, each outlet's share is ever more trivial, leading to calls for indirect aid such as tax relief, among other types.

No market research guides the creation of press outlets or programming decisions. Founders of media outlets are often attracted by the prestige that comes with media ownership, or simply to a desire to settle scores or peddle influence.

According to Yattara, "One of the flaws of the Malian media is the lack of suitable management." Official print run claims do not reflect reality and cannot be trusted. Audience ratings have not yet become common practice. The polling institutes, however, will occasionally conduct research by special request

Mali has about 60 specialized associations and professional networks, and it is widely agreed that this is too many. Almost all are based in Bamako, the capital. These associations are part of a federative structure called the Press House.

of a given newspaper, radio, or television outlet. It is not uncommon for several years to pass without a poll.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Mali Objective Score: 2.20

Although some supporting institutions uphold the interests of the independent media, their support is of little help, and direct public funding is a drop in the ocean. The existing professional associations are not very efficient, which has led the Malian authorities to consider creating a journalism school to foster professionalism.

Malian media have two owners' associations: the Association of Private Press Editors and URTEL. Considered relatively well-structured, these two groups protect their members' interests by negotiating with authorities and other partners and working to strengthen their capabilities. However, they require more resources to broaden their influence in upholding the interests of the media professionals.

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.

Mali has about 60 specialized associations and professional networks, and it is widely agreed that this is too many. Almost all are based in Bamako, the capital. These associations are part of a federative structure called the Press House. There is a division between the National Union of the Press and Printing Industry, which focuses on the public media, and another union that is being created for the private sector.

Associations and NGOs such as the International Human Rights League and the Malian Human Rights Association have a tentative role as supporters and observers of freedom of speech and independent media. “Even if they are not directly involved in the country’s leadership, some international NGOs do contribute to upholding the freedom of the press,” Tèninfinfing Traoré said.

Mali has no proper journalism school, but some schools offer communications and marketing programs. The Ministry of Communications is moving forward with plans to create a journalism training institute in the near future to make up for this deficiency.

Created in 1996 as a federal structure to provide advanced media training, Press House is now dysfunctional due to a structural crisis. It has trouble offering continuous training to the various professional categories. Media associations themselves must organize the training sessions, based on

members’ specific needs. As Cissé explained, “Everybody is a trainer, and the biggest school is the newsroom.”

With the exception of the national daily *L’Essor* and other public newspapers in local languages published by AMAP, most newspapers are private. AMAP is state-funded and has its own printing house, like the daily newspapers *L’Indépendant* and *Les Echos*. There is no political interference in the business of the printing houses—all of which are privately owned—but the government is also the biggest client, and many publishers treat them with kid gloves so as not to lose government business.

Mali’s distribution networks are apolitical and free. However, print media distribution is a bottleneck for these enterprises, because they sell exclusively in Bamako. The few newspapers that are distributed beyond Bamako, even the closest cities, have delays. Nonetheless, some regional newspapers, such as the bi-monthly *Le Ségovien*, are distributed far from Bamako. Due to the lack of a distribution system, newspapers are sold in the streets.

At its beginning in Mali, the Internet was subject to a governmental monopoly by way of the now-privatized telecommunications operator, the Société de Téléphone du Mali (SOTELMA). However, now the Internet is open to anyone.

List of Panelists

Alexis Kalambry, journalist; publication manager, independent daily newspaper *Les Echos*, Bamako

Bréhima Touré, journalist, *L'Essor*; the National Union of the Press and Printing Industry, Bamako

Ibrahim Famakan Coulibaly, journalist; president, Journalists Union of West Africa, Bamako

Isaïe Somboro, manager, Union of Free Radio and Television Stations of Mali, Bamako

Kassim Traoré, journalist, Radio Klédu; secretary-general, Organization of Young Reporters of Mali, Bko

Mahamane Cissé, journalist and publication manager, *Le Scorpion*; president, Journalists Union of Francophone Press, Bamako

Haby Diallo Touré, director, Belekan Community Radio, Kati

Ténéfing Traoré, journalist, rural radio of the Office of Radio-Television Mali, Bamako

Moustaph Maïga, founder, *Le Ségovien*, Ségou

Sadou Yattara, journalist, coordinator of the Institute for Democracy and Media Education, Bko

Sékouba Samaké, journalist, editor-in-chief, *Info-Matin*; secretary-general, Journalists Association for the Promotion of Professionalism, Bamako

Moderator and Author

Mahamadou Talata Maïga, journalist and trainer, Bamako

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