
However, according to some panelists, the government has started to monitor e-mail and the online distribution of data. The developers of Tamtaminfo, an informational website on Niger, were pressured to withdraw a number of articles the government considered upsetting.



NIGER

The government's repression of the media persisted over the past year, in response to the rebellion raging in the northern regions since 2007. Cracking down sharply on the press, the Niger authorities showed a continued reluctance to allow journalists to do their job. In this country, violations of the freedom of the press are common and sometimes perpetrated by the nominally independent Higher Communications Council (HCC)—the very agency tasked with protecting the freedom and independence of the media.

Following the government's decision to close down the Press House in June 2008, relations among the media organizations and the authorities have grown even tenser. The media community took this act as proof that the authorities are bent on undermining the ability of media organizations to unite in confronting hardships, including the difficult economic environment, unprofessional conduct, and poor working conditions for journalists and other media professionals.

Additionally, censorship of the public media has grown increasingly overt, especially affecting journalists attempting to cover sensitive topics, such as food insecurity and security issues related to the conflict in the north. It has grown very difficult for political actors and civil-society organizations to access these media; as a result, the pluralism of opinions, essential to any democracy, has been suppressed. The public media have become the mouthpiece of the government, in discordance with the law.

Despite all these deficiencies, access to the Internet is in no way controlled or restricted in Niger; cost is the primary barrier to connectivity. However, according to some panelists, the government has started to monitor e-mail and the online distribution of data. The developers of Tamtaminfo, an informational website on Niger, were pressured to withdraw a number of articles the government considered upsetting.

While the overall score did not change dramatically, for the first time, Objective 1 (freedom of speech) fell below a score of 2 (the threshold of near-sustainability), signifying a setback. Again this year, panelists gave poor scores to Objective 4 (business management), showing that the few efforts made in this field have not paid off and that the true challenge is the need to establish a more favorable economic environment for the media. Objective 5 (supporting institutions) once again received the strongest score.

NIGER AT A GLANCE

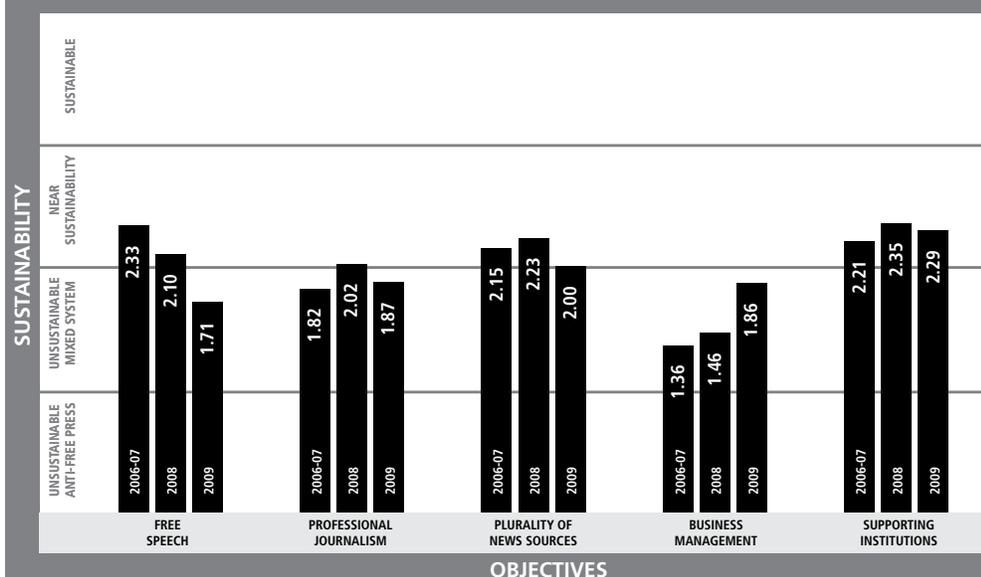
GENERAL

- >> **Population:** 15,878,271 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Niamey
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Haoussa 55.4%, Djerma Sonrai 21%, Tuareg 9.3%, Peuhl 8.5%, Kanouri Manga 4.7%, other 1.2% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 80%, other (includes indigenous beliefs and Christian) 20% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Hausa, Djerma (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$5.197 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$660 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 28.7% (male 42.9%, female 15.1%) (2005 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Prime Minister Mahamadou Danda (since February 19, 2010)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 2 public newspapers and 65 other publications; Radio Stations: 37-8 public and 29 private; Television Stations: 2 public and 5 private channels (source: RJDH, 2007 report)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Niger Press Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** (est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: NIGER



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

Niger Objective Score: 1.71

Until recently, the freedom of speech used to be one of the most inviolable rights secured by the democratization process in Niger, despite multiple attempts to disrupt it. The panelists emphasized that theoretically, there are no major legal restrictions blocking the freedom of the press. However, the panelists unanimously denounced the outrageous discrepancy between the legal provisions and the reality on the ground for journalists. "The Niger constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, but journalists are confronted with enormous difficulties when they attempt to exercise this freedom," said Diaffra Fadimou Moumouni, a journalist and member of the Niger section of the Association of African Communication Professionals.

The former chair of the media regulation agency, Aboubakari Kio Koudizé, commented that the legislation provides "all the universally acknowledged guarantees so that this freedom may be exercised responsibly," but he added that "in reality, it is limited by the intolerance of certain politicians in the ruling party, and the excessive partisan involvement of some journalists who mistake themselves as political actors instead of informers." Abdourhamane Ousmane, chair of the Journalist Network for Human Rights, also believed that the main problem lies in enforcement. According to Albert Chaibou, editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper

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.

The persistence of this armed conflict serves as an excuse for the political and administrative authorities to further muzzle the media; in this very context the Press House—one of the very few independent institutions that has provided training for journalists—was closed down in June 2008...

Alternative and chair of the Niger office of the Francophone Press Union, "There are countless practical obstacles to freedom of speech"—so much so that, he added, "it continues to be a tireless quest for journalists."

Addressing the question of government abuse, Ousmane pointed HCC's arbitrary closure in April 2008 of Sahara FM (a private radio station broadcasting out of Agadez, a region rife with rebellion). The persistence of this armed conflict serves as an excuse for the political and administrative authorities to further muzzle the media; in this very context the Press House—one of the very few independent institutions that has provided training for journalists—was closed down in June 2008 after being accused, without any merit according to the panelists, of becoming "hostage to some small groups and serving foreign interests."

The HCC is an independent administrative authority tasked with protecting media freedom. As noted in last year's report, independent of the government's executive branch, it issues broadcast licenses, monitors editorial content, makes certain that the media respect their ethical obligations, and ensures that all citizens have access to the media. However, Ousmane pointed out examples of the HCC's apparent scorn for licensing regulations. He said that license applications for the Alternative and Dounia press groups are still pending before the HCC, and he added that the process of issuing licenses to start new radio and television outlets is also scarred by injustice. "License granting has been selective," he said. Ali Idrissa, deputy general manager of the radio station and television channel Dounia, went further, saying, "Licenses are assigned based on political and other affinities."

Regarding the fairness of market entry and the tax structure, the panelists agreed that no outlets are treated preferentially. However, the more solid broadcast media are the most resilient, while newspapers are confronted with serious hardships and are forced to pay a professional tax. The precarious economic situation of the media (especially newspapers) raised questions about the appropriateness of the tax regime.

Although in 2008 no crimes were committed against journalists, verbal threats have become more frequent, according to Oumarou Keita Lalo, editorial manager of the newspaper *Le Républicain* and member of the National Committee for Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties.

While journalists in the public media are undeniably privileged in terms of access to official information, Moumouni pointed out that they are not at all able to report freely. "The freedom of journalists in the public sector has never been so muzzled as in recent years," Moumouni said, adding that the public media (particularly the radio stations and television channels) never release anything that opposes the official line.

According to Boubacar Diallo, journalists in the public media are not free to do their jobs honestly, as "the government dictates what information must be released and indicates who is and who is not allowed to speak in the state-run media." Lalo added that the public media are not open to conflicting views and are known for praising the members of the government and the regime's high priests. The legislation regulating fair access by political and social actors to the public media is not upheld; political opponents do not have the opportunity to freely express their opinions in the public media.

Gazéré Sophie Ledru, a journalist with the National Office for Editing and Publishing, said that the rulers' intolerance is one of the most serious obstacles inhibiting the freedom of the press. Such intolerance is apparent by the obstinate refusal of the Niger authorities to decriminalize press offenses, noted the panelists, whereas many other countries have eliminated prison sentences for journalists committing such offenses. Despite the many other pressures placed upon media organizations, this important issue has not been taken into consideration by the authorities, according to Lalo. Niger journalists continue to be imprisoned for press offenses, and N'Diaye Babacar Ameth, manager of the marketing and advertising agency MultiCom, said that, under these circumstances, journalists enjoy no legal protection—and not for lack of legal instruments.

In the context of legal proceedings, private media operate at a disadvantage, Lalo said, and when a complaint is filed against journalists it is their obligation to prove that their allegations are true to the facts. The chair of the Niger Association of Independent Press Publishers, Mahamadou Boubacar Diallo, commented that it is nonsensical to ask journalists to produce evidence while they are in custody. And herein lies the gap between the principles upheld by the legislation and reality, he concluded. Furthermore, "Niger's judges excel at enforcing prison sentences," Kio Koudizé lamented. Based on his network's annual monitoring, Ousmane noted that in 2008, several journalists were

arrested, questioned, or sentenced to imprisonment after being investigated for libel.

The panel discussions brought out the fact that access to public information by the public and private media, respectively, is unbalanced. Manzo Diallo said that journalists working in the private sector do not always have access to official information sources, in contrast to their public-sector counterparts, who are given all but a red-carpet entrance into administrative buildings. "The doors are closed to journalists in the private media, whom government officials consider to be too fond of scandals," he said.

Nevertheless, in recent years media professionals have started to lobby for equal access to public information; unfortunately, such advocacy efforts have come up against the authorities' refusal to adopt a specific act guaranteeing citizens' and journalists' access to information. The public officials continue to rely on Prime Minister Hama Amadou's administrative order to justify their refusal to share information destined for administrative use, although the very basis of the order is strongly disputed by human rights and media organizations.

Despite all these deficiencies, the panelists pointed out that access to the Internet is in no way controlled or restricted in Niger—although some panelists noted that ever since the resurgence of the armed conflict in the north, the government has started to monitor e-mail and the online distribution of data. Manzo Diallo said that the developers of Tamtaminfo were pressured to withdraw a number of articles considered upsetting. The main problem regarding Internet access is the cost—too steep for many press outlets.

In Niger, just as in many other countries, the international press agencies have local correspondents who are free to do their jobs; however, since the sad saga of the RFI correspondent, Moussa Kaka, who spent many months in prison, and the episode of two French journalists, Pierre Creisson and Thomas Dandois, who were questioned in the North and thrown into Kollo prison, the country has become somewhat inhospitable to foreign journalists seeking to do independent reporting, especially if their reports address topics that the authorities consider sensitive, such as the food crisis and security issues related to the ongoing conflict.

The political authorities have shown increasing intent to limit access to the profession. Narey Oumarou, a teacher and researcher at the University of Niamey, said that recently, access to the profession has tightened. Narey said that before issuing press cards, the HCC runs checks on an applicant's file. On the same topic, Abdourhamane Ousmane said that in 2008 the HCC denied issuance of a press card to some journalists solely due to their critical views of the government—or of the HCC itself.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Niger Objective Score: 1.87

According to the panelists, journalism, as it is practiced in Niger, fails to meet basic ethical standards. In the same vein, Lalo commented, "Some journalists have no qualms about trampling on the basic rules of the trade." He said that these journalists "are not objective and practice self-censorship for various reasons."

While the panel participants unanimously recognized the professional deficiencies of Niger journalists and the hardships they face, their opinions diverge when it comes to the causes of such shortcomings. In Boubacar Diallo's view, professional standards cannot be upheld because government officials refuse to disclose information. Moumouni said the main source of the problem is the proliferation within the media of interns and volunteers, who are easy targets for corruption.

Manzo Diallo placed journalists into two categories: good journalists who do an excellent job because they do not live from hand to mouth, and bad journalists who write mediocre articles because they are struggling with extreme poverty. This publisher believes that the introduction of the press card in 2008 failed to clean up the profession, because the HCC disregarded the card-granting criteria. Thus, he said, many "black sheep" were able to slip through the net.

Nevertheless, according to Idrissa, "Production quality in the private media has improved significantly in recent years." In contrast, Chaibou claimed that only a handful of journalists uphold professional standards; furthermore,

he continued, most of the graduates from the Information and Communication Techniques Training Institute, the only journalism school in Niger, are strikingly incompetent. "This institution must rethink its approach to education if it wants to restore the good name of the trade," he said.

Ousmane emphasized the link between low professionalism and poor access to information sources, as such difficulties inevitably lead to the abandonment of journalistic investigations. "Confronted by the public administration officials' refusal to collaborate, most journalists give up their hunt for information," he said. As a result, editorial production is mediocre, and professional practices are at odds with the basic rules of journalism, even if it is comforting to see that the various training sessions offered in 2008 did contribute to improved respect for professional ethical standards. Kio Koudizé noted that Niger's professional journalists adopted a professional charter in 1992. "This charter essentially covers the same provisions concerning rights and obligations that appear in the French journalists' universal charter," he said, and added that abiding by this charter is key for preserving the credibility and dignity of the profession that has been so greatly put to the test by some practitioners.

The panelists established a direct link between the journalists' working environment and the lack of rigor in reporting. Censorship and self-censorship have become commonplace. For example, Ousmane noted, "Journalists do not dare to report on the armed rebellion in the northern area of Niger since the warning issued in August 2007." After RFI and the private group Dounia were closed down twice, self-censorship has increased in the Niger media, according to Ousmane.

At the same time, the panel participants wanted to appreciate the courage and boldness of the Niger media, for despite the harsh working conditions, some press outlets do work hard to produce quality content. "We acknowledge the media's bravery in addressing issues such as the continuation of the Niger president's term in office or of human-rights violations," Ousmane said. These examples point to a sustained effort to observe professional ethical rules by some journalists.

Journalism is threatened by poverty today more so than ever. The journalists' working conditions are generally pitiful. Professionals often work illegally with little job security. Most of them are reduced to accepting work without a pay slip or social-security contribution, and curiously, the media do not denounce this demeaning treatment. Journalists themselves often torpedo initiatives to put together a collective work contract.

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).

Furthermore, Niger's media face a very harsh economic environment and tough working conditions without competitive equipment. Some newspapers do not even have an office or computers. The printing house monopoly is gone, but the prices continue to be elevated compared with the rest of the sub-region. This also explains the low newspaper print runs and the fact that there is no private daily newspaper in Niger.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Niger Objective Score: 2.00

There are multiple news sources in Niger. The press family includes over 60 private newspapers, two public newspapers, 23 private radio stations, four private and two public television channels, and more than 100 community radio stations. The flourishing of the media facilitates citizen access to varied and diverse news. "These news sources play a decisive role in shaping public opinion and ensuring transparent management of public affairs, by criticizing and exposing everything," according to Oumarou.

Other panel participants believe that private ownership of communication channels limits citizen access to the media. Ousmane, who shares this view, pointed out that the media are increasingly treated as a commodity. "If you have money, you get to speak in the press; if not, you do not," he said. Chaibou added that many citizens have very limited access to information, because of poverty and the fact that they live far from the center of news production. Since electricity

is barely available in some smaller areas of Niger, television is not accessible in many places, including the villages near the capital, noted Chatou Mahamadou, director of the radio station Alternative in Niamey.

Ledru said that the concentration of the media in the capital creates a real asymmetry in terms of how citizens are able to access information. Newspapers are available only in the larger urban centers, and the private radio stations and television channels have a very limited broadcasting radius. Hence, the rural population often finds out what is happening in the country with a delay, unlike the larger-city inhabitants, who receive information in real time.

It is also important to point out that the concentration of the media in the larger cities is not the only source of inequality in terms of the access to information. The main source continues to be the unaffordable nature of the media. Purchasing a newspaper involves a financial sacrifice that many readers are not ready to make. The selling price of weekly newspapers is XOF 300 (\$0.65)—that is to say 100 francs more than a loaf of bread—in a country where households spend more than 80 percent of their income on food. Since the high illiteracy rate in Niger also constitutes a major obstacle, in truth the rural population has only indirect access to the written press—through the press reviews that the private radio stations broadcast in the national languages.

Legally, citizen access to international media is not restricted, but in recent years the foreign media have fallen under tremendous pressure or have received sanctions. RFI, in particular, was suspended twice by the HCC, and its correspondent, Moussa Kaka, was accused of "complicity with the armed rebellion" and jailed. The foreign media are extremely influential in forming public opinion, as many citizens trust them more than those run by the government. Often, the programs in the foreign media are relayed by private outlets.

As a consequence of the democratization process, the public monopoly has abated in all media sub-sectors, except for press agencies. There is no private competition at the national level for the state-owned, long-troubled Niger Press Agency (known by its French acronym, ANP). Its meager annual subsidy does not even cover its current expenses, not to mention the need to replace obsolete equipment. The private press organizations rarely use ANP as a news source and resort instead to foreign press agencies (Reuters, AFP, AP, IPS, etc.) for international news.

As noted in last year's report, broadcast media need to improve their capability to produce their own programs. Nigerian law requires that most media content be produced locally and in the national languages, but most media outlets,

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.

particularly television stations, are not yet able to produce their own news programs.

The panelists recognized that liberalization has led to a decrease in governmental media influence on public opinion. In recent years, the public media have allowed no criticism against the regime, and the private outlets have remained a last resort for the political and social forces opposing the government. The majority of the panelists believe that the government has reduced the public media to utter submission, and said the journalists working in these media are not free at all. "Any idea contrary to the official line is systematically censored in the public media, so they should no longer be called 'public,'" Fadimou Moumouni said. Kio Koudizé added, "The public media are the voice of their masters." Ousmane's view is that "in 2008, the access to the public media was almost exclusively reserved to the proponents of the government."

Fortunately, some believe this serious deficiency is counterbalanced by the existence of a plethora of press outlets producing original content and striving to reflect the diversity of opinions and interests that permeate Niger society. However, Kio Koudizé noted, "The private radio stations produce original shows and try to meet their listeners' expectations by showing an opposing view of the public media." Still, rural residents often depend upon international channels (RFI, BBC, DW, VOA, etc.) to stay informed about their own country and to hear a different side of the story, such as that of the political opposition or civil society.

According to Chaibou, minority groups, in particular, still have a big problem gaining space in the media. "The ethnic minorities do not receive useful information in the weekly timeslots that are assigned to the state-run media," he lamented.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Niger Objective Score: 1.86

After two decades of media liberalization, business management continues to be a key weakness of the Niger media. The panelists were unanimous that no significant progress has been made in this area. The press outlets have inextricable hardships and a lot of trouble becoming viable businesses. Most adopt a small-scale approach to management, lacking accounting and sales services. This situation is especially noticeable in the print media. The Niger newspapers are unable to increase their print runs as a result.

Another problem is that private media sponsors often lack entrepreneurship, according to Manzo Diallo and Idrissa—two press owners who recognized that press enterprises are undermined by bad management. Manzo Diallo said, "Managers and investors manage their media as they please, because they lack the desire to create a durable enterprise." Idrissa commented, "In the end, it is profitable only for the owners, while the workers slave away in poverty."

Given this situation, a number of panel participants advocated a separation between financial and editorial management. The managerial ineffectiveness of press enterprises primarily stems from the fact that they are generally run by journalists, not managers, claimed Ousmane, who added, "The inability of written press outlets to manage their outlets better is why they cannot apply for sponsorships with organizations such as the Francophone support fund for the southern press—which makes its selections based on management criteria." Under these circumstances, he pointed out, "Not even the socio-professional organizations of the media offer media management training."

Reacting to these analyses, Lalo indicated that very few Niger outlets can be considered true press enterprises, for an enterprise implies an office, accounting, permanent staff, strategic development plans, etc. According to him, in most cases, the term "press enterprise" is not suitable to describe Niger press outlets. "Very few Niger outlets function as real enterprises," Chaibou confirmed. Moumouni introduced a more nuanced view, however, agreeing that newspapers may lack infrastructure but claiming that broadcast outlets are more or less well-managed enterprises.

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 economic environment of the media is disconcertingly gloomy, not only because those in charge are bad managers. The panelists were unanimous that the already flimsy advertising market is heavily affected by political factors. The criteria used by public advertisers, in particular, are discriminatory, according to the panelists. Only pro-government media are able to take advantage of this market, and even there, print and broadcasting press are treated differently in terms of advertising. Most Niger advertisers, being illiterate merchants, prefer the broadcast media and hire unofficial agencies to produce commercials—and what happens then is that they promote the seller and not the product—instead of working with legally constituted agencies.

According to the majority of the participants, the public media have privileged access to advertising, while already enjoying a state subsidy that covers most of their expenses. A number of panel participants consider this situation unjust, as the private media are forced to accept the leanest share of advertising. Community radio stations are excluded completely from the advertising market, according to the provisions of the law relative to the broadcasting sector in Niger. In the absence of any kind of government support, this situation provokes considerable hardships at all levels. Most of the radio stations can broadcast only a few hours a day for lack of human, technical, and financial resources.

Addressing the advertising market issue as well, Oumarou mentioned the lack of initiative by the media regulation agency. In his view, the inequalities denounced by media professionals could have been solved by means of appropriate legislation. Ameth added, “The current situation is extremely prejudicial to the communication and marketing agencies.” Before a new legal provision is put in place, the panelists advocated a temporary solution, such as a rate synchronization agreed upon by the media outlets.

The panelists also described the issue of legally provided public aid to the press as crucial. Most of the private media that have applied for it in the past two years have received grants, with the notable exception of the community radio stations. Niger’s publishers consider the criteria as subjective and not very credible. The media organizations denounced the attempt to modify the conditions by which this aid is allocated; furthermore, given the dire needs of the media, the amount of aid available is deemed miniscule.

The panelists did not discuss concerns that government subsidies could lead to greater editorial influence by the state. In fact, Oumarou said there is an urgent need to increase this amount, arguing that this is the only way to guarantee the independence of the media from certain political influences. Moreover, Ousmane specified, “Direct

aid to the press must be doubled by indirect aid, in terms of implementing the Florence agreements on the removal of taxes on the paper and consumables used by the press enterprises.” Mahamadou denounced the exclusion of the community radio stations from public aid to the press, arguing that this is not justifiable when these media cannot depend upon the advertising market.

According to Chaibou, the majority of the Niger media—newspapers or radio stations alike—were launched without prior market research. Furthermore, the circulation numbers published by newspapers are thought to be inflated.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Niger Objective Score: 2.29

In 2008, the Niger authorities closed down the Press House, charging that it served only the interests of a small group. The panel participants unanimously condemned the closing down of this federative structure, which included three categories of media organizations: owner organizations (publishers and private broadcast media investors), media worker organizations (unions, journalist associations), and specialized or thematic organizations and networks.

Most of the panelists agreed that the Press House, now-shuttered by the government, had proven its usefulness for the entire trade, and just last year the MSI noted that its strength was growing. Since its inception, it strived to offer various benefits to Niger journalists, publishers, and media investors. In return, the media community has fought to support this institution, as well; when the government took away its offices at the Ministry of Communications, many

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.

media organizations rallied and helped the Press House find a new location.

In the same vein as Press House, a number of socio-professional media organizations have continued to play a decisive role both in terms of defending the interests of the trade and the freedom of the press. These organizations include unions, associations, and thematic networks, such as the National Information and Communication Workers Union, the National Joint Committee of Community Radio, and the Journalists Network on Questions of Security and Peace. Generally, these organizations work hard to improve professional standards and stand up against attacks on the freedom of the press, showing particularly strong solidarity in legal matters. However, Chaibou lamented the lack of sustained efforts toward the adoption of a collective work contract for journalists.

In addition to the media organizations, there are other structures supporting the freedom of speech in Niger. They are mainly human-rights organizations that often react in cases of attacks on the media.

According to Oumarou, media organizations have also contributed to reinforcing journalists' skills. With the help of certain partners for development, these organizations initiate many training sessions for journalists, helping to enhance their professionalism and their ability to address more specialized issues. Since the training needs of Niger's journalists cannot be met by the Information and Communication Techniques Training Institute, the only specialized school in the country, the initiative of media organizations is crucial.

Addressing the issue of professional training, some panelists said that the Information and Communication Techniques Training Institute fails to provide quality education. Graduates specializing in the written press often need to be retrained, while those trained in the broadcasting field are immediately operational. Professional training remains an important issue in Niger. According to Idrissa, a number of investors are working on this problem.

The owners of printing houses and newspaper stands are generally neutral and apolitical, which is a significant asset for the defense of the freedom of the press—an increasingly appreciated value within Niger society. However, the panelists criticized newspaper distribution, as it is limited to the large urban centers; the panelists underlined the need for press organizations to develop an outreach strategy for secondary markets.

List of Panel Participants

Abdourahamane Ousmane, chair, Journalists Network for Human Rights, Niamey

Mahamadou Boubacar Diallo, founder and publication manager, *Libération*; chair, Niger Association of Independent Press Publishers, Niamey

Chatou Mahamadou, director, community radio station Alternative FM, Niamey

Diaffra Fadimou Moumouni, secretary-general, Niger section of the Association of African Communication Professionals, Niamey

Gazéré Sophie Ledru, journalist and sales manager, National Office for Editing and Publishing, Niamey

Aboubakari Kio Koudizé, lecturer, Institute for Training in Information and Communication, Niamey

Oumarou Keita Lalo, secretary-general, Niger Private Journalists Union; editor-in-chief, *Le Républicain*; member, National Human Rights Commission for the Independent Media, Niamey

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