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REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Despite an oil boom in 2007 and 2008, corruption is endemic in the Republic of Congo, and more than half of the population in this Central African country lives in poverty. Transparency International ranked the Republic of Congo 162 out of 180 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index.

The presidential elections, which led to another seven-year term for Denis Sassou-Nguesso, dominated the headlines in 2009. The opposition boycotted the elections, which excluded the main opposition candidate. In the lead-up to the July elections, the authorities stepped up pressure against journalists as well. Several international journalists reported physical attacks and intimidation. An online journalist lost his life in a house fire, and his relatives raised the possibility that it was retribution for his work criticizing the authorities—though an official investigation ruled the cause of the fire accidental.

Self-censorship has become such a scourge in the Congo that it is devastating the profession. Journalists were so nervous during the election season that no media outlet broadcast a single program about the electoral process; they simply relayed advertisements from government ministries. Nonetheless, politics dominate the headlines, while the media neglect various societal problems such as child mortality, shortages of safe drinking water, poor waste management, electricity outages, and other issues that plague the populace.

The Congolese depend primarily on radio for information; access to other forms of media outside the capital is poor. Even Pointe-Noire, the second largest city and the country's economic capital, does not have a locally produced newspaper—and few can afford newspapers, in any case. Poverty affects journalists, too; salaries are low and working conditions are quite poor. A collective contract, which the media community hopes could improve compensation and job security for journalists, was adopted in 2009, but had not yet been implemented at the time that the MSI panel convened.

Journalists lack appropriate equipment to conduct their work; some journalists at Radio Pointe-Noire have not even been exposed to computers. Internet access remains a luxury. In addition to the prohibitive cost, poor connectivity hampers access to the web—even in Brazzaville, the capital and largest city. For now, the Internet is not used as an information source—though online news sources and blogs are emerging, some based in France, that could help spread usage.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO AT A GLANCE

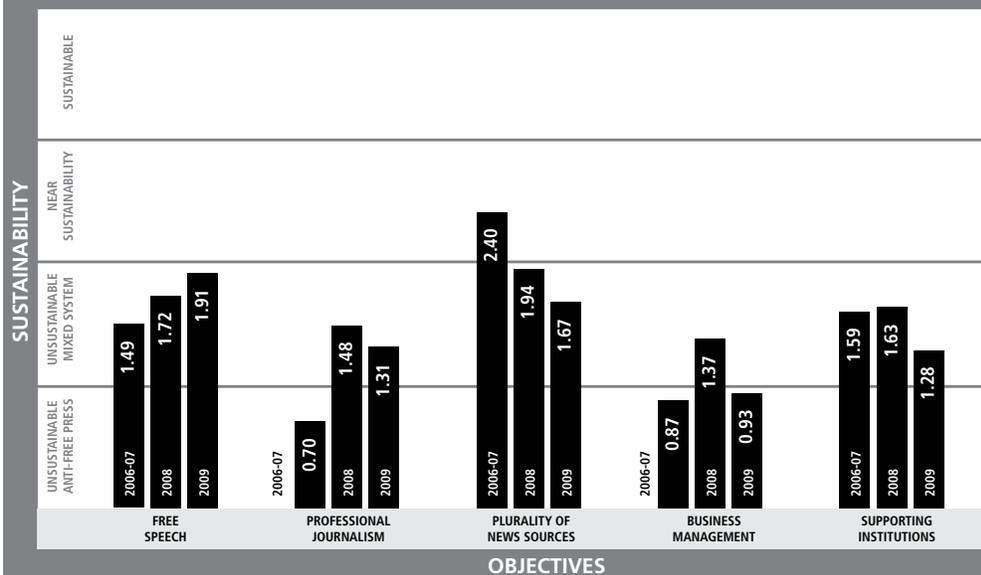
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,012,809 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Brazzaville
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kongo 48%, Sangha 20%, M'Bochi 12%, Teke 17%, Europeans and other 3% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 50%, animist 48%, Muslim 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Lingala and Monokutuba (lingua franca trade languages), many local languages and dialects (of which Kikongo is the most widespread) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$6.748 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$2,940 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 83.8% (male 89.6%, female: 78.4%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Denis Sassou-Nguesso (since October 25, 1997)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 1 daily newspaper (*Dépêches de Brazzaville*), 50 private newspapers (only a handful appear regularly), 10 weekly magazines; Radio Stations: 18, including Radio Liberté; Television Stations: 10 channels
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Congolese News Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 155,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: 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

Republic of Congo Objective Score: 1.91

All the participants of the Brazzaville panel in the Republic of Congo generally agreed that their country has the necessary legal and social standards in place to protect and encourage the freedom of speech and access to information—with limits to safeguard human rights and public order. The Congolese information and communication sector is regulated by two laws: law number 8-2001 of November 12, 2001, concerning the freedom of information and communication; and law number 15-2001 of December 31, 2001, concerning the pluralism of the public broadcast media. The High Council on Freedom of Speech (known by its French acronym, CSLC) watches over cases of abuse and transgressions within the Congolese media.

Jean Clotaire Hymboud, a journalist and member of the Association of Press Publishers of Congo, added that in contrast to the single-party period (1963 to 1990), legislation has seen major progress. Perpétue Sandrine Mazandou, a freelance reporter, added that the Congo's legal provisions are consistent with international legislation. The challenge, the panelists agreed, is in the implementation and enforcement of legislation. The democratic transformations have not brought about a change in political leadership, and authorities continue to subdue the media reflexively and appear content to keep the media sector unstructured and weakened.

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.

Mazandou added, "When dealing with lawsuits between journalists and public officials, the justice system is neither free nor fair, but easily corruptible, and that leads to sometimes tougher sanctions against journalists."

Christine Matondo of the Federal Union of Communication Workers concluded that the media is only independent on paper, and journalists are scorned for their own turpitudes: corruption, favoritism, and distortion of the news. "Sometimes, articles in newspapers deemed to be close to one political party or another are censored, but their authors are never brought to justice," she said.

Marcellin Ndokadiki, a media consumer, provided a slightly more nuanced perspective based on the intense politicization of the media sector, noting that the president has stated openly that journalists should not face prosecution for their words. However, according to Eugène Gampaka, managing editor of *Tam-Tam D'afrique*, freedom of the press is relative. Judicial power is not independent; rather, it operates on the orders of the executive power, he said. Mazandou added, "When dealing with lawsuits between journalists and public officials, the justice system is neither free nor fair, but easily corruptible, and that leads to sometimes tougher sanctions against journalists."

Hénoc Nazaire Ebethas Bissat commented on the relative freedom of Congolese media laws. "The legal framework in the Congo is among the best in the sub-region, as it offers a great deal of freedom to the people. It is our personal experience that shows the limits of this legal framework when compared to others. But the most important aspect is how the media practitioners relate to the legal system in force."

CSLC controls and regulates broadcasting licenses. Bernard Mackiza of the Congolese Media Observatory (known by its French acronym, OCM) noted that the license granting process is fraught with difficulty, and explained that in most cases, applicants receive temporary permits—but these "temporary" licenses tend to last forever. Annette Kouamba Matondo, of the state-owned *Nouvelle République*, commented that often CSLC grants operating licenses based on personal affinities; however, Christine Matondo noted that under the terms of a 2003 press law, anyone who has been denied a license may appeal to an administrative judge. Gampaka said that some media owners make their outlets operational before receiving governmental authorization—

Gampaka agreed that the Congo has no regulation denying access to information to certain media, but argued that public authorities favor the state-owned media—while journalists in the private media must use their special connections.

and added that authorization is granted easily to a very specific social class.

Furthermore, most of the private radio stations and television channels with temporary licenses are owned by investors close to political powers. The authorities are known to apply pressure on investors, and sometimes even shut down broadcasts. For example, the government suspended Canal Bénédiction Plus (CB+) in February 2009 over aired political footage in the lead-up to the elections. Pointing to the arrest of CB+ director Edith Ebourefe, André Itoua of the Congolese Human Rights Observatory noted that the National Surveillance Department oversteps its authority and investigates journalists.

In terms of market entry, Blanche Simona Ngokoumounga, a journalist with the Pointe-Noire radio station, said that the Congolese media are tax exempt, unlike other industries, and the media sector continues to be “informal.” Jocelyn Francis Waboutoukanabio confirmed that the government places no tax pressure on the Congolese media. Gampaka commented that the broadcast media are subject to more restrictions than newspapers, which have free entry access based on a simple court order.

Some panelists claimed that while journalists suffer from various forms of intimidation, serious attacks against journalists are rare. However, the panelists agreed that violence against journalists goes unpunished by the authorities—and is sometimes perpetrated by the authorities. Edouard Adzotsa, vice president of the Central African Media Organization (known by its French acronym, OMAC), said that the public criticizes criminal acts against journalists, but Annette Kouamba Matondo disagreed, saying that journalists themselves are divided and afraid to speak for fear of punishment. Mazandou confirmed this, noting, “Unfortunately, journalists who have been beaten are afraid to press charges.” Ngokoumounga claimed that journalists in the Republic of Congo do not suffer as badly as journalists in other countries in this sub-region.

The authorities ramped up pressure on journalists ahead of the July elections. This year saw several cases of violence against or intimidation of journalists. The Committee to

Protect Journalists highlighted the case of Bruno Jacquet Ossébi, a correspondent for the Congolese online newspaper *Mwindi*, who died in a mysterious house fire. The CPJ report noted, “Ossébi was known for his outspoken coverage of alleged government corruption and his support for a lawsuit that seeks to uncover the purportedly extravagant personal holdings of African leaders. Ossébi’s brother, Roland Kouka, told CPJ that family members fear the fire may have been set to retaliate for the journalist’s coverage of alleged official corruption.”¹ The official investigation, however, ruled out foul play, according to the U.S. Department of State 2009 Human Rights Report for the Republic of Congo. Additionally, the U.S. Department of State reported that military police harassed several foreign journalists during the elections in July: for example, journalists from the BBC and France 24 reported that police assaulted them and seized their equipment.

Theoretically, the state-owned or public media are free, according to all legal provisions. According to Adzotsa, public media enjoy preferential treatment, and the law guarantees independence for public media journalists despite their very small salaries. But Mackiza said that in reality, many public servants are afraid to confront their immediate supervisors. Although the government has no influence over appointments in the private media, the minister of communications appoints the heads of the public media, and managers of state-owned media are placed under the influence of the government and ruling parties. The panelists gave the example of Adrien Wayi, a news chief at Radio Congo, who was fired for covering an opposition rally. Waboutoukanabio concluded, “In the state-run media, the interventionism, muzzling, and strict surveillance of the personnel by the government is apparent.”

A 2001 press law struck down prison terms for libel (while retaining prison sentences for incitement to violence or ethnic hatred), and since then, no journalists have been sent to jail for defamation. However, according to Mazandou, print journalists are harassed often and charged with lawsuits if they publish pieces of news that authorities deem too shocking or embarrassing. Gampaka noted that Internet service providers and website hosting services are never prosecuted or punished.

Berthe-Jeanine Koumba, a journalist with Radio Télévision Nouvelle Alliance in Dolisie, said that journalists are waging an access-to-information war. Mazandou noted that the CSLC charter provides for unrestricted access to information sources, and CSLC is supposed to guarantee access to

¹ Keita, M. H. Keita with S. Turbeaux. “Republic of Congo Special Report: From a Fatal Fire, Many Questions.” Committee to Protect Journalists. April 23, 2009. <http://cpj.org/reports/2009/04/republic-of-congo-special-report-from-a-fatal-fire.php> (Accessed October 31, 2010.)

information sources. Gampaka agreed that the Congo has no regulation denying access to information to certain media, but argued that public authorities favor the state-owned media—while journalists in the private media must use their special connections.

Annette Kouamba Matondo noted, however, that now journalists are able to obtain their news from the web—although access to other information sources still poses significant problems for journalists. Hymboud agreed, and said, “The spread of the Internet in the larger cities, and the decreasing costs of access, have helped media professionals do a better job managing their news sources.”

Although some panelists said that the government does not block access to foreign or domestic media, Ngokoumounga said that news sources are not always accessible. According to Gampaka, journalists in the private media can use domestic and foreign news resources freely, but journalists in the public media must choose carefully from among the two categories.

According to Waboutoukanabio, anyone can become a journalist. Some Congolese journalists have degrees, others do not. CSLC issues press cards, and sometimes takes a long time to issue them. Gampaka commented, “No license is required for reporting, except for specific events, such as the head of state’s swearing-in ceremony.” In the public media, anyone can become a journalist, provided that he or she has a journalism degree and is eligible to apply for a public servant position. Gampaka noted, “The government does not get involved in the recruitment of junior journalists in the private press, but it does organize hiring tests for the state-run press.” The panelists said that the government does not influence journalist associations.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Republic of Congo Objective Score: 1.31

While the panelists expressed concern over declining standards of quality and objectivity in reporting in the Congo, Mackiza said that Congolese journalism is still a developing profession. Despite the weaknesses in the media, generally journalists try their best to meet professional standards of quality, he said.

However, many panelists underscored pervasive shortcomings. Journalists often fail to check all the information they present, and they rarely conduct background research—either for lack of technical and financial resources, because they are pressed for time, or for lack of access to the information sources. Gampaka said this is especially true of reporters in the private media. According to Waboutoukanabio, few

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reporters check their information or ask experts technical or specialized questions. Bissat agreed that pieces are not researched well enough, and noted that the same expressions are repeated constantly.

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Adzotsa also attributed the declining standards to the lack of a good quality school of journalism. “The fact that academic programs do not meet the requirements of the trade creates huge discrepancies between training and practice,” he said. However, he also blamed laziness and the impoverished conditions in which many journalists live. “A country where journalists can barely survive and lack the courage to face life’s challenges cannot be a real democracy,” he concluded.

Corruption and political influence affect the quality of reporting as well. Elenga noted that most media and journalists are unofficially part of groups that are close to

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).

Matondo said, "Salaries are a fundamental issue in the fight against corruption. Journalists are indeed extremely underpaid; as a result, they place themselves at the disposal of politicians, who manipulate them according to their own purposes."

either the opposition or the government, and they are not apolitical despite their official statements. Christine Matondo said, "Sometimes journalists distort facts to obey politicians' orders; reporters and editors are often forced to alter reality to save their jobs, especially in the state-run media. Rarely are they neutral. They always seem to overemphasize a point of view, to harm a competitor, to block an attack, to make sure they get promoted, etc." Ngokoumounga agreed, adding, "Journalists in the state-owned media act according to the government's policy. There is no objectivity; only the government's opinion counts. Stories are always one-sided. The editorial line at the Pointe-Noire radio station coincides with the government's policy, as the coverage of the presidential election of July 12, 2009 showed."

Annette Kouamba Matondo said that while political bias is pervasive, the rise of private outlets in recent years has started a sort of competition, making journalists want to do a better job. Kouamba agreed that improvement is increasingly visible, and the media outlets that are interested in preserving the quality of journalism stand out.

OCM monitors the media and works to help journalists meet ethical standards. Waboutoukanabio said that many Congolese journalists not only fail to meet professional quality standards, they trample on ethical rules. Annette Kouamba Matondo agreed, commenting, "Many journalists flout ethics to fill their pockets with politicians' money." She added that some journalists cozy up to ministers and help ensure that officials' priorities are covered, while pressing societal issues are swept under the rug. However, Gampaka argued that ethical standards are more or less observed, and the lack of suitable training for young journalists explains their frequent mistakes.

Journalists in the Congo are weighed down by self-censorship. In Elenga's opinion, self-censorship is so rampant that the profession is being destroyed. Self-censorship was evident particularly during the election season; outlets ran advertisements from government ministries, while journalists were largely afraid to cover the positions of other candidates.

Gampaka said that field reporters censor their pieces before they are made public, either for fear of losing their jobs (journalists in the public media) or to avoid putting their personal safety at risk (in the private media). In the public media, editors block the coverage of certain events; for example, opposition meetings and press conferences. Matondo noted, though, that some events are censored to avoid disturbing public order and compromising safety.

There are certain topics that journalists know they must avoid. For example, Mazandou said that the notorious public hygiene problem in the capital city cannot be covered in the press, particularly the broadcast press, because the problem is the mayor's responsibility and journalists are afraid to criticize the mayor. According to Kouamba, the media cover key events only when officials feel the need to gain publicity for good deeds. Adzotsa said that many journalists are preoccupied primarily with sports and small political and cultural affairs.

Journalists cannot live off of their salaries, and very few media outlets actually have the resources to pay their employees on time—or at all, in some cases. Journalists generally earn less than other professionals, and journalists in the private media often are not even paid salaries, surviving as freelancers.

The panelists said that they believe that the poor working conditions and low salaries invite corruption. Economic need drives some journalists to accept gifts and under-the-table payments to cover events, and in order to survive, private newspapers sell pages to politicians. Matondo said, "Salaries are a fundamental issue in the fight against corruption. Journalists are indeed extremely underpaid; as a result, they place themselves at the disposal of politicians, who manipulate them according to their own purposes."

Low salaries affect state-run and private media alike. Annette Kouamba Matondo said, "The low salaries of journalists in the public media induce some of them to become political puppets to round up their monthly income." The government guarantees salaries for the public media, and according to Ndokadiki, the salaries of Congolese journalists are comparable to those of other civil servants. But according to Elenga, while the 2001 press law recommends that press managers provide journalists with salaries to guarantee their independence, the reality is that journalists in the public sector do not earn livable wages. Small salaries have caused an exodus to better-paying jobs in the administrative, economic, or political sectors.

Although Congolese journalists signed a collective contract in January 2009, whether it will ease the insecurity of journalists remains to be seen, as the contract has not been implemented yet.

The panelists disagreed slightly regarding the balance between entertainment and news. Some panelists claimed that entertainment outweighs news, but Gampaka said that the near-complete absence of entertainment programs forces viewers to watch channels from France (RFI) and the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. Ndokadiki said that entertainment programs dominate but are poor-quality fare. According to Koumba, "Entertainment prevails over newscasts for the simple reason that it is the only way to bring in some money."

Waboutoukanabio said that many media use very low-quality equipment. In contrast, the state-owned media received new equipment in February 2009, but few state employees are trained to use the gear. Gampaka said that journalists both in the public and private media are well prepared and experienced professionally, but not all are equipped for field reporting.

The private sector especially needs technological assistance. Christine Matondo confirmed that private media outlets struggle to achieve national coverage due to their subpar equipment. Some panelists said that the lack of equipment is especially apparent in the written press; Gampaka said that the fact that all newspapers are printed at just two or three printing houses explains their irregular appearance. The broadcast sector is not immune, however; Ngokoumounga said that Radio Pointe-Noire's equipment is very old, and journalists there do not even know what a computer is.

According to Mackiza, with sponsors investing less in human resources as well as technical equipment, journalists have a difficult time producing quality programs or investigative reports. Ngokoumounga put it bluntly, saying that investigative journalism does not exist; journalists with the Pointe-Noire radio station content themselves with covering seminars, general gatherings, or small meetings.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Republic of Congo Objective Score: 1.67

The Congo has multiple news sources, including newspapers, the Internet, radio, and television, but most people depend on radio. According to the U.S. Department of State's *2009 Human Rights Report: Republic of Congo*, in addition to three state-owned radio stations, the three privately-owned radio stations are pro-government. The country has one state-owned television station, plus four privately owned television stations, two of which have recently stepped up their criticism of the government. In addition, those who can afford satellite television services have several choices.

Despite the diversity of offerings, political influence is so great that journalists only address issues partially, and fail to present the full spectrum of opinions. Waboutoukanabio said, "Once you read, listen to, or watch one outlet, you feel that you have read, listened to, and watched them all. That is how similar the programs are, and how flagrantly minorities are marginalized. The local radio stations and television channels follow in the footsteps of the media from the capital, in terms of utter unoriginality." Annette Koumba Matondo agreed. "Journalists lack the sense that their job is to serve the population and not politicians," she said. She added that some private broadcasters have started to make a difference, but they are not numerous enough at the local level. Itoua commented that the Congo has no real community radio stations, except for one in Pokala, in the north.

Although the Congo has multiple media outlets, and citizen access to domestic and international media is unrestricted formally, most media outlets are clustered in the large cities—mainly Brazzaville. Elenga noted that outside Brazzaville, the country does not have a locally produced newspaper, even in Pointe-Noire. In addition, only public servants can afford to buy newspapers. Gampaka estimated that just five percent of the population can afford to purchase private newspapers at XAF 500 each (slightly more than \$1.00).

Television channels broadcast only in the cities. Although it is possible to follow foreign programs on channels such as Euronews, TV5 Monde, and other satellite channels, access varies hugely between the urban and rural areas. Rural populations can receive only the national radio station, which sometimes broadcasts in the national languages;

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.

and sometimes they can receive RFI. Adzotsa said that the Congolese government does not restrict access to foreign sources; those wealthy enough to afford satellite services are free to tune in to all the radio stations and television channels they want.

Although the written press is urban essentially, Mackiza expressed the hope that perhaps the broadcast media, which is just starting to permeate the rural areas, will be able to bridge this gap.

Internet access remains a luxury in the Congo. In addition to the cost, access is hampered by extremely bad connectivity issues in Central Africa. Even in Brazzaville, the Internet is not available everywhere. Christine Matondo noted, "The Internet is more of a communication tool than an information tool."

According to the U.S. Department of State's *Human Rights Report*, "There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail." According to International Telecommunication Union statistics for 2008, approximately four percent of the country's inhabitants used the Internet.

The 2001 press law regulates pluralism in the public broadcast media, requiring it to produce, schedule, and air regular programs allowing all political and professional organizations, groups, and unions to express themselves directly. In reality, the opposite holds true. Hymboud said that instead of working in the public interest, the public media are placed under the complete control of the ruling political actors. Itoua said that most of the state-run outlets and even private outlets offer privileged coverage—bordering on propaganda—of the government's activities. Ndokadiki commented, "The state-run media are not free. There is a sense that they are the exclusive property of the ruling politicians. The media are extremely politicized."

The July presidential elections stole most of the headlines in 2009. The campaign season revealed clearly that, although every candidate has the right to fair and equal media exposure—as the CSLC itself proclaimed—, in reality content is all but dictated by political forces. For example, the Congolese opposition did not have access to the public media, and the social programs that opposition candidates formulated were not aired; only the statements coming from governmental sources were broadcast. Ngokoumounga noted that rookie journalists at the Pointe-Noire radio station covered the election by merely gathering reactions from the authorities.

Furthermore, the public media air very few cultural and educational programs. Ndokadiki said, "There is a dire need of quality programming in the public media."

The only press agency, Agence Congolaise d'Information, is not independent, and according to some panelists, it does not fulfill its responsibilities in feeding news to the state-run and private press. No foreign press agencies have bureaus in the Congo. Gampaka said that journalists tend to copy and paste the news they find on the Internet.

Ndokadiki said that the independent broadcast media rarely produce original content; political activity reports dominate radio and television news, while investigations are non-existent. However, several panelists said that radio stations and television channels produce at least some original content in addition to broadcasting foreign programs. Gampaka said that the private broadcast media produce religious shows and other original programs that differ greatly from the state-run programs. The community media try to produce shows that meet local needs, focusing on agriculture, stock breeding, fish farming, etc.

Regarding the transparency of media ownership, the names of owners and managers of the private press outlets are known to the public. It is also thought that owners of the private media have a heavy influence on their outlets. According to the panelists, most investors are politicians that dictate the editorial policies of their outlets through financial pressure and threats to fire those who do not comply. Elenga noted that the 2001 press law prohibits multiple media ownership, but in practice, this occurs nonetheless. For example, DRTV, DRTV Force One, and DRTV Pointe-Noire all belong to one owner, General N. Dabira. Panelists said that they consider foreign investment in the Congolese media insignificant.

The Congo has no print media outlets in minority languages. Except for a few independent journalists, broadcast media do not produce shows for Congolese minorities, panelists said. However, Waboutoukanabio described a pilot effort started in March 2009 by the community radio station Biso na Biso, the first indigenous-language radio station in the Congo Basin. The station targets the Pygmy population by offering programs in their languages and those of other minorities. According to the World Bank blog Development Marketplace, "The project, funded with generous support from the WB Development Marketplace (2005), Congolaise Industrielle des Bois, TFT and the Chirac Foundation, aims to give indigenous people and local communities a voice in forest management decision-making that impacts their livelihoods."²

² Poynton, Scott. "Biso na Biso Live on Air!" Development Marketplace, [blogs.worldbank.org](http://blogs.worldbank.org/dmblog/biso-na-biso-live-on-air); April 10, 2009. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/dmblog/biso-na-biso-live-on-air> (Accessed October 31, 2010.)

Gampaka said that both the public and private media address social issues, and that journalists are not harassed for addressing social issues. Other panelists said that the press neglects the Congo's severe societal problems such as child mortality, the shortage of potable water, poor waste management, electricity outages, etc.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Republic of Congo Objective Score: 0.93

According to the panelists, independent media outlets do not function as profitable, well-managed enterprises. Elenga said, "Strictly speaking, there are no real press enterprises in the Congo—at least in the private sector. Granted, the DRTV group could call itself an enterprise, but the lack of transparency prevents us from stating that the private media are well-managed." Adzotsa agreed that the Congolese independent media are generally ill-managed, but singled out a few exceptions: *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville*, *La Semaine Africaine*, DRTV, and the Presse Auguste printing house.

Accounting practices in the press leave a lot to be desired. The media are not known for accurate bookkeeping. According to Gampaka, accountants and marketing and human resources personnel lack suitable training. Christine Matondo pointed out that the media do not want to use real professionals because they would have to pay them. The financial management of the independent media is ambiguous, as the private media have obscure funding sources and lack a common business plan.

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 private media survive off advertising and the selling of special advertising pages, or advertorials, while the public media receive their assigned annual budgets in installments. International institutions subsidize community media outlets. Hymboud noted that the 2001 press law prohibits the media from receiving financial aid from foreign sources, and this allows the government to keep media outlets under its control.

The Congolese advertising market is underdeveloped. According to Itoua, the advertising system as an income source, for newspapers in particular, is not well-oiled. There is no advertising agency to work with newspapers or other media; every outlet looks for advertising within a very tight market. Christine Matondo said, "Given that media enterprises are so weak, the advertising market is also almost non-existent. As a result, the media that boast of their independence often succumb to temptation—for they are not really financially independent."

The bulk of advertisements in the private press are from cellular telephone companies, along with breweries and services including hotels, schools, and cosmetics. Elenga said, however, that these businesses are not necessarily capable of supporting the media efficiently or helping them boost revenue.

According to Gampaka, the state-run media are privileged in terms of receiving advertising. As Hymboud asked, what entrepreneur would give advertising to an anti-government outlet, given that the public authorities are the greatest market providers?

The advertising sector is unregulated in the Congo. Advertisements are run informally and commercial airtime is not subject to limits. According to Mazandou, advertisements and commercials consume too much space and airtime. Gampaka said that all broadcast outlets assign timeslots to special advertising programs, at the expense of news, to secure revenue. Mazandou noted that his outlet's television channel feels forced to cram in a lot of commercials during highly rated soap operas to attract more advertisers.

In 2001, the president granted the media sector a one-time subsidy of XAF 300,000,000 (about \$607,000). However, the subsidy has not been renewed. Gampaka commented that although this subsidy did not influence the production content or the management policies of the media, it was distributed unfairly, based on how various outlets reported government activity. "If subsidies were institutionally implemented, it is expected that they would not be shared fairly; some media would receive less due to their critical stance," Gampaka said.

While some panelists said that private media outlets receive no subsidies whatsoever, Christine Matondo said that the private press does benefit occasionally from presidential gifts, and Ndokadiki commented that subsidies are merely under wraps. “While advertising and paid reporting constitute the main media income sources, subsidies are often kept secret,” he said. “For instance, the newspaper *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville* has a price per issue of only XAF 100 (\$0.20). How could this newspaper possibly meet its expenses without a government subsidy? This outlet’s editorial policy clearly indicates its dependence upon the authorities.”

The Congo has no organizations producing broadcast ratings, print run estimates, or market research. Annette Kouamba Matondo said that there is no press market research to speak of due to the informality of most print outlets—they have never taken the time to order research. According to Elega, “The media set up their programming without considering the needs of their listeners and viewers—they do not care about implementing rating committees or clubs.” Waboutoukanabio commented that there are no polling institutes that could be called upon to research the market or estimate ratings. However, the Biso na Biso radio station in Pokala uses rating committees made up of representatives of various communities. The committees are tasked with reacting to program contents and making suggestions on how to enhance their quality. Waboutoukanabio concluded that radio and television programming content is weak, and outlets rarely take into consideration the expectations of their listeners and viewers. “Reader’s mail is an unknown concept,” she added.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Republic of Congo Objective Score: 1.28

Essentially, the Congo’s few existing media trade associations are neither active nor do they lobby the government. These include some press publishers’ associations and related business associations that media owners may be a part of.

In the Congo, the main supporting institutions working to uphold the interests of independent media are the professional associations. One, OCM, focuses on helping journalists meet ethical standards. The International Federation of Journalists, and its affiliated union, the Federal Union of Communication Workers, work to advance the welfare of Congolese journalists. A number of associations represent specific fields (sports, national languages, etc.) within the trade and they operate independently from the government.

Although more than 10 other professional associations for journalists have sprung up, they are still in embryonic stages and do little to help protect journalists, according to the panelists. They said that no association has ever issued a statement about a case of censorship or attack against journalists—for example, these associations did nothing when journalist Christian Perrin, with *Télé Pour Tous* in Pointe-Noire, was arrested and placed in custody in 2008. Mazandou added, “In our country, when a journalist is brought to the courts, very few journalists or NGOs protest publicly—with the exception of the human rights NGOs. Basically, there is absolutely nothing that is being done in this area.”

These associations offer free memberships but have few members, as a result of their lack of effectiveness. According to Christine Matondo, associations have no membership criteria; any information or communication professional can be a member. Several panelists said that journalists are more concerned with their personal interests than the collective good of the profession. Christine Matondo said that the associations existing in the Congo were created for political purposes, and Waboutoukanabio expressed her impression that too many partisan interests damage collective action. Mackiza suggested that a press house, in collaboration with the government, could help journalists come together outside of press conferences.

Very few human rights NGOs join forces with press outlets. The panelists singled out the Congolese Human Rights Observatory and the Association for Human Rights in Prison Settings as the preferred partners of the Congolese media. They offer legal support to media professionals, launch emergency appeals, and collaborate with international organizations concerned with the freedom of the press. However, Annette Kouamba Matondo pointed out that

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.

“NGOs cannot act as lobbyists while journalists themselves are divided.”

Although Congolese schools offer university degrees for journalism, Ndokadiki said, “There is no proper school of journalism. The Humanities department at the Marien N’Gouabi University has two training programs, and another one is offered by the Ecole Nationale Moyenne d’Administration [ENMA]. But such institutions do not exist outside of Brazzaville.” Some panelists proclaimed the training programs decent; according to Christine Matondo, “The two governmental programs [ENMA, Department of Communication Sciences and Technologies at Marien N’Gouabi University] that train professionals are up to the task.” However, others said that academic studies are far too theoretical, and noted that the university has no laboratory. New graduates heading to work for the state-run print or broadcast media must enroll in practical training first.

Students have multiple opportunities to study abroad and obtain degrees from foreign schools; some of them never come back to the country, due to the unsuitable working conditions and uncertain salaries available in the Congo. Most journalism graduates are currently unemployed because there are not enough positions for them—particularly not in the state-run outlets.

Although the government and international organizations organize skill-improvement seminars, the panelists said that short-term training opportunities are rare, given the level of need. The United Nations Human Rights Center organizes frequent seminars, while the press professionals’ union of Central Africa only organizes seminars once a year, due to limited financial resources. Even when training seminars are offered, very few journalists participate. According to Waboutoukanabio, media companies have no staff training plans outside of the opportunities provided by international organizations. In addition, training for younger journalists is not adapted to the new practices within the radio and television fields. Koumba said, “There are no training programs. Young people do not want to learn anymore.”

Printing houses belong to the private sector and the panelists felt that the government does not impose onerous restrictions in this field. However, Mackiza said that the printing of Congolese newspapers does not completely meet the needs of the consumers, as there are not enough professional printing houses (with the exception of the one used by *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville*). Furthermore, according to Waboutoukanabio, some printing houses play into the hands of the government by refusing to print certain newspapers.

The Congo has no newspaper distribution network; every newspaper simply chooses where to sell their papers. The

government controls the radio transmitters of the state-run media, but not those of the private media. The installations managed by private entities are not politicized.

List of Panel Participants

André Itoua, member, Congolese Human Rights Observatory, Brazzaville

Jean Clotaire Hymboud, journalist; member, Association of Press Publishers of Congo, Brazzaville

Christine Matondo, member, Federal Union of Communication Workers, Brazzaville

Eugène Gampaka, managing editor, *Tam-Tam D’Afrique*, Brazzaville

Jocelyn Francis Waboutoukanabio, journalist and coordinator, Biso na Biso radio station, Ouessou

Annette Koumba Matondo, journalist, *Nouvelle République*, Brazzaville

Hénoç Nazaire Ebethas Bissat, head of communications, Civil Society Forum for Free and Transparent Elections, Brazzaville

Perpétue Sandrine Mazandou, freelance reporter, Brazzaville

Bernard Mackiza, chair, Congolese Media Observatory, Brazzaville

Marcellin Ndokadiki, media consumer, Brazzaville

Blanche Simona Ngokoumounga, journalist, Pointe-Noire radio station, Pointe-Noire

Sylvain Elenga, journalist, Congolese Information Agency, Brazzaville

Berthe-Jeanine Koumba, journalist, Radio Télévision Nouvelle Alliance, Dolisie

Moderator

Edouard Adzotsa, vice president, Central African Media Organization, Brazzaville

Authors

Edouard Adzotsa, vice president, Central African Media Organization, Brazzaville

Donat M’baya Tshimanga, president, Journaliste en Danger, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

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