

---

---

*Still, objective observers tend to agree that Burundi's media, and particularly community radio stations, played a significant part in bringing back peace to the country.*



## BURUNDI

In June 2010, Burundians re-elected President Pierre Nkurunziza, who first took office in 2005, in a landslide. It was an overwhelming victory for the ruling party, the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie et Forces de Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD). But the win came only after six other opposition candidates withdrew to protest irregularities in May municipal elections. The withdrawals, and a wave of grenade attacks in June, revived fears of a return to the violence that rocked the country between 1993 and 2006 and killed at least 300,000.

In a press conference in July in Bujumbura, Vestine Nahimana, chair of the media regulation agency Conseil National de la Communication (CNC), made statements illustrative of the bad relations between the government and the press. She strikingly accused journalists of “inflaming the country by their reporting and siding with the opposition by helping them to dispute the elections.” She accused the media of offering too little airtime to Nkurunziza during the campaign. She also pointed to a low election turnout rate ranging from 30 to 50 percent—numbers that conflict with the official rate of 80 percent, announced by the electoral committee.

A few days after Nahimana’s statement, the publication director of the online newspaper Net Press was jailed for several months. The government charged him with treason for an article questioning Burundi’s defense and the ability of security forces to deal with a potential attack by Al Shabaab Somali Islamists, the group responsible for grenade attacks in the capital of neighboring Uganda.

Still, objective observers tend to agree that Burundi’s media, and particularly community radio stations, played a significant part in bringing back peace to the country. Cyprien Ntamagara, chair of the Organisation des Médias d’Afrique Centrale (OMAC), said the media allowed “the people to speak and distance themselves from the official platform, RTNB [Radio Télévision Nationale Burundi].” In Ntamagara’s opinion, it was the responsible attitude of the associated radio stations that democratized Burundi’s institutions. He noted that in the 2005 elections, radio stations banded together in a show of solidarity, deploying more than 120 journalists to cover the elections in every district and contributing to election transparency. Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) itself conceded that without the media, it could not have stamped out electoral fraud and other irregularities for that election. Judging by the results of the May municipal elections, however, it is clear that work remains to ensure the fairness of future elections.

Nevertheless, the MSI panelists recognized the importance of the media in reinforcing democratic values, peace, and reconciliation—so much so that some urged the media to expand traditional roles.

# BURUNDI AT A GLANCE

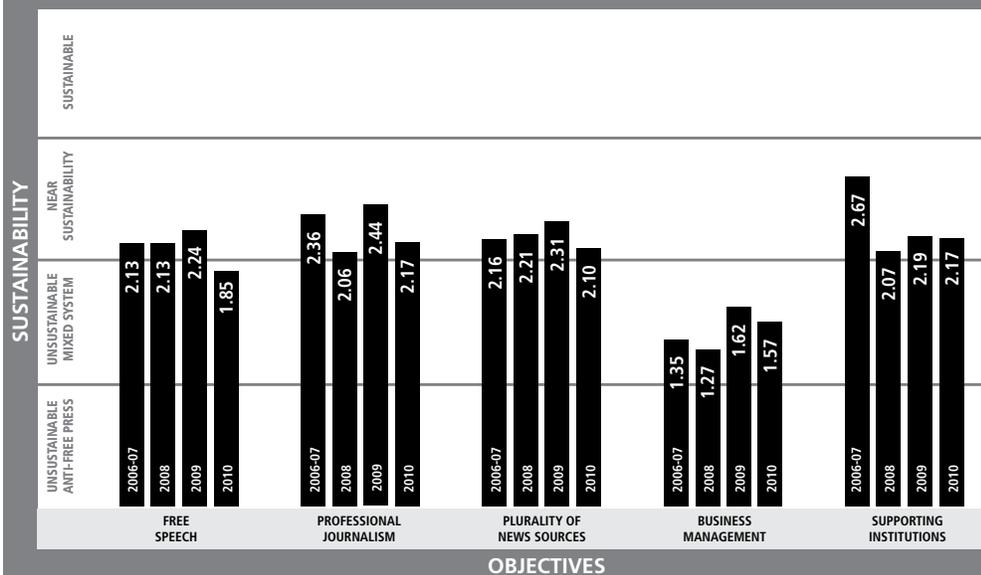
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 10,216,190 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bujumbura
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Hutu (Bantu) 85%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 14%, Twa (Pygmy) 1%, (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Christian 67%, indigenous beliefs 23%, Muslim 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Kirundi (official), French (official), Swahili (along Lake Tanganyika and in the Bujumbura area) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$1.402 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$390 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 59.3% (male 67.3%, female: 52.2%) (2000 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Pierre Nkurunziza (since August 26, 2005)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**  
Print: regular newspapers include *Le Renouveau du Burundi* (state-owned), *L'Avenir* (private), *Ubumwe* (state-owned), *Ndongezi y'Uburundi* (Catholic Church-owned); Radio Stations: 7 main stations including Radio-Culture, Radio-Umwizero or Radio de l'Espoir, Radio-CCIB FM+, and African Public Radio; Television Stations: 1, National Radio Television of Burundi
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Burundi Press Agency (public), Net Press Agency, Infop Agency, Expresso Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 157,000 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BURUNDI



### 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

### Burundi Objective Score: 1.85

The MSI panelists reported major recent developments in terms of freedom of the press. The past several decades have seen momentous change in press freedom in Burundi. One of the panelists recalled that before the 1992 constitution, Burundian media were governed by a 1976 law which stated among its provisions that “journalists of Burundi must always act as staunch patriots, be deeply aware of the ideals of the party, the only body responsible for the life of the nation.” Until 1992, freedom of the press was nonexistent and effectively no independent press existed.

The constitution lays the foundation for free speech, stating in Article 26, “...everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression in accordance with public order and the law.” Major Buyoya’s rise to power after the 1996 putsch had an enormous impact on Burundi’s media because he suspended political parties—the main sponsors of newspapers. Many rights of the press were derailed with the passage of the very restrictive Decree on the Press on March 21, 1997.

On November 27, 2003, a new press law replaced the 1997 decree. The newer press law represents a major step forward for the Burundi media, incorporating the fundamental rights of journalists and ensuring greater freedom for journalists and media managers. It guarantees the protection of sources; does away with pre-publication censorship; and guarantees

#### 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.

*Ernest Nkurunziza of the human rights group Ligue ITEKA commented on the difficulties with licensing. “In these last five years, freedom of speech has been seriously violated, as though criticizing political acts was a bad thing. The licensing agencies in Burundi are heavily politicized,” he said.*

the conscience clause, which allows journalists to resign in case of conflict with their employers. Although the law is more liberal, it still provides for heavy prison sentences for press offenses.

Consideration of this history provides perspective on the progress that Burundi made regarding freedom of speech. However, despite some democratic progress, laws are powerless without enforcement. At least two of the reforms—a bill declaring CNC independent of the president, and another creating a media promotion fund—have not yet been put into effect. “Burundi has taken a step forward in terms of freedom of speech and access to public information,” said Joselyne Nzobonwanayo of OMAC. “But unfortunately, the media are protected by laws that are not enforced.”

Félix Nzorubonanya, of Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), pointed out holes in the press law. He said that there is a lack of clarity surrounding libel laws, for example, and signs of bias in access to public information. Muhimpundu, too, noted several problems with Burundian law. He concluded that the justice system is neither free nor independent. And more than enforcement, he said, the way the courts interpret laws causes great harm to media and journalists. The press law does not mention breaches of the right to privacy as offenses, and political authorities influence the judiciary as well—particularly in cases involving journalists, he said.

Fiacre Muhimpundu of *Le Visionnaire* noted that the only agency granting licenses is run by the government and vulnerable to political pressure. Ernest Nkurunziza of the human rights group Ligue ITEKA commented on the difficulties with licensing. “In these last five years, freedom of speech has been seriously violated, as though criticizing political acts was a bad thing. The licensing agencies in Burundi are heavily politicized,” he said. He cited two cases as examples. “RPA faced restrictions when it tried to create community radio stations, and Star FM in Makamba managed to set itself up much more easily because of its closeness to

the government.” Nkurunziza also decried the fact that the Burundi media receive no tax relief.

Nkurunziza said as well that Burundi journalists are at the mercy of public authorities, with no law specifically protecting them. As last year’s MSI noted, while no media workers have been murdered in Burundi, journalists suffer from other forms of intimidation. Local correspondents in particular are sent to prison and persecuted with phone threats, and their reporting equipment is seized by the national information service. Journalists value freedom, but they face threats if they write anything displeasing to the public authorities. Publishing information related to national security or to budding rebellions exposes journalists to threats and unlawful arrest, as in the aforementioned case of Jean-Claude Kavumbagu of Net Press.

Nadège Irambona, also with OMAC, decried the fact that heads of public media are appointed politically.

As for access to public information, Nzobonwanayo noted that all media have the right to access public information according to the law, but in reality, the law is not enforced. Irambona gave an example: “During the latest press conference by the head of state, only the public and pro-government private media were allowed in,” she said. There are no laws to guard against such restrictions, she added. Nzobonwanayo gave another example: only the public media and those outlets close to official circles were authorized to enter the presidential palace for a recent interview with the head of state. Private media were denied access.

However, journalists have unrestricted access to domestic and international media sources, and the government does not intervene or set terms regarding entry into the profession.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Burundi Objective Score: 2.17

In a country with more than 30 years of serious ethnic violence (which the media has fed in some cases), professionalism is equated sometimes now to “peace journalism.” The unprofessional approach that many journalists exhibit has both ethical and financial roots. Some journalists, even those not necessarily poorly trained, cultivate special friendships with political actors to gain access to press conferences, and often repeat official messages in exchange for money and other benefits.

The panelists acknowledged that within Burundi remain good and trustworthy journalists that, despite pitiful salaries,

do their jobs admirably while striving to maintain honesty. Professional standards in Burundi are spelled out in the texts that regulate the profession: the press law and the Code of Ethics and Practice of the Press in Burundi of 2004. Both are available to reporters. The panelists said that the profession is well regulated but still has deficiencies, which some try to explain away or even justify. Panelists also called into question the neutrality of CNC, the media regulation agency. One panelist added that mistrust and suspicion among media partners is quite harmful to the freedom of the press and to the solidarity of media professionals.

Panelists pointed out that Burundi has no school of journalism, but in the wake of the conflicts that tore the country apart, NGOs and other external partners have implemented “peace journalism” training projects. Journalists from private and community radio stations have capitalized on these training opportunities more so than their counterparts in print and television.

In 2009, during the most recent workshop for Burundian journalists, the participating professional organizations and media regulation agencies reinforced the theme of compliance with professional ethics. According to one panelist, “The point was not to explore the journalists’ code of ethics and practices, but to discuss with managers and the organizers what lies at the root of violations of the code and how to remedy the situation.”

In terms of ethics, Irambona provided a far-from-glowing summary of the current situation: “Some media flouted ethics and balance in the news. During the elections, several media outlets spread false news, in service to the ruling party. Self-censorship is common, especially in the public media. Since they support the ruling party, media chiefs block any

#### 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).

news related to insecurity and the activities of other political parties, to avoid upsetting their appointers.”

News censorship is a reality in the public media as well as the private media, because of journalists’ fear of threats, intimidation, and harassment. In fact, many media outlets choose not to cover sensitive social and political news. Kabanyana Spes-Caritas, a journalist with Radio Isanganiro, gave a personal example of self-censorship. “I am afraid to report the policemen who looted a village up-country because they will come after me and eventually arrest me,” she said.

Muhimpundu blamed the politicians that influence the editorial policies of the media they control. Most of those media, he said, operate using free labor from unpaid interns. Rema FM and Salama radio stations, which are close to the government, were particular targets of his criticisms.

In general, Burundian journalists are not well paid, so they migrate from one press outlet to another looking for a better situation. These paltry salaries affect quality of news negatively, and corruption is rampant. At some outlets, journalists work without contracts, leading to a great number of freelancers.

As for equipment and facilities, Irambona commented, “Burundi’s media are not very well equipped. Some of them do not have Internet access, and there are other obstacles to handling certain kinds of information.” In 2009, MSI panelists noted that equipment shortages for field correspondents in particular are so severe that they lack computers or even recorders, and broadcast journalists based in some regions are forced to produce soundless reports.

Quality niche reporting is still rare, with limited training or funding for specialized journalism in diplomacy, trade, health, or economics. Irambona commented that only RPA has the resources to conduct investigative reporting. It has investigated sensitive news items, particularly on human rights and investigations into political and economic crimes committed by those in power. In contrast to RPA, Irambona said, “Rema FM radio blindly defended the interests of the president’s circle of influence and did not hesitate to delve into the private lives of certain well-known members of the opposition, trampling journalistic ethics underfoot all the while.”

*Kabanyana Spes-Caritas, a journalist with Radio Isanganiro, gave a personal example of self-censorship. “I am afraid to report the policemen who looted a village up-country because they will come after me and eventually arrest me,” she said.*

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Burundi Objective Score: 2.10

In the last few years, press outlets have become abundant in Burundi. The newly created newspapers and radio stations have broken a de facto news monopoly in a country that had long been accustomed to an exclusively state-run press. When Burundi and its neighboring countries introduced multiparty political systems in the 1990s, an opening of the media—especially print—accompanied the changeover. During the civil war, however, the Burundian press were accused of inflaming the conflict. Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) described many press outlets as “hate media” until 1996, when the newly re-elected President Buyoya suspended many of these controversial outlets. In the past decade, an opposition force critical of the government and emphasizing peace has also emerged.

#### 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.

*One panelist commented that many people live in a state of total ignorance. "A nation cannot develop if it is not informed and educated," he said.*

The early 2000s brought change and a commitment to peace among some media. Examples include the creation of Studio Ijambo at the initiative of the Belgian-American NGO Search for Common Ground. Studio Ijambo stresses unifying factors such as peace, reconciliation, and dialogue over divisive factors, such as ethnic differences. New private radio stations inspired by Studio Ijambo launched as well, dedicated "to the service of peace" and giving a voice to underrepresented people. Before long, the government started to harass the outlets, accusing them of treason for allowing militias to be heard on air. Nevertheless, despite pressure, these private radio stations are holding their ground and allowing ordinary Burundis an opportunity to speak—something that RTNB has never done, panelists said.

Radio stations have played a particularly significant role in this shift. They can be accessed everywhere by everyone, while the general public considers newspapers and television more elitist. The first private radio stations appeared as early as 1995. These were CCIB+ FM, run by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Burundi; and Radio Bonesha. In 1999, Radio Culture appeared, followed in 2001 by RPA. In 2002, it was the turn of Radio Isanganiro, and in 2004, Radio Renaissance and Radio Maria began.

Faced with this new atmosphere of openness and competition, RTNB, which the government had long used as a propaganda tool, was forced to refocus and open to diverse points of view—or risk losing its audience. Still, the national radio channel is the only station that covers a large portion of the country.

Currently, the country has some 20 radio stations—including community radio stations, although they are not very well developed. One panelist commented that many people live in a state of total ignorance. "A nation cannot develop if it is not informed and educated," he said. "Hewing to the logic of keeping the Burundi people under-informed, the government prevents some media from covering certain news objectively by threatening journalists. In this context, public authorities harass civil society and opposition political parties when they voice opinions on political issues or try to provide the public with the results of real social and political research."

At the same time, the proliferation of private radio stations dealt the printed press a lethal blow. Burundi's oral cultural

tradition and high illiteracy create audiences, and as radio has become more diverse, even the elite once loyal to the newspapers have moved away from print media. Today, the print landscape is strikingly sparse. The three newspapers created in the early 1990s survive, specifically the two public newspapers, *Le Renouveau* and *Ubumwe*, and the Catholic paper *Ndongozi*. Only one private weekly newspaper, *L'Arc-en-ciel*, manages to carry some weight in the press sector.

Today, *Ndongozi*, the most consistently published private paper, has an average circulation of 3,500 to 5,000 every two weeks, selling for a symbolic 150 Burundi francs (BIF) (\$0.12). Other private publications struggle to hold on, living hand-to-mouth. They are not published at all regularly and their circulations—restricted to the urban centers—are a minuscule 300 to 500 copies. Most of the titles registered with the CNC exist only in the abstract, since they appear on newsstands only sporadically.

The authorities do not restrict access to domestic or international media. Moïse Gahungu of Union Burundaise des Journalistes (UBJ) said that, at first glance, everybody has access to news sources; however, there are some anomalies. For example, radio's success owes much to the fact that a high percentage Burundis cannot read or write, and that traditionally, predominantly rural African societies have lent themselves to oral communication. "If we also bear in mind that televisions are almost completely beyond the financial reach of most Burundi people, and having to pay every time one wants to read a newspaper has a psychological impact, there is no doubt that the popular vote goes to radio as the news medium par excellence," in the words of one panelist.

With about 8,000 registered Internet users in a total population of 8 million, access to Internet news remains quite limited. Nzorubonanya commented, "Access to the Internet remains severely limited in the country. Newspapers do not reach the whole country—except for *Iwacu*, which is distributed in all regions. *Iwacu* is written in the national language, Kirundi, which is accessible to most of the population." Radio stations and television channels are clustered in the large towns. Television remains a luxury in some parts of the country. RTNB cannot be picked up nationwide. In the north of the country, people can watch only Rwandan television.

Ruston Uwimana, a journalist, said that private newspapers as well as public are rather expensive relative to the average person's purchasing power. A newspaper costs between BIF 500 and BIF 1,000 (\$0.40 and \$0.80), with the exception of the bimonthly Kirundi-language Catholic *Ndongozi* at BIF 150 (\$0.12).

Turning to media content, Burundi has independent media with their own editorial policies; however, those media are not transparent, and are at the beck and call of their sponsors. Meanwhile, the panelists said, the public media are politicized and favor the interests of the ruling party. Uwimana noted that the public media are searching in vain for independence. Their journalists are considered to be state officials, while the government appoints their directors. For example, the head of RTNB radio was a member of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD. Some official sources refuse to release information to journalists from the private press. Since the point at issue is the equal distribution of information and ideas, according to the panelists, RTNB neglects its mission by serving as a mere conduit for the government.

Regarding the existence of news agencies, panelists had the opinion that the weakness of the printed press helped fuel the creation of many news agencies. In addition to the Agence de Presse Burundaise (APB), a public agency created in 1976 and financed by the state, there are the private news agencies Net Press, Aginfo and Zoom.net. Most of their subscribers are public servants or NGOs. Net Press is the best known, often attracting the unwanted attention of the government; the director of Net Press, Jean-Claude Kavumbagu, was in prison even as the MSI panel convened, the panelists noted. These news agencies owe their survival to the Internet for distributing news, even though Internet access remains quite limited in the country.

Independent broadcast outlets do produce original content and programs, often in partnership with foreign media, but they are inhibited somewhat by a lack of funding. As previous MSI panels have noted, independent media content differs markedly from the content of the state-run public media.

Media ownership in Burundi is not transparent, as noted in last year's MSI. Only rarely do media owners declare publicly the sources of funding for their outlets. While some media receive funds from abroad, foreign investment in the media sector is considered insignificant.

Previous MSI panelists have said that the media reflect a broad spectrum of social interests, including minority issues. However, stories focusing on social issues, such as agriculture and the environment, are rarely covered in the media. Last year's panelists confirmed that the media can broadcast freely in any language they choose, and journalists cannot be prosecuted for writing or reporting on minority issues. Swahili is the main minority language, but Burundi has only one newspaper in Swahili and English, owned by Karenga Ramadan. When CNDD-FDD became the ruling party, the national television station began to broadcast a news program in English and Swahili.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Burundi Objective Score: 1.57

According to the panelists, human rights organizations find funding with greater ease than the media. The issue of financing is a significant weak link in the Burundi media sector, and a threat to independence.

Nzorubonanya wondered whether the sector has any business management of which to speak, under such circumstances. The reality is that recruitment and financial management are not transparent. Muhimpundu underlined key shortcomings in the financial management of press outlets, noting: "Most private media do not have access to qualified accounting services. Bookkeeping is vague and not fit for the purpose of balancing income and expenditure." Furthermore, centers for media research, assessment, and production need better management and organization, he said.

Spes-Caritas observed that 20 years earlier, *Ndongezi* had had 4,000 subscribers, while today the figure sits at no more than 2,500. She attributed the decline to poverty aggravated by the civil war. The Burundi media are financed from sources ranging from NGOs to political authorities. The Catholic Church funds radio stations *Ndongezi* and *Voix de la Paix*, while the ruling party funds *Radio Rema FM*.

The panelists agreed that the overwhelming majority of radio stations live on external financial support. Most stations were created using international funds, and some are financed entirely from abroad. Such external funding has provided a certain degree of financial autonomy and strengthened their editorial independence. Also, it has bought them operational

### 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.

stability with employees, who are better paid than their colleagues in the private and the public press. Yet the panelists noted that such funding has drawbacks, including dependency on donors: “None of the media financed by foreign sources could survive without their sponsors,” a panelist said.

At the heart of the problem, advertising revenue is not solid enough to allow the media to be viable financially. The media are extremely vulnerable to various forms of influence as a result. With no income from advertising, Burundi media businesses cannot hope to be self-sufficient, pay their employees’ salaries, or produce their own programs.

The lack of a developed advertising industry is a key issue that must be addressed if journalists are to be compensated properly, panelists said. Anaïs Niragira, journalist in Bujumbura, said that telecommunications companies place advertisements using their own subjective criteria and at prices they set. Additionally, a number of cellular telecom companies, such as Ucom, Africel, and Smart, give the broadcast media cell phones and toll-free numbers, asking in exchange that the media run their commercials free of charge.

Gahungu countered that Burundi press companies are able to operate despite the difficulties, although the revenues that they generate vary, depending on their level of planning. To illustrate, he mentioned Radio Isanganiro, whose daily receipts exceeded \$1,500 thanks to the remarkable work of the station’s marketing team. For perspective, those receipts cover the salaries of six of the 50 people on its payroll.

The independent media are not financed by the state. Panelists did not debate the pros and cons of government subsidies, but noted that the government’s promises to create a fund to support the media have not materialized. At any rate, Irambona expressed the belief that even foreign sponsors try to control the reporting of the media outlets that they support.

Burundi has little to no market research to inform media programming. An agency called Observatoire de la Presse Burundaise (OPB) collects statistics on ratings, circulation, and Internet use, but largely, its staff members are untrained.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Burundi Objective Score: 2.17**

As the reconstruction of Burundi depends upon the rule of law, the nation’s radio stations have worked hard as “watchdogs,” denouncing the evils of society—in particular,

bad government, human rights violations, and financial crimes. Their work has not come without a price. Some radio journalists have been imprisoned; others have entered voluntary exile after physical threats. Despite this, advocacy efforts have proceeded, in the form of roundtables, lobbying and advocacy workshops on tax relief and public assistance, and discussions on the role of radio in the post-election period, among other efforts. The country’s highest officials have taken part in interviews and meetings, easing tensions between the media and the authorities. International organizations and media support associations have offered support as well.

Muhimpundu mentioned that the country still has no associations for publishers, although one for radio broadcasters exists. The only union movement is Union Burundaise Journalistes (UBJ), which tackles major issues, reportedly including a journalists’ collective agreement that it has in its sights. Irambona confirmed that Association Burundaise des Radiodiffuseurs (ABR) and UBJ lobby on behalf of journalists. Recently, the two associations have intervened in cases of wrongful arrests and other violations of journalists’ rights. For example, UBJ and International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) met with Burundi’s first vice president to plead for the release of Kavumbagu.

The panelists concluded that the existing professional associations are doing their best to defend the professional interests of journalists and the media, but lack financial resources. At the same time, Burundi civil society members have created associations that visibly support the freedom of speech and independent media. They react to violations of media freedoms by denouncing them publicly and organizing assessment meetings with a view to change the laws governing the media.

**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 support the freedom of speech and media also, actively providing equipment and funds to train media professionals. Institut Panos Paris (IPP) is the most engaged. Likewise, private universities such as Université du Lac and Université Lumière have communications departments that could train journalists. A number of other NGOs, such as GRET (Groupe de Recherche et d'Échanges Technologiques), USAID, and others work to build journalist capacity in specific areas. Local media support organizations include Observatoire de la Presse Burundaise (OPB), which serves as a peer tribunal; and Media Organization of Central Africa (known by its French acronym, OMAC), whose monitoring efforts allow the media to assess their own production values and encourage journalists to produce high-quality news. However, with the exception of Journalistes en Danger or Human Rights Watch, these organizations almost never react in cases of violations of journalists' rights.

Still other organizations fund the media's capacity to conduct investigations and denounce gross misconduct. For example, the NGO Search for Common Ground and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights offer journalists training courses in human rights.

Currently, a few private universities in Burundi offer degrees in communications. In general, though, the lack of journalistic training is one of the greatest academic shortcomings of the entire Burundi education system. Several projects have attempted to remedy that; two particularly bright spots include a master's degree in journalism led by UNESCO, and the forthcoming reopening of the School of Journalism, which has been closed for almost 20 years. The panelists commented also that many graduates leave the field. Institutions outside the media often recruit graduates of journalism and communications master's programs on financial terms far more attractive than media outlets can offer.

Several short-term training opportunities are available that are quite useful to journalists. The problem is that some programs are redundant, uncoordinated, and lacking attention to practical applications. That certainly held true for legal and environmental journalism training programs. Many journalists have been trained in these techniques, yet still it is rare to see professional coverage of these subjects. Also, panelists highlighted the need for radio journalists and technicians to have more hands-on training, which the panelists said is inconsistent at best.

Newspaper printing houses are run privately and independently, and the owners act out of business interests. The only newspaper that has its own printing house is *Ndongozi*, which is owned by the Catholic Church. The only state-run printing house, INABU, went bankrupt. Yet

*In general, though, the lack of journalistic training is one of the greatest academic shortcomings of the entire Burundi education system.*

according to Karihungu, the managers of these companies are concerned with their own welfare and not the welfare of the newspapers. As noted in last year's MSI, the public authorities can interfere and stop print runs, including those for newspapers and books.

With no established media distribution network, most services are apolitical and protective of their own business interests. Typically, newspapers are sold at various grocery stores and in some offices, or mailed directly to subscribers.

## List of Panel Participants

**Moise Gahungu**, member, Union of Burundi Journalists, Bujumbura

**Amissi Karihungu**, journalist, Radio Bonesha Bujumbura

**Fiacre Mahimpundu**, journalist, *Le Visionnaire*, Bujumbura

**Anais Niragira**, freelance journalist, Bujumbura

**Christella Niyonzima**, student, Bujumbura

**Ernest Nkurunziza**, member, Iteka League, Bujumbura

**Kabanyana Sprès Caritas**, journalist and producer Radio Isanganir

**Ruston Uwimana**, journalist, *Ndongozi*, Bujumbura

**Nadège Irambona**, analyst, Media Organization of Central Africa, Bujumbura

**Jocelyne Ininahazwe**, monitor, Media Organization of Central Africa, Bujumbura

**Félix Nzoroubonanya**, correspondent, Radio Publique Africaine, Bururi

**Fabrice Niyokuru**, journalist, Bujumbura Communications Agency, Bujumbura

## Moderator and Author

**Alain Gashaka**, correspondent, Journalist en Danger, Bujumbura

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