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# CAMEROON

At age 77, Cameroon President Paul Biya has ruled for 28 years—the majority of the nation’s half-century of existence. Yet those years have not been enough for Biya to transform his country into what it was supposed to be: a bastion of development and democracy. In his speech marking the 50th anniversary of Cameroon, Biya himself summarized the state of affairs: “bad management, judicial insecurity, bureaucratic apathy, customs fraud and corruption are among the ills that must be systematically combated in Cameroon.”

Such great ills require great remedies, one might say. And yet, the government’s “Operation Sparrowhawk,” begun in 2004 to track down corruption and offenders against the commonwealth, is not yielding expected results. In fact, journalists are paying the high price for freedom of the press and for unveiling corruption, as evidenced by events in the beginning of 2010. The public prosecutor at the central Court of Appeal issued a statement then, warning journalists about the cases underway as part of Operation Sparrowhawk. Specifically, the prosecutor noted that the law forbids journalists to become involved in such cases, and pointed to confidential information from the operation’s ongoing trials that had found its way into the headlines of newspapers and radio programs without prosecutorial approval. The prosecutor warned the media about the risks—including prison—of publishing such information.

Days after the threat, Alex Gustave Azebaze Djouaka, Thierry Ngongang, and Rabbier Annanie Bindzi—all journalists working in the private press—were prosecuted by the Cameroonian justice system. They had anchored a televised debate on cases related to Operation Sparrowhawk and the Albatross affair (regarding President Biya’s aircraft, which was acquired under questionable circumstances). Moreover, the prosecutor claimed that the journalists were in possession of a document classified as a “professional secret”: the statement of a political figure that the Judicial Police questioned in Yaoundé.

According to the panelists, journalists feel that it is unacceptable in a democratic country such as Cameroon to be condemned for exercising the constitutional freedom to inform. The mission of true journalists, they argued, is to disclose information. One panelist noted that in other job sectors, “professional secrecy” means silence, while journalism requires practitioners to make facts and events public. Cameroon has no legal provision that orders journalists to maintain confidentiality of sources, and when someone who is obliged to maintain secrecy breaks that silence, it becomes news and journalists are beholden to report it. But Charles René Nwe, of *La Nouvelle Expression*, said that overzealous authorities prevent constitutional freedoms from being enforced properly.

During 2010, overall relations between the public (political and judicial) authorities and the independent press were quite tense in Cameroon. The government viewed private journalists as subversives, so arrests, imprisonments, beatings, and threats became the everyday lot of journalists in Cameroon.

# CAMEROON AT A GLANCE

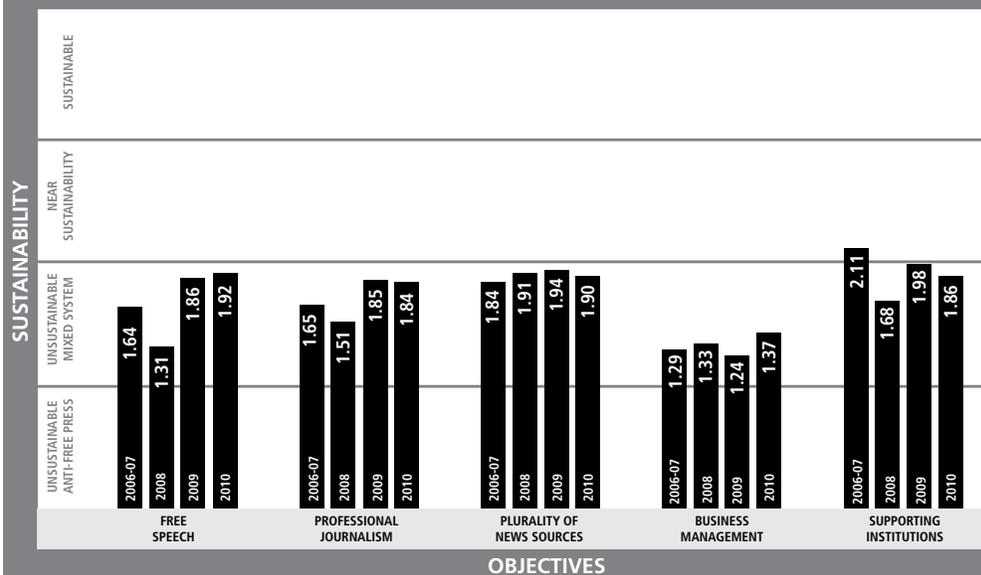
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 19711,281 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Yaounde
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigritic 7%, other African 13%, non-African less than 1% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 40%, Muslim 20% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$23.17 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$2,190 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 77%, female 59.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Paul Biya (since November 6, 1982)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**  
Print: 5 daily newspapers; Radio Stations: 3 main stations; Television Stations: 3
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: *Le Messager* (private), *Cameroon Tribune* (state-owned), *Mutations* (private)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Cameroon Radio Television (state-owned), Radio Reine (Catholic) station, Radio Siantou (private)
- > **News agencies:** None
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 749,600 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: CAMEROON



### 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

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.92

Despite longstanding censorship and oppression in the private press, Cameroonian newspapers did not wait for passage of the 1990 “Rights and Freedom” laws to begin exercising freedom of the press. In addition, the promulgation of Law 96/04 on January 4, 1996 sparked an explosion in freedom of speech: a proliferation of titles, a hardened tone in the newspapers, and a huge increase in virulent critiques of the government. However, the government responded almost immediately with arrests of journalists, censorship, seizures of equipment, and bans on publishing.

Notwithstanding the laws on paper, the freedom of the press is monitored heavily. Access to official information is bolted and barred, especially for the private media; the press receive no financial support; and the justice system serves the political powers that be—and the power of money.

Sending journalists to prison has become the rule, and freedom the exception. Several journalists have been arrested and sent directly to jail without trial. An example weighing heavily on the panelists is the case of Serge Sabouang and Robert Mintya, the publication directors of bimonthly newspapers *La Nation* and *Le Devoir*, respectively. They were held in “pre-trial detention” beginning March 10, 2010. Their imprisonment was based on a complaint by Laurent Esso, secretary general of the Office of the President, accusing

#### 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.

them of “forgery and use of forged documents and imitation of the signatures of senior officials of the Republic.”

The two journalists shared a cell with Germain Ngota Ngota, director of the newspaper *Cameroun Express*. Forty-five days later, Ngota died in prison of hypertension and asthma. The government ordered an inquiry into the conditions surrounding Ngota’s tragic death, which drew the attention and indignation of Cameroonians and the international community. The government publicized “the results of the inquiry” surprisingly quickly, blaming the death on “opportunistic infections” related to AIDS. Outraged, Ngota’s family came to his defense, and the Cameroon Medical Council reacted with indignation to what they termed “a breach of patient confidentiality” by the doctors at Kondengui prison. It was rumored that the government bought off the doctors in order to hush up the truth in the Ngota affair. The year closed on an encouraging note, however, with the release of Sabouang and Mintya in November 2010.

Blaise Djila Mba, a panelist from CRTV public radio and television, was optimistic regarding distribution of broadcasting licenses, describing efforts to simplify the system. However, other panelists criticized the procedures for granting of radio and television licenses as incomprehensible and biased. François Xavier Eya, from *La Nouvelle Expression* daily newspaper, said that legal provisions exist but enforcement is lacking. Currently, he noted, many television channels and radio stations are operating without licenses. Additionally, sometimes the government grants provisional licenses and can shut down media outlets based simply on the tone of broadcasts; panelists mentioned Magic FM and Equinoxe TV by name. On the other hand, self-censorship is rife in the media deemed close to the government.

Jean David Mihamle, a BBC correspondent, noted that the legal framework governing radio and television media relies heavily on the tolerance of bureaucrats. Journalists censor themselves to avoid being shut down by government. The cases of Magic FM and Equinoxe TV, shut down in the midst of the food riots, were symptomatic. The tone they used was too free, Mihamle said, and they were closed for “failure to comply with the laws in force.”

The panelists said that is clear that a number of political and economic restrictions dampen the freedom of speech. Simon Patrice Djomo Nkouandjo of the weekly newspaper *Germinal* noted that in radio and especially in television, tax costs are very high. As a result, the owners of those media must operate in a climate of uncertainty, constantly fearing that they could be shut down for not being able to pay their tax bills. Media outlets are forced also to keep a low profile and practice self-censorship over certain kinds of news

so that they appear “politically correct” in the eyes of the government. Otherwise, what happened to the radio station Freedom FM, part of the Le Messenger group, could happen to them.

Press owners, media backers, and journalists must fight to survive in an environment where there are no Queensberry rules to keep the fight fair, and that often works against the interests of the profession, the news, and the public.

Journalists face paying high prices, too, enduring harassment and intimidation. Jean Bosco Talla, the panel moderator and *Germinal's* publication director, was arrested in December 2009. He was charged with insulting the Cameroon head of state after his newspaper published an excerpt from a book by Ebale Angounou, a former colleague of President Biya. The book, *Sang pour Sang*,<sup>1</sup> discusses the alleged secret pact between Biya and Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first president of Cameroon. The Department of State for Defense held Talla in a cell before transferring him to prison, where he spent almost a month. Ultimately, a court gave him a suspended one-year prison sentence, three years' probation, and a fine of CFA 3 million (\$6,500), and he paid legal costs of CFA 154,000 (\$340). As noted in previous MSI studies, usually such incidents do not cause a public outcry.

Cameroon's Kondengui prison is familiar to many journalists. Lewis Medjo, publication director of the newspaper *La Détente Libre*, was arrested in 2008 and sentenced in 2009 to three years in prison and a fine of CFA 2 million (\$4,200) for an article entitled, “Paul Biya limoge Dipanda Mouelle.” The article described an alleged maneuver by the head of state to force the president of the Supreme Court to retire in 2009. Medjo was freed on May 26, 2010.

Libel and defamation are subject to both criminal and civil law.

Again this year, panelist underlined the extreme difficulties journalists face in accessing official information. Although the 1990 social communication law addresses information access, Cameroon has no law applicable to the press specifically. To help encourage a normal framework for relations between the independent media and official news sources, some foreign cooperation providers (for example, the Agence Française de Développement) organize press conferences regularly.

As for the media's access to foreign and international news, the government does not restrict access to news sources, the Internet, or international media. Cameroon has many well-established foreign broadcast networks, including BBC, CNN, and RFI, and Internet and satellite availability is improving.

<sup>1</sup> Angounou, Ebale. *Blood for Blood*. Sphinx, Yaoundé: 2001.

On the subject of access to the profession, last year's MSI study noted that the government requires journalists to carry identification documents, such as press cards and accreditation. Such materials must be issued by a public institution and can be difficult to obtain. Still, previous panelists expressed concern that standards for entry into the profession are too lax; they called for better regulation to prevent further damage to journalism's reputation.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.84

The panelists expressed a negative view of the status of the journalism profession in Cameroon, noting that reporting is often biased and falls short of balance. Panelist Cathy Yogo, a journalist, claimed the field is infested with non-professionals. Very few abide by the rules of the profession, she said. The panelists blame poor training, low salaries and Cameroon's climate of corruption—noting that the press is not immune from the corruption that plagues the government. All the panelists agreed that many articles amount to nothing more than advertorials, or even outright advertising, without calling it such. Naturally, the reputation of the profession has suffered, and journalists have lost credibility. Another panelist added that the public views journalism skeptically, with consumers openly doubting some stories.

But who is to blame for the poor reputation of the press? Panelist Nestor Nga Etoga, a journalist from Yaoundé, said media as a whole are making a clear effort to double-check their facts, but sometimes in the process of fact checking,

#### 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).

they are accused of attempting to blackmail sources. In 2008, this led to the arrest and imprisonment of three journalists who dared to question Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature (ENAM) leaders about some complaints lodged against them. At other times, when journalists approach experts to shed light on a complicated subject or provide a different perspective, doors are shut in their faces.

Alongside the collapse of democracy, the disintegration of the state, and the spread of corruption throughout Cameroon, many media members commit serious ethical breaches. This includes journalists in the private press, who still practice something resembling "combat journalism," with excesses and abuses of professional conduct and ethics.

At the same time, journalists in the public sector are far from professional role models. François Bikoro Oba'a, journalist from Yaoundé, remarked on the bias that public service journalists often display, in clear violation of standards of professional conduct. As but one example, the public press covers ruling party meetings systematically, but not meetings of the opposition. Nwe blamed institutional laxity, as well, for the failure to ensure that media members observe the laws and standards of the profession.

Cameroon does have a regulatory agency in place, the Conseil National de la Communication (CNC). Its role is to police compliance with the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, as well as provide a mechanism for dialogue between the state and the media. In the panelists' view, CNC has failed partly due to lack of resources, but largely because of politicization. In fact, CNC has become one of the government's weapons of repression against the independent press.

Self-censorship is common, and the media's poor financial health has rendered it vulnerable and dependent on providers of official notices and advertisements. Given this widespread dependence, no media outlet can speak freely or denounce the excesses of companies that advertise, which include the state betting agency PMUC and the Orange and MTN mobile telephony companies. Press owners act in self-defense by imposing biased news reporting.

In a country where press owners must be very strong both economically and politically just to survive, it is not a given that journalists can practice their profession under proper working conditions. Poor facilities, insufficient investment, and low salaries lead to unstable footing for media workers. A collective agreement for setting journalist salaries was negotiated and signed in 2008, but never implemented—and salaries remain below the terms of the agreement. Some press outlets pay journalists virtually no salary at all, citing the lack of government subsidies for the press as an excuse.

Social protection of salaries and medical insurance are not guaranteed. The panelists agreed that low pay increases the temptation for journalists to veer toward corruption. For example, journalists often cover institutional news just to rake in *per diem* allowances and make ends meet.

According to the last MSI study, entertainment and news shows are clearly balanced. However, in terms of facilities and equipment, media outlets still have obstacles. While the broadcast media have sets and studios acceptable from a technical standpoint, low-powered transmitters and poor working conditions pose other problems. Some press outlets have the appropriate technical equipment to gather and process news, but most of them lack adequate workspace.

As noted as well in the 2009 MSI's discussion of niche journalism, the media focus heavily on political topics, while neglecting social, health, and environmental subjects. Additionally, outlets have difficulty finding funding to support specialized news development.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.90

Cameroon's radio and television landscape is extremely uneven. After a long period of state monopoly of the sector, in April 2000 the government finally agreed to allow private operators to produce and broadcast radio and television programs. Decree 2000/158 of April 3, 2000 set the operating terms and conditions for private media. Up to that point, Cameroon was one of the few countries in the region

#### 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.

that had not liberalized its airwaves. But the legal vacuum preceding that decision did not prevent the development of community or religious radio stations—nor the growth of pirate cable operators broadcasting foreign stations, panelists noted. They said that middle-class and wealthy people watch foreign channels mainly, so the number of pirate operations increased.

A few small private radio stations have made halting appearances, in addition to rural and community stations created through a partnership between the state, international agencies (such as Agence de la Francophonie, UNESCO, and other Swiss and Canadian associations) and local grassroots communities. The stations include Radio Lolodorf and Radio Dana in Yagoua, Radio Kembong in Mamfé, Radio Oku in Kumbo, and Radio Fotuni in Bafang. These stations broadcast over a 40–50 kilometer (25–30 mile) radius. Categorized as not-for-profit local radio stations, they operate under agreement with the government and the Ministry of Communication. Still, it is proving difficult for community radio stations to gain secure footing—which, in combination with the poor quality of public media, has driven the success of international radio stations in Cameroon. A study carried out in 1995 by the Research Center on Economics and Survey Studies (known by its French acronym, CRETES) backed this idea, showing that Cameroonians prefer news from foreign radio stations.

As for the print media, the official 2000 census counted 1,300 legal newspapers in the county. In reality, only 30 actually published, and only 19 of those appear regularly. The rest publish in fits and starts.

Quite a few of the old pre-liberalization Cameroonian press continue to appear. *Le Messenger*, founded in 1979, is one of the oldest African independent newspapers and has long been held up as an exemplary private paper. Its editor-in-chief, Pius Njawa, is an international symbol of the independence of the press. Other long-running papers include the *Cameroon Tribune* (since 1974), *Aurore Plus* (since 1988), *L'Effort Camerounais* (since 1955), *Cameroon Post* (since 1969) and *Le Patriote* (since 1984). Other newspapers arose after 1990, including *Mutations*, *Perspectives Hebdo*, *Popoli* (the satirical version of *Le Messenger*), *La Nouvelle Expression*, *Dikalo*, *Ouest Échos*, and *Le Front Indépendant*. Some newspapers are published in English, such as *The Herald*, *The Sketch*, *The Messenger*, and again *Cameroon Post*. All are weekly, biweekly, or triweekly publications. The government-run *Cameroon Tribune* is the only daily newspaper (published weekdays), and is bilingual, published in English and French.

Apart from those leading newspapers, other irregular publications are filled with advertorials (prepaid articles).

They do not deserve to be called newspapers, said panelists, who view their very existence as harmful to the media sector as a whole.

Some newspapers (*Le Patriote*, *Cameroon Tribune*, and *La Nouvelle Expression*) have an online presence, while *Cameroon Actualité* is an exclusively online publication.

Comparing the Cameroonian press to their counterparts in other West African countries, panelists emphasized the striking absence of an independent daily newspaper (the only “almost daily” is a state newspaper, and the most significant independent papers appear only two to three times a week), and noted the decline in the quality of the Cameroonian private media.

According to Yogo, the existence of multiple news sources favors an exchange of ideas. Mihamle cautioned, however, that the plurality of news sources does not always guarantee objective news reporting. The independent press cover news stories abundantly, although there is a regrettable tendency (forwarded not by journalists, but special interest groups) to protect certain behind-the-scenes interests.

For example, advertisers and influential business people are able to skew the news in their favor. The Commercial Bank of Cameroon, for instance, managed to get a primetime interview on the major television channels, as an effort to overhaul its image. Following a lackluster performance in the World Cup, soccer star Samuel Oto’o also appeared on the major television channels in primetime for a similar rehabilitation effort. Albert Moïse Njambe, a political and business mover and shaker, was able to promote a singular and unchallenged current of thought by funding some 20 newspapers. For years on end, he appeared on front pages, thanks to the sheer power of money. The playing field is leveled only by the foreign press and other domestic media.

Still, Djila Mba said that given the boom in computer and communications technologies, people are now able to obtain information from many sources, and access to domestic and international media is unrestricted. Janvier Njikam, a journalist from Yaoundé, noted that multiple sources of news are broadcasting to urban areas. While coverage is lower in rural areas, community radio stations and regional newspapers do relay news. But the panelists stressed that wide distribution does not at all preclude complaints about news objectivity and credibility.

Bikoro Oba’a, for his part, expressed satisfaction with the breadth of news media. The opening up to foreign competition has allowed citizens to get their news from the best sources, he noted, and that in turn forces the local press to up its game. Djomo Nkouandjo granted that multiple news sources are accessible freely in Cameroon, but

emphasized that the news is not always objective or reliable, because journalists have scant training and people have little money to purchase media. Nwe agreed that most people cannot afford to buy newspapers, instead congregating at newsstands to read.

The panelists also concurred that public media are unabashedly allied to the political party in power. As one panelist noted in last year's MSI study, CRTV, the official radio/television station, trains its attention to information about the presidential inner circle, neglecting much else. In the electronic media, the lack of properly updated websites for state agencies is a major problem, and editorial control remains in the hands of a few people within the Ministry of Telecommunications.

The country is still without a strong news agency; the national news agency, CAMNEWS, is experiencing financial difficulties that prevent it from producing its own programs. Instead, it distributes stories from New China (Xinhua) news agency. The international news agency Syfia, meanwhile, is funded by the Agence de la Francophonie and by French, Swiss, Canadian and Belgian cooperation. Last year's panelists did confirm that independent media produce their own original content.

Media ownership remains rather murky. Often the true financiers of the media prefer to remain in the shadows, which has prompted previous MSI panelists to argue in favor of government regulation of funding sources.

As for minority language coverage, last year's MSI study noted that the liberalization of broadcast media, combined with the proliferation of community radio stations, has facilitated the development of programs in local languages other than French and English. Although cable television and the Internet have helped to stimulate debates on social and minority issues, journalists still tend to approach issues related to tribal minorities cautiously.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.37

All the panelists recognized that, in general, existing press outlets are not businesses in the full sense. Proper business ventures have start-up capital, make appropriate investments both in human resources and physical plants, plan their activities, and know their sales figures—none of which can be said of most Cameroonian press outlets.

Still, the economic and financial situation of the press is no different than most media in underdeveloped African countries. Most Cameroonian publications are small private

or family-owned businesses, managed haphazardly on a shoestring budget. When owners die, their press outlets tend to die out, too. Nga Etoga observed that good management in the private media depends on the particular outlet's resources.

Onohiolo Souley, a journalist from Yaoundé, concluded that the financial and technical management of press companies—particularly private press companies—is not transparent. Financial information is treated as owners' well-kept secrets. One panelist commented that Cameroon has more than 600 press outlets, but fewer than 10 are actual press businesses.

The Cameroonian press fell into a state of generalized bankruptcy because of a collapse in sales, which the panelists attribute to readers' lack of confidence in newspapers. A wave of corruption, mediocre writing and reporting, and the tense relationship between the authorities and the private press all contribute to the wider problem.

The circulation numbers tell the story. In the early 1990s, the biggest newspapers printed 80,000 copies. *Challenge Hebdo* had a circulation of 60,000. Owning a press outlet was a lucrative business, and sales were strong—though journalists were paid little. Today, newspapers print between 2,000 and 8,000 copies. The regular version of *Le Messager* has a run of 6,000, and the satirical version, *Popoli*, 7,000.

Economic factors behind the decline of newspapers include the devaluation of the CFA franc and the economic crisis, which reduced purchasing power greatly—while at the same time, newspapers were forced to raise their cover prices to compensate for increased production costs. On average, the cover price of newspapers went from 200 to 300 CFA francs

## 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.

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(from \$0.43 to \$0.65). Thus, revenue from copy sales is small, and journalists are paid badly.

The public's spreading disillusionment also hurt the media. Ten years earlier, a critical stance toward the government proved the recipe for upping sales. Now, faith in political change and democracy has all but evaporated, and newspapers have suffered a great deal from the nation's loss of interest in politics. Even though the press have softened their tone, they have not adapted to the change in popular demand for a different kind of news that is closer to people's everyday concerns. They have attempted to allocate more space to news briefs and sports, and soccer in particular—supposedly in line with demand—yet most newspapers still seem to fail to understand their readers' interests effectively.

According to Nga Etoga, access to advertising is spotty for most Cameroonian press outlets, and employees cannot count on being paid. Editorial content suffers as a result. Mounting public distrust of the press has also hurt the media's advertising prospects, as no advertiser will risk placing advertising with newspapers that have no visibility or impact. Henri Etene Tobie, a journalist from Douala, added that advertising is allocated by political affinity or through professional networking, with a chilling effect on media freedom and independence. Oba'a expressed regret over the absence of any advertising agencies.

Njikam concluded that the independent media live from day to day in a state of near-permanent cash flow crisis, and noted that the tense relationship with the government discourages assistance from the public purse. Furthermore, government-sponsored advertising favors press outlets funded by public capital. Support is granted based on evaluation of the press outlet's editorial policy. However, the panelists did not explore whether or not government subsidies could further harm the editorial independence of private media outlets.

Although previous MSI studies have indicated a dearth of market research, accurate ratings, or circulation figures, some

foreign organizations have ordered research. In addition, the private company CRETES has conducted audience and readership surveys.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Cameroon Objective Score: 1.86

For some years now, the Cameroonian media sector has been in serious crisis, partially attributable to the disaffection of the public and the government with the media. Although some associations of media defenders and publishers exist, they are not organized well enough to defend the interests of their members properly in Cameroon's challenging media climate.

Djila Mba noted that the country has associations and other unions that defend the professional interests of journalists. Union des Journalistes Camerounais (UJC) is an organization supported by UNESCO and intended to include all journalists, but some journalists consider it a tool of the government. Organisation Camerounaise pour la Liberté de la Presse (created by Pius Njawe, former head of *Le Messager*) fizzled after going through a militant and enthusiastic phase. The Association des Journalistes Economiques, supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, established the Observatoire Déontologique des Médias, but has limited scope, focusing on economics.

Panelists said that overall, journalists' attempts to organize into unions and associations have not been very successful, with journalists apparently lacking a sense of solidarity or shared ideology. Many issues divide journalists as a group, ranging from political and ethnic differences to splits

#### 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.

between public and private journalists, salaried employees and freelancers, and owners and journalists. Some journalists on the panel said that such associations do not do enough for journalists facing trials, and commented that any training that associations provide for journalists is done on the cheap.

The activities of the various NGOs and cooperative ventures to support media development are limited and low-profile, especially at the local level. The principal ventures supporting the media are bilateral French, German (the Friedrich Ebert Foundation), and Swiss efforts, and multilateral between Agence de la Francophonie, UNESCO, and the World Bank. Catholic NGOs also lend some support, and Reporters sans Frontières intervenes actively on behalf of imprisoned journalists. UNESCO and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation have focused on supporting the professional associations. In addition, the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) donated equipment and technical materials to the media regulatory body Conseil National de la Communication (CNC), while the Friedrich Ebert Foundation supports the media self-regulatory economic group Observatoire Déontologique des Médias.

Even before the state had defined the framework for private broadcast operations, several local and community radio stations were founded with support from the Catholic Church, Agence de la Francophonie, UNESCO, and the government of Switzerland. Unfortunately, the donors did not seem to have much coordination or dialogue between them. Most of their interventions were one-off actions, rather than part of a structured, long-term effort to support the sector.

Yogo said that Cameroon has unions and associations of journalists, but the bulk of the advocacy work is done by international NGOs. Mihamle agreed that journalist associations exist, but their activities leave something to be desired. Often such associations are springboards for media owners, who use them to their own ends and to the detriment of their own guild. International associations are extremely helpful, though, Mihamle said.

With regard to training, Cameroon has quality state and private institutions that provide theoretical and practical training. Two private colleges, Siantou and Ndi Samba, offer established programs to train journalists. Ndi Samba also runs a university radio station, Radio Lumière. However, short-term internships and work experiences are the most common type of basic professional training for journalists, and the panelists expressed regret that more opportunities are not available—especially for journalists interested in upgrading their skills. Specialized opportunities are offered

sometimes; the World Bank, for example, has led training programs in economic journalism. Panelists noted that donors have stopped funding the regional journalism training center, ESSTIC, which offered basic theoretical training to journalists. Earlier, ESSTIC had developed a communication program that covered advertising, public relations, publishing, and documentation.

The two major printing houses are Macacos (which is owned by the Catholic church and run independently) and Sopecom (run by the state and in control of the content of private newspapers). However, most newspapers and most printing houses belong to the private sector, as do newsstands and Internet service providers. Although media distribution channels are owned privately, they cannot be described as apolitical. As noted in previous MSI studies, the government interferes at times, shutting down television and radio transmitters when an outlet has run afoul of the government somehow.

## List of Panel Participants

**Henri Etene Tobie**, journalist, *L'éveil Républicain*, Douala

**François Xavier Eya**, journalist, *La Nouvelle Expression*, Yaoundé

**François Bikoro Oba'a**, journalist, Vision 4 TV, Yaoundé

**Onohiolo Souley**, journalist, *La Nouvelle Expression*, Yaoundé

**Charles René Nwe**, journalist, *La Nouvelle Expression*, Douala

**Nestor Nga Etoga**, publication manager, *Gestion et Perspectives*, Yaoundé

**Djila Mba Blaise**, journalist, CRTV public radio and television, Yaoundé

**Djomo Nkouandjo Simon Patrice**, reporter, *Germinal*, Yaoundé

**Yogo Cathy**, journalist, *Mutations*, Yaoundé

**Jean David Mihamle**, correspondent, BBC Cameroon, Yaoundé

**Janvier Njikam**, journalist, *Frontières d'Afrique*, Yaoundé

## Moderator and Author

**Jean-Bosco Talla**, publication director, *Germinal*, Yaoundé

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