
Journalists can no longer muster the courage to cover so-called sensitive stories. Instead, they file “rent-paying” stories that merely help them to get by financially.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Four years have passed since the first presidential and legislative elections in 2006 ended years of destabilizing rebellions and armed conflicts, and one year remains until the next elections in 2011. Security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains a concern, and destabilization is a real possibility.

A sense of insecurity has heightened since the assassination of a prominent human-rights activist, Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, chief executive officer of La Voix des sans Voix (VSV; the Voice of the Voiceless), in Kinshasa on June 1, 2010. The murder chilled human-rights advocates and media professionals alike. Journalists can no longer muster the courage to cover so-called sensitive stories. Instead, they file “rent-paying” stories that merely help them to get by financially. All the panelists admitted that self-censorship driven by fear is now the greatest threat to the right to inform and be informed in the DRC. Accordingly, the indicator concerning professional journalism scored lowest in this year’s MSI.

Other incidents stemmed from insecurity in the eastern provinces. Chebeya Bankome, a media professional, was assassinated in April 2010. In another incident, a journalist accused of “treason” was arrested and thrown into jail for five months because he had published a press release of the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan rebel group based in the mountains of the eastern DRC. The release, taken from a website, accused the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (AFDRC) of atrocities against civilians. Congolese authorities accused Radio France Internationale (RFI) of a smear campaign against the AFDRC fighting the FDLR rebels and halted the FM broadcasting arm of RFI for over a year across all of the DRC.

After these incidents and other violations of the freedom of the press, Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) and Journaliste en Danger (JED) sent an open letter to the president to point out the deterioration of working conditions for journalists and the decline of freedom of speech. Panelists recalled several cases where journalists were assassinated, threatened, or arrested and discussed the difficulties foreign media face in a consistently tainted and unsafe environment.

Nonetheless, the compiled scores from all panelists show that the weakest link in the Congolese media system is the financial instability of press companies, which must deal with an environment unfriendly to business and being managed like small, family corner shops. The majority of Congolese journalists are either badly paid or not paid at all due to the economic precariousness of their employers. They are sitting ducks for manipulation and corruption.

The panelists pointed out that there is a direct connection between the “professionalism of journalists” (measured by Objective 2 of the MSI) and the economic sustainability of press companies (Objective 4). “The ultimate guarantor of the freedom and independence of a journalist is his/her employer, who must secure the conditions that will shelter him/her from manipulation and corruption,” one panelist noted.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AT A GLANCE

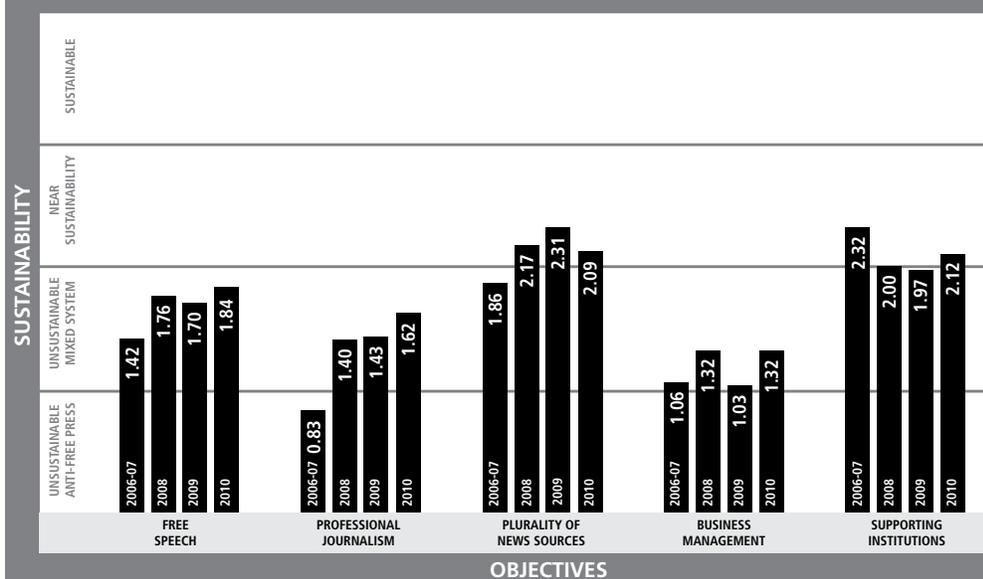
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 71,712,867 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Kinshasa
- > **Ethnic groups:** Over 200 African ethnic groups, of which the majority are Bantu; the four largest tribes—Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantu), and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) make up about 45% of the population (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguist 10%, Muslim 10%, other (includes syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs) 10% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Lingala (a lingua franca trade language), Kingwana (a dialect of Kiswahili or Swahili), Kikongo, Tshiluba (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$11.95 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$310 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.2% (male 80.9%, female, 54.1%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Joseph Kabila (since January 17, 2001)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:**
Print: 8 daily newspapers, more than 100 others; Radio Stations: 226; Television Stations: 60 (Source: GRET, 2005)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top three radio stations: National Radio (state-owned), Golfe FM (privately-owned), Capp FAM; Top three TV stations: National television (public channel), Canal3 (private channel), Golfe TV (private channel)
- > **News agencies:** ACP (private), APA (private), Syfia (private), DIA (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 290,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: DEMOCRATIC 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

DRC Objective Score: 1.84

In the latest worldwide Freedom of the Press Index, published in 2010 by RSF, the DRC dropped to 148th out of 178 countries. The French organization attributes the ranking to violence against and arbitrary arrests of journalists.

For the sixth consecutive year, a media professional has been assassinated. Chebeya Bankome was shot dead on April 5, 2010, in his home in the eastern DRC. A high-profile trial was promptly organized 72 hours later and ended 12 days after that. Two military servicemen were found guilty and sentenced to death, but the verdict failed to satisfy human-rights defenders. As in other cases of murder of journalists, pre-trial investigations and the subsequent trial failed to meet the professional standards of fairness. Thus, indicator 4—related to the punishment of freedom-of-the-press violations—was the lowest among Objective 1 scores.

All the panelists agreed that the DRC has on its books the necessary legislation to guarantee freedom of speech. Godefroid Kabongo Nzengu, an attorney with the Kinshasa Bar Association, noted other deficiencies within the freedom-of-the-press laws: “Journalists can be found guilty even when their facts are true. In other words, journalists can be held responsible merely for exposing someone to criticism. More importantly, journalists charged with treason may be sentenced to death, a hugely disproportionate response.”

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.

Continuing in the same vein, Nzembebe Muika Natasha, a JED legal assistant, adds that the law no. 96-002 of June 22, 1996, regulating the exercise of the freedom of the press in the DRC, is in fact killing the same freedom due to its direct link to the criminal code. “Let’s remember the case of the journalist Jullson Eninga, the publication manager of the Kinshasa *Le Journal*, who came close to getting a death sentence after his paper published a press release of the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR): an armed faction of the Rwandan army operating in the eastern DRC. He was charged with ‘treason’ and imprisoned for five months.” Fortunately, he was acquitted, but the worst was a possibility.

This case and many others prompted Rosette Mamba Poloto, a journalist with Raga TV, to assert: “Current legislation and social rules are not enough to protect journalists and encourage freedom of speech and access to public information.” Not everyone on the panel, however, shares her opinion. Jhonny Mbenga Mudiayi, an attorney with the Gombe Bar Association, believes that freedom of the press really exists despite the obstacles journalists face.

As evidence, Mudiayi notes that since democratization in the 1990s, journalists can express themselves objectively within certain limits of professional ethics. The great challenge for the professional organizations is to make sure these standards are observed by the legal authorities and the professional community.

To illustrate the difficulties in enforcing the law, Kasonga Tshilunde Joseph-Boucard, secretary-general of the Union Nationale de la Presse du Congo (UNPC) and managing editor of *L’Eveil*, noted that in 1999, when he was accused of slander by an important diamond mining company (the Bakwanga mining company), he won after a long trial, but the sentence has not been carried out.

While in Kinshasa entering the news market is contingent on obtaining licenses from the security services, such as the Agence Nationale des Renseignements (ANR), in the provinces it is much easier, especially in Nord-Kivu province.

Tuver Ekwevyo Muhindo Wundi, a journalist with the national Radio Television station of Goma (Nord-Kivu), noted a willingness to ensure the free speech in the media, despite the onerous requirements of certain state services, particularly the ANR. He also pointed out that many operators are starting up radio stations on their own as community stations, evangelical stations, or commercial stations, in addition to the state-owned radio and television outlets.

Nord-Kivu, he goes on, is flooded with these new outlets, but the government’s watchful eye is always present. Managerial appointments in the public media are often

handled through consultations between the government and the appointing agents. This happens with Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) and the Agence Congolaise de Presse (ACP). Although these outlets are based in Kinshasa, their provincial managers always consult with governors and local authorities when assessing or appointing a manager. They are also under pressure from the authorities, to which they are faithful servants. As opposed to the public media based in the capital, which receive regular subsidies from the government, the provincial media are often at the mercy of said authorities.

As reported in previous MSI studies, libel is usually treated as a criminal offense. It remains to be seen how any modifications to the 1996 law in parliament might affect the provisions defining and sanctioning slander and offenses against authorities, but for now, journalists continue to face prison sentences for libel cases.

Regarding access to information, the panelists regretted the absence of a law forcing the representatives of the state to make information available to the public, while at the same time accusing journalists of not obtaining information directly from the source. On the same issue, Michel Mukebaya Nkoso, publisher of *CongoNews*, is more radical, commenting, "A system built on corruption cannot tolerate too much freedom of speech or a wide accessibility of information on state services and public institutions."

According to all the panelists, access to international news sources, especially via the Internet, is still free to all, including the editors-in-chief and program managers of various media outlets. Access to international media remains generally unrestricted to journalists; nevertheless, the panelists pointed out that the foreign press itself is under strict control. Most notably, the panel discussions took place just days after the authorities allowed the return of FM broadcast of RFI after a year-long interruption.

Since the launch of their military operation against the Rwandan FDLR rebels, the government has restricted drastically the activities of foreign journalists in the DRC, particularly in the eastern provinces. The authorities denied the visa application of one Belgian journalist, of Congolese origin, because he refused to provide the names of every person he intended to interview in his application form.

Moreover, the official pass that allows foreign journalists to work temporarily in the DRC, once just a document, is now a temporary pass that must be renewed periodically and costs \$250. For freelancers, the fee is excessive, one participant said. A four-member, nondomestic television crew must pay \$1,000 to shoot a single story in the DRC.

Others believe the press pass is a political weapon in the hands of the government. On July 27, 2009, the security services in the eastern DRC denied access to a crew from the Belgian television channel VRT, although they had a press pass signed by the secretary-general of the Ministry of Communications and the Media. The television crew had to wait for a new pass signed by the minister of communications and the media himself.

These new requirements are troubling. In addition, any criticism or exposure of shady deeds by the troops or their commanding officers can be qualified as crimes in the form of "incitements to commit acts contrary to the military duty and discipline or to military demobilization."

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

DRC Objective Score: 1.62

According to recent statistics, the number of press freedom violations has decreased markedly. Even the authorities are satisfied that fewer journalists are imprisoned or harassed due to their work. But these falling figures lend themselves to different interpretations. For the government, they signify improvement in freedom and of the press in particular. For media observers from the general public, the "quantitative improvement" comes at the expense of content and quality.

The panelists also recognize that journalists self-censor when it comes to sensitive issues—particularly corruption-ridden mining contracts, customs fraud, misappropriation of public funds, human-rights violations, etc.—to stay out of trouble. In the panelist's opinion, "repressive" measures have softened. Brute force has been replaced by financial considerations—the buying of consciences. The famous transportation expenses commonly known as "blending" are a thing of the past. Now, prominent media owners are offered sums of money in exchange for a kinder media treatment. One manager of a newspaper stated during the panel meeting that on the night when the governor of the Central Bank of the Congo held a press conference, several envelopes containing \$5,000 were dispatched to the owners of certain media outlets with no explanation, but with the clear intent that the media should cover the story in a flattering light. As a result, news reporting is neither objective nor documented and echoes a single voice—that of the payer.

The phenomenon called "one minister, one newspaper" that was widespread in the DRC during the transition toward free elections was succeeded by a different tradition: "A minister for each journalist and a journalist for each minister,

making sure that nothing bad is being published about his benefactor.”

Any dividing line between communication and propaganda has disappeared, especially in the audio-visual media. The impression is that of a perpetual electoral campaign. Prestigious shows anchored by a group of journalists are sold by the organizers at the price of up to \$20,000 each. Viewers are none the wiser; they think they are watching real news programs, but in reality it is nothing more than campaign advertising—a violation of the law of 1996 requiring election advertising to be labeled as such.

Being paid little or nothing at all, confronted by the economic crisis and a subjective advertising market, with the advertiser setting the prices, journalists and the wider media are forced to seek drastic measures: accepting mercenary work (journalist–press attaché), clandestine advertising, and under-the-counter political funds.

According to several panelists, the consequence is public disavowal of the national media. The credibility of the media and journalists suffers, and the profession is helpless to protect their fellow-journalists when in trouble. To illustrate, a panelist rehearsed the indifference and passivity of the Congolese journalists and media at the government’s poor decision to suspend the FM signal of RFI for an unlimited period on behalf of the national security and defense.

Mamina Masengu says that the majority of the Congolese journalists knowingly flout their own code of ethics. Objectivity is sacrificed on the altar of the economic crisis and serving the “client.” Badly paid and insufficiently trained, they botch their reports. Investigative journalism is but a theoretical concept. Controversial issues are carefully

avoided—a form of self-censorship. No one wants to risk tackling issues that might upset the politicians.

The colorful magazine *Au Coeur de la Cité* and the opinion program *Le Desk* on Numerica TV are exceptions. In general, however, the attorney Kabongo said, “Our media deal much more with relaying official events than journalism.”

Jean Mbay Katshingu Mbay, executive secretary of the Observatoire des Médias Congolais (OMEC, a self-regulation agency whose mission is to enforce the ethical rules), believes that journalism as practiced—with a lack of financial and technical resources, unreliable social and working conditions, and an unstable political environment—is far from professional. Nonetheless, Jean added, press professionals’ will to survive is worth mention. With an average salary of \$50–\$100, journalists are preoccupied with finding ways to survive, rather than researching stories in the public interest. The perpetual struggle for survival has created a new type of journalism dubbed by the panelists themselves as “rent-paying journalism.”

Furthermore, entertainment shows consume the airwaves. Mbayi Katshingu lamented that the majority of television channels fill the time with foreign shows or programs for which they lack copyright clearance. “People who participate in call-in musical shows to make ‘special requests’ to their loved ones are less likely to get involved in real debates and get important news. Thanks to this easy practice, journalists and show hosts have made a lot of friends, which helps them to better provide for their families.” The system called “libanga” (literally, “a pebble”) is a survival technique employed by the people in the media, according to Henriette Kumakanda with Radiotélévision Amazone, based in the province of Kasai Occidental, in the center of the DRC.

Jean-Marie Kapongo, the editorial staff coordinator of a newly created television channel, Télé 7, said that low salaries are not the only reason for the poor quality of the journalistic product. He points at the equipment, which, he said, is severely outdated, especially in the audio-visual media. As a result, specialized shows covering key issues of public interest are quite rare. The equipment in most of the media outlets is outdated, and there are no funds for updating it, directly affecting the quality of the media products. Therefore, pleads Mambuya Obul’ Okwess Abélard, a professor of journalism, investment in production equipment is crucial to the future of the profession.

Tuver Ekwevyo Muhindo Wundi, who works for a public outlet, provided a slightly different perspective. At least in his province, Nord-Kivu in the eastern DRC, he notices some progress in terms of getting new equipment in the state-owned media. He adds that the private media have

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).

Minority languages are poorly represented in almost all the media, despite the presence of over 400 ethnic groups, the panelists noted. This issue is, however, addressed by the community media that have been producing programs in the dialects.

made efforts to acquire modern equipment. The owners of the private media compete to get state-of-the-art technologies and secure training for their employees.

According to Wundi, the various press outlets in the eastern regions are producing thematic shows and quality news in the format of the international media. Although these productions are rare and experimental, they are very well edited, documented, and even balanced. They address the political, cultural, economic, and social issues of the country.

“Almost every aspect of social life is covered by some form of media. They report on local communities and the activities of politicians. Radio and television newscasts and newspaper articles do their best to report on local facts that may be interesting to the listeners, viewers, or readers,” said Wundi.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS
DRC Objective Score: 2.09

The DRC is without doubt one of the record-breaking African countries in terms of media plurality. There are at least 50 television channels, more than 200 private and community radio stations, and some 50 newspapers that appear more or less regularly. This media boom has much to do with the constitution that liberalized the sector. The government, of course, brandishes these numbers to argue that freedom of the press is in good shape in the DRC, though the panelists bemoan the unsatisfactory content of most of these media.

According to Rosette Mamba Poloto, it is relatively easy to create a media outlet in the DRC. There are some 50 audio-visual outlets and a variety of newspapers, but they are all subservient to their owners, who, after all, created them for very personal reasons. Each owner uses his media to his own benefit. If it is a politician, he will use it to convey this political message—his propaganda. If it is a businessman, he will pursue his economic interests. This is one of the reasons, Poloto says, why the press is not really committed to changing the society.

Nzembele Muika Natasha mentioned the one exception—the UN-run Radio Okapi—with credible, objective, and reliable news. The Congolese, however, are particularly fond of Radio France Internationale, which continues to be the first station to provide credible news above the local stations.

Thus, the interruption of the FM signal of RFI for over a year (May 2009 to October 2010) hit most Congolese hard, depriving them of important news about their country and the world. Masengu added that for many people RFI is the only credible station for big news. RFI had become, and still is, the main news source for many media, to the detriment of the local news agencies (ACP, APA, etc.), whose updates were nothing short of exasperating in the age of instantaneous news.

On a positive note, in the eastern region of the country, particularly in the unstable provinces of Nord and Sud-Kivu devastated by years of war, the media landscape is open to all. Wundi said that the population is free to choose the media they follow and the state has no control, and multiple media choices give the public an opportunity to be informed and educated by independent and plural sources. There is a variety of channels—on the Internet, in print, or in audio-visual—and the owners of these media compete for public attention. Indeed, news sources are widely available, and investments updating New Information Technologies (NTIC) are making them more accessible.

Although the plurality of media outlets makes it easier for the public to access multiple news sources, not everybody can afford to purchase newspapers, while the Internet remains the privilege of a wealthier social class. Personal equipment

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.

allowing individuals to receive foreign channels via satellite is also a luxury not available to most. There are many distributors, but rebroadcasting certain foreign programs in the public as well as private media is subject to signing prior distribution contracts. But that does not always happen.

Indicator 3, on access to the public media, received a low score because all the panelists agreed that these media are public in name only, failing to reflect all the political tendencies and movements in the country.

Kabongo said that although RTNC has been dubbed “the radio-television station of the people in the villages,” the nickname is ironic, given that the station is completely under the control of the government and never airs an opinion that contradicts the official line. As the public media belong to the government, the members of the opposition are forced to turn to the private channels that get no funds from the government.

For his part, Katshingu, with the Observatoire des Médias Congolais and a manager of the Agence Congolaise de Presse (ACP, a public media), believes, on the contrary, that it is the opposition members who practice self-censorship who are refusing to appear in the public media because they are prejudiced against them.

Media plurality does not always coincide with the diversity of information, however. The panelists lamented that news agencies, ideally the main providers of news for the media, are almost non-existent. Kapongo expressed regret that the public and state-owned media fail the public interest. The very few existing news agencies, such as APA (Agence Presse Associée), ACP (Agence Congolaise de Presse), and Syfia, are news agencies in name only, and the public turns to the international agencies (AFP, Reuters, etc.) instead. The independent press has difficulty producing news programs due to lack of resources.

As for the transparency of media ownership, there are no laws forcing media owners to disclose their identities. However, earlier MSI studies have noted that the population can easily guess the identity of a particular media. Many media are thought to put up fronts and disguise the true owners.

Minority languages are poorly represented in almost all the media, despite the presence of over 400 ethnic groups, the panelists noted. This issue is, however, addressed by the community media that have been producing programs in the dialects. Key social topics are mainly covered in the vernacular to reach a larger audience. But the general tendency in the public and private media of Kinshasa is to use the four national languages: Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili, and Tshiluba.

As earlier MSI studies have mentioned, crucial social and quality-of-life issues, such as unemployment, are generally not well-addressed.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

DRC Objective Score: 1.32

Entitled “Completing reforms successfully in these difficult times,” the “Doing Business 2010” report from the World Bank places the DRC in the 182nd position on the list of the 183 most reformed countries in terms of business environment. Yet all the panelists bemoaned the fact that current legislation makes it hard to create and operate a goods-and-services production company in the DRC. This is due to the sheer number of taxes imposed on businesses, bureaucracy and the police, judicial insecurity, corruption, etc.

The media businesses are part of this gloomy situation, as their economic health depends largely on the macro-economic environment. The panelists’ view on the economic sustainability of the Congolese media is definitely not a gentle one. They talk of family-run businesses happily managed by their owners.

According to Katshingu, these companies do not even qualify as businesses, but mere press outlets with no invested capital, accounting departments, or marketing policies to speak of. To survive, small newspapers with 100 to 300 copies must sell advertising space at ridiculous prices to advertisers that dictate their own rules.

And yet, Kabongo maintained, the economic crisis alone does not explain the precariousness of media outlets. Poor

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.

management by “media owners,” who live in high style while the journalists on their payroll brood, also deserves some blame.

All the panelists pointed out that most of the media, and particularly the audio-visual outlets, are owned either by politicians, who use them for propaganda or promotion of their political parties, or by gurus of the Awakening Church. A few examples are Digital Congo, owned by the sister of the president (ruling party); CCTV and Canal TV, owned by Jean-Pierre Bemba (opposition); the radio-television station of the Groupe l’Avenir, owned by Pius Mwabilu (house representative with the ruling party); Canal Numérique Télévision, owned by Alexis Mutanda, secretary-general of the UDPS (opposition); RTVS 1, owned by Prime Minister Muzito; and Africa TV, owned by Azzarias Ruberwa, chair of the RCD, a former rebel movement.

The panelists agree that newspapers cannot survive on individual copy sales. Buying a newspaper is a luxury reserved only for a wealthier social category. Not only does the population have a high illiteracy rate (60 percent of the adults), but “Congolese newspapers are the most expensive in the world at \$1.00, while being the thinnest with eight to 12 pages,” said Kapongo. He recognizes that only advertising revenues allow his company to hold on, but he was unable to specify their percentage out of the total revenues made up by advertising. That number is a secret known by the owner alone.

“As long as tabloids print fewer than 1,000 copies, the media business is an illusion. Advertising is a ghost. There are very few advertisers spread across a high number of media, and, therefore, they have taken complete control of the market and set the prices they want. These circumstances have radically compromised the independence of journalism,” said Mukebayi Nkoso, who manages a weekly newspaper.

A few newspapers close to the government publish advertising pages regularly, particularly for the telecommunication company Vodacom. However, their quality and content do not justify it, according to Joseph-Boucard, managing editor of a small newspaper with provincial distribution, who adds that advertising is being offered based on subjective and political criteria and not clear, objective rules.

Kapongo believes that newspapers are victims of their own depravity: “How do you expect serious advertisers to entrust the image of their product to newspapers that only print a few copies, have no readers, and print low-quality content?”

To illustrate, he mentioned *Soft International*, a newspaper managed by Professor Kin Kiey Mulumba, an important and revered journalist who is currently a member of the House

of Representatives close to the ruling party. He uses his connections in the political and business worlds to attract advertising. His is the best newspaper in the DRC, both from the point of view of technical quality and content; it costs almost \$5.00, while all the other newspapers cost \$1.00,” Kapongo said.

Officially, no privately owned media receive state subsidies. However, in the past two years a two-million-dollar fund for the press is being included in the annual state budget—although the media claim that no media outlet has yet caught a glimpse of this money.

Rosette Mamba Poloto, with Raga TV, recognizes there is no nationally established institute that measures the audience of the audio-visual media. Advertisers make their decisions on their own terms, and the media are vulnerable to their whims. As long as politicians are the hidden sponsors, the media will not be independent.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

DRC Objective Score: 2.12

On paper, the associations and organizations working in the media sector do not merely exist; they flourish. But their success defending their members is unproven. These include the Association Nationale des Entreprises de l’Audiovisuel Privé (ANEAP), Association Nationale des Éditeurs du Congo (ANECO), Union Nationale de la Presse du Congo (UNPC), Observatoire des Médias du Congo (OMEC), Journalist in Danger (JED), Institut Facultaire des Sciences de l’Information et de la Communication (IFASIC), and Syndicat National des Professionnels de la Presse (SNPP), to mention only a few.

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.

The indicators of this objective received low scores based on the lack of public visibility of these associations. Nearly all of the panelists recognized the work of JED in defending freedom of the press, but they deplored the decline of education that also affects the professionalism of journalists.

Mambuya Obul' Okwess Adelard, who teaches at IFASIC, the largest school of journalism in DRC, explained that there are many students in the journalism field, but the schools lack the capacity, infrastructure, and staff to care for them. "The schools of journalism have been replaced by universities or communication departments. This is a sector that should receive more investment," he said. "A new higher school of journalism should arise and take up the flag."

Kapongo, who supervises young journalists at his media outlet, Télé 7, shares this view. "What the training programs fail to produce are well-trained journalists. Permanent, on-the-job training is more or less covered, and sometimes personal contacts between fellow journalists are helpful."

In the same vein, Kabongo believes that continuous training is more necessary now than the training offered by IFASIC no longer meets requirements. He noted that the DRC is experiencing a boom of academic departments of communication, which is basically different from "journalism"—a discipline that requires a specific teaching methodology.

Several programs in these areas are currently underway in Kinshasa and the provinces to the benefit of journalists and the media. To illustrate, the JED secretary-general mentioned that Canal France International (CFI, French media) is training a group of journalists from Kinshasa on economic reporting and investigations; in Kinshasa, a degree of Master of Management is now being offered to a few media managers by the École Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille (ESJ); a training newspaper called *Le Journal du Citoyen* is being published weekly in Kinshasa, thanks to the Institut Panos-Paris in collaboration with IFASIC; continuous and distance trainings are being offered to the interns of a training newspaper in Kisangani by the Agence Syfia Internationale; and radio shows, documentaries on peace culture, democracy, good governance, etc. are being produced.

The panel recognized that printing houses are less numerous than the media, and they are mostly owned by private individuals who use them more for other kinds of printing jobs. None of them is equipped to print, for instance, 20,000 copies of a newspaper in one night.

Distribution services are almost non-existent, because media companies are not well-organized. Given these deficiencies, the secretary-general of JED informed the panel that from 2008 to 2011 France Coopération Internationale (FCI, a French

NGO) carried out a vast support project for the media in the DRC. The project, entitled "The Media for Democracy and Transparency in the DRC," is funded by the Groupe Inter-bailleur des Médias (GIBM), comprised of the British Cooperation (DFID), French-Congolese Cooperation, and the Swedish Cooperation (ASDI) to the tune of about €5 million.

As part of this project, FCI launched calls for tenders and signed agreements with several domestic and foreign organizations to carry out specific projects in the four main areas: professionalizing journalism; production of programs on democratization; regulation and self-regulation; and public-service media.

List of Panel Participants

Rosette Mamba Poloto, journalist, TV Raga, Kinshasa

Henriette Kumakana, journalist, Radiotélévision Amazone, Kanaga

Mambuya Obul' Okwess Abélard, professor, Institut Facultaire des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, Kinshasa

Mamina Masengu, journalist, Kinshasa

Natasha Muika Nzembele, legal expert, Kinshasa

Tuver Ekwevyo Muhindo Wundi, journalist, Radiotélévision Nationale, Goma

Godefroid Kabongo Nzengu, attorney, Kinshasa Bar Association, Kinshasa

Kasonga Tshilunde Joseph-Boucard, secretary-general, Union Nationale de la Presse du Congo; managing editor, *L'Eveil*, Kinshasa

Benoît Kambere, journalist, *Renaître*, Kinshasa

Michel Mukabayi Nkoso, publication director, *Congo News*, Kinshasa

Jean-Marie Kapongo, editorial staff coordinator, Télé 7, Kinshasa

Jhonny Mbenga Mudiayi, attorney, Gombe Bar Association, Kinshasa

Jean Mbay Katshingu Mbay, executive secretary, Observatoire des Médias Congolais, Kinshasa

Moderator

Tshivis T. Tshivuadi, secretary-general, *Journaliste en Danger*, Kinshasa

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