Media outlets that dare to criticize the authorities are repressed forcefully. Journalists have said that they cannot perform their jobs properly, for fear of being branded opponents and threatened with imprisonment.

On the heels of the violent demonstrations and political crisis of 2009, Madagascar continued to face many challenges in 2010. The adverse effects of the still-unresolved political crisis have impacted almost the entire population, but the poorest above all. Politically, little has changed, with a transitional regime that the international community refuses to recognize, a blockade that continues and even tightens, and suspension of aid from the outside. Various attempts at a resolution or mediation (at the national level through civil society organizations or political parties, and internationally through the SADC) have not yet ended the crisis. Proposals for a roadmap and agreements remain at embryonic stages, rejected by stakeholders for failing to be consensual and inclusive.

Almost in tandem with these mediations, the country experienced various failed attempts at overthrowing the transitional regime. They involved incidents with high-ranking non-commissioned officers of the Malagasy army and open insubordination by some elements of the Force d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (FIgN). Similarly, the members of the opposition—the movements of the three former presidents—continued demonstrating against the regime. Their attempts were unsuccessful, and ultimately ended in the authorities pursuing and imprisoning opposition leaders (or those presumed responsible) and their accomplices.

For its part, the ruling regime initiated various efforts also to try to end the crisis. At the end of its National Conference in September 2010, the government ratified general guidelines and principles to conduct a “consensual and inclusive transition” and form the “4th Republic.” In October, the regime restructured its transitional institutions, establishing the Conseil Supérieur de la Transition (CST) and the Congrès de la Transition (CT). A constitutional referendum in November 2010 paved the way for the advent of the 4th Republic, announced formally in December.

Socio-economically, the situation remains alarming, with a 10 percent rate of inflation keenly felt by all—and low-income households especially. Fuel prices (and therefore transportation costs) keep rising, along with basics such as rice, sugar, and oil. Key sectors, such as tourism and textiles, continue to suffer, with recovery uncertain and unemployment worsening.

Journalism continues to be one of the sectors most severely impacted. Media outlets that dare to criticize the authorities are repressed forcefully. Journalists have said that they cannot perform their jobs properly, for fear of being branded opponents and threatened with imprisonment. Within this context, the MSI’s overall score of 1.68, the lowest in the four years of the MSI in Madagascar, reflects a situation that is deteriorating and confirms the precarious viability of the media in Madagascar. None of the five objectives scored above a 2.00. Objectives 1 (freedom of speech) and 3 (plurality of news) scored the lowest, at 1.58 and 1.61, respectively.
Languages (% of population): creole, comoran (official), Malagasy (official) (CIA World Factbook)

Ethnic groups (% of population): Malayo-Indonesian (Merina and related Betsileo), Colours (mixed African, Malayo-Indonesian, and Arab ancestry - Batemaraka, Tsimihety, Antsaka, Sakalava), French, Indian, Creole, Comoran (CIA World Factbook)

Religious (% of population): religious beliefs 52%, Christian 4%, Muslim 7% (CIA World Factbook)


Capital city: Antananarivo

Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: 157 radio stations; 24 television channels; 104 daily newspapers, 21 bi-weekly, 33 weekly, 12 bi-monthly (Ministry of Communication, Directory of Information and Communication, July 2010, Antananarivo)

Newspaper circulation statistic: top three by circulation: Tsara (38,750), Ny Gazetteer (45,000), AMI-Madagascar (30,000), around 200,000 daily copies for the entire country (Directory of Information and Communication, Antananarivo, July 2010)

Broadcast rating: highest-rated television outlets: Télévision Nationale Malagasy (state-owned), Radio Nationale Malagasy (state-owned), TV Plus Madagascar (private)

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Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.

State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, as noted in last year’s MrI, national media, such as RNM and digital plus journalists Njaka Andriamahery, noted that the majority of licenses are awarded to senior state executives, such as directors of the radio station to stop broadcasting for some time. In another incident, authorities closed down radio Fahazavana following the government’s decisions at the risk of being transferred, and public media journalists feel compelled to put up with self-censorship. As noted in last year’s MrI, national media, such as RNM and TMV, have always been given preferential treatment, and public media journalists feel compelled to put up with the government’s decisions at the risk of being transferred, suspended, or banned to speak on the air. Public media broadcasts are always under the directives and within the editorial lines set out by the ruling regime. According to Andriamahery, the private pro-regime press is favored as well, when it comes to key events. As reported in previous MrI studies, libel is handled in criminal courts as well as civil courts, with prison sentences a cabined in Madagascar. The panelists noted that a committee made up of former and current presidents of the Order of Journalists, tasked with reviewing the code of communication, has not produced the desired effect.

According to Rahaga Ramahilimahao, chief executive officer of the Société Malgache d’Édition (SME), all stations face the same procedures to obtain a broadcast license. Applicants follow a series of steps in the application process, running from technical tests to documenting specifications. But some panelists, including TV Plus journalist Prisca Rasmoelison, noted that the majority of licenses are awarded to senior state executives, such as directors of Madagascar's state-run media. They argued that the majority of licenses are awarded to senior state executives, such as directors of Madagascar's state-run media. They argued that the majority of licenses are awarded to senior state executives, such as directors of Madagascar's state-run media.

Constitutional provisions, laws, and regulations supporting the freedom of speech are in force in Madagascar, but the ruling government applies them only according to its needs. Thus, the 2010 MrI panelists gave Objective 1 the lowest scores of any objective. Most indicators scored close to the objective score. However, indicator 7 (access to public information) received an especially low score and more than half a point lower than the objective score. Indicators 8 and 9, regarding the free access to international news and the free entry into the journalistic profession, remained the best rated, scoring about a point higher than the objective. Legal safeguards and freedom of speech remain weak in Madagascar. The panelists noted that a committee made up of former and current presidents of the Order of Journalists, tasked with reviewing the code of communication, has not produced the desired effect.
All of the panelists taking part in the workshop agreed with Prisca Ramasoolion of Sobika online, who said that felaka (a Malagasy slang term for a form of corruption—the practice of paying journalists for coverage) has become widespread.

The public media benefit from favored access to information, at the expense of private-sector media. Journalists from the private sector cannot obtain information except through tedious questioning, seemingly like interrogations. The authorities reveal news only according to their interests. Access to information depends also on the subject matter; if the information concerns societal issues, access is easier; but if it concerns legal, political, or economic information, then access to the sources becomes more complicated, according to Manakura TVJ journalist Stephenson Rayanajany.

With regard to breaking into the journalistic profession, only the Order of Journalists is able to grant press credentials. Currently, granting of new credentials is suspended, for reasons unknown to the panelists. Nevertheless, according to Ramaholimiaso, reporting is not judged by whether or not the journalist holds a license, but by the dynamism and savoir faire in carrying out his or her work on a daily basis.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Madagascar Objective Score: 1.68

Again in 2010, the panelists expressed concern about the lack of professionalism in the field, and above all, in individual journalists. No indicator scored higher than 2.00, although all but one scored within a half point of the objective score; the exception is indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, which scored slightly more than half a point lower.

Some MSI panelists noted last year that the intensified requirements and pressures on journalists—especially regarding expenses—UNdP media and communications expert Nanou Fiankinana said that journalists are afraid to bring their problems to their press owners. Often with events concerning the armed forces, relevant information is inaccessible or confidential, which prevents journalists from producing well-informed reports and quality broadcasts. For lack of information and for fear of reprisals, self-censorship comes into play automatically.

The only norms that journalists seem to respect are the editorial lines of their own press agencies. Universal ethical norms that are commonly accepted and respected elsewhere are hardly even recognized in Madagascar. All of the panelists taking part in the workshop agreed with Prisca Ramasoolion of Sobika online, who said that felaka (a Malagasy slang term for a form of corruption—the practice of paying journalists for coverage) has become widespread.

As mentioned earlier, self-censorship is a pervasive problem. Some self-censorship is linked to media managers and their editorial priorities and interests, but social expectations come into play as well. Journalists are aware that the Malagasy public considers certain subjects too sensitive. Self-censorship inhibits journalists from covering all major events and newsworthy topics, but so do the lack of resources and the poor access to information.

The year 2010 was rich in events of major importance, especially in politics. Consequently, politics often dominated the news media. But the panelists said that other subjects of concern among the people should not be neglected. As Fiankinana said, “Journalists are the communications mediators between the government and those governed. They should promote integration of information: religious, diplomatic, political, economic, and social.” And in fact, some journalists have demonstrated great breadth, producing quality broadcasts on a diverse range of subjects, according to independent journalist Lemaha Rakotosaisibola.

The panelists had the opinion that insufficient income for journalists is one of the principal factors contributing to corruption. Moreover, given the poor salaries, many journalists are on the lookout for any event—even those seemingly lacking in newsworthiness—liable to generate additional income, to the detriment of more important coverage. In addition, media owners cut corners and hire inexperienced, younger journalists so that they can pay lower salaries—which ultimately hurts the quality of reporting.

As most of the media operate mainly on advertisement income, according to Andriamahery, radio and television necessarily favor entertainment broadcasts, especially during primetime. During this timeslot, some outlets broadcast only short news flashes, just enough to keep people informed about the news but not lose any clients. In addition, the print media reserve full pages for advertisements. As last year’s panelists noted, the problem is not limited to the broadcast media; advertisements are encroaching on the space for news articles as well.

While national media outlets are using modern equipment increasingly, quality varies at the regional level, as reported in the 2009 MSI. With limited resources for training for specialized journalists, niche reporting remains rare except where supported by NGOs or other private institutions. Economics and legal journalism, for example, are weak areas where there is special need.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Madagascar Objective Score: 1.61

Panelists noted that although Madagascar has multiple sources of news, information is not always accessible to everyone—especially rural populations. Among Objective 3’s seven indicators, only indicator 5, private media produce their own news, scored higher than 2.00, coming in about three-quarters higher than the objective score. Indicators 4, independent news agencies, received the poorest rating, more than half a point lower than the objective.

Indeed, city dwellers have plenty of choices in terms of their access to news, with a number of radio and television channels of differing views broadcasting in large cities. In urban centers, newspapers and journals are available, access to satellite television (and by extension, information via international channels) is possible, and access to the Internet is reasonably affordable, according to Fiankinana.

In sharp contrast, access to news in rural areas is hindered by many factors: the lack of electricity in remote areas; very high Internet costs, coupled with slow performances; and regulations that still do not permit private channels to cover the entire country, with the exception of certain preferred channels. Furthermore, newspapers and journals are not distributed. According to Andriamahery, a TV Plus journalist, rural residents have almost no alternatives to RMA and TVM and the other public media, which are heavily slanted towards the ruling politicians and regime. Additionally, independent news agencies are practically non-existent, so public and private media no longer use their services.

Public media are far from apolitical; they continue to favor the ruling regime and the political parties that support the authorities. They serve the public interest, but only with the news dictated by the regime. The panelists said that it is clear

Regarding the transparency of ownership, Ramaholimiaso commented on the emergence of a dominant media conglomerate in the private media. Many of those owners are major economic players or influential politicians.
The media, especially private outlets, try to customize programming according to the needs and interests of the public, but not necessarily according to in-depth market studies.

that public media seldom convey the opinions and views of opposition parties.

Generally, independent broadcast media produce their own programs. By nature of having their own financial resources, their productions are sufficiently diverse, especially with the rise of sponsored programs. Educational, religious, business, and sports shows all compete to attract the attention of various audiences. Collaboration with public media outlets is not out of the question, since they can help reach additional audiences. Regarding the transparency of ownership, Ramaholimihaso commented on the emergence of a dominant media conglomerate in the private media. Many of those owners are major economic players or influential politicians. Otherwise, information regarding media ownership remains rather hidden and unknown by the average citizen. However, consumers can glean whether an outlet sympathizes with or opposes the ruling regime, based on the content of a certain article or program. Media broadcast programs designed to reflect social interests and minority languages exist, and are reflected in audience ratings. Often, in certain areas, the dialect used to broadcast information depends on the interest and the nature of the information. Rakotosaimbola said: "In Majunga, a Muslim radio station broadcasts news and publicity announcements in standard Malagasy or in the local Sakalava dialect. However, it transmits in Arabic to read or disseminate texts of the Koran." Furthermore, according to Fiankinana, the recent development of using social media, such as Facebook and blogs, while not professional sources of information, has provided a quasi-selective source of information and directly answers the needs of a certain public segment. The reach and effectiveness of these tools remain limited nevertheless, since access depends on Internet coverage—which not all can afford.

The media, especially private outlets, try to customize programming according to the needs and interests of the public, but not necessarily according to in-depth market studies.

Independent media do not receive government subsidies. However, in acquiring funding and implementing the benefits of training effectively. Journalists face practical barriers (low salaries, lack of resources, temptation to corruption) in upholding their professional and ethical responsibilities.

Trade associations in the media sector are still small in number in Madagascar. Only the Groupement des Éditeurs de Presse d’Information (GEPIM) is functioning and protects the interests of its members, Ramaholimihaso said. Journalists are not grouped in a union, but there is the legally recognized Order of Malagasy Journalists (OJM). However, according to Rasamoelison, OJM has lost its legitimacy and is no longer able to defend the interests of journalists. According to the panelists, OJM rarely lifts its voice in the defense of a member’s cause.

To remedy this situation, often journalists assemble in a multitude of associations, grouped according to personal preferences and skills (sports, economics, politics, environment, etc.). International organizations working in the same fields support the associations. In 2010, a new association, Collectif des Journalistes Malgaches, was established.

with most agencies located in the capital. The agencies collaborate closely and professionally with the private media as well as public media. Advertisers, including communications companies, target their media partners on the basis of parameters such as the credibility and visibility of media outlets.

Independently, independent media do not receive funding from the government. However, some preferred (pro-regime) private media groups receive indirect funding through material donations, or sponsored programming during state media broadcasts, according to Rasamoelison. Given the slowing of opportunities for the private sector during the global economic crisis, the state remains the media’s main source of advertisements. According to Andriamahery, the media that convey the regime’s political ideas enjoy a clear advantage. “...the choice of the media (broadcast or print) to broadcast advertisements is not equal and transparent, and often is discriminatory,” he said.

The media, especially private outlets, try to customize programming according to the needs and interests of the public, but not necessarily according to in-depth market studies. More often, customizing is done through practical experience. For example, almost all television stations broadcast South American and Indian programs, since these are the programs that appeal to the vast majority of the population, according to Andriamahery.

Print media companies have commissioned surveys with private consulting firms specializing in audience rating analysis. They conduct surveys quarterly, with a view to reviewing the company’s profitability and determining each press organization’s position compared with others, Rahingomalala said. The problem lies in the reliability of a polling agency.

Furthermore, although specialized consulting firms conduct surveys regularly to determine the ratings and circulation figures, the results are not reliable, according to the panelists. These firms work for the media outlets, and they may distort data to attract more advertisers, if the station is influential enough. Often, these statistics are calculated from surveys that the independent media themselves fund, in order to capture the best advertising market, Rasamoelison remarked.

Even with a score within the “unsustainable, mixed system” range, this objective scored the highest for the entire MSI 2010 study. All indicators scored within a half-point of the objective score.

According to Ramaholimihaso, Madagascar has supporting institutions that act in the interests of the media professionals, and provide training opportunities to improve the sector. Difficulties arise, however, in acquiring funding and implementing the benefits of training effectively. Journalists face practical barriers (low salaries, lack of resources, temptation to corruption) in upholding their professional and ethical responsibilities.

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founded. It organized a roundtable conference on threats to the freedom of the press in Madagascar, drawing the participation of several foreign diplomats. Madagascar has quality journalism diploma programs, such as those offered by the University of Antananarivo and Catholic University. The number of formally educated journalists is inadequate, however. As noted in last year’s MSI, graduates from these institutions often head for careers in communication at development enterprises or international organizations, rather than journalism. Furthermore, panelists pointed to the need to support training initiatives beyond just core knowledge and expertise. According to Ramaholimihaso, media companies need to reinforce practical skills, and above all, to organize specialized training to draw professionals with relevant expertise. Panelists underlined the importance also of better preparing future editors, especially those involved in the legal, political, business, and public opinion fields.

Beyond university studies, short-term, on-the-job training programs are available. Often, international NGOs engaged in promoting democracy and freedom of the press offer training programs. However, some journalists have found the programs too theoretical and even impractical. According to the panelists, often the content is dictated by the needs and the missions of the NGOs. Furthermore, Andriamahery said, sometimes they fail to account adequately for the local realities and the technological limitations that Malagasy journalists face.

Printing facilities belong mainly to the private sector, and they engage in free competition in terms of production. Generally, news organizations choose their printers according to commercial criteria (relationship between quality and price), and the printing businesses respond accordingly, according to Sidonie Rahaingomala, an M4TV journalist. Similarly, channels of media distribution, such as kiosks, transmitters, and Internet service providers belong to the private sector and are apolitical. Kiosks, for example, sell newspapers with editorial lines totally in opposition to the regime. But these distribution channels are relatively limited; they are accessible only in the capital and large cities.

List of Panel Participants

Rahaga Ramaholimihaso, chief executive officer and owner, SME-Tribune, Antananarivo
Nanou Fiankinana, journalist, PNUD Communication, Antananarivo
Sidonie Rahaingomala, journalist, M4TV, Antananarivo
Pasteur Tiburce, journalist, Radio Fahazavana, Antananarivo
Njaka Andriamahery, journalist, TV Plus Madagascar, Antananarivo
Prisca Rasamoelison, journalist, SOBIA, Antananarivo
Stephenson Ravoajanahary, journalist, RTV, Manakara
Jemima Rakotoasimbola, freelance journalist and consultant, Majunga
Joel Verthino Koto, journalist, Radio Voanio, Toamasina
Fara Christelle Rakotomanga, UNICEF Communications, Antananarivo
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