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NIGER

A decade of political stability in Niger, ushered in by the general elections of 1999, came to an end by mid-2009, as the country began to recede into another cycle of political turmoil. For the first time since 1991, the country was preparing to undergo a peaceful handover of power from one civilian president to another. But quite unexpectedly, the country lapsed into another political crisis reminiscent of those that paved the way for the military coups of 1996 and 1999.

Up until May 2009, most of Niger's citizens exuded confidence about the future of democracy in their country—their assurance based largely on signs that relations had become less confrontational between the regime in power and the parliamentary opposition. Thus, in May, when President Mamadou Tandja announced his intention to host a referendum on a new constitution—tailor-made to allow him to stay in power for three more years—he took most of the public by surprise. Soon after the official announcement, political and social advocacy groups in Niger mobilized to condemn the president's bid to remain in power. In a show of protest, a number of media outlets imposed a news blackout for a week in July. The plan's opponents said that the move was obviously designed to bring back authoritarianism, and fundamentally undermined the democratic progress that had been constructed so painstakingly. Nevertheless, in August 2009, the Republic of Niger found itself with a new constitution, following a referendum that was declared unlawful by the Nigerien Constitutional Court.

An upsurge in serious attacks against the freedom of expression accompanied the upheaval. They peaked with the president's decision to grant the chair of the media regulatory body, the Supreme Council for Communications (CSC), sole power to punish the media and journalists. Furthermore, the president was given the authority to appoint a majority of CSC members. These changes effectively wiped out any semblance of CSC independence. Public and private media outlets alike suffered a great deal throughout the year at the hands of authorities. In addition to its standard censorship of the public media, the regime did not hesitate to take other steps to hush the media, such as arresting journalists and shutting down private outlets whenever it did not like their tones. The public media, meanwhile, served as propaganda outlets for President Tandja's bid to hold onto power.

Given these serious steps backwards, MSI scores, especially in respect to Objective 1 (freedom of speech), have slipped from the initial study in 2006/2007. Expressing concern as well over the effects of the extremely unfavorable economic environment, the panelists also judged that the situation of the media sector in Niger had not improved in the context of Objective 4 (business management).

NIGER AT A GLANCE

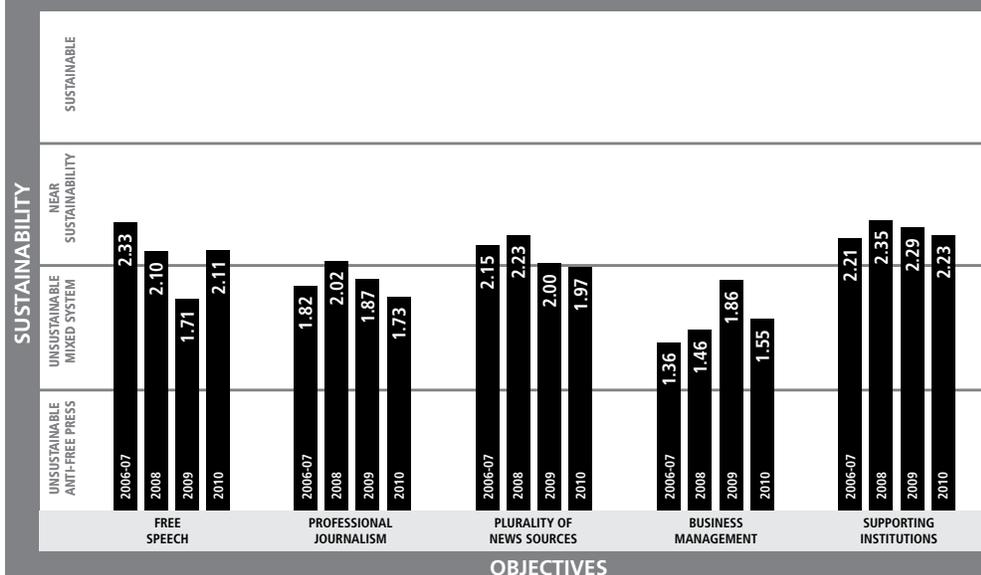
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 16,468,886 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Niamey
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Haoussa 55.4%, Djerma Sonrai 21%, Tuareg 9.3%, Peuhl 8.5%, Kanouri Manga 4.7%, other 1.2% (2001 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 80%, other (includes indigenous beliefs and Christian) 20% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** French (official), Hausa, Djerma (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$5.689 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$700 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 28.7% (male 42.9%, female 15.1%) (2005 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Prime Minister Issoufou Mahamadou (since April 7, 2011)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 2 public newspapers and 65 other publications; Radio Stations: 8 public and 29 private; Television Stations: 2 public and 5 private channels (RJDH, 2007 report)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** N/A
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Niger Press Agency (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** (115,900 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: NIGER



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

Niger Objective Score: 2.11

The new constitution succeeded in changing the nature of the political regime in power to a presidential regime, concentrating executive power into the hands of the president. In accordance with the president's wishes, the new law also put an end to the sacrosanct principle of presidential term limits, and opened the way for the president to stay in power beyond December 22, 2009, the lawful end of his term of office.

Abdourahamane Gayakoye, deputy state prosecutor at the Court of Appeal, said that Niger is one of the few countries in West Africa with legislation that respects universal press freedom standards. Theoretically, the country's legal framework guarantees freedom of expression and allows journalists to engage in their profession, but in everyday practice, news professionals face serious obstacles that relate more to the shortcomings of the dominant political culture than any loopholes or gaps in legislation.

Although no law explicitly limits the freedom of expression in Niger, most panelists did not gloss over their concerns about the potential fallout of the provisions of the new constitution. One of its most significant impacts on freedom of expression lies in its alteration of the composition of CSC, which supposedly operates independently of the executive and legislative branches. Under the new constitution, CSC is composed of seven members, four of whom the president

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.

Other panelists, in agreement, decried the backward-looking culture that persists among many state officials, who simply refuse to communicate with journalists. Panelists also criticized parliament for indefinitely postponing consideration of the draft law on access to public information.

nominates; the speaker of the National Assembly, the speaker of the Senate, and the minister responsible for the media nominate the remaining three. In addition, the new constitution provides for the CSC chair to be appointed by decree of the president—contrary to tradition and to rules instituted by the constitution of August 9, 1999 and Law No. 2006 24 on CSC composition, powers, and operation. In essence, the new constitutional provisions take away CSC's neutrality; as the panelists said, the degree of independence of a body such as CSC is linked intrinsically to the independence of its leaders.

Regarding the fairness of broadcast frequency allocation procedures, most panelists held to their beliefs that the media regulatory body is non-transparent and discriminatory. Some radio and television station owners obtain permits with no difficulty, panelists noted, while authorities force others to wait for long periods just to have their applications processed. Similarly, the heavy taxes on private media hinder market entry, although last year's panelists expressed the belief that no outlets receive preferential treatment in that respect. Newspapers, however, are forced to pay a professional tax despite facing great hardship; previous panels have questioned the appropriateness of taxes on newspapers in particular.

Concerning attacks on journalists, Freedom House's Freedom of the Press 2010 noted that while "arrests and legal harassment constituted the government's main method of media control in 2009, cases of physical attacks were less common."¹ Freedom House documented the measures against the private Dounia Media Group as an example. Two of the group's journalists were arrested in April on charges of "broadcasting false information." While authorities released them the following day, by June, CSC had shut down Dounia outlets for several days.²

¹ "Freedom of the Press 2010: Niger." Freedom House, 2010. Available through this website: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=16>

² Ibid, Freedom House.

Discussing the question of legal preference for public media outlets, Gayakoye argued that from a legal point of view, the private press enjoy complete freedom, whereas the public press are under state control. Journalists in the public sector, bound by their status as public officials, are subject to constant pressure from the administrative hierarchy.

The panelists had the opinion that the restrictions on public media members greatly promote the practice of self-censorship, and clearly represent a roadblock to diversity of opinion within the public media. But according to some panelists, the responsibility for these shortcomings is shared between public sector journalists, who generally are reluctant to take risks, and political leaders with authoritarian leanings. The panelists said that journalists in the public sector enjoy a few small advantages relative to their colleagues in the private sector, especially in the area of access to public information and coverage of certain government events (e.g., council of ministers meetings, audiences with the authorities, etc.).

Balkissa Hamidou, a journalist with Alternative FM radio, expressed the feeling that the government gives strong preference to journalists from the state media. She recalled with indignation that one of her colleagues at the government daily newspaper had no difficulty obtaining information from the leaders of a local public corporation, while the same information had been denied to her. Diaffra Fadimou Moumouni, a journalist and the former director of television and secretary-general of the Niger Office of Radio and Television (ORTN), disagreed. Moumouni claimed that journalists in the public sector do not receive preferential treatment, and noted that all the media are subject to the same taxes as commercial companies.

As for libel, Nigerien legislation still stipulates prison sentences for press offenses, and journalists still bear the burden of proof in defamation cases. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) highlighted a case involving a prison sentence for Abdoulaye Tiémogo, editor of *Le Canard Déchaîné*, for “casting discredit on a judicial ruling.” His defense lawyer told CPJ that the case stemmed from his reports on alleged corruption scandals involving the minister of justice and the president’s son.³

Aboubakari Kio Koudizé, the former chair of the National Media Observatory (ONC), said that journalists face enormous problems gathering public information from officials, who claim that much information is confidential. Unsurprisingly, public officials are reluctant to pass any information to journalists from the private press.

Other panelists, in agreement, decried the backward-looking culture that persists among many state officials, who simply refuse to communicate with journalists. Panelists also criticized parliament for indefinitely postponing consideration of the draft law on access to public information. A member of the opposition submitted the draft before President Tandja dissolved the parliament in the run-up to the constitutional referendum of August 2009.

Last year’s MSI report noted that the country has become somewhat inhospitable to foreign journalists—especially those seeking to report on topics that the authorities consider sensitive, such as the food crisis and security issues.

In terms of entry into the profession, however, journalism is one of the few professions in which access is relatively free, especially in the private sector. But as last year’s MSI noted, political authorities have shown increasing intent to limit access. According to some panelists, CSC discriminates in granting press cards to professional journalists. Souley Magé, editor-in chief of the Hausa-language *Dokin Karfe*, fulminated against CSC’s refusal to issue press cards to certain accredited journalists. Last year’s MSI panelists noted that CSC runs checks on an applicant’s file before issuing the card, and apparently CSC denies cards for some journalists solely due to their critical views of the government. Although the panelists noted that the requirement for a professional card is not a restriction imposed from outside—the Union of Journalists demanded the cards originally—Albert Chaibou, editor-in-chief of *Alternative*, criticized the practice. He argued that in this day and age, requiring press cards is indeed a restriction on entry into the journalism profession.

Mahamadou Boubacar Diallo, owner and publication director of the newspaper *Libération*, and chair of the Niger Association of Independent Press Publishers (ANEPI), agreed. He noted that twice in the past year, police arrested him for not having a press card. But as head of the organization of publishers, he said, he is well aware that the standards for entry into the profession are not the main problem facing journalists in Niger. The absence of social norms protecting journalists, and the lack of a collective agreement to ensure decent income, pose even larger challenges. Media professionals—in particular those in the private sector—are not insured against any of the risks they incur in the course of their work. The political context of 2009 was particularly unfavorable for Nigerien journalists. First, they had to organize public mobilization against the presidential decision to strengthen the CSC chair’s power to impose punishments on the media. Then, they came up against the arbitrary measures forced on a number of private media outlets—such as Dounia radio and television, which were shut down unjustly.

³ “Niger editor sentenced to prison.” Committee to Protect Journalists website, August 19, 2009. Available at: <http://www.cpj.org/2009/08/niger-editor-sentenced-to-prison.php>

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Niger Objective Score: 1.73

For the fourth year in a row, the panelists were unanimous that professionalism is one of the weak spots of Niger's media. Most of the panelists said that Nigerien journalists do not abide by the profession's standards of ethics and practice, but recognized that a few rare journalists observe high standards—particularly in the broadcast sector. Print media journalists exhibit more lapses, which the panelists tied to that sector's more lax entry standards. Furthermore, working conditions in the independent print media are less secure, and pay rates for print media professionals are poorer than for their counterparts in the broadcast sector. The disparities between the two sectors are also evident in terms of initial and in-service training and social welfare benefits.

While job insecurity and poor working conditions certainly do not inspire professionalism, they are not at all sufficient to explain the clear lack of professionalism among so many print media journalists, the panelists argued. In truth, they said, many journalists are not aware of those standards; panelists emphasized strongly that standards are not taught in schools of initial training in journalism. Furthermore, newsroom managers—even those who are perfectly well aware of the standards—very seldom use them as a basis to evaluate their journalists' work. Managers are seemingly unconvinced that they stand to profit by holding up standards, such as rigor in handling information and moral integrity among journalists.

Although it is true that many consumers complain about the media's shortcomings, panelists conceded that seemingly

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 said that the most flagrant example is political actors, who complain of the lack of professionalism in the media while continuing to attempt to manipulate journalists. Also, the panelists condemned Niger's persistent culture of political-hire journalism.

no outlets have suffered following such accusations. Rather, consumers appear ready to put up with and even contribute to the abuses of trust, according to some panelists. They said that the most flagrant example is political actors, who complain of the lack of professionalism in the media while continuing to attempt to manipulate journalists. Also, the panelists condemned Niger's persistent culture of political-hire journalism. As Gayakoye explained, some journalists in Niger excel in writing for hire, leaving by the wayside the principles of telling both sides of the story and obtaining multiple sources.

Souley Adji, a professor at Abdou Moumouni University, agreed wholeheartedly, and made the equally damning observation that journalists in Niger are too subjective, often publishing their own opinions over the facts. Journalists are generalists, he said, and ideally more would specialize in specific areas, such as economics or environmental coverage. Clearly, self-censorship plays a major role, and some subjects invite the wrath of the authorities. CPJ commented that this year, the government cracked down on the media's coverage of corruption, "particularly in the management of Niger's natural resources."⁴

Other panelists, however, said that the fundamental problems are the insecure living and working environments for journalists. Moumouni argued that the impoverished conditions for journalists could not fail to affect the quality of their reporting.

On that very controversial subject, Boubacar Diallo said that low pay does expose journalists to corruption, although pay rates cannot explain all the profession's lapses. Magé claimed that the corruption prevalent in press circles is not related to journalists' pay levels, because journalists in the public sector are the most corrupt—even though they are better paid than their colleagues in the private sector.

Concerning the balance of entertainment and news, the panelists agreed that political news dominates, at the expense of all other subjects. The situation is particularly

⁴ Ibid, Committee to Protect Journalists.

Community radio plays a key role in raising awareness about the importance of girls' education, disease prevention, livestock security, etc. However, the quality of community radio programming is not on par with programs aired by private commercial stations.

worrisome in the print media; Adji attributed their focus on political subjects to the fact that many print media outlets are in politicians' pockets. Souleymane Maazou, journalist and director of Alternative FM radio in Zinder, noted that the treatment of topics depends on reporters' personal interest, not the subject's relevance to the public. He complained about his colleagues and their lack of attention to subjects such as the environment.

Panelists agreed that only better training, and measures to protect journalism as a profession, could eradicate these lapses. Gayakoye agreed with Kio Koudizé that journalism is too noble a profession to be open to just anyone, and commented that a tragedy of Nigerien professional journalism is the lack of standards required to become a journalist.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Niger Objective Score: 1.97

The panelists' thoughts on Objective 3 differed little from previous years. The panelists were unanimous in recognizing that several sources of news (newspapers, radio stations, television channels, news agencies, and the Internet) are available and accessible to the Nigerien public. Unlike other countries on the continent, Niger has no laws limiting media access, and authorities are not in the habit of blocking the distribution or broadcasting of media products.

Illa Kané, chair of the Niger Independent Media Observatory for Professional Ethics and Practice (ONIMED), added that the plurality of news sources gives people a choice and helps them escape the propaganda that permeates the official media. Boubacar Diallo stressed that the public appreciates the importance of media pluralism, as having access to multiple sources allows them to cross-check information and form their own opinions.

Speakers noted, and welcomed, Niger's significant progress in expanding the radio and television landscape. The state

monopoly in that sector seems safely a thing of the past, even though public radio and television remain the largest in terms of geographic coverage. Many radio stations and private television channels complete the picture, though, including international channels such as BBC, RFI, Deutsche Welle, Radio China, and VOA. Those stations can be picked up on FM in most major urban areas.

An impressive number of community radio stations cover rural areas. Despite the numerous intractable problems they face—stemming, Kio Koudizé commented, from the government's initial resistance to the stations—they try to provide local service for a largely illiterate population. Community radio plays a key role in raising awareness about the importance of girls' education, disease prevention, livestock security, etc. However, the quality of community radio programming is not on par with programs aired by private commercial stations. Primarily, untrained volunteer presenters that lack proper equipment to produce quality content run community stations.

Some panelists were quick to note that the plurality of news sources exists in urban areas only. Access to some media—particularly newspapers and the Internet—does not extend as easily to rural residents. Newspaper distribution is still limited to the capital and a few other cities, and the cost of Internet access has kept it a luxury for much of the country. Furthermore, the issue of affordability does not affect just rural citizens; the cover price of print titles and costs for Internet and cable television subscriptions are very high for most ordinary people in the urban centers. According to Chaibou, Niger remains one of the most expensive countries

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.

in the world in terms of telecommunications, including telephone and Internet.

Although the authorities do not control access to the Internet in Niger, last year's MSI reported that after the resurgence of fighting in the north, the government began to monitor e-mail and the online distribution of data. In one example, the developers of Tamtaminfo, an information website on Niger, were pressured to withdraw articles that angered the authorities.

Last year's MSI also noted that citizen access to international media is unrestricted, but the foreign media in Niger have faced tremendous pressure, and some have been sanctioned. RFI, for example, was suspended twice, and one of its correspondents was jailed. Still, the foreign media play an influential role in informing the public, as many citizens trust them more than government news sources.

As for content production, the panelists stressed that the private broadcast media produce their own news programming, but some radio and television stations relay programs from international channels, especially programs in national languages and French. Gayakoye noted that Nigerien media have made considerable progress in providing the public with news, thanks to independent radio and television outlets, which he said provide the most reliable information overall.

The panelists concluded also that the private media reflect the diversity of opinion within Niger better than the public media. Hamidou agreed, commenting that the public media fail to cover the whole political spectrum, as they ignore the activities of opposition political parties and civil society. Kio Koudizé agreed as well, and Moumouni added that during the referendum campaign, the people of Niger had heard only one side of the story—that of the ruling party. Aichatou Seyni Mounkaila, a researcher and member of the Niger Anti-Corruption Association-Transparency International (ANLC-TI), added that the bulk of the reports aired on state media in 2009 were designed to encourage people to support the president's proposed constitutional amendment, and that sometimes public media broadcasts sound more like propaganda than news.

Most of the panelists also denounced the linguistic imbalance in the public media. Adji, speaking as a sociologist, maintained that some minorities are effectively excluded from public debate because the state media provide them with only weekly news summaries. Other panelists agreed that the minority situation is unacceptable, deeming it a form of discrimination and urging the regulatory body to act on the issue as quickly as possible.

The absence of clear legislation for advertising favors a degree of anarchy that damages the media. Kio Koudizé pointed out that the advertising industry lacks any degree of organization. To achieve that goal, not only would the government need to adopt specific legislation, but the media sector would need tools such as the Audiomat® audience rating system.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Niger Objective Score: 1.55

The panelists noted that the business management side of Nigerien media has become worse. They cited the sluggish economy and lack of managerial culture that plague the sector.

Kio Koudizé said that management of press outlets tends to be a hit-or-miss, "mom-and-pop" sort of affair; often, only the founder of a media business has any real idea of its resources. He noted that very often, the founder serves as general director, publication director, editor, accountant, bill collector, and courier. Maazou agreed that the entire staff at some newspapers could all be rolled into one publication director. Gayakoye characterized the structure and management of independent press businesses as prehistoric.

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.

According to the panelists, the week-long news blackout presented an opportunity for professional organizations to overcome the differences and leadership disputes that undermine their standing with political authorities.

Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, publisher of the private French-language regional newspapers *Air Info* in Agadez and *Le Damagaram* in Zinder, added that some press outlets run as family businesses in a manner lacking completely in transparency—and to the detriment of their journalists. Kané, however, found that criticism to be too harsh: in his view, it goes too far to talk of mismanagement, because the private media have no resources left to manage. He said that it must be recognized that against the odds, many outlets have made significant strides in the past few years to obtain a registered office, computer equipment, and competent staff. Some panelists, however, suggested that progress has more to do with the desire to meet the criteria for access to press than a desire to modernize management. Adji agreed that at least a handful of press outlets operate like real businesses, with registered offices, accounts departments, and permanent salaried employees.

The panelists concluded that a clear distinction should be made between the business issues of print and broadcast outlets. They observed that commercial broadcasters are driven to make a profit on their investment, while independent printed press and the community media suffer more from unreliable and unstable sources of funding than mismanagement. The panelists also lamented the difficult environment for independent media, given their lack of access to the advertising market or subsidies for the press.

Sophie Ledru Gazéré, a journalist and the former sales director of the National Publishing and Press Office (ONEP) and *Le Sahel*, emphasized the gap between the desire for quality media and the lack of consistent support. In her view, the private press's great misfortune is that the public media continue to have privileged access to advertising. Furthermore, advertising revenues are still far from equaling the ideal 70 percent of total income, and public companies—which are the main suppliers of advertising—are not even-handed.

The absence of clear legislation for advertising favors a degree of anarchy that damages the media. Kio Koudizé pointed out that the advertising industry lacks any degree of organization. To achieve that goal, not only would the government need to

adopt specific legislation, but the media sector would need tools such as the Audiomat® audience rating system.

Given the challenging economic environment, most panelists welcomed the government's implementation of aid for the press. Generally, panelists judged the distribution of the funds to be transparent and effective. The legislation and regulations concerning the management of the subsidies provide for appeals for any outlets that believe that they have denied unfairly. Most panelists said that they do not feel that the subsidies detract from the independence of the media recipients. Gayakoye even argued that the subsidies had actually strengthened the independence of the outlets. Maazou, on the other hand, claimed that a number of media outlets had courted the regime in order to appear on the list of the fund's beneficiaries.

Gazéré assured the panel that the establishment of a press assistance fund had not changed the situation of the independent media in Niger. She was convinced that with or without the subsidy, press businesses could not thrive in a country where people are mainly focused on satisfying basic needs.

As Chaibou noted in last year's report, most media outlets in Niger are launched without any market research. Newspapers publish circulation numbers, but they are widely considered inflated.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Niger Objective Score: 2.23

In 2010, strong mobilization by professional organizations in defense of press freedom was again a highlight under Objective 5. The week without press, in reaction to the president's decision to empower the CSC chair to punish the independent media, is a prime example. Journalists displayed unity and solidarity in the face of the regime's authoritarian inclinations, and some panelists welcomed that initiative as evidence that supporting organizations are capable of forming a powerful pressure group.

According to the panelists, the week-long news blackout presented an opportunity for professional organizations to overcome the differences and leadership disputes that undermine their standing with political authorities. This mobilization was significant, considering that for quite some time, professional organizations had communicated very little with each other. In the past, collective actions tended only to exacerbate the splits within the journalism community.

Professional organizations continue to play an important role in capacity building for their members—particularly with the

support of the American Cultural Center and the German Development Service (DED), the principal partners of the Press House association in Niger. Although the regime frowns upon this umbrella organization, the Press House has become a linchpin for training activities. Private and public media journalists on the panel united in recognizing its usefulness, and said that the Press House largely makes up for the individual shortcomings of the organizations under it.

However, some panelists said that professional organizations have not proven very effective in resolving a number of key issues, such as the adoption of a collective agreement for journalists. Some panelists also criticized certain associations for their timid response to the closure of the Dounia, a private radio and television company. While the panelists acknowledged some support from civil society organizations in Niger, they argued that the efforts are insufficient to meet the need.

In the realm of training, the panelists noted considerable effort by the Institute for Training in Information and Communication Technologies (IFTIC). IFTIC professor Kio Koudizé emphasized that the institute provides training that is up to international standards. Some speakers questioned this, though, given the deplorable operational level seen in newsrooms staffed by graduates. The panelists also noted that several civil society organizations contribute to capacity building for journalists through short-term training courses.

As for the state of printing and distribution, the panelists stressed that printing shops, newsstands, and telecommunications infrastructures are accessible and owned privately, with no discrimination of any kind. However, at a time when other countries are preparing for digital convergence, the panelists lamented, Niger has a considerable delay in that respect.

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.

List of Panel Participants

Souley Adji, professor, Abdou Moumouni University, Niamey

Aichatou Seyni Mounkaila, researcher, member of the Niger Anti-Corruption Association, Transparency International, Niger Section, Niamey

Balkissa Hamidou, journalist, Alternative FM, Niamey

Mahamadou Boubacar Diallo, journalist and owner, *Libération*; chairman of the Niger Association of Independent Press Publishers, Niamey

Chatou Mahamadou, director, Alternative FM, Niamey

Diaffra Fadimou Moumouni, journalist and secretary-general, Association of African Women in the Media, Niger Section, Niamey

Sophie Ledru Gazéré, journalist; former director, National Office for Editing and Publishing, Niamey

Aboubakari Kio Koudizé, journalist and former chairman of the National Media Observatory, Niamey

Abdourahamane Gayakoye, judge and deputy state prosecutor, Niamey

Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, publisher, *Air Info* and *Le Damagaram*, Zinder

Souley Magé, journalist and editor-in-chief, Dokin Karfe, Hausa

Albert Chaibou, editor-in-chief, *Alternative*; chair, International Francophone Press Union-Niger Section, Niamey

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