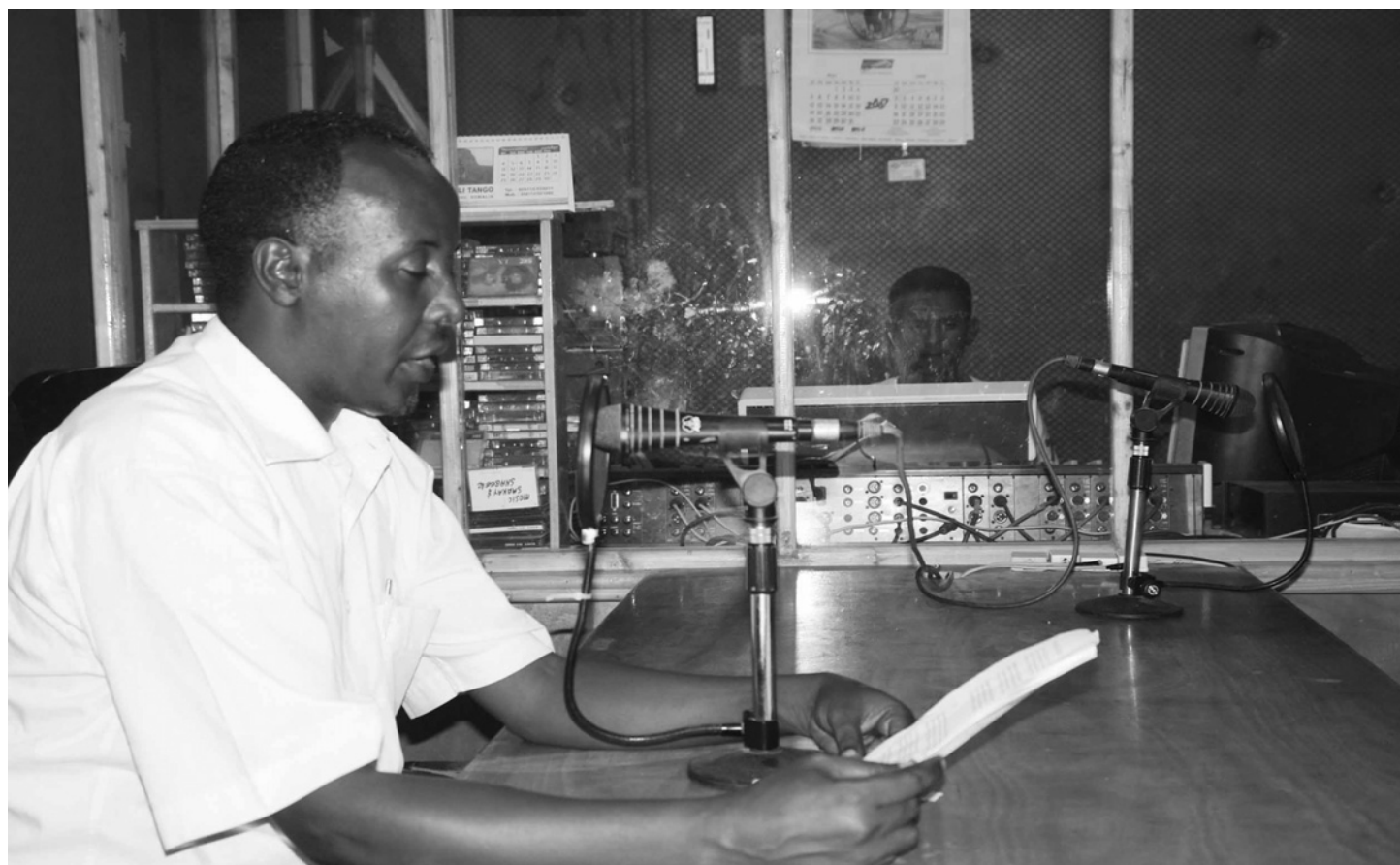

Radio stations open and then suddenly disappear; journalists enter the profession with virtually no experience or training only to exit months later; and licensing is an informal process in much of the country.



SOMALIA

Since the collapse of the Somali government in 1991, the country has been governed by a patchwork of regional authorities, Islamist rebels groups, and clans. In 2004, the second and current interim government, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), was formed and in 2009 Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed was elected president. Today, the TFG's authority is limited to parts of the capital Mogadishu and enclaves across the country. Meanwhile the anti-TFG Islamist group Al Shabaab controls a large swathe of southern and central Somalia, and the Puntland regional government has essentially autonomous authority over much of the north.

In this fluid and often explosive environment, journalists and media organizations face immense challenges. In 2010, Somalia remained one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Media outlets also came under pressure from the government and clans when they attempted to report on sensitive issues including the country's ongoing conflict. In Puntland, for example, the regional government instituted an across-the-board ban on airing interviews with rebels and imprisoned journalists who violated the edict.

Radio dominates the Somali media sector, although print publications and a handful of broadcast television stations exist. One of the MSI panelists described the media environment as being in a constant state of "anarchy." Radio stations open and then suddenly disappear; journalists enter the profession with virtually no experience or training only to exit months later; and licensing is an informal process in much of the country. Moreover, outlets lack the structure to effectively generate revenue and instead rely on financing from powerful and often secret backers.

Despite dangerous working conditions and meager pay, many brave Somali media professionals carry on. Against a generally dour backdrop, the number of radio stations continued to increase, Mogadishu University announced plans to open a journalism degree program, and international, Somali-language radio broadcast by the BBC and Voice of America remained accessible, offering some hope for the future.

SOMALIA AT A GLANCE

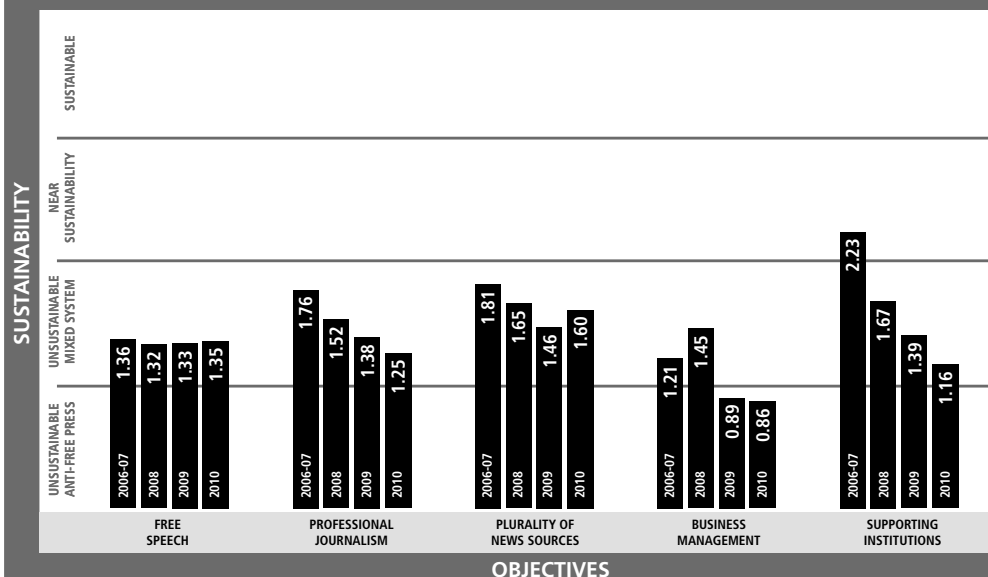
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 9,925,640 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Mogadishu
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions:** Sunni Muslim (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Somali (official), Arabic, Italian, English (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** N/A
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** N/A
- > **Literacy rate:** 37.8% (male 49.7%, female 25.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Transitional Federal President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (since January 31, 2009)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 20 print media, 20 radio stations, 3 television stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top newspapers and estimated circulation: *Xog-Ogaal* (800), *Qaran* (500) and *Ayaamaha* (400) in Mogadishu; *Jamhuuriya* (1000) in Hargeisa.
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: Shabelle Radio, Somali Broadcasting Corporation, and Horn Afrik. Universal TV covers the whole country, Somaliland TV covers an area with an estimated 1500 television-watching households, and Somali Broadcasting Corporation TV covers an area with an estimated 1000 television-watching households
- > **News agencies:** Somali Independent News Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 106,000 (2009, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SOMALIA



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

Somalia Objective Score: 1.35

The Transitional Federal Charter, Somalia's current governing document, guarantees freedom of speech and protects the rights of the press. In practice, however, the TFG is largely powerless to enforce these provisions and officials often flaunt them with impunity. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the government regularly prevents journalists from covering the country's ongoing conflict and works to censor the photos and stories that depict it in a negative light.¹ The Al Shabaab forced a number of stations off the air and enforces strict censorship backed by the threat of violence across much of the country.

In the northern, semiautonomous region of Puntland the situation is slightly better, panelists reported. Both the Puntland constitution and the law on the media guarantee freedom of speech and journalists there are under comparatively less pressure from rebel groups than their peers in the conflict-ridden south. That said, the panelists also reported that there was reason for heightened concern in 2010 after the Puntland government imprisoned Abdifatah Jama Mire, radio director at Horseed Media, after his station aired an interview with a rebel leader. Following Mire's arrest,

¹ *Attacks on the Press 2009: Somalia*. Committee to Protect Journalists: February 15, 2011. <http://www.cpj.org/2011/02/attacks-on-the-press-2010-somalia.php>

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.

In areas controlled by Al Shabaab broadcast authorization is verbal and subject to the outlet's strict adherence to Islamic law as defined by the rebels. Over the course of the previous year, the militants seized equipment and destroyed stations at will.

the government summarily banned all media organizations from interviewing rebels.

Licensing of media outlets in Somalia is an ad hoc and often informal process. Panelist Omar Wardhere, the manager of Radio Tusmo, reported that some owners apply for and receive a letter of authorization from the TFG's Ministry of Information and Telecommunications but that authorization only extends as far as the government's control. Others simply broadcast without an official license.

In areas controlled by Al Shabaab broadcast authorization is verbal and subject to the outlet's strict adherence to Islamic law as defined by the rebels. Over the course of the previous year, the militants seized equipment and destroyed stations at will. In Puntland media outlets can apply for licenses issued by the regional government, but few do.

Otherwise, entry into the media field is unfettered. The tax system, where it is enforced, does not treat media outlets differently from other businesses.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for media professionals. Two journalists were killed in 2010 while engaged in journalism. In May, Sheikh Nur Mohamed Abkey, a veteran journalist with the TFG-backed Somalia National News Agency was gunned down outside his house in southern Mogadishu.² Representatives of Al Shabaab ultimately claimed responsibility for the killing. Later in the year, Hurma Radio journalist Barkhat Awale was caught in a crossfire and killed while attempting to fix the station's transmitter.³

Journalists reporting on Somalia's conflict face near constant threats and harassment. Al Shabaab considers most members of the press to be supporters of the government and thus potential targets. In this environment, many journalists turn to armed clans for protection. Independent and minority

² *Sheikh Nur Mohamed Abkey*. Committee to Protect Journalists: September 14, 2010 <http://www.cpj.org/killed/2010/sheikh-nur-mohamed-abkey.php>

³ 2010 Human Rights Reports: Somalia. U.S. Department of State. April 8, 2011

Self-censorship is a way of life for most journalists; to do otherwise would be to invite swift and harsh retribution from rebels groups or Somalia's various governing bodies.

journalists who operate without clan support are the most vulnerable to pressure—both from the rebels and the TFG.

In a small but significant improvement from 2009, the U.S. State Departments' annual report on human rights in Somalia reported that no journalists were directly threatened by the TFG in 2010, although reports of indirect threats and other forms of harassment were still widespread. Crimes against journalists are rarely, if ever, prosecuted and the judiciary is beholden to the government or armed groups depending on where the magistrate is located.

Libel remains criminalized although, unlike previous years, there were no reports that the TFG used the statute against media professionals in 2010. In practice journalists are regularly compelled to apologize or issue a retraction if a report offends a powerful figure.

Journalists often face impediments when attempting to access information. Government officials stonewall or otherwise work to obfuscate important facts if they are deemed sensitive. Somali media outlets are regularly forced to turn to international outlets like the BBC, Voice of America or Al Jazeera to fill in the gaps.

According to the panelists, the Somali media sector has an exceptionally high rate of staff turnover and as a result, there are virtually no limitations on entry to the profession; most outlets simply try to fill positions with bodies—regardless of the individual's experience or skill.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Somalia Objective Score: 1.25

Somali journalism on the whole falls well short of international standards of professionalism. Journalists lack basic skills and have little awareness of the need to accurately report facts, properly source stories, or maintain objectivity. According to the panelists, radio journalists routinely use fake eyewitnesses in an attempt to bolster the credibility of their reporting. Often a purported eyewitness is a station employee calling from a different room.

The absence of professional standards is directly related to the hardship caused by Somalia's ongoing conflict, panelists said. Somali journalists are subjected daily to physical danger and pressure from rebels, the government, and various clans. These issues are exacerbated by the fact that most journalists are young and inexperienced. Somali organizations, most notably the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), work in partnership with international organizations to promote professional standards, but it lacks the support of many journalists and media business owners.

Self-censorship is a way of life for most journalists; to do otherwise would be to invite swift and harsh retribution from rebels groups or Somalia's various governing bodies. Those journalists who do not mold their reporting to serve the narrative presented by either the government or Al Shabaab are often forced out of the profession or into exile.

Despite these issues, the panelists reported that Somali journalists do a serviceable job reporting major events. Additionally, while few consumers have access to the Internet, online media has given journalists some space to report freely. In all regions of Somalia, news and information programming generally takes precedence over entertainment.

Panelists reported that journalists working for Somali outlets are poorly paid. Wardhere said that the highest wage he can afford to pay is \$50 per month but that most employees are paid less. The rest of the panel agreed that this is standard across the Somali media sector. Many journalists also receive bonuses or incentives from media owners as a reward for volunteered time or from local businessmen interested in favorable coverage. This practice is known as *shardoor*, a Somali phrase for the food and

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).

drink traditionally presented when a guest arrives. According to the panelists, many journalists sell advertisements or positive coverage to local businesses to augment their income. Journalists working for international news organizations receive significantly higher salaries.

The facilities and equipment used by most media outlets are rudimentary. The few remaining newspapers are printed on A4 paper using commercial printers with the exception of the state-owned *Xiddigta Oktobar*, which is printed on A5 in Nairobi, Kenya and imported. Radio stations generally consist of little more than a small building and a transmitter. Support from international organizations has helped the state-run radio station in Mogadishu expand its facilities somewhat but they still fall short of international standards, panelists said. All media outlets are plagued by frequent power outages. In areas controlled by Al Shabaab, radio stations are often forced to turn over their equipment to the rebels.

Amidst the ongoing conflict, niche issues receive little coverage and journalists rarely engage in investigative reporting.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Somalia Objective Score: 1.60

Somalia's protracted civil war has forced media outlets to pick sides in order to survive. While Somalia still has a handful of active newspapers and television stations and a larger number of radio stations, few are truly independent. The TFG, the Puntland regional government, and Al Shabaab all pressure

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.

private media outlets in their respective territories to present a partisan narrative that essentially amounts to propaganda.

Years of fighting have taken an especially steep toll on the Somali press. According to Abdulkadir Mohamed Osman, director of the Somalia Media Center, most newspapers operate on the verge of extinction. Only one newspaper continues to publish daily while others publish weekly or as often as they can. The vast majority of Somalis instead rely on the radio for information. In the capital Mogadishu, 13 FM radio stations broadcast regularly, the majority of which are privately owned. Somali-language radio channels operated by the BBC and Voice of America are widely accessible and very popular. Indeed, these international radio channels are the only sources of information available in some parts of the country. The panelists reported that Al Shabaab tries to prevent citizens from watching or listening to certain broadcast channels, but that their attempts have been generally unsuccessful.

Only a small percentage of Somalis use the Internet regularly. Those that have access are able to view the plethora of media produced by the Somali diaspora in Europe and the United States. According to the panelists, most domestic media outlets have established an online presence and as access increases there is potential for expanded digital journalism in Somalia.

The state-funded media based in Mogadishu are unashamedly pro-TFG and offer little in the way of public interest programming. The panelists described the public outlets as tools in the government's propaganda war against the rebels. Similarly, outlets controlled by Al Shabaab rail against the TFG.

Because of the dangers associated with reporting in Somalia, there are no news agencies based inside the country. The Somali Independent News Agency, which was founded by NUSOJ in partnership with Reporters Without Borders is headquartered in neighboring Djibouti, with staff scattered across Somalia. Most radio stations rely on their local staff to research and report news. The panelists estimated that 90 percent of local news is produced by Somali media outlets, while the remaining 10 percent is taken from international broadcasters.

According to the panelists, media ownership in Somalia is opaque. Consumers are unable to judge whether an outlet's objectivity is impaired by the owner's interests, political connections, or clan affiliation. Outlets commonly receive financing from Somalis living outside the country, which adds another layer of confusion.

Reporting on the Somali conflict and related issues tends to dominate media coverage, panelists said. Somalia's minorities,

Formerly, well known radio stations like HornAfrik and Shabelle Media Network were able to make significant amounts of money from advertisements but the continued conflict in the south had a profound negative effect on the business sector and by extension the advertising market.

however, receive little attention—despite the fact that they have suffered disproportionately over the past two decades. Similarly, other social and cultural issues are rarely covered by Mogadishu-based media outlets. Outlets based in Puntland occasional report on minority and social issues. Most notably, in 2009 journalists advocated for the rights of internally displaced persons living in the regions of Bay and Bakol after the regional government announced a plan to deport them over security concerns. Officials ultimately dropped the initiative after pressure, fueled by the work of independent journalists, grew.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Somalia Objective Score: 0.86

The panelists agreed that privately-owned media outlets in Somalia are on the whole poorly run. Managers have little training and often no background in media. Owners prefer to hire employees on the basis of family or clan connections.

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.

Few outlets are able to generate enough revenue to cover basic operating costs, let alone turn a profit.

Media organizations are often funded directly by their owners with support from businessmen, politicians, or Somali expatriates. Outlets sell advertisements, but this revenue is rarely sufficient to sustain operations. Wardhere said that his station generates \$900 of advertising revenue per month, which is less than 5 percent of its operating budget. Formerly, well known radio stations like HornAfrik and Shabelle Media Network were able to make significant amounts of money from advertisements but the continued conflict in the south had a profound negative effect on the business sector and by extension the advertising market. Businesses have gone bankrupt or, in some cases, were closed by Al Shabaab; meanwhile potential consumers were displaced and impoverished.

While Puntland is more stable than the restive south, several large companies have monopolies over the various sectors of the economy and as a result advertising is of little importance to those business owners.

Advertising agencies do not exist in Somalia. Instead, media organizations generally have advertising departments that both solicit and produce advertisements for local businesses and occasionally international humanitarian agencies. Media owners rely heavily on personal relationships to recruit advertisers.

A handful of outlets receive support from international organizations, but the panelists reported that these grants are generally small. Independent media outlets in Puntland and TFG-controlled areas do not receive government subsidies.

Media organizations in Somalia do not conduct market research or attempt to tailor their programming to specific audience segments. The panelists speculated that this is because reliable statistics including broadcast ratings and circulation figures are not recorded.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Somalia Objective Score: 1.16

There are a number of local organizations supporting journalists and independent media outlets in Somalia. The most active include NUSOJ, the Somali Women Journalists' Association, and the Media Association of Puntland. Some panelists reported that Somali media support organizations are often riven by internal conflicts and limited in their geographic reach. Others cited the effective advocacy and

training work done by NUSOJ, among others, as an example of the positive role media support organizations have played in Somalia. Private newspaper and broadcast media owners do not have their own representative associations.

According to the panelists, Mogadishu University offers journalism courses and recently announced plans to start a journalism degree program. Panelists also noted that over the last two decades of conflict not only have the most qualified journalists fled, but many journalism instructors have left the country as well. As a result, journalism education in Somalia has been an uphill struggle.

Some Somali journalists receive professional training outside the country, while others participate in short-term courses funded by international organizations or receive on-the-job training. According to the panelists, Somali journalists, many of whom are young and inexperienced, are in desperate need of further training opportunities.

Somali news outlets regularly face shortages of material, panelists said. Channels of distribution for broadcast media are generally private and unrestricted, although panelists reported multiple instances of rebels seizing transmitters to prevent radio stations from broadcasting.

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

Abdulkadir Mohamed Osman, director, Somalia Media Center, Mogadishu

Mohamed Abdullahi, field producer, Al Jazeera, Mogadishu

Abdulnadir Moallim, member, Somali Pen, Mogadishu

Omar Wardhere, manager, Tusmo Radio, Mogadishu

Amin Khasaare, reporter, Somali Talk Website, Mogadishu

Sadia Mohamed Noor, reporter, IRIN Radio, Mogadishu

Hawo Mohamed Ali, chairperson, Somali Women Journalists Association, Mogadishu

Zahro Mohamed, member, Media Association of Puntland, Bosaso

Mowlid Ahmed, reporter, Radio Galkayo, Galkayo

Kadijo Abdi, reporter, Radio Mogadishu, Mogadishu

Isse Mohamed, chief editor, *Dalka*, Mogadishu

Shair Hareed, member, Somali Media Network, Mogadishu

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