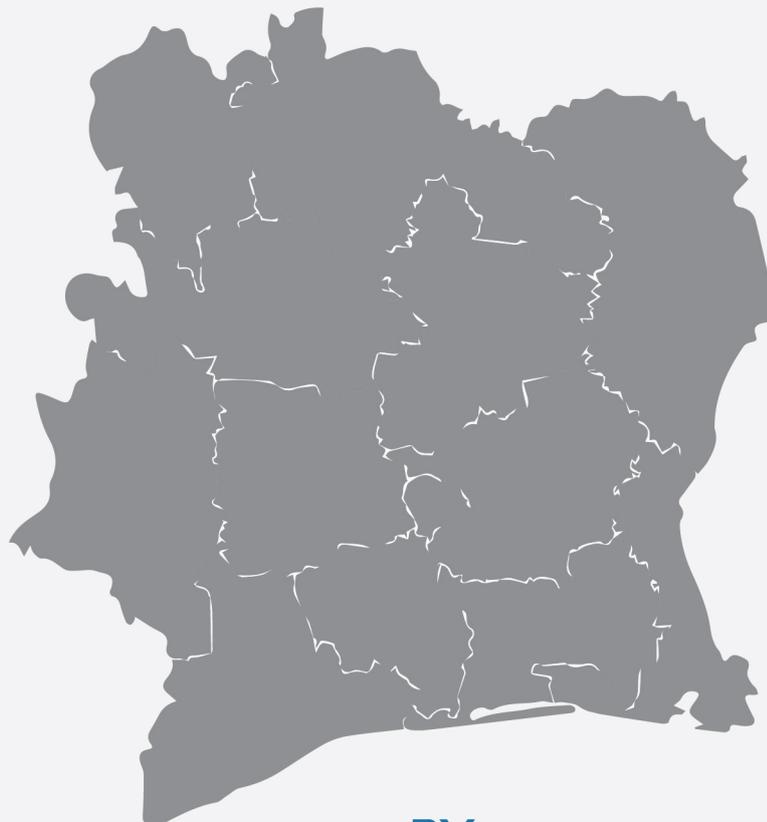




# CAPACITY ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA IN COTE D'IVOIRE

Baseline Study



BY  
MEDIA FOUNDATION FOR WEST AFRICA  
2019

WITH FUNDING SUPPORT FROM:



# Capacity Assessment of Media in Cote d'Ivoire

By

*Media Foundation for West Africa*

with funding support from:



## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary .....  | ii |
| Broad Context of the Media landscape in Cote d'Ivoire .....    | 1  |
| Research Methodology.....                                      | 3  |
| State of the Media in Cote d'Ivoire.....                       | 4  |
| Media Ownership Patterns in Cote d'Ivoire.....                 | 4  |
| <i>(i) State-owned Media.....</i>                              | 4  |
| <i>(ii) Decentralised Territorial Collectivity Media .....</i> | 4  |
| <i>(iii) Community, Associations and Religious Media .....</i> | 4  |
| <i>(iv) Private Media (commercial &amp; political) .....</i>   | 5  |
| <i>(v) Media Owned by Journalism Schools .....</i>             | 5  |
| Strengths and Weaknesses of the Media in Cote d'Ivoire .....   | 6  |
| Strengths .....  | 6  |
| Weaknesses .....   | 7  |
| Conclusion .....   | 9  |
| General Recommendations .....                                  | 11 |
| Appendix : List of interviewed individuals.....                | 11 |

## Executive Summary

The media landscape in Cote d'Ivoire is under transformation. The press and the audio-visual communication sector have opened up, with the launch, in January 2019, of the pilot phase of the Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) marking the liberalization of the Television sector. Also, owing to the law reforms on audio-visual communication and the press, (Loi No 2017-687 and 2017-688), voted in 2017, there is more press freedom. Jail sentences for journalists who have committed press offences have been cancelled, and there are now many easy steps to form a media organisation.

Furthermore, for the first time, online media outlets have been included in the legal frameworks of the media in Cote d'Ivoire. Notwithstanding the progress recorded, in practice, media houses and journalists in Cote d'Ivoire still face many challenges. Some examples are attempts by authorities to monitor journalistic work, intimidations and assaults etc.

Moreover, the digital breakthrough and the improvement of Information Technology tools are threatening the so-called "traditional press". While some organisations have been able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technological advancements, others are still lagging behind. For media organisations to be at the service of democracy and good governance in Cote d'Ivoire, there is a need to create an enabling environment by improving press freedom and support media organisations in their transition towards digitalisation.

## Broad Context of the Media landscape in Cote d'Ivoire

Since Cote d'Ivoire gained independence in 1960, the country's media sector has experienced several changes. The existing printing press, the first state-owned media organisation "*Radiodiffusion Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI)*" (*Ivorian Radio and Television Broadcasting*) was created in 1962. The media organisation included the first state-owned television "*RTI 1*" and Radio station "*Radio Côte d'Ivoire*". Another state-owned television "*RT2*", radio station "*Fréquence 2*" and the radio and television stations making up "*RTI Bouake*" were later created. In 1964, a state-owned newspaper "*Fraternité Matin*" was created. The aforementioned two state-owned media organisations constituted the main sources of information in the country until the advent of the multiparty system in 1990. Then the country witnessed a multiplication of media outlets, particularly print outlets. The period was known as the "*Spring of the press*". In fact, that period marked the creation of several opposition political parties with various opinions and ideologies. The majority of the newly created newspapers, that supported the propagandas of the new political ideologies, ended up disappearing. The successive governments of Côte d'Ivoire since the death of the first president in 1993 have had various forms of relationships with the media. According to Acafou (2015) "*over the 200 newspapers that were created between 1990 and 2000, only 23 were still publishing in 2001; i.e. 177 have disappeared.*"

In 1998 also, a decree authorized the creation of the first community radios and in 1998, they started to fully broadcast. In 2004, two joint laws on the legal framework of the press and audio-visual communication were enacted. The two joint laws replaced the 1991 law on the Press, and established a new context for more press freedom in Cote d'Ivoire. The 2004 law was latter replaced by Act n°2017-867 voted on December 27, 2017. The new law cancelled jail terms for journalists that commit press freedom related offences. It also created easy steps for the establishment of media outlets in the country. In fact, it is credited as a notable improvement to freedom of expression in Cote d'Ivoire.

However, the political rivalries that have marked the recent history of Cote d'Ivoire have also affected the Media. In fact, while community and commercial radios in general have survived various political influence, the print sector and state-owned media outlets in a certain proportion have suffered the most from these political rivalries. This situation led to a bipolarization of the media landscape at the beginning of the 2000s. There is on one side the "*journaux verts*" (*green newspapers*), affiliated to the Democratic party of Cote d'Ivoire "PDCI" and the Rally of Republicans "RDR" of the current

president Alassane Ouattara, and on the other side the “*journaux bleus*” (blue newspapers) said to be close to the former president Laurent Gbagbo. With this fierce battle to control the news, the country witnessed several breaches of the journalism code of ethics. Between 1995 and 2000, the National Observatory of the Journalism Code of Ethics (OLPED) reported about 2025 cases of violation of the journalism code of ethics. Many journalists were jailed, threatened and assaulted during the period. In 1999, a media house owner was killed<sup>1</sup>. The 2004 law on press freedom created the first regulatory body of the audio-visual communication in the country. It became known as the High Authority of AudioVisual Communication “*Haute Autorité de la Communication Audio-visuelle –HACA*” and was the counterpart of the National Council of the Press “*Conseil National de la Presse (CNP)*”, that became the National Press Authority (ANP) under the 2017 law, created in 1991.

The liberalization of the audio-visual landscape has just started. The advent of the Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) that is supposed to lead to the liberalisation of the audio-visual (especially television) sector is still at the pilot phase since January 2019. This liberalisation will surely come with a certain level of competition in the television sector that has long been dominated by the two state-owned television stations (*RTI 1 & RT2*) with the creation of five (5) new privately-owned television stations in the country. However, it should be underlined that Ivorians have had access to many other foreign TV channels.

Furthermore, in 2010, owing to the internet breakthrough, the improvement of networks and the relatively affordable cost of data bundles, the country witnessed a multiplication of news sites and other online media (radio and televisions). Although these online media are facing some challenges, they are considered, as serious competitors to the traditional media whose growth has since slowed.

Along the dynamic media landscape, several media unions have also been formed. These unions are working to advance press freedom, defend media practitioners and fight for the improvement of the standard of living and working conditions of journalists. Observatoire de la liberté de la presse (OLPED) is one such organization leading this advocacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Abdoulaye Bakayoko as he was known was the owner of a newspaper « Le Libéral », said to be close to the Rally of Republicans (RDR) the party of the current president Alassane Ouattara, who was then in the opposition.

## Research Methodology

This research was carried out in Cote d’Ivoire from February 11, to March 4, 2019. Most of the data collection was carried out in Abidjan and its suburbs where about 95% of newspapers, 100% of commercial radio, and about 10% of the country’s community radio are found. However, other community radio in the inner country were also included in the study. The research consisted of reviews of literature on related reports and laws on communication in the country. Interviews were conducted with various journalists, editors and managers from the print, audio-visual and online media. Other key actors included the Ministry of Communication, regulatory bodies, lecturers and students from the journalism and communication schools. There are other key media outlets like Radio Jam and Nostagie who were not available at the time of the study. In all, a total of thirty (30) individuals were interviewed<sup>2</sup>. The table below shows the various media houses, bodies and institutions that were interviewed as part of the study.

| Categories  | Media House/bodies  |
|---|---|
| Printing press  | L’éléphant déchaîné, Fraternité Matin   |
| Online Media  | Lepointsur.com, laréférence.net   |
| Group RTI ( <i>Radiodiffusion télévision ivoirienne</i> ) | RT1, RT2, Radio Côte d’Ivoire, Radio Fréquence 2, RTI Infos   |
| Radio   | Radio Cocody, Radio Yopougon, Radio Al-bayane, Radio Espoir, Radio Zanzan, Radio Alépé, Radio Azaguié, Radio bien-être, Radio Crystal-Aboisso,  |
| Professional Bodies                                       | “National Union of Cote d’Ivoire Journalists” (Union Nationale des journalistes de Côte d’Ivoire (UNJCI)), “Union of Community Radios of Cote d’Ivoire” (Union des radios de proximité de Côte d’Ivoire (URPCI)),<br>“Workers Union of private press in Cote d’Ivoire” (Syndicat National des professionnels de la presse privée de Côte d’Ivoire (SYNAPPCI))<br>“Observatory of Press Freedom” (Observatoire de la liberté de la presse (OLPED)) |
| Media Regulatory bodies                                   | “National Authority of Press” (Autorité Nationale de la Presse (ANP ex-CNP))  |
| Ministry of Communication                                 | Technical adviser to the Minister of Communication of Cote d’Ivoire   |
| Schools of Journalism                                     | Lecturers and Students  |

**Table 1:** *Media outlets and other institutions/organizations included in the study*

<sup>2</sup> Refer to attached list of interviews for names and positions of interviewees.

# State of the Media in Cote d'Ivoire

This part of the report focuses on the ownership patterns, strengths and weaknesses on the media in Cote d'Ivoire.

## A. Media Ownership Patterns in Cote d'Ivoire

Multiple stakeholders are involved in the media landscape in Cote d'Ivoire. In this study, an attempted has been made to categorise the ownership into five broad areas.

### *(i) State-owned Media*

In Cote d'Ivoire, there are two state owned media organisations. The “*Radiodiffusion Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI)*” that offers audio visual communication services with three television channels (*RT1, RT2, and RTI Bouaké*), three radio stations (*Radio Côte d'Ivoire, Fréquence 2 et Radio Bouaké*), a website and a mobile application (*RTI Mobile*).

The second state-owned media organisation is the “*Société Nouvelle de Presse et d'Édition de Côte d'Ivoire (SNEPCI)*” focused on the printing press with its main newspaper (*Fraternité Matin*), magazines (*Femmes d'Afrique, l'Émergence Économique*), its online news website (*Fratmat.info*) and two mobile phone applications (*Frat mat Mobile and Frat Mat Express*). Also, the state owns a press agency the “*Agence Ivoirienne de Presse (AIP)*”.

### *(ii) Decentralised Territorial Collectivity Media*

The Ivorian State chose decentralization as the model of governance of the territory. This led to the creation of municipalities (197), regional councils (31), and functional autonomous districts (2). These territorial collectivities are mandated to implement the local development policy of the state, hence they have the possibility to own a community radio to support this mission. Therefore, there are more than a hundred of territorial collectivity radio stations all over the country. Some territorial collectivities own newspapers, which generally publish on monthly basis. However, this is very underdeveloped and were not covered in the study.

### *(iii) Community, Associations and Religious Media*

The first community radios in Cote d'Ivoire were created in 1998. The mandate of community radios

is to support local development. Community radios are normally supposed to be owned by associations or non-for-profit groups. However, for some years now, many community radios are owned by individuals and turn up functioning more or less like private commercial radios. Regarding religious radios, they are owned by major religious groups in Cote d'Ivoire especially the Christian and Muslim communities.

#### ***(iv) Private Media (commercial & political)***

Regarding the private media, there is a need for a distinction in order to better understand and grasp what is hidden behind the term, "*Private Media*":

##### ➤ *Private commercial Radio*

There are about 5 and they function as corporate entities. They are generally owned by private companies or entrepreneurs and unlike community radios, commercial radios are not subjected to any limit for adverts and so, are supposed to pay taxes (VAT).

##### ➤ *Private Newspapers*

The Private Newspaper function as an independent newspaper. This newspaper is not affiliated to any political party and is said to be the most credible newspaper in the country.

##### ➤ *Newspapers owned by or affiliated to political parties*

In Cote d'Ivoire, while community radios and commercial radios are banned from partisan politics and given that the existing television channels are state-owned, there is no ownership restriction on the printing press. And so, the majority of newspapers published in the country are owned by political parties or influential individuals close to political parties.

#### ***(v) Media owned by Journalism Schools***

Many private universities and journalism schools own media outlets whose first mandate is to serve as tools for the practical training of students. This has led to the creation of radios known as "*radios écoles*" and several online media owned by schools.

## **B. Strengths and weaknesses of Media houses in Cote d'Ivoire**

This section provides an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the media in Côte d'Ivoire.

### **Strengths**

Since the advent of the multiparty system in 1990, the media sector in Côte d'Ivoire has made some notable progress.

#### ***Improvement of the legal framework***

The revised laws on Press Freedom and Audio-visual communication are considered by media actors as a step in the right direction. These revisions in the laws have promoted more critical reporting by journalists in the country. There are no more self-censorships for fear of being jailed.

*“The law is favorable to Freedom of expression. No journalist can be arrested anymore as part of their work.”*  
Moussa Touré, Head of the National Association of Journalists of Côte d'Ivoire (UNJCI).

#### ***Well-trained journalists***

Due to the existence of several state and private journalism and communication schools offering in their respective capacities quality training, there has been improvement in the quality of many media outputs.

*“In Côte d'Ivoire, there are great media professionals. The country remains a key provider of professional journalists.”*  
Soum Oulaï, Manager of Studio Mosaik.

#### ***Relative diversity and plurality***

The relatively diverse media means greater access to information. As it stands now, there are various media outlets across the country. Almost each town across the country has a community-based or municipal radio station providing programs and information in local languages. Further, the 2017 law has also made it possible for the creation of more media outlets in the country. Many radio stations have national coverage airing and broadcasting news to all groups of society.

#### ***Duly registered media outlets***

Apart from the community-based radio and online sectors where some are yet to be registered, most of the outlets (especially print media and TV) in the country are duly registered and function as corporate entities with clear management structures. These entities are identified and function according to the laws governing the sector in the country. This has greatly curbed unprofessionalism

in the media space.

### ***Community radio championing peace and social cohesion***

In the wake of the crises the country has gone through, community radio contributed to the promotion of social cohesion, peace and reconciliation. These actions were mostly supported by international NGOs, the former United Nations peace-keeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and other national institutions and NGOs. Community radio offers the advantage of providing programs and information in local languages understandable by the local people. According to the National Statistical Institute, about 43.8% of the Ivorian population is still without formal education.

### ***Effort to adapt to the technological advancement***

Finally, it is worth mentioning that a few “traditional media” outlets are trying, though slowly, to adapt to the evolution of the technology by creating online platforms, building mobile Apps and training their workers in web journalism and the use of social media to reach more audience. As an example, “*l'Eléphant déchainé*” cited as one of the most credible newspapers in the country reported that they have in place a project to conduct their digital transition. Likewise many media including state-owned media have their own online platforms and mobile applications as an effort to adapt.

## **Weaknesses**

### ***Political affiliation to the detriment of the journalism code of ethics***

If the ownership pattern of the media sector in Côte d'Ivoire offers a form of diversity and plurality to the media sector in the country, the political affiliation of most of the print media and state-owned media represent a weakness to the sector. As a matter of fact, according to the regulatory body of the press (ANP), most of the breaches of the journalism code of ethics are made by politically-affiliated newspapers. But the breaches do not necessarily depict ignorance of the rules and regulations of the sector. Rather, the breaches occur as those media defend their political parties, ideologies and leaders to the detriment of the regulatory rules of the sector.

*“There are solid grounds to complain about what the media actors serve to citizens.”* Agnès Kraïdy, *Journalist, Advisor to the Minister of Media and Communication of Côte d'Ivoire.*

*“As far as the majority of newspapers represent political parties, we are afraid. The media war has started and the situation goes deteriorating everyday.”* Soum Oulaï, *Manager of Studio Mosaik.*

### ***Perception that state-owned media are not fair***

Citizens, especially people who identify themselves close to opposition parties and some prominent media figures<sup>3</sup> criticise state-owned media that they are not fair and balanced in the information they provide to the population. This might account for the fall in audience. A 2017 ranking<sup>4</sup> of radio stations in Côte d'Ivoire placed the national state-owned radio station, "Radio Côte d'Ivoire" at the 7<sup>th</sup> place in terms of audience despite its coverage of the whole territory. An anonymous internet user recently posted on Facebook the following humorous comment depicting the level of lack of confidence in the state-owned media.

*«After every newsroom at RTI, journalists are obliged to pray in order to ask for forgiveness from God for their lies».*

### ***A "disaster-stricken" print sector***

Owing to a decrease in the sale of newspapers, the print media sector is facing a crisis according to the interviewees. As a matter of fact, even the state-owned print media *Fraternité Matin* laid off 155 of their staffs in 2018 owing to financial difficulties and the evolution of technology with several of the (old) processes being computerized and digitalized.

*"Currently, we consider the print media sector as going through a disaster", Konaté DOH, Vice-director in charge of media development at the National Press Authority (ANP).*

Mr. Konaté DOH reported that about 80% of newspapers printed in the country are not sold. As a matter of fact, many newspapers, especially non-affiliated ones, have closed recently for lacking the means to pay their employees. As a result, qualified journalists tend to leave the press sector to work in other sectors whereas many of them have joined the communication teams of political parties and leaders.

### ***A fragile and unregulated online sector***

Although there is a burgeoning online media sector (mostly news sites), this sector is yet to be fully structured and regulated. According to interviewees, the online sector remains fragile and many news sites have been found to report fake news, copying and pasting articles without proper reference to the authors. Also, the National Press Authority (ANP) report that news sites have difficulties monitoring comments by Internet-Users on their platforms. Comments relating to political issues have

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<sup>3</sup> Trainers in journalism schools

<sup>4</sup> Team, Classement des Chaînes de Télévisions et de Radios les plus suivies en Côte d'Ivoire, published on February 20, 2017 <https://buzzyafrica.com/articles/classement-des-chaines-de-televisions-et-de-radios-les-plus-suivies-en-cote-divoire>

been found to be conflict-insensitive and disrespectful to the values of tolerance and acceptance of others. Interviewees reported that many news sites were created without business plan and do not have a mastery of the online revenue model. Therefore, they are unable to generate sufficient income to meet operating costs and growth. Finally, although the online sector is covered and supposed to be regulated by the 2017 law, the sector remains unregulated and even the National Press Authority is not fully equipped to monitor this sector.

### ***Poor management and difficult working conditions in community radio stations***

As to the radio sector, apart from commercial radio stations, the majority of community radio stations are poorly managed, lack adequate financial and managerial procedures. This situation is partly related to the regulations which prevent radio stations to generate more than 20% of their revenues through advertisement.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the precariousness in the sector is also due to the lack of capacities of community radio stations to raise fund from national or international donors<sup>6</sup>. As a consequence, they cannot keep qualified staffs and are caught in a form of vicious circle of precariousness.

*“Working conditions should be improved so that our employees can be more effective”* Severin Kouadio, *Manager of Radio Crystal, Aboussou.*

## **Conclusion**

At the end of this study relating to the capacity assessment and sustainability prospects of the media in Cote d’Ivoire, it is clear that there is some level of press freedom in the country. One could also speak of a pluralistic media based on the level of diversity of in ownership. It is also clear that owing to the liberalisation of the audio-visual communication sector and the transition towards digitalization, the media in Cote d’Ivoire has opened up. However, there are still obstacles to a more free, sustained and professional media sector in Cote d’Ivoire considering the attempts to shut down some outlets, assaults on journalists, political injunctions, and partisan threats from political parties. In addition to these challenges, there are the internet breakthrough and the improvement of digital tools which come as a threat to many traditional media outlets, especially the print sector. The future of the media in Cote d’Ivoire lays in the transition towards digitalisation.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Article 83, Section 2 of the 2004 law on the audiovisual communication, *Loi N°2004-644 du 14 décembre 2004 portant régime juridique de la communication audiovisuelle*

<sup>6</sup> Community radios are supposed to function as non-for-profit entities.

## General Recommendations

Based on the investigations, observations, and interviews, we recommend the following:

- Assist the digital transition of print outlets. The assistance could be in the form of support for the creation of active websites, training in web journalism, mastery of the revenue model of online media, online adverts, selling of ads on internet, Google and other search engines referencing, and better communication on social media.
- Capacity building for journalists in investigative journalism, fact-checking, conflict-sensitive journalism, discourse analysis, in order to equip them with tools to play their role and strengthen democracy and good governance in Cote d'Ivoire.
- Create spaces and exchange opportunities between Ivorian journalists and journalists to share good practices, exchange experiences and collaborate on investigations and other issues as part of their works.
- Assist press unions and other professional associations fighting for the improvement of the living and working conditions of journalists, i.e. the implementation of the salary schemes agreement signed as part of the collective agreement in the media sector.
- Assist community radio stations with trainings in financial management, advertising, capacity building in conflict-sensitive journalism, organizing debates and programs on sensitive topics such as the elections.

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