



# THE MEDIA AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN BURKINA FASO

*Media & Governance Series*

*June 2019*



with funding support from:



# 1 - Introduction

According to the 2018 Mo Ibrahim Index of governance in Africa<sup>1</sup>, Burkina Faso is among the countries in which good governance is improving. The country has improved its ranking thanks to the progress recorded in participatory governance and the respect for human rights. Since the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, a new model of governance was instituted. This new model prioritized the rule of law, an independent judiciary, accountability in the implementation of public policies, participatory governance, and freedom of expression and of the press.

Across the world, the role of the media (legacy; social) is considered crucial for sustainable development, democracy and popular participation. Indeed, a functioning democracy thrives on informed and active citizens. This is because the media's role in participatory governance, transcends informing, educating and entertaining to include an active role in shaping understanding, highlighting key issues for the attention of society and ensuring political mobilisation.

In Burkina Faso, the development of media plurality and press freedom is interlinked with the advent of a democratic system which provided a legal framework that enabled the media to operate in a safe and ethical environment allowing for a deepened participatory governance and a consolidated democracy. Before 1991, access to information was a privilege owned solely by the state and the creation of audio-visual organisations by private individuals was forbidden. In 1993 however, the Information Code (1993) set the ground rules for freedom of expression and of the press and allowed the media to deepen its role in promoting participatory governance.

Since the return of democracy in Burkina Faso in the 1990s', both the media and citizens have together denounced social injustice and held demonstrations against corruption, financial embezzlement, assassinations of dissidents and other motives. Media organisations positioned

themselves to play three major roles in promoting participatory governance:

1. **Providing platforms for public discourse** - giving the opportunity to all citizens and stakeholders in the country to express themselves;
2. **Gathering / Mobilizing citizens for collective actions** - contributing to citizens' engagements and participatory governance;
3. **Watchdog** - observing and monitoring the various state powers (executive, judiciary and legislative) and contributing to ensuring transparency and accountability of public officials.

Drawing on available data and literature, this policy brief assesses the contribution of the media in promoting participatory governance in Burkina Faso. The paper begins with an introduction on the media landscape in Burkina Faso and explains how they have today become key platforms for citizen-authorities' engagements - where citizens can express their views and also receive information on the implementation and the operationalization of public policies. It also highlights key challenges hindering the media from effectively contributing to participatory, transparent and accountability governance in Burkina Faso and finally makes some recommendations improving the situation.

<sup>1</sup> The Ibrahim Index of African governance is a barometer used to assess the state of good governance in which country of the continent, measure progress recorded and

contribute to development of targeted and efficient policies. On the Index Burkina Faso was ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in 2015, 21<sup>st</sup> in 2017, and 16<sup>th</sup> in 2018.

## 2- The Media Landscape in Burkina Faso



### 2.1. Description of the Media Landscape

The media in Burkina Faso currently consists of private and state owned newspapers, radio, television and online. According to the latest report (2015) from the country's official media regulatory agency, the High Council for Communication (Conseil Supérieur de la communication - CSC), the media landscape in Burkina Faso was made up of about 87 newspapers (11 dailies, 11 weeklies, 17 bi-monthly, 20 monthlies and 1 bi-quarter and 27 in local languages), 25 online media, 163 radio stations and 33 television channels. Although many media organisations are still being formed, especially online news media, there is no recent statistics.

As in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, radio is still the preferred choice of media. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), about 67% of Burkinabés have a mobile

phone subscription. People use their phones to access information but also to interact with radio stations. Print media, television, and especially online media are increasingly playing an important role as well. According to Internet World Stats, a global digital and population data website, as at the end of March, 2019, 3.7 million Burkinabés, about 18.2 percent of the population had access to the internet with 840,000 Facebook users. [lefaso.net](http://lefaso.net) is cited as the most reliable and popular online news source. The outlet has about 40,000 - 45,000 visitors daily.

### 2.2. Legal and Policy Frameworks on the Operation of the Media

In Burkina Faso, freedom of expression and of the press, as well as access to information are all fundamental rights guaranteed by article 8 of the 1991 Constitution. From the dawn of Democracy until 2015, the major legal framework regulating freedom of expression and the press was the Information Code voted in 1993 which stipulates the right to create media organisations, and the Right to Information (RTI).

The Code also grants every professional journalists free access to sources of information with exceptions to information pertaining to the internal or external security of the state, military secrets, strategic economic interests, ongoing investigations or legal proceedings and “anything that threatens the dignity and privacy of Burkinabés”.

The media in Burkina Faso enjoyed a number of improvements to the legal and political environments in 2015, after the mass protests in 2014 which brought an end to former president Blaise Compaoré’s 27 years rule. In September 2015, the National Transition Council (CNT) adopted a new legislation abolishing prison sentences for libel and other press offenses, though the law also increased potential fines.

Following the public protests on December 30 and 31, 2014, the National Transition Council (CNT) passed four major laws on freedom of expression and of the press based on the constitution:

- a) *Law 051-2015/CNT governing the right to access public information and administrative documents,*
- b) *Law 057-2015/CNT guiding the functioning of the printing press,*
- c) *Law 058-2015/CNT regulating online media,*
- d) *Law 059-2015/CNT on the legal framework of radio stations and televisions.*

The above listed laws and instruments aside from improving the legal context in which the media operates, also has the potential to contribute to improving accountability and transparency in the management of public resources. In December 2016, the country became a member of the Open Government Partnership, a multi-party initiative that seeks to promote the principle of good governance.

The national legal frameworks and policies on freedom of expression and of the press, as well as access to information are complemented by

the International Agreement on Civic Rights and Policies from the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1966; The African Union Charter on Human and People’s Rights of June 21, 1981; the ECOWAS Protocol on democracy and good governance of December 21<sup>st</sup> 2001, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Good Governance issued on the January 30, 2007. Others are the Guidelines N°01/2009/UEMOA outlined by WAEMU on transparency in the management of public finances within the monetary space and the Human Right Declaration of August 1789 and the Code of good practices and transparency in public finances from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) voted on February 2001.

## 2.3. Media Regulatory Bodies

The right and freedom of expression and of the press are implemented and regulated by three main stakeholders.

### 2.3.1 The Ministry of Communication

The Ministry currently works toward strengthening media coverage throughout the country and the implementation of a legislative and regulatory framework that could guarantee the liberalization and the democratization of the media sector, the professional training of media practitioners, and ensuring the coordination of national communication. The Ministry is today the launching ground of governmental policies on freedom of expression. In fact, reforms undertaken on the legislative and the regulatory framework regarding the press cannot be implemented without its approval.

The Ministry is also responsible of the management of governmental media outlets (Burkinabe Radio and Television (RTB) and edition Sidiwaya) through the Minister of Communication. The State agency is also in charge of contributing to capacity building of media professionals through the General Directorate of the Media (DGM). Aside from these roles, the body also organises yearly in collaboration with the African Universities of Communication in Ouagadougou (UACO) a high-level conference during which issues of freedom of expression and of the press are discussed. During the Conference they also give the Gallians Award to celebrate outstanding medias professionals.

### **2.3.2. The High Council of Communication (CSC)**

The Council for Communication (CSC) is the official media regulatory agency and nominally independent. The Ministry's level of influence regarding freedom of expression and of the press has considerably been reduced since the creation of the High Council of Communication in 1995. It is a semi-autonomous body.

The CSC roles were redefined in the organic law 015-2013/NA: to ensure the application of the laws and regulation, promote freedom of expression and the right to information, guarantee the right to access to sources of information. It also ensures equitable citizen's access to media, especially during electoral periods. It may also summon journalists and issue warning for ethic violations.

For years, the CSC has been criticized for inconsistent and mismanaged licensing procedures. The body has the power to summon journalists to hearings about their work and even suspend or ban outlets that violate ethical standards or the law. The CSC actively monitors the media sector, including online outlets, to ensure compliance with its dictates.

In May 2015, it issued a three-month ban on live radio and television broadcasts of a political nature, purportedly to protect "social cohesion" in the run-up to presidential election. The ban was withdrawn later that month after a number of television and radio programs ignored the order.

### **2.3.3. Media Practitioner Organisations**

There are numerous associations and organisations for media workers in Burkina Faso. Perhaps the main focal point for all journalists is the **Centre National de la Presse Norbert Zongo** (CNP-NZ). The Centre's steering committee feel that all activities related to the media should go through the Centre.

Some of the main organisations include:

- Syndicat Autonome des Travailleurs de l'Information et de la Culture (SYNATIC): The collective body for media workers. Under administrative tutelage of the Minister of Communication and Culture.

- Association des Journalistes du Burkina (AJB): Created in 1988, AJB is a professional organisation for journalists in Burkina. The AJB just held a congress following the mission and a new president was elected to replace outgoing president Jean-Claude Meda.
- Association des Professionnels Africaines de la Communication (APAC): a pan-African organisation focusing on women in media. Their goal is to improve the role of women working in the media sector as well as improve the image of women in media. The head is very dynamic but the organisation is not particularly active though they are in the midst of formulating their three-year action plan.
- Société des Editeurs de Presse (SEP): Association for newspaper editors. Together with AJB and SYNATIC they manage CNP-NZ

## **3 - The Media and Participatory Governance in Burkina Faso**

Even though Burkina Faso has improved its international ratings in popular participation, there are still a few challenges. For instance, there is the limited knowledge and participation of key groups such as youth, women, and Persons with Disability in public discourse and governance processes.

There is no official censorship in Burkina Faso, and media outlets conduct investigative journalism that can be critical of the government. Programming in local languages that address issues of gender equality, reproductive health, and domestic violence has contributed to diversity of content. Foreign radio stations are able to broadcast freely. Over the years and especially since the implementation of a democratic system in 1991, media have played very meaningful roles in sustaining and advancing popular participation. This was particularly the case during the 2014 political crisis that led to President Blaise Compaore's resignation. According to Cheriff Sy, president of the society of private press Editors (SEP), « the media were the largest actors in a positive sense.

People had forgotten what an important role they play ». Since 2014, the media has continued to promote participatory governance by encouraging citizens to take part in public debate.



### 3.1 The Trends of Media's role in Participatory Governance

#### 3.1.1 Interactivity between Media and Citizens

Citizen's participation in democratic governance is growing in Burkina Faso. Since 1990 there have been several media platforms and programmes encouraging citizens' voices on national issues and allowing them to express their views on public administration as well as the implementation of policies.

After the 2014 protest, citizens' interest in issues around security, politics, social demands, education, health, sport, environment and culture was boosted and the need for interactive news programmes has grown. Citizens contribute to the democratic discourse through phone calls, text messages via traditional telecommunication networks or social media (whatsApp, Facebook, Twitter).

Some of significant programmes on the broadcast media are:

- **Ça nous concerne (it is about us):** This programme is organized from 09am – 10 am on Oméga FM from Monday to Friday and usually focuses on specific topics of the news feed on which listeners give their opinions. On Thursdays, the topics can vary, that is listeners can call in and express themselves on any topic;

- **Dialogue avec le gouvernement (Dialogue with the government):** This is a programme that runs on the National Television Channel. It was instituted by the Civil Society Convention for Election Observation (CODEL) and Diakonia, an NGO in partnership with "Presimetre" a social accountability IT platform. It allows citizens to call on the President and government officials. The president and ministers get invited on to the programme;

- **Controverse (Controversy):** This is also a programme that runs on the national television of Burkina Faso (RTB) and allows citizens to directly communicate with various authorities from diverse socio-professional backgrounds on current issue in the country.

The Press and online news sites also contribute to participatory governance through editorials and opinion pieces. People use the platform to denounce and condemn government's malpractices and also contribute to governance discourse. Furthermore, almost all written media in Burkina Faso have an open attitude toward citizens' demand to express themselves in their column provided that it respects journalistic standards. For instance, the bi-monthly newspaper L'Évènement gives such opportunities to citizens under its rubric « Courrier des Lecteurs » (Reader's mail). In the same way, the online daily news sites Lefaso.net<sup>1</sup>, Burkina24<sup>2</sup> and WakatSéra<sup>2</sup> have an "opinion" section.

### 3.2 Social Media Impact on the Civic Space

Aside from traditional media, social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, are vibrant public spaces where debates on democracy and good governance take place. Today, they offer an opportunity for citizens to:

- a) **Criticize public policies:** For example, in March 2019, citizens revealed via Facebook the government's plans to destroy the Kua forest in Bobo-Dioulasso for the construction of a hospital financed by the Chinese government. This led to a serious wave of criticism of the government's actions and citizens' protests which gave birth to the Movement for the Protection of the Kua

Forest (MPFK). The movement coordinated by the Member of Parliament Moussa Zerbo resulted in delaying the government plans in razing down the forest.

- b) **Denounce poor management of public finances:** Also in May 2019, citizens denounced through social media motivation bonus given to officials at the Ministry of Public Finances. Following the controversy, the government corrected the texts and commissioned an investigation into the manipulation of the law in its implementation.
- c) **Denounce corruption:** In December 2017, citizens shared through social media two videos featuring law enforcement officers extorting money from travellers. These videos triggered a set of reactions and pressured the National Chief Commander of the Army together with Colonel Marie Omer Tapsoba to announce that the officer had been identified, dismissed and sanctioned.

As a matter of fact, the president as well as his office regularly report to citizens both in the country and in the diaspora through social media (Facebook, Twitter). This practice has also been adopted by various ministers as MPs and local level officials (Mayors and governors) prefer meeting with the citizens at the electorate.

### 3.3 Significant Impacts from Citizen's Voices and Participation Through the Media

Citizens' mobilization and participation in public debate through traditional and digital media has had significant impacts on Burkinabé society.

- a) Improvement of the quality of services following a series of criticism of clients through the media: The National Company of Electricity (SONABEL), the National Body in charge of Water and Sanitation (ONAE) and the body in charge of the distribution of Gas (SODIGAZ) have all improved the quality of their services following a series of criticism and recommendations expressed on interactive media platforms allowing citizens to express themselves.

- b) Improvements in the infrastructure works: Thanks to citizen's participation in the governance process through the media, public infrastructure works that used to be carried out without consideration for the rights of riverside communities have recorded the implementation of a number of solution (indemnification for the construction of the international airport at Donsin and the construction of a dam in Sanandeni). Today, acquiring administrative documents issued by the state in remote areas has been eased and the plans to restart the public transport system is currently underway in the country.

## 4 - Challenges to Media and Participatory Governance

Media plays an indispensable role in participatory governance in Burkina Faso. However, there are a number of challenges to the media's actions in improving citizen's participation in the governing processes which might in the worst case threaten both the existence of many media outlets and freedom of expression.



### 4.1. Troubling Security context

Since the 2014 public protest that led to the overthrow of former president Blaise Compaoré, Burkina Faso is considered a country in which people are free to express their views. However, the recent terrorist attacks and inter-community conflicts have had an impact on citizens' security, especially, journalists.

According to the 2018 state of freedom of expression in Burkina Faso, the country recorded in 2018 about 80 terrorist attacks which claimed about 133 lives. The report further underlines that in total the country recorded about 230 death in terrorist attacks and about 115 000 people were forced to flee their homes. Due to this situation, journalists' mobility has greatly been affected. Hence, it is very difficult to ensure a safe media coverage of those regions.

#### **4.2. Legal Actions and Law Suits Intending to Intimidate and Mute Critical Media Outlets**

Several legal actions have been taken to intimidate or even close down some media outlets. For example, the bi-monthly newspaper Mutation has been sentenced to pay a fine of CFA Francs 17.5 million (USD 30, 000) fine following a defamation trial. The state has taken control of the bank accounts of the newspaper. This further weakens journalists and media outlets and makes them less critical of corruptible deeds. On top of this difficult situation are the heavy. If sentenced, media house owners are usually urged to close down their outlets. This precarious situation does not allow media organisations to adequately produce quality and independent reports. On the contrary, it encourages partisanship, biased media contents, and corruption in the media sector.

#### **4.3. Sustainability - Salaries and Remunerations**

The economic situation of most media in Burkina Faso is dire. Although a collective agreement agreed upon by media professionals defining the minimum salary for media professionals has been adopted since 2009, it has still not been implemented. Therefore, journalists still get poor salaries. Some of the media professionals even work without a contract to support themselves

and the cost of production (communication, fuel, transportation). Media outlets in Burkina Faso usually charge a fee for reporting and for advertising. This is one of the few resource generating strategies. The financial subsidy of CFA Francs 400 million provided by the state every year for private media organisations is far from being sufficient. According to the General Secretary of AJB, Boukari Ouoba, "*most journalists are not well paid. The adoption of a collective agreement (non-adapted to the current socio-economic realities) did not improve the salary of journalists. Some of them work without contract or adequate salaries*". The problem with this situation is that it does not allow media organisations to adequately produce quality and independent reports. By extension citizens will also not have access to quality and precise information that can impact their daily lives.

#### **4.4. Non-Implementation of the Law on Access to Public Information and Administrative Documents**

The law n°051-2015/CNT on access to public information and administrative documents makes provision in article 52 for the setting up of the National Authority on Access to Public Information (ANAIP). However, the body has not yet been created and transparency in public information is still not a reality. Therefore, citizens and journalists still have limited access to sources of public information. This in turn affects active citizens' participation in public discussion and governance.

#### **4.5. Media Crackdown Due to Disregard for the Journalism Code of Ethics on Interactive Programmes**

Several times, media professionals have violated the journalism code of ethics during their interactive programmes by defaming private individuals, or disrupting the public order. Indeed, show hosts sometimes are not able to control the heated discourse on their programmes when citizens are given the opportunity to intervene.

Two radio shows, "Sondage démocratique" and "Ça va, Ça ne va pas" broadcast by Horizons FM were suspended in March 1997 by the CSC for "serious harm to people's rights, honour and dignity as well as public order". In 2008, the regulatory body also suspended the afternoon's local language news programme following the accusation that it violated a law. On May 7, 2015 the State suspended all interactive radio and television programmes in the country for three months due to "numerous offenses" recorded. Considering that the suspension violated the organic law 015-2013/AN, media organisations decided to resume their programmes on May 28, 2015.

#### **4.6. Limited knowledge of citizens on governance issues and their civic right to participate in governance:**

There is no democracy without citizens' participation in public discourse. This requires that citizens are aware of public policies as well as the stakes of their participation in the public discourse. Meanwhile, in Burkina Faso, many express their views on issues of governance through the media without having a good understanding of participatory governance and the impact of their contributions on the governance process. There is also a concentration of media outlets in Ouagadougou. This does not allow rural communities to be informed and participate in public debate.

#### **4.7 Lack of follow ups on editorials and citizens' concerns raised through the media**

Generally, newspapers, online media, and radio stations just limit themselves to publishing issues. As a popular saying goes among media practitioners in Burkina Faso "mon rôle se limite à lever les lièvres" (my job is limited to raising burning issues). This means that beyond raising issues and ensuring their publications, journalists hardly conduct follow ups on such issues. Meanwhile for an adequate democratic

foundation, it is advisable for media outlets to amplify the publications by undertaking critical and investigative reporting and follow up on the issues raised.

## **5 - Recommendations**

The outlined trends and challenges call for many interventions and actions from different stakeholders such as the government, media owners and regulatory bodies and citizens. In order to allow media organisations to adequately carry out their watchdog mandate and improve participatory governance, we recommend to:

### **5.1 Citizens and CSOs**

- Provide maximum support to the media despite the challenges of low ethical standards and professionalism knowing that the original objective of the media is to serve the interest of the public and their absence thereof will incur negative impacts on the citizenry.
- Express interest in governance and actively participate in public debate through media outlets. Thereof CSOs should also encourage the population to take part in actions and discussions, especially in rural communities, through the organisation of campaigns of information and sensitization.

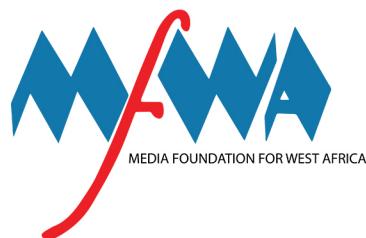
### **5.2 Media organisations and Media Regulatory Bodies**

- Better inform citizens on how the media works as well as the stakes related to freedom of expression and of the press in the democratic process by organizing panel discussions, public conferences, open days on the theme Media and democratic governance.
- Train journalists to conduct the highest ethical standards and professionalism in their work and promote a more critical reporting based on the various requests made by citizens to prompt actions and commitments from government and duty bearers.

- Media owners and regulatory bodies should institute punishments for journalists who breach the ethical codes or are engaged in dishonest acts that bring disrepute to media and its image

### **5.3 The government**

- Adopt financial measures adapted to the economic situation of media organisations.
- Implement the law on the Right To Information (RTI) by creating the independent National Authority on Access to Public Information whose creation has been blocked for financial reasons. If the operationalization of the body is proven impossible, its mandate could be transferred to the CSC. In general, the government should help the media in the role they play in participatory, transparency and accountability by given access to more public information.



Media Foundation for West Africa

30 Duade Street, Kokomlemle,

Telephone: +233 (0) 302 555 327

Twitter: @TheMFWA

Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa

[info@mfw.org](mailto:info@mfw.org)

[www.mfwa.org](http://www.mfwa.org)



@themfwa



@TheMFWA



[www.mfwa.org](http://www.mfwa.org)