3. Media Health

3.1 Status of the laws regarding rights and access to information

Article 1 of the general provisions of Cameroon’s 1990 Freedom of Social Communication law and the 1996 revised constitution, both guarantee freedom of the press. Article 2(1) of the 1990 law stipulates that freedom of communication applies to all forms of communication. However, at present there is no specific law mandating access to information (Republic of Cameroon, 1990b; 1996b).

3.2 Status of the laws regarding criminal defamation and insult

There are no criminal libel or insult laws in Cameroon. The Freedom of Social Communication law outlines civil remedies for cases of defamation by the press, stating in Section 1, Article 52, that “the Publisher of a Press Organ is obliged to publish, in the next issue of his journal, every rectification addressed to him by a depositary of public authority in relation to his duties which were wrongly reported” (Republic of Cameroon, 1990b). Article 53 of the same law outlines newspapers’ obligations to provide a right of reply. Article 57 outlines broadcaster obligations to provide a right of reply (Republic of Cameroon, 1990b).

3.3 Status of the laws that exist to enable media regulatory bodies to function independently

A number of provisions exist in Cameroon in relation to media regulation, but there is no provision for an independent media regulator. The main regulatory bodies are the Cameroon Media Council (CMC) and the National Communications Council (NCC). While the former is answerable to the Minister of Communication, the latter answers to the Prime Minister.

3.4 Current provisions that aim to secure the independence of publicly-owned media

There are no current provisions that aim to secure the independence of state-owned media. The general tendency is that the state media is pro-government.
3.5 Current provisions to support community or alternative media

The 2000 Decree on Private Audio-Visual Communication Enterprises (private media) authorised the creation of both community and alternative media (Republic of Cameroon, 2000a). A 2002 Ministerial Order further supported development of a community sector by providing for public assistance to private communication (Republic of Cameroon, 2002b). These two legal texts are a sign that the government encourages and acknowledges the existence of both community and alternative media in Cameroon. It should be noted that the assistance given by the Ministry of Communication to private media houses has not been accompanied by attempts to exert government control.

3.6 Regulatory obligations for public or state broadcasters to fulfil a public-service broadcasting remit

State broadcasting outlets in Cameroon are not subject to public-service broadcasting (PSB) obligations. The editorial line for state radio and TV broadcasters is set by the state-owned Cameroon Radio and Television Corporation (CRTV). While there is some difference of opinion among media observers, the general feeling is that the state radio and TV outlets side with the political grouping in power.

3.7 Regulatory obligations for private broadcasters to fulfil a public-service broadcasting remit

One public-service obligation imposed on private broadcasters is the requirement, in terms of the 2000 Decree (Republic of Cameroon, 2000a), that 51% of daily radio air-time should be reserved for local production, while for television the quota is 30%. There has been no study to find out if these quotas are respected by the private media.

3.8 Journalism

According to the Cameroon Union of Journalists (UJC), there are 874 practising journalists in the country: 183 women and 691 men (UJC, 2005). This means that 21% of the country’s journalists are female, and 79% male. Practising journalists are expected to register with the government, and a 2002 Decree established a press card system for registered journalists (Republic of Cameroon, 2002c). Only journalists who own a press card are allowed access to cover public events related to the state. For a journalist to obtain a press card, he or she must prove that he or she belongs to a legal media house or a media organisation. There is, however, no legislative provision for the licensing of journalists. Neither are there any provisions for journalists to belong to a professional association. For this reason, there is no data on the number of journalists who are registered with trade unions. A number of professional journalists’ associations exist, but there is no single forum that brings together all associations.

State media employees are categorised as ‘A2 state workers’, getting an average monthly salary of F.CFA 165,500 (US$300) (Republic of Cameroon, 2000b). An average monthly salary for a teacher is also US$300. It is difficult to estimate the wages of independent journalists in Cameroon. Private media employers generally pay low salaries. Thus, there is a tendency for non-state journalists to expect payments from individuals or organisations covered in their reporting.

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6 Based on anecdotal sampling of public opinion.
7 The exchange rate used is F.CFA 550 = US$1.
There is one vocational journalism school, the Advanced School of Mass Communication, based in Yaoundé. There are also three university departments offering journalism programmes, two of which are private institutions (Siantou Superieure and Institut Ndi Samba), and the third a public institution (Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Buea). There are also NGOs that provide journalism training, such as UNESCO, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), and the British Council in collaboration with the Thompson Foundation.

**Figure 4: Number of Journalism Training Institutes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institute</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University departments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other organisations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author estimate, 2006

**Key findings**

- Freedom of the press is protected by a 1990 law and the 1996 revised constitution, but there is no specific access to information law.
- There are no criminal libel or insult laws.
- Media regulation is not independent from the state.
- There is provision for community and alternative media.
- State-owned media outlets are perceived to lack independence and to support the government.
- Journalists are required to register in order to get a press card to cover state events, but do not have to be part of a professional body, or be licensed.
- Pay for non-state journalists is low, prompting private journalists to seek payments from the people and organisations on which they report.