



UNIOGBIS

## **Guinea-Bissau media landscape and UN support to the media**

### **Background paper for UNIOGBIS Transition**

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#### Introduction

As mandated by the UN Security Council in February 2020 (UNSCR 2512), the United Nations is reconfiguring its presence in Guinea-Bissau, and the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) will close by the end of December 2020.

Since its establishment, UNIOGBIS has been working closely with national media outlets and media associations as key stakeholders to foster a social environment conducive to the implementation of its mandate and for advancement of key state reforms.

As recognized in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, peace and democracy are preconditions for equitable and sustainable development. When freedom of expression and safety of journalists are protected, the media can play a vital role in preventing conflict and in supporting peaceful democratic processes. These outcomes are conditions for the realization of Africa's Agenda 2063 which envisages a peaceful and secure continent, and which calls for "an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law".

In late 2017, after broad consultations with stakeholders and an assessment of previous initiatives in support of the media sector UNIOGBIS led the design of a project to support the media sector to submit to PBF. The project- "Boosting the media sector for greater peace and stability" - with a total budget of 801,000 USD was approved and jointly implemented with UNDP and national partners between January 2018 and June 2020.

This paper aims at providing an overview of the media landscape and media legal framework as well as UNIOGBIS support for its revision and for the media sector in general.

## 1. Media landscape

In Guinea-Bissau there is a state-owned television network (TGB), one National radio (RDN), one state owned newspaper (No Pintcha) and a news agency (ANG).

There are 9 private radios based in Bissau. 36 community radios (of which 27 are fully operational) throughout the country, including the most remote areas; 4 community TVs (in Canchungo, S. Domingos, Bissau and Iemberem);

All media outlets are under equipped and staffed. In addition, staff is insufficiently paid and not regularly, therefore there is a high staff rotation. Most journalists have some capacity gaps. In addition, they are very vulnerable to political and economic pressure.

According to a media consumption habits study by the Lisbon Catholic University Survey Centre (CESOP), commissioned by the UN in 2020: *Four out of ten Bissau-Guineans refer to listening to the radio daily, to which 16% add that they listen almost every day. At least 37% of Guinea-Bissau public has no access to television.*

*Radio information programs. Seventy-eight percent of listeners are looking for information programs. Music, sports, djumbais and interactive are mentioned by more than 25% of listeners.*

*Newspapers and magazines are for a small group. Only 3% of respondents read newspapers or magazines daily. There is a huge difference between regions. If in SAB, 10% of respondents are daily readers (or almost), in other regions that percentage is no more than 4%. Likewise, access to newspapers is much higher in urban areas than in rural areas.*

*Journalism has improved. The population has a globally positive image of the evolution of the work of journalists in the past three years. Most journalists are seen as quality messengers of news from the country and the world.*

*Internet. Forty-seven percent of the population aged 16 or over has used the internet at least once, and 44% say they have done so in the past 12 months. The use is more intensive in the age groups between 25 and 49 years. Internet access is clearly dependent on the mobile phone.*

<sup>1</sup>.

The media sector is characterized by structural financial weakness, lacks in literacy and professionalism, as well as an inadequate legal and institutional framework to regulate the exercise of the profession. Most of the media companies “*are only able to maintain themselves thanks to the support of the State, companies, citizens, international organizations. And the availability of journalists to continue working under the conditions in which they work, often without pay or with huge payment delays.*”<sup>2</sup> As such, the media are highly vulnerable to political and economic pressures, undermining the sector's credibility. Despite the international consensus that media outlets play a crucial role in contributing to the democratic process, the media in Guinea Bissau has been linked to political propaganda since its early days and struggling to overcome that situation. This prevents comprehensive, impartial, and inclusive news coverage, contributing to the permanent country instability. The 2020 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters without Borders) ranks Guinea-Bissau in 94th out of 180 countries. According to this assessment, the country's media and journalists are “*extremely vulnerable*” to political and economic pressures, free access to information is not guaranteed and self-censorship prevails in addressing government failures, organized crime, and the military's influence on society.

*“The political impasse during these years has polarized the media and journalists, weakened them and left them extremely vulnerable to political influence and pressure. It has also resulted in an increase in government meddling in the state-owned media, whose directors have all been*

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<sup>1</sup> Survey on the use and consumption of information by the population of Guinea-Bissau, CESOP 2020

<sup>2</sup> Study on Financial conditions of Guinea-Bissau's media, CESOP 2020

*replaced. (...) The right of access to information is not guaranteed and journalists still usually censor themselves when covering governmental shortcomings, organized crime and the military's continuing influence. Some journalists have fled abroad to escape threats and intimidation.*"<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, *The population has a globally positive image of the evolution of the work of journalists in the past three years. Most journalists are seen as quality messengers of news from the country and the world.*<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Media Legal framework

The Constitution of Guinea-Bissau (article 56) provides for freedom of the press, an independent public broadcasting service, and for the creation of a National Council for Social Communication (NCSC) (Law 8/2013), as an independent body in charge of ensuring respect for the independence of the services of radio, television and the press and for ideological pluralism (art.56 (4)), which was established in 2013. Broadcasting licenses are issued by the National Regulator Agency (ARN)<sup>5</sup> which has increased the fees in 2019.

To strengthen the independence of the NCSC, amendments on its composition and sanction powers were passed by the National Assembly in December 2018. However, these amendments are still awaiting promulgation by the President of the Republic.

In addition, Guinea-Bissau has a comprehensive legal framework for the exercise of the media: Law of the Printed media (1/2013); Press Freedom Law (2/2013); Law of television (3/2013); Law of the Radio (4/2013); Statute of Journalists (5/2013); Law of Publicity (6/2013); Law on the right to public broadcasting (7/2013).

The Statute of Journalists prescribes the creation of a Commission to Issue Journalists Licenses. In the context of the PBF project "Boosting the media sector...", UNIOGBIS has supported the Government (Ministry of Social Communication) and the journalist's association to prepare a draft decree-law, which is pending approval in the Council of Ministers since December 2018 before to be submitted to the Parliament for a vote.

A code of conduct on ethical standards in journalism has been elaborated by representatives of the professional association of journalist (Ordem dos Jornalistas, Portuguese name) and the Union of Media Professionals (SINJOTEC, Portuguese acronym) in 2018 and validated at the

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<sup>3</sup> Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/guinea-bissau>

<sup>4</sup> Survey on the use and consumption of information by the population of Guinea-Bissau, CESOP 2020

<sup>5</sup> <https://arn.gw/radiodifusao/>

journalists' forum in November the same year. The code constitutes the basis for self-regulation (by the future commission for media accreditation) and for regulation by the National Council for Social communication.

A code of conduct for electoral coverage has been elaborated in the run-up to the legislative elections and signed by the directors of media outlets on 15 February 2019. Compliance with the code was monitored by the National Council for Social communication during the legislative and two rounds of presidential elections later that year. To that effect the Council also received support from the PBF "Boosting the media..." project.

### 3. UNIOGBIS Support to the media - legal framework revision

For the past decades, the UN in Guinea-Bissau has been training groups of journalists, and printing and distributing relevant legislation/regulations (such as the code of conduct for election coverage). Before the 2014 elections, UNIOGBIS designed and implemented a 450,000 USD PBF project, to support the media election coverage. This support included the donation of equipment (computers, motorbikes, etc.) to all media outlets which committed to comply with the media code of conduct for the elections, and production of peace sensitive content.

The evaluation of the project in 2015 found that the support provided lacked sustainability. In many instances equipment had been misused and misappropriated. Evaluation into UNIOGBIS media training activities also found that impact was limited due to high turnover of journalists in the media outlets due to poor working conditions.

In 2016, in cooperation with the Ministry of social Communication and the two existing journalists' associations, UNIOGBIS organized a Media Forum during which journalists and media managers identified the main problems of the sector - poor working conditions (80 percent did not receive regular salaries), incipient media companies, weak advertising market, lack of consistent training opportunities, vulnerability to political and economic powers.

At the forum journalists proposed long-term solutions which include reviewing media laws and the creation of a commission to issue journalist licenses. The outcome of the forum informed the design of the PBF funded project "Boosting the media sector for greater peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau".

Between 2016 and 2018, UNIOGBIS Public Information Unit worked with the journalists' associations to assist them in drafting and approving their ethics code. This was formally adopted in December 2018.

In early 2018, UNIOGBIS commissioned a study on Guinea-Bissau media Law (see attachment) following consultations with media associations and a request from the Minister of Social Communication. The study conducted by former minister of justice, Carmelita Pires, resulted in two draft laws projects:

- Decree-law to establish journalist self-regulatory body - an independent commission to issue journalists licenses (media accreditation), as prescribed in the Statute of Journalist Law;
- Law to regulate online social communication

main recommendations include:

- Establishment of a Fund to support the Media, based on a special customs tax on media related equipment, possibly complemented by a small tax on telecommunications or on mobile internet services. The use of this fund would be done in a pedagogical way, with the objective of favoring the change of mentalities and best practices. The introduction of this fund would be contemporary to the entry into force of the coercive effects introduced at the level of the fulfillment of the journalists' duties, reinforcing its effects in the confrontation for the positive.
- Revision of the Journalist's Statute, namely regarding gaps, omissions, inaccuracies, as well as its simplification towards the effectiveness of its application, adapting it to the socio-economic reality, in the context of class dignity and a desirable evolution of Media Law.
- Preparation of a legislative package that includes the Law on the Commission to issue journalists licenses (CCP), which should include the CCP's organization and functioning regime, as well as the Disciplinary Regulation, a coercibility mechanism aiming at an effect at the corporate level, but whose simplicity guarantees the respective feasibility, to bring credibility and dignity to the profession of journalist.
- Preparation of the Internship Regulations, as well as the adoption of the three different models for professional titles, the professional journalist, intern and foreign journalist portfolios. It is also recommended the adoption and ratification of international instruments, which are in a queue, due to the inoperativeness of successive governments and the National Popular Assembly.

- Revoke Radio Law of 2013 in order to create the figure of community radio, granting them, not only exemption from licenses to use frequency, GPI and other taxes, but also trying to find ways to reward them for their service to the community, particularly, but not only, at the educational level, in order to strengthen and enhance their role.
- Repeal of current laws and their reunification in the same legal instrument, with a common part and sections dedicated to each of the media types.

### 3.1 Follow-up on recommendations and other initiatives to boost media regulation and independence

After delivering the two above mentioned draft laws to the media associations and Secretary of State for social communication, on November 20, 2018, UNIOGBIS Public Information Unit (PIU), in the context of the PBF Media project, supported the organization of a media forum with the then Ministry for Social Communication, focusing on the “Analysis of Legal Framework for Communication”. During the event, attended by 150 journalists, the Consultant presented a Communication on “Legal and institutional framework for Bissau-Guinean Media”, addressing the following issues: Evolution of the legal framework and institutional; Strengths and Weaknesses in the Media Sector; Conclusions and Recommendations. The forum also allowed for journalists to debate and give feedback on the draft laws.

In a more restricted forum, particularly composed of media professionals, on the 1st and 2nd of December 2018, the draft Decree-Law on the Regulation of the Professional Licenses of Journalists added additions and some changes, duly noted and attached to the final version of the diploma proposal. On 8 December the updated Laws were delivered to the Secretary of State for Social Communication which was expected to submit to the Council of Ministers for approval.

In 2019, in the context of the same PBF project, another legal expert was recruited to consult stakeholders and draft a law on the establishment of a financing mechanism for the media sector.

In 2020 the newly appointed Secretariat of State for Communication, Conco Ture, contacted the Journalists associations and National Council for social communication to discuss further changes and additions to the proposed Decree-Law on the establishment of a Commission to issue Journalists licenses, before presenting the draft law to the Council of Ministers. One of the proposed amendments was the inclusion of a representative of the Government in the

membership of the Commission. This proposal was rejected by the journalist associations who recruited the same consultant to assist them in the negotiations with the Government. The Decree-Law was approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 November 2020.

Support to journalists' associations to advocate for media law revision: Several other activities were implemented in the context of the PBF media project to support the Media law revision efforts:

- Training of media managers (2018)
- Training of 120 journalists in Law (2019)
- Training of media associations representatives in Lobbying and advocacy to design and implement a strategy to have the laws approved in parliament and council of ministers (2019);
- Grant provided by UNDP to journalist's Union to implement the lobbying and advocacy strategy (2020)

Other activities in support of ethical journalism, combating hate speech and attacks on press freedom

- Support to National Council for Social communication to monitor the electoral campaign and incidents of hate speech on social media (Jan-March 2019; Nov.2019 - Jan 2020);
- Support to the establishment of a Fact checking team to combat fake news on COVID-19 (March-May 2020)
- Training of 20 journalists on identifying, and debunking fake news (June 2020)
- UNDP grant to Journalists Union (Sinjotecs) to support their lobbying efforts and establish a fund to protect journalists (Sinjotecs is working with Human rights defenders to establish a protection mechanism)

### 3.2 "Boosting the media for greater peace and stability" - PBF support overview

The major goal of the ‘*Boosting the media sector for greater Peace and Stability in Guinea-Bissau*’ project was to contribute to institutional stabilization of the media sector in Guinea-Bissau by supporting the creation of better conditions for journalists to play a positive role in a democratic society, promoting professional accountability, responsibility and conflict-sensitive reporting. The project was financed by the



Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and implemented by the United Nations Integrated Peace-building Office in Guinea Bissau (UNIOGBIS) Public Information Unit (PIU). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) acted as the Project’s financial administrator. The project ran from January 2018 until May 2020, with a \$801,877 budget. The project strategy was to use a multidimensional approach to address the issues preventing media from playing its positive role in democracy and for sustaining peace. The project intended to reinforce individual and institutional capacities within the media sector and its main players, to ensure that professionals and institutions are better skilled and equipped to promote self-initiative, responsibility and accountability and at the same time defend against attacks and dynamics of instrumentalization that further destabilize and undermine the central role that journalism plays in democratic systems.

To achieve the objectives, three main outcomes were thought:

**Outcome 1: an improved and universally applied legal framework regulating media sector and the journalistic profession contributes to enhanced professionalism and accountability as well as a decrease of tensions between media professionals and state actors**

Three new laws to better regulate the media sector and improve journalism standards were drafted: on online communication, on the establishment of a commission to issue press-card for journalists and for a public fund for financing media which respect the ethics code. To advocate for approval of these laws in Parliament and in the Council of Ministers, a lobbying strategy has been developed. The project also supported the revision of the statutes of the National Council for Social Communication. Inside the Council, a fact checking team was created to ensure better journalistic integrity during the elections. In addition, the project managed to gain the approval of a Code of Conduct for elections coverage and an Ethics Code for journalists signed by 23 media.

*Bissau, 20-21 November 2018, Forum for the analysis of the legal framework of Social Communication in Guinea-Bissau*

**Outcome 2: Journalists, media professionals, outlets and associations organize more effectively and exercise greater professional and economic autonomy due to improved governance of the media sector**

The Union of Journalists (SINJOTECS) elected new representatives in one of the first completely free and fair elections in the association's history, helping to ensure the organizations' independence and curbing government interference in the union's affairs.

The Community Radio Network also held free and fair elections of its representatives and a new Consortium Center of media organizations was legalized and established.

Workshops on media management for 34 media owners/managers were held and entrepreneurship grants and coaching offered to three women managers.

Furthermore, five community radios and two TV in remote areas received solar panels that enabled greater economic and political independence.

Finally, the first radio fully run by women in the country, the Bafata Women Radio, became operational with 10 staff trained and equipped. The project funded the editorial team's salaries for 1.5 years while their commercial and resource mobilization skills was developed.



*After training and selective process, 3 women receive media entrepreneurship grants and coaching (January 2020)*



*Five community radios and two TV in remote areas equipped with solar panels (January – December 2019):*



*Bafata Women Radio, first radio only composed of women with 10 staff (trained, equipped, salaries paid for 1 year and a half). The Radio received 2 grants to produce investigative journalism programs.*

**Outcome 3: Established and young media professionals produce quality, impartial and conflict-sensitive content.**

A grant was signed with the Association of Writers of Guinea-Bissau to write 32 episodes of a soap opera showcasing effective conflict resolution on issues of national importance and promoting behaviour change for peacebuilding.

The project also funded the establishment of a Journalism Professional Course in an existing and reputed school. The curriculum has been defined for a 2.5 years study program. The teachers have been recruited and, in support to the course, the project funded the construction of a Multimedia Center fully equipped with a radio broadcasting room; TV production room, a library, a mobile radio (the only one in the country) and a conference room. The course is self-sustaining with 40 paying students registered. The project enabled five women to receive study grants, thus helping improve gender equity in the field of journalism. Classes have started on 6 October 2020.

In addition, the project trained journalists from Bissau and regions in conflict-sensitive reporting, legal issues related to journalism and investigative reporting. Nine journalists received grants for investigative reports on taboo issues as well as personalized coaching from the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. During the COVID19 pandemic, 4 e-tutorials were realized and sent to journalists through internet and USB drive to the 150 journalists of the country. Also, a Covid19 fact-checking team was created amongst the civil society and wrote more than 80 articles countering fake-news. They have more than 1,000 followers on social media.



*Five women received a grant to study journalism after a competitive selection test (February 2020)*



*Multimedia Center built and fully equipped : radio room; TV room ; Press room, Mobile radio ; Library, conference room (January 2020)*



*Nine investigative journalism project were selected for a grant and received a personal coaching from the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. (March 2019 – March 2020)*

#### 4. Measuring Impact

Two studies were conducted in Guinea-Bissau by the Survey Centre of Lisbon Catholic University: (1) on media consumption habits; (2) on the socioeconomic situation of the media

in Guinea-Bissau. An independent evaluation of the project is also under validation. Both assessments conclude that the project had positive results (studies attached). We could also observe some positive progress on the performance of Guinea-Bissau media which can be attributed to the results of this project.

During the last electoral cycle, media coverage and public debate in national media were, for the first time, mostly focused on candidates' proposals, and guided by the principles of rule of law.

The increase in pressure and incidents of intimidation of journalists by political actors and spoilers also shows some enhanced adherence of journalists to their ethics code, in particular, the principles of independence, objectivity and notions of public interest.

## 5. Lessons learned

- Support to the media must respect their independence and be in line with their ethics code,
- Dependency from international assistance, which blurs the line between information and institutional communication (by international partners) must be avoided
- Support to the media must be based on long term sustainability, fostering responsibility and autonomy;
- The establishment of the media consortium has fostered unity among journalists which now can speak at one voice and establish partnerships and relationship with international consortiums, international media and unions;
- Other PBF and UN projects with a communication component can now recruit services from the consortium with can offer human and technical resources to organize multidimensional communication campaigns;

## 6. Recommendations

- *UNIOGBIS and OHCHR recommend the promulgation of the revised law on National Council of Social Communication by the President of the Republic, to issue a law*

*governing licensing procedures for media outlets, to review any other laws that may negatively impact freedom of expression and to end all attempts of censorship in state-owned media as well as intimidation of journalists.*<sup>6</sup>

- The PBF media project ended in May 2020. Some of the outcomes of the project – professional journalism training course, Bafata women’s radio, the independent consortium of media – will require support after the project. We already presented the project to UNDP
- The work towards improving the legal framework requires good offices efforts:
  - Revised statutes of the National Council of Social Communication (including punitive powers: approved by parliament, pending promulgation by President of Republic.
  - Draft Law regulating online social communication: handed over to the Ministry of social communication and pending....
  - Draft law on Financing the Media: draft prepared and discussed with journalists. (an advocacy strategy is being prepared to bring it to parliament) – funded by the PBF media project, next steps...
- The UN in GB should approve a code of conduct for the relationship with the media to set the example that journalists must not be paid for news coverage (draft discussed with journalists and submitted to UNCG);

7. List of Annexes:

1. [Media profile](#)
2. [Draft laws: Lei da Comissão de Carteira; Lei comunicação online, Lei financiamento dos Media; Lei do Conselho nacional de Comunicação Social](#)
3. [Ethics Code](#)
4. [Draft code to regulate relationship of the UN with media](#)
5. [Final Report of the study “media Law in Guinea-Bissau” \(in Portuguese\)](#)
6. [Syllabus of the Journalism Course](#)
7. [Large survey on the use and consumption of information by the population of Guinea-Bissau& Study on Financial conditions of Guinea-Bissau's media \(Folder including also Executive summary\)](#)

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<sup>6</sup> UPR report 2019