
Sahel

IMS' regional Sahel Programme, 2018-2021, covers Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and the fragile, conflict-ridden border zone between the three countries. Working on multiple dimensions, the programme aims to widen space for freedom of expression and enable the realisation of the SDGs through strengthening civil society and media to improve social cohesion and interregional collaboration.



A journalist is interviewing a woman in Ansongo, Mali.
Photo: Radio Soni/2018.

We focus on

- Strengthening community radios and women's debate clubs securing a high-quality content on topics like resilience, social cohesion, peace-building and migration aiming to catalyse discussion among rural citizens.
- Increasing quality, quantity and outreach of professional and investigative journalism in the region to promote transparency and accountability.
- Enhancing the regional collaboration between media, civil society and international organisations on issues of media freedom, diversity and safety of media workers.

Impact

- A training and production cycle has started whereby 10 community radios and 20 local "listener's clubs" (lead by women) meet every three months to discuss content and identify the topics and radio programmes for the following three months.
- 40 radio programmes have been produced so far covering both 'soft' and 'hard' security issues, e.g. problems related to health, education, climate change, women and social cohesion, local conflict-resolution, employment and local development, and young people's role in peace building.
- 50% of the radio programme production budget is allocated to the women in the listeners' clubs.
- Seven investigative journalism projects are underway covering e.g. illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Burkina, child soldiers in Mali, and a cross-border investigation on the rice mafia.
- 15 journalists have received training in investigative journalism, conflict sensitive journalism, handling sources and fact-checking. Two more trainings are underway.
- Actors working with community radio and media in the area are being brought together to find common ground for collaboration, combine efforts and to avoid duplication.

- Significant institutional development and capacity building of the programme's two main partners CN-RACOM (the National Coordination of Community radios in Niger) and CENOZO (Regional centre for investigative journalism covering the ECOWAS, HQ in Burkina Faso).

Media Overview

- Security challenges in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are numerous and related to severe poverty, alarming lack of food security, high unemployment rates, high rates of population growth, problems related to endemic diseases, and very limited opportunities for youth in general.
- All three countries have a vibrant media scene with 1000+ state, private, local and community radios, 60+ state and private TV stations, more than 300 newspapers (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly) of varied quality and an increasing amount of online media.
- As only around 20% of the population is literate, people rely heavily on the radio for information and news – especially in the rural areas.
- Legal frameworks guaranteeing freedom of speech and media freedom are in place as well as regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, however, not fully functioning. Only few journalists work in accordance with professional standards and ethics, and self-censorship is widespread.
- There are regular violations of professional standards including dissemination of unverified information or personal attacks through the media.
- Access to information remains a big challenge in all three countries and a lack of capacity and professionalism in the media to monitor the performance of power holders, civic organisations, public and private corporations etc.
- Impunity in all three countries is widespread.