

MEDIA AT THE MILLENNIUM AFRICA



AFRICA MEDIA FORUM

June 3-4, Dakar, Senegal • June 6-7, Bamako, Mali

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Issues examined, ideas exchanged at forums in Mali and Senegal



Chris Wells, senior vice president/ international of The Freedom Forum

ment — particularly for newspapers and television.

"Media at the Millennium," the theme for this year's forums, is particularly apt for Mali and Senegal, which are struggling against poverty and illiteracy while trying to catch up to a high-tech-driven global information network. Newspapers are expensive to produce and have a narrow audience; television has severe economic limitations; and a substan-

The Freedom Forum's international media forums for 1999 continued in June with a series of programs in two African nations.

Mali and Senegal, once part of French West Africa and independent since 1960, are rich in press freedoms but lack many of the requisites for a vibrant media environ-

ment. Standard telecommunications infrastructure hampers widespread use of the Internet. Radio, alone able to reach the masses, is the only medium approaching anything resembling prosperity.

The Freedom Forum brought together journalists from the region for discussions, roundtables and interviews June 3-7 in Dakar, Senegal, and Bamako, Mali. The sessions enabled news executives to examine key issues affecting the media in the former French colonies and explore solutions to common problems. This report reflects the diversity of ideas and opinions exchanged there.

The Freedom Forum's goal is to help the news media and the public understand one another better. That mission is accomplished, in part, through conferences like the Africa Media Forum as well as workshops, journalism libraries and other projects around the world. The 1999 international forums began in India and will conclude with programs in Latin America and Europe.



Many citizens of Senegal are poor and illiterate so radio is an important news medium.

Poverty, illiteracy and language are a two-edged sword for the media



Jerelyn Eddings, director, The Freedom Forum African Center

Mali and Senegal, blessed with media climates that are among the most unrestricted in Africa, are fertile ground for radio for the very reasons that they are less fruitful for print media: poverty, illiteracy and language.

Mali, twice the size of Texas with a population of 10 million, has a literacy rate of 31% and a per capita income of \$600. In neighboring Senegal, roughly the size of South Dakota and home to 9.5 million people, 33% of the population are literate and per capita income is \$1,600.

In each country, radio carries the news to the illiterate and largely rural populations in their native tongues for relatively low operational costs. Daily newspapers, on the other hand, for the most part are published in French (the official language in both countries, but not spoken by most people), have limited audi-

ences and are expensive for both producer and consumer.

Newspaper circulations are small. Mali's largest newspaper *L'Essor* sells about 15,000 copies daily; Senegal's *Le Soleil* fares slightly better at 22,000, but total daily newspaper circulation in each country is well under 100,000.

Private-sector radio, however, has boomed in Mali. In the late 1980s the country had a single, state-run station; today there are more than 100 private stations, many of which broadcast into the remotest regions. The growth of private radio has been somewhat slower in Senegal, which did not license its first private station until 1994.

State-run television is the norm in both countries, and although there are signs of growth in the private sector, the cost of a television set remains prohibitive for most Senegalese and Malians. In Mali in particular, the erratic supply of electricity is a major problem.

The Internet is making inroads in both countries, although it, too, carries a price tag that discourages its use. Journalists nonetheless are eager to join the technological revolution, and several newspapers have Internet editions.

Journalists from throughout the region long have received their training at the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal, but its finances have been strained by a drop-off in outside assistance. Although the University of Mali has no formal journalism program, this year it initiated a series of short courses in the field. And in Senegal, the private media company Sud Communications has opened its own training school.

Mali media overview

Mali has a free media climate that has flourished under the democratic government of President Alpha Oumar Konare:

- More than 50 independent daily and weekly newspapers are published, reflecting a wide variety of opinion. Most are published in French and cater to the country's literate minority. Nearly two-thirds of Malians cannot read or write.
- Mali had just one newspaper, the state-owned *L'Essor*, until the late 1980s. Today, it faces competition from at least six other dailies. Newspapers often are squeezed financially in Mali, one of the five poorest countries in the world.
- Radio, particularly in indigenous languages, has the most influence and the widest reach. More than a dozen ethnic groups exist in the country of 10 million, where Islam is the main religion. There are more than 100 stations.
- Radio Television Mali (ORTM), the state-owned network, runs the country's only television network as well as several radio stations.
- The Internet is making inroads, although the cost keeps use down. Several newspapers have Internet editions.

Senegal media overview

Senegal also enjoys one of the most unrestricted media climates in the sub-Saharan region. Political reforms in the early 1990s resulted in the emergence of strong private media.

- Five daily newspapers, all published in French, have a combined circulation of just 60,000 in a country of nearly 10 million people. Four private dailies compete with the state-supported *Le Soleil*. There are also several weeklies.
- Private and state-run radio stations are the most important information source for Senegalese, especially those in rural areas. Some of the stations carry international newscasts from Voice of America, the BBC and Radio France International.
- The state broadcasting ministry controls licensing of independent television and radio stations. Television remains under government control, though efforts are under way to establish a private channel.
- Major newspapers have Internet editions. The urban elite have embraced technology, but equipment remains prohibitively expensive for most people.



Participants at the opening forum in Mali, from left: Souleymane Drabo, editor of *L'Essor*; Ibrahima Traore, director of *Le Republicain*; Makoro Camara, editor and publisher of *Kabak* and *Wassa*; and Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare.

Editors in Mali see the press as a tool to help build up a young democracy

BAMAKO, Mali — The “Media at the Millennium: Africa” forum here opened with fanfare, pageantry and a speech from President Alpha Oumar Konare, who said, “In Mali, a free and pluralistic media are an essential element of our democratic process.”

Konare’s 30-minute speech, aimed at his countrymen, was delivered before an audience of nearly 200, including more than 70 government ministers, secretaries and judges, and ambassadors from more than 25 countries, including U.S. Ambassador David Rawson.

In an ensuing discussion, three editors said the Malian press has the responsibility to help strengthen democracy and to exercise thoughtful editorial judgment. Many of their remarks were responses to Charles L. Overby, chairman and chief executive officer of The Freedom Forum, who questioned whether “the policies and actions of government, journalists and citizens will create another system of haves and have-nots or a system of openness and fairness.”

Ibrahima Traore, director of *Le Republicain*, said the news media should play the role of peacemaker. “We should create conditions to promote the rule of law,” he said.

Citing a “spirit of responsibility,” Traore said the media should endlessly explain the problems facing Malian society and should

help build the growing democracy in Mali.

Souleymane Drabo, editor in chief of the state-owned *L'Essor*, maintained that newspapers already contribute to Malian society, mainly through the diversity of opinions that are published. Mali has about 75 political parties.

“Not all information collected can be disseminated.”

— Ibrahima Traore, director of *Le Republicain*

He called for improved training of journalists to upgrade the level of professionalism.

Most training is on the job, said Makoro Camara, editor and publisher of *Kabak*, a weekly newspaper, and *Wassa*, a monthly magazine. Better training of journalists is necessary for the long-term survival of democracy — just eight years old in this landlocked coun-

try that flows into the Sahara Desert.

If, for example, journalists don’t understand how the justice system works, she said, they won’t be competent to explain to the public the workings of the police and courts.

When moderator Bernard Kalb of CNN’s “Reliable Sources” asked Traore to elaborate on “spirit of responsibility,” the editor’s response prompted a dialogue about self-censorship and fairness in editing.

The “spirit” includes careful selection of information to be published or broadcast, Traore said. “Not all information collected can be disseminated.” He said information that might start an ethnic war should not be published: “self-censorship, more or less.”

Information that could create social turmoil should be handled carefully, Drabo agreed. Information may be needed, but consequences should be weighed before publication, Camara said.

When Kalb made a distinction between editorial judgment and self-censorship, defining self-censorship as the exclusion of news that could be vital to the public, Traore offered his definition of what generally is considered a pejorative term. Self-censorship is exercising “careful, professional caution,” he said. “Check everything before it is published. This is what I mean by self-censorship.”

Western press takes heat

Mali's president says negative coverage harmful

BAMAKO, Mali — The president of Mali said the Western press should devote more attention to struggling attempts at development in Africa and not just focus on war and conflict.

“We have problems that can never be solved without outside help,” President Alpha Oumar Konare told a Freedom Forum delegation during a private interview at the presidential palace.

He said favorable public opinion in the West is necessary for Africa to move closer to democracy. Acknowledging that conflict remains a reality in Africa, he said there is another side to the continent that doesn't get reported, such as his efforts to improve Mali's education, health care and infrastructure.

Two-thirds of Malians are illiterate; an equal number don't have access to modern medical care. “If you can't change that, you can't have democracy,” Konare said.

Konare said he is trying to implement a 10-year program to reform schools. Among the new features he is promoting are classes in local languages and shorter school terms. French is the official language, but Bambara is spoken by 80% of the population. Malians also speak numerous other African languages.

Konare, whose second five-year term ends in 2002, also said he is focusing on primary health care, citing campaigns promoting immunization, hygiene and sanitation, and campaigns to fight AIDS and malaria.



Freedom Forum Chairman Charles L. Overby presents Mali's President Alpha Oumar Konare with a crystal globe following an interview Konare gave to a Freedom Forum delegation.

If the public in Western countries doesn't get news reports on attempts to improve living conditions in Africa, it won't respond positively when African countries need money, he said.

Konare said the news media are flourishing in Mali. More than 100 private radio stations comprise the main news and information medium, reaching illiterate, rural inhabitants in local languages as well as urban dwellers. Bamako, the capital, has 15 stations.

The print media also are flourishing: There are more than 50 independent daily and weekly newspapers in Mali.

“Journalists are trying to tackle the problems of society,” the president said, but added that Malian journalists need advanced training and government authorities need to im-

prove communication policies to give the press more information.

Television remains under state control eight years after democracy began to bloom with the end of a military-led, one-party political system. But Konare said he does not oppose private television. In fact, state-owned media — the daily newspaper *L'Essor* and Radio Television Mali — freely criticize the Konare administration. “Newspapers sell better when they have a headline against the president or a minister,” he joked.

Konare interrupted his political career to work in journalism in the 1980s and early '90s. He was editor of *Les Echos*, a daily newspaper, until shortly before he was first elected president, in 1992. He said his pursuits after he leaves office will include journalism. Mali's constitution limits a president to two terms.

“Today I know the importance of the press and communication more than before,” he said. “I will continue informing and enlightening.”

“Newspapers sell better when they have a headline against the president or a minister.”

— Alpha Oumar Konare, president of Mali

Journalists in some West African nations have few freedoms, face great peril

BAMAHO, Mali — The murder of a newspaper editor last year in Burkina Faso marked the first time a journalist in western Africa had been killed for reporting the news, a fellow editor said.

Boureima Sigué, director general of the daily newspaper *Le Pays*, also said that a report recently submitted to the Burkina Faso government concluded that Norbert Zongo was killed by government agents, possibly members of the national guard. Zongo had been publication director of *L'Indépendant*, a weekly. He and three traveling companions were shot Dec. 13. Their bodies and their vehicle were burned.

"It's up to justice officials to make an investigation and confirm or reject the accuracy of the report," Sigué said.

Sigué and three colleagues from the region formerly known as French West Africa — where French remains a commonly used language — recounted news-media conditions in their countries with an eye on the future during a discussion here.

Burkina Faso has had private media ownership since 1991. The press is subject to a government-approved council that can scrutinize press activities. No journalists from independent media are on the council, which "is credible to the state but not to journalists," Sigué said.

A journalist from Niger, Abdoulaye Ibbou Daddy, said it is not easy to talk about the press situation in his country, which borders Mali on the east. Basically, he said, there is no press freedom. Journalists are prohibited, for example, from writing about the military.

"Journalists have been tortured and arrested" and a radio station closed, he said.

Political pressure makes being a journalist difficult, he said, adding, "people do it because they believe in

it." They persevere in journalism without training and often without pay, he said.

A coup in April eased tensions, said Ibbou Daddy, editor in chief of *Anfani*, a weekly published in Niamey, but he said it isn't known if the letup will last.

Gisele Adissoda Da-Matha, a newspaper editor in Benin, raised an alarm about potential divisions between journalists who work for state-owned media and those who work for private media. She said journalists must stick together. Otherwise, the state may try to pit one group against the other, and "we will be the losers."

Da-Matha noted that privately owned media receive no state money, unlike state-owned media. Money sometimes runs short,

she said, but at the end of the month when bills are due, "you shouldn't succumb to the temptation of a political party or the government."

Yaya Sangaré, director of Radio Jamana in Koutiala, Mali, called for laws to protect journalists and press freedom. Sangaré, who is active in professional organizations, said statutes defending the right to information and the right to be informed are necessary. Other needs, he said, are solidarity among journalists in the region and strong professional training.

Ibbou Daddy agreed that protections are needed and said they should be devised "not by government but by professionals."



Clockwise from top left: Abdoulaye Ibbou Daddy, editor of *Anfani* in Niger; Boureima Sigué, director general of *Le Pays* in Burkina Faso; and Yaya Sangaré, director of Radio Jamana in Koutiala, Mali.

Maliens rely on radio for news, information

BAMAKO, Mali — A Malian radio executive minced no words describing the difference between state-owned and independent news media.

“Private radio is the voice of Malians while ORTM (the state-owned broadcast network) is the voice of Mali,” said Moussa Keita, director of the private station Radio Patriote.

He and three other radio executives — competitors of sorts, but collaborators in their sense of responsibility toward providing needed information to a democratic society — stressed the importance of connecting with their audiences. They all said they measure success not by profitability alone, but also by how well they know and serve their listeners.

“The best radio is the radio that knows its audience,” said Tiona Mathieu Kone, principal coordinator of the company that owns Radio

Kledu, which covers Bamako with four newscasts a day.

Kone said Radio Kledu also sponsors debates on politics, the perennial hot topic in town, and produces programs that allow young people to talk on the air about issues of importance to them.

Mali has weathered 60 years of French colonialism and another 30 years of one-party and military rule in this century. In 1991, after violent, student-led demonstrations, the government collapsed and was replaced by a multiparty democracy with a new constitution and a free press.

The state-owned media persist today, but they are outnumbered by independent radio stations and newspapers under private ownership. Ramata Dia, director of a community radio station, said the role of ORTM is to broad-

cast the official position of the government.

The government controls the only local television channel, but President Alpha Oumar Konare said he would welcome private ownership. Until that occurs, however, the facts of everyday life make radio the country's most important medium:

- Two-thirds of Malians are illiterate.
- Most people reside in rural areas.
- Most of the 10 million citizens are too poor to afford a newspaper.
- Most newspapers are printed in French, the official language, but most of Malians speak Bambara.

Thus it's hard to overstate the importance of radio. Exact numbers differ, depending on the source, but more than 20 commercial radio stations and 80 rural stations broadcast in Mali.



Executives from Malian radio operations, from left: Moussa Keita of Radio Patriote; Ramata Dia, director of a community radio station, Radio Guintan; and Tiona Mathieu Kone, a coordinator for Radio Kledu.

High-tech seminar focuses on online news gathering

BAMAKO, Mali — Journalists who saw demonstrations of e-mail and online translation software realized the technologies' immense potential as tools for news gathering.

“It is essential that journalists throughout Africa become skilled at using the Internet and using even basic e-mail as a tool for reporting,” said Roland Stanbridge, director of the New Media Laboratory at the Rhodes University journalism school in South Africa.

He spoke at a technology seminar at Spider Cyber Cafe Internet, which has more than a dozen terminals with high-speed Internet access. But the focus of the discussion was technological reporting tools that could be used in newsrooms and schools, which usually have the far-slower Net connections that are prevalent in

Mali and other West African countries.

Stanbridge demonstrated News Tracker, an online “clipping service” that delivers excerpts from Internet news sites, and WorldNews.com, which scans dozens of journalism sites from the BBC to the *South China Morning Post*.

Because nearly all the journalists attending the seminar report and write in French, there was particular interest in online translation software, which they used to translate English-language Web sites into French.

More than 40 journalists attended the program, most from newspapers and broadcast newsrooms in Mali. Other countries represented were Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger.



The media climate in Senegal is discussed by, from left, Miniele Baro of the state broadcasting system; Pape Samba Kane, publisher of *Info 7*; Aissata Tall Sall, Senegal's minister of communications; and Mamadou Oumar Ndiaye, director of publication for *Le Temoin*.

Senegal newspapers have high prices, few readers

DAKAR, Senegal — The Senegalese press suffers from low readership, a high single-copy price and a weak advertising base, a newspaper publisher says.

"The weakness ... is structural," said Mamadou Oumar Ndiaye, director of publication for *Le Temoin*, a popular weekly tabloid.

In a country with a population of nearly 10 million people, Senegal's five dailies have a combined circulation of 60,000 copies. *Le Soleil*, the state-owned daily, leads with a circulation of about 22,000.

Ndiaye cited the country's high illiteracy rate and the low per capita income as the main reasons that newspapers are not a mass medium. More than 70% of the population is illiterate. Per capita income is about \$1,600.

With little purchasing power, consumers opt for necessities over newspapers, Ndiaye said. A newspaper costs about the same as a kilogram (2.2 lbs.) of rice, or about 50 U.S. cents.

Ndiaye and another publisher, Tidiane Kasse of *Wal Fadjri*, said the revenue sources for Senegalese newspapers turn conventional newspaper economics upside down. In Senegal, 70-80% of revenue comes from newspaper sales and 20-30% comes from advertising. That formula is the reverse of that for U.S. newspapers, for example.

Kasse said newspapers that traditionally supported the ruling political party once got most of the ad revenue. But that began to change in the 1990s, and independent newspapers are starting to get a bigger share of the market.

"The Senegalese economy is growing, and

newspaper owners are taking advantage of that," Kasse said.

Start-up costs and structural problems are still fresh on newspaper people's minds in Senegal. Until 1991, *Le Soleil* was the only daily in the country. The notion of an independent press began to take hold in the 1980s, but the role of the press began to increase only after President Abdou Diouf instituted political reforms in 1990.

"Without the press, democracy could not be dynamic."

— Pape Samba Kane, Publisher of *Info 7*

"Without democracy, the press could not develop. Without the press, democracy could not be dynamic," said Pape Samba Kane, publisher of the Dakar daily *Info 7*. The press has done more for democracy in Senegal than the politicians have, he said.

In remarks opening the Dakar sessions, Senegal's Minister of Communications Aissata Tall Sall had noted that "freedom of the press and the plurality of the media are irreversible privileges provided by ... law, which ensures and guarantees its necessary independence while accompanying its economic bloom."

When the independent newspapers started, they naturally printed the viewpoints of the opposition and became known as the opposition newspapers. Over time, Kane said, the independent press became more balanced and now sees itself as midway between the opposition and the ruling party.

Ibrahima Gaye, director general of *Le Soleil*, said independent newspapers helped raise the standards of newspapering in Senegal.

Radio also was a state monopoly until after Diouf's political reforms. Now about 15 radio stations have become the main medium of information for the country's remote and largely illiterate population. "That's how they get information about daily life," said Remi Waly Dione, manager of Radio Penc-Mi in Fissel, about 75 miles south of Dakar.

Radio speaks to the people in their local language. Although French is the official language, Wolof is spoken by 80% of the people, though no newspapers are published in Wolof. But radio translates the French-language newspapers and reads the stories over the air.

Miniele Baro of Radiodiffusion Television Senegalaise, the state broadcasting system, said RTS broadcasts in 10 languages.

Television remains a state monopoly. Whether to open television to private ownership remains a political decision, according to Boubacar Seck, editor of *Le Matin*, another of Dakar's dailies. He said there is no reason why Senegal shouldn't have two or three TV stations, but he questioned whether there would be enough advertising revenue.

Cultural divide

Don't judge African press by West's standards, editors say

DAKAR, Senegal — When American Bernard Kalb asked two African journalists about the lack of Kosovo coverage in the Senegalese press, he triggered a journalistic bombardment of the Western media.

The forceful words came from Mame Less Camara, West African correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corp., and Latif Coulibaly, director of the Sud Communications training school. The exchange occurred at a program moderated by Kalb of CNN's "Reliable Sources."

Coulibaly responded to Kalb's observation that "I can barely find coverage of Kosovo" in Senegalese newspapers by recounting how at a recent conference in Madison, Wis., he had looked through *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* for coverage of Africa. He was looking specifically for an event that happened in Burkina Faso and expected to find coverage of it as well as of the continuing strife in central Africa. He found neither.

Noting that the press everywhere operates along basic lines — geographical, social and cultural — Coulibaly observed that "African journalists apply the same principal to Kosovo as the American press applies to Africa."

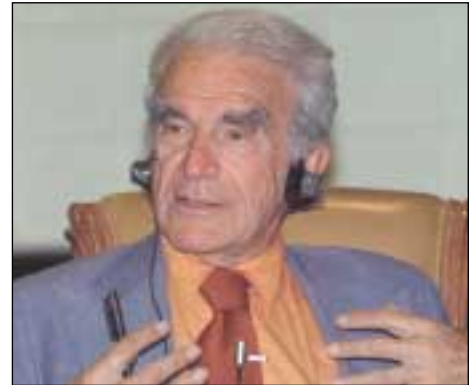
The main salvo came from Camara, who doubles as a political analyst for the Dakar daily *Le Matin*. He, too, said he was not surprised by the lack of local media interest in

"The stronger the media are, the more they can lie."

— Mame Less Camara,
West African correspondent, BBC



Latif Coulibaly, director of a communications school, says the press everywhere operates along geographical, social and cultural lines.



Moderator Bernard Kalb's question on Kosovo coverage got a swift and strong response from African journalists.

Kosovo. And he also responded to Kalb's comment with an anecdote.

He said the Senegalese press was very interested in what he called the Iraqi War (what the Western allies called Operation Desert Storm). He said the lesson from the war is that the press can create an enemy. Western governments labeled the Iraqi military the fourth-strongest in the world. "That was a lie," he said, but with the help of the media, it passed as fact.

"The stronger the media are," Camara said, "the more they can lie." He added, "The greater (the media's) capacity to reach people, the greater your capacity to manipulate them."

Camara said the Western media have never provided an accurate account of Iraqi casualties, which he said they called "collateral damage."

He also seemed to refer to riots, in which 52 people died, in south-central Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict. "The media have organized an oblivion around this matter," he said.

Senegal has been independent from France since 1960, but political freedom and press freedom failed to materialize until 1990

when President Abdou Diouf, under pressure from opposition groups, instituted political reforms. Since then, private newspapers and radio have blossomed, but television remains under state control.

The two Africans also said the Senegalese media and the public learned some lessons from three of the biggest news stories, as measured by media interest, in the United States during the '90s.

Coulibaly said the Senegalese people were surprised to learn that President Clinton "was not above the law" as the impeachment proceedings played out in the winter of 1998-99. "It was a nice American story for us in Senegal," he said.

Questions followed about Senegalese coverage of the O.J. Simpson double-murder case and Monica Lewinsky. Coulibaly said the lesson learned from the Simpson story was that "if you are rich, you can hire good lawyers. If you are poor, you may face the death penalty." He also said there were comments about "one (legal system) for whites and one for blacks."

Camara, responding to a question from Kalb about Lewinsky, said Senegal is culturally different from America. "Your society is entertainment-oriented," he said.



At left center, Oumar Diagne of the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal, speaks during a session on journalism education. At right, the entrance to the university's Center for Studies in Information Sciences and Technology.

Region's lone journalism school puts emphasis on 'communications'

DAKAR, Senegal — Students who graduate from Senegal's journalism program at the University Cheikh Anta Diop here leave prepared for careers in communications.

"There is confusion between communications and journalism," said Oumar Diagne, director of the university's Center for Studies in Information Sciences and Technology, echoing a refrain heard in the United States. "Journalism is a tiny part of communications."

Communications includes the social sciences, Diagne said. After completing a three-year program, his graduates are prepared to go on to master's and doctoral degrees, he added.

Some American journalism educators say U.S. journalism departments that get absorbed into communications schools become diluted and graduates aren't adequately prepared to step directly into newsroom jobs. Others argue that the demands of a multimedia world require that students be

trained in all forms of communications, including journalism.

Robert H. Giles, executive director of The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center in New York City and a former editor and publisher of *The Detroit News*, said accredited journalism schools in the United States limit journalism courses a student can take to 25% of their college workload. The other 75% should be in the liberal arts and sciences, he said. "Journalists must have a broad-based knowledge of our society," he told a group of about 20 educators and twice as many students.

Diagne said his school's program has done away with traditional training: Students pursue several streams of specialization and graduate with expertise in political science, international relations, sports, environment and other fields. The goal, he said, is to make students versatile.

Second-year students are exposed to professional news environments, and third-year

students spend the entire academic year as interns. In the current class of 32 second-year students, 16 want newspaper careers and 14 are interested in radio. The other two have opted for television, which is state owned. Most students would prefer to work for a private company, Diagne said.

Latif Coulibaly, director of a private and competing journalism school started by Sud Communications, said change is needed in the approach to journalism education. Current thinking is based on the model of training journalists to be jacks-of-all-trades without preparation in critical thinking. "The model is static while things are changing daily," he said.

Diagne said that for practicing journalists his institution has a specialized, but expensive, training program "known outside Senegal better than in Senegal." The training takes place in June, July and August for professionals who want to improve their skills.

Newspapers in 8 countries to use Internet as network for reporting and story-sharing

DAKAR, Senegal — Ten newspapers in eight African countries are forming a news-gathering and story-sharing network via the Internet.

The network is expected to launch in three to four months, Seydou Sissouma, editor of *Le Soleil* online, said. After six months of testing, news media in other French-speaking African countries will be invited to join.

Sissouma said the network will use the speed and reliability of the Internet, which has the potential to be a key component for communication in remote and underdeveloped parts of Africa. The network also will promote solidarity among African newspapers, he said.

The eight countries with participating news outlets are Senegal, Mali, Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mauritius and Tunisia.

Le Soleil, the state-owned daily in Dakar, formed its online site in April 1998. In less than a year, planning for the network began.

Sissouma learned the value of the Internet when a judge was killed in neighboring Mali by a religious sect unfamiliar to Sissouma. He e-mailed a Malian newspaper and received a four-page report that provided background on the sect and details of the assassination.



Seydou Sissouma (left), editor of *Le Souleil* online, and Daouda Toumbou, editor of *Sud* online, discuss the news-gathering and transmission advantages of the Internet.

Sissouma was joined on the program with Daouda Toumbou, editor of *Sud* online in Dakar, and Roland Stanbridge, director of the New Media Lab at Rhodes University in South Africa.

Stanbridge said it is important for editors in charge of new media in Africa to share experiences and information, promote the training of African journalists, defend press freedom and support journalists facing harassment.

"The Internet is not a friend of regimes who want to curtail the free flow of information," Stanbridge said. "Many African journalists have been, or are, in prison for out-

spoken writing."

He said "these are historic times" in Africa. "There are trends toward democracy in many African states, and it seems fairly certain that new information technologies, in particular the Internet, are going to play an important role in this development."

Sud online is updated around the clock, Toumbou said. *Sud* also uses the Web site to transmit audio news reports from its radio correspondents around the world. The radio reports then are retransmitted on the air to listeners around Senegal.

"The Internet has cut down the cost of communication," Toumbou said.

Regional support system urged for journalists

DAKAR, Senegal — A group of editors in west Africa said there's need for a support system in the event a fellow journalist is harassed by a government or is imprisoned.

"We must find the means to get closer to one another," said Dan Moussa, editor in chief of *Fraternité Matin*, a daily newspaper in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

Gabriel Ayite Baglo, a co-founder of the biweekly newspaper *Crocodile* in Lome, Togo, said that if editors hear of a colleague who has been arrested, they immediately should send a message to a Western-based press association so the information can be disseminated worldwide.

Once the word gets out internationally, "the arrested journalist is treated better," Baglo said.

"African countries are more sensitive to outside pressure than international pressure," said Amadou Gueye, editor and publisher of *Le Journal de l'Economie*.

Souleymane Diallo, director of publication for *Le Lynx* in Conakry, Guinea, said he has been imprisoned twice and both times received support from colleagues in neighboring countries. "Solidarity should prevail in all countries," he said.

Moussa said authorities have tended to set journalists who work for state-owned news media against journalists who work for the independent press, and have used similar tactics against print and broadcast journalists. Warning his colleagues against such exploitation, he said, "When we are divided, we are doomed to failure."

The Freedom Forum is a nonpartisan, international foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people. The foundation pursues its priorities through conferences, educational activities, publishing, broadcasting, online services, fellowships, partnerships, training, research and other programs.

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