

---

---

*The partisan characteristics of most media have compromised the principles of value-based journalism. Some of these journalists and their news media organizations are accused of encouraging violence, terror, and crime in Somalia.*



SOMALIA

S

Somalia is still in a situation of chaos, as most of its south-central regions remain lawless. The security situation continues to deteriorate, particularly in Mogadishu, Bay, Bakool, Lower Jubba, Lower Shabelle, and Hiraan regions. Civilians still bear the brunt of the conflict and are victims of indiscriminate use of force by the warring sides. Piracy in Somali waters has emerged and remains a persistent security concern. Humanitarian laws and human rights have been systematically violated, and freedom of expression, including freedom of speech and of opinion, are infringed upon and ignored.

A large number of Somali journalists and other media workers are being subjected to various forms of violence and oppression, from censorship, professional punishment, arbitrary detention, and maltreatment to harassment, beatings, threats, and killings. Such poor working conditions for journalists and other media staffers are major impediments to their ability to work professionally and advocate for their rights.

The rights to free speech and freedom of the media are enshrined in Somalia's Transitional Federal Charter (interim constitution), as well as the constitutions of regional administrations such as Puntland Regional State. However, the precarious working environment of the media threatens the quality of journalism, principles of press freedom, human rights, and the proper functioning of news media organizations.

The partisan characteristics of most media have compromised the principles of value-based journalism. Some of these journalists and their news media organizations are accused of encouraging violence, terror, and crime in Somalia. Somali politicians and intellectuals criticized media performance, urging the media to be more professional in informing the public on developments in conflict-affected areas and details of army operations. But for security reasons, journalists were not active in hostile areas. Further, in 2008, the media exercised extensive self-censorship when reporting on warring sides in the country, as well as opposing politicians vying for the Puntland presidency.

Media support organizations, however, were actively engaged in Somalia. They addressed the topical and pressing issues pertaining to the news media, including freedom of expression, the right to information, conditions of working journalists, gender and the media, the role of media in peace efforts, and media ownership.

Given the ongoing political upheaval and armed conflict, it is not surprising that the scores for Somalia mostly went down this year, from 1.68 to 1.52. All five objectives scored in the "unsustainable, mixed system" category, with Objective 1 (freedom of speech) coming in lowest with 1.32, and Objective 5 (supporting institutions) receiving the highest score of 1.67. The conflict itself is at once a severe challenge to the media and a key to limited freedom. For example, the security situation makes Somalia dangerous for journalists, yet it prevents the government from implementing laws seen as repressive. No one party can control the media, which in turn creates relative plurality of voices. Still, individual media must self-censor out of fear, and many have become openly partisan.

# SOMALIA AT A GLANCE

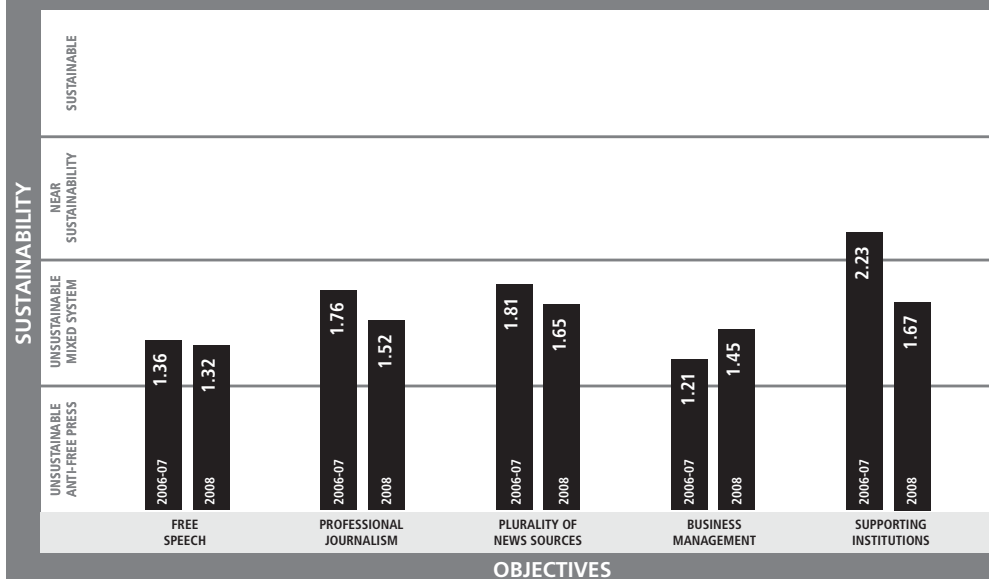
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 9,832,017 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Mogadishu
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Sunni Muslim (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Somali (official), Arabic, Italian, English (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** N/A (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** N/A (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 37.8% (male 49.7%, female 25.8%) (2001 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Transitional Federal President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (since 31 January 2009)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** 50 print media, 20 radio stations, 3 television stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top newspapers and estimated circulation: *Xog-Ogaal* (800), *Qaran* (500) and *Ayaamaha* (400) in Mogadishu; *Jamhuuriya* (1000) in Hargeisa.
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio stations: Shabelle Radio, Somali Broadcasting Corporation, and Horn Afrik. Universal TV covers the whole country, Somaliland TV covers an area with an estimated 1500 television-watching households, and Somali Broadcasting Corporation TV covers an area with an estimated 1000 television-watching households
- > **News agencies:** No local news agencies operate in Somalia.
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Not available
- > **Internet usage:** 94,000 (2006, *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SOMALIA



### Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

### Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

### Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

### Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Somalia Objective Score: 1.32

For the year 2008, Somalia still qualifies as a very dangerous country for journalists. Intimidations, arrests, attacks, and even killings occur regularly. The major cause of all these violations is armed political conflict between Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) with its allied Ethiopian troops and the armed elements opposing its rule. The media, especially those in central and southern regions, still operate in conditions that do not allow professionalism and independence. In 2008, two renowned journalists were murdered in Kismayo, south of Mogadishu.

The score in this objective remained essentially unchanged, although some indicators did show movement compared with last year. Indicators 6 (libel laws) and 8 (media access to international news reports) both declined, while Indicator 9 (free entry into the journalism profession) improved. Most of the indicators scored relatively close to the overall objective score. The two exceptions are Indicators 4 (attacks on journalists), which scored about two-thirds of a point lower, and 9, which scored about two-thirds of a point higher.

The Transitional Federal Charter guarantees freedom of the media and freedom of information. But a media law passed in December 2007 imposes restrictive measures on the media, despite several efforts to bring the law up to international standards of freedom of expression. The bill was signed

#### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

into law by Acting President and the Speaker of Transitional Federal Parliament Sheik Adan Mohammed Nur. However, the TFG has not enforced the law, due to power struggles among the top leadership of the government and several attacks by Islamic insurgents. The effects it may have on the media, therefore, remain to be seen.

Licenses are not issued regularly to any print or electronic media, despite various governmental bodies in the country. For example, Puntland has its own constitution, though it recognizes the TFG. It has regulations that require media to seek licensing, but they are not imposed on a regular basis. The establishment of a news media organization is not as complicated—Somalia imposes no taxes or other impediments on the establishment or running of a media outlet.

Impunity is pervasive. Crimes committed against journalists and news media organizations are not investigated or punished, due to the lack of an independent and effective judiciary system and political will. Most crimes are politically motivated and covered up by powerful politicians or armed groups.

Reporters from national outlets gather information disseminated by international and regional news organizations, but local media professionals do not have the necessary access to information from certain senior politicians. For example, Somalia's new prime minister was accused recently of not responding to local journalists and instead answering inquiries from foreign media.

Radio Mogadishu and Radio Bay, the radio stations of the TFG, are allowed only to disseminate news from a perspective that supports the government's actions. There is no expectation, legal or otherwise, of editorial independence.

Despite incomparable risks facing media professionals and their news media organizations, dedicated and brave young adults are joining the journalism profession. Some of these journalists are recruited by news media organizations based on their connections to the media house owner, but a good number of journalists join out of enthusiasm for the profession. This is promising news for the survival of media organizations, as many journalists who had invested much time in professional development and had become backbones of their outlets have fled Somalia. The National Union of Somali Journalists estimates that at least 65 senior journalists have left in fear of their personal security.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Somalia Objective Score: 1.52

Somali media endeavor to inform Somalis on political, economic, social, health, cultural, educational, scientific, religious, ecological, and sporting events in the country and abroad. Occasionally, media outlets try to encourage open and free discussion by allowing citizens to express their viewpoints. But in general, news media organizations are mismanaged and overwhelmed by cronyism and bribery, and plagued by accusations of inciting violence.

The score for this objective, therefore, is moderately lower this year. Most indicators fell; only a few remained more or less the same: Indicators 2 (journalism ethics), 3 (self-censorship), and 7 (modern technical equipment). One indicator increased somewhat: Indicator 5 (pay levels for journalists). All indicator scores were very close to the overall objective score, with none more or less than a third of a point higher or lower.

The panelists said that media professionals in Somalia face a twofold challenge: to defend quality and standards of journalism and to create decent working conditions for all media workers. Without such conditions, Somalia has no concrete basics for forming a culture of independent and ethical journalism, panelists said. "The development of professional journalism is a crucial element in building a framework for press freedom," said Idle Moallim, director of the Puntland Journalists Club.

A few Somali journalists do pursue internationally accepted ethical and professional standards. But overall, as the media

industry is mushrooming in Somalia, media workers are struggling to maintain a satisfactory level of professionalism. The bulk of journalists need to learn basic reporting and news writing skills, in addition to committing to carry out their duties impartially, accurately, and responsibly.

Somalia has no schools of journalism or tradition of formal journalism education. Some Somali journalists were either trained outside the country or trained on the job with a few seminars and workshops to improve their skills. But some news media organizations believe that on-the-job training represents a major drain on time and other scarce resources, the panelists agreed.

Most panelists said that Somali journalists are failing in their duty to present all sides of a story in a fair and balanced way, due to mounting pressure from media owners and difficulty in securing interviews with politicians and newsmakers. MSI panel participants noted that independent sources are rarely quoted in news stories. Many news reporters are operating more like columnists and feature writers, reporting hearsay and including commentary in their stories. Politicians often criticize media professionals for lacking the competence to report on the facts rather than rumors. "Some of us rush to file unsubstantiated gossip without finding out whether there is any truth in it," said Muna Hassan.

Panelist Zaynab Abukar said that many journalists are not suited to inform the public, as they lack the knowledge to report on people from all walks of life. "Some of our colleagues are not enthusiastic, committed, or eager to learn the main issues that affect our society on a daily basis," she said.

Panelist Mohammed Hussein defended journalists, however. "It is a huge task for us as journalists to observe, record, and report information impartially and independently, while we know someone is not happy with what we are reporting."

Self-censorship, as a form of protection, is common among Somalia's media organizations and professionals. Journalists are sometimes encouraged to report on key events as long as they are not posing any risks to themselves and their families. Some news media organizations have begun to allocate more airtime to entertainment programming and less to news since the 2007 attacks on the media.

The current working conditions of journalists in the south-central and Puntland regions are a major impediment to performing in line with professional ethics and professional obligations. Poor services for journalists, lack of protection, and gender inequality remain major obstacles. Mowlid Haji Abdi of Somali Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) said that inexperience is an issue as well. "Media are growing in number in Puntland compared to last year, but the quality has

### JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

#### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

dropped greatly, as many young people and unskilled media managers are in the highest levels of decision-making," he said.

Journalists, particularly those reporters in the lower cadre, are among the most poorly paid professionals in the country. Most journalists do not have an employment contract, and many work under a "name for work" policy—receiving only a byline as compensation. Some media houses employ relatives or prefer to recruit unqualified staff in order to pay low salaries, taking advantage of a labor market with no standard minimum entry-level wage. The low wages partly explain the poor performance and incessant disregard of journalism ethics.

Journalists do, however, have access to technologically advanced equipment to perform their daily tasks.

Lack of specialization has affected the general quality of the news media, with little attention paid to niche issues or investigative reporting.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Somalia Objective Score: 1.65

The score for this objective fell slightly, and most indicator scores fell as well. Indicator 3 (objectivity of state media) remained the same, while Indicators 4 (news agencies) and 6 (transparency of media ownership) both improved somewhat. All indicators scored very close to the overall objective score.

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

Although Somalia does not have a system that encourages or protects experimentation, innovation, or the inclusion of many voices, there is plurality of news sources. Somalia has 21 radio stations, three television stations, and about 20 newspapers. But warlords and other politicians are accusing these outlets of being vehicles for promoting political strife and tribal conflicts. Indeed, partisanship has affected the credibility of the news media organizations in Puntland and south-central Somalia. Citizens must listen to several radio stations to get a comparatively correct evaluation of events and developments.

Wherever they are in the country, Somalis have access to international and regional news media organizations. Local radio stations rebroadcast programs from BBC, VOA, and RFI; Arab Satellite provides Arab-language and English-language channels, including CNN and Al-Jazeera English, without censorship or other interference.

Although the government has little or no influence on the private media, it controls the state-owned media with a firm grip. Radio Mogadishu and Radio Bay are partisan media and report government viewpoints only. They are not regarded as public-service broadcasting media. Somalia National News Agency (SONNA) is an inactive news agency. Because of the risks foreign journalists face, international news agencies AP, Reuters, AFP, and Xinhua collect news and information from different regions and districts by relying on local stringers.

However, a major development of the past decade is the increasing presence of the private media sector, which is impacting the reach and influence of state-owned media. Because of competition from their counterparts in the private sector, the TFG media of Radio Mogadishu and Radio Bay no longer enjoy the monopoly that the military government had before its collapse in 1991.

Local radio stations produce their own programs. The UN humanitarian news agency, IRIN, has recently established a half-hour program produced from Nairobi and broadcasted through local radio stations and the Internet.

### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

#### Somalia Objective Score: 1.45

The score for this objective improved modestly thanks to slightly better evaluations by the panelists of a number of indicators. All indicators scored very close to the overall objective score.

Media in Somalia are owned solely by Somalis, representing the diaspora, politicians, or, most often, private

businesspersons. Media outlets are run by the owners or individuals with whom owners have a close relationship, such as a family or tribal member. Private media operate as profit-making companies, but it is widely known that media managers have little understanding of how to run a successful, profitable business. This lessens their power to remain independent from private, political, and commercial influences.

Somalia has no advertising agencies. No market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, or tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.

Media are funded by various sources, all of which are declining. The financial strain has negatively impacted programming, prompt coverage of important news, and the overall quality of media.

Panelists could not name a private media outlet that has received public subsidies from the TFG, because the government itself is dependent on foreign aid. But panelists said that regional administrations, such as Puntland Regional State, provide some funding to private media indirectly, as do politicians in the south-central regions.

The panelists said that advertising does not make up the majority of media revenue and agreed that what little advertising existed has decreased drastically since the ruinous war in southern and central regions. Most commercial companies closed down and fled for the safety of their employees and property. In the past, media ran advertisements by small-scale industries, retail and wholesale companies, telecommunications enterprises, money-transfer companies, airlines, schools, and UN agencies, among others.

**INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.**

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:**

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

A media outlet's chance of securing advertisements depends mainly on the relationship between the media owner or manager and the advertiser.

Some media houses were previously accused of broadcasting advertisements that were in breach of religious values as well as ethical standards of Somali society. Media managers and owners had been focused on the potential income rather than public consequences. Abdi, editor with the SBC, though, was able to offer a positive example of professionalism in advertising. "We were offered money for campaigning by presidential candidates, but the owners were hesitant to allow their media directors to have income generated by campaign advertisements," he said.

Donor-funded projects, such as public-awareness campaigns and training programs for media members, have decreased, as donors recognize the unfavorable environment in which Somali media operate.

According to the panelists, this combined decrease in advertising and donor funding has increased the number of media houses that receive financial support from politicians from their clan or in alliance with their clan politicians. Some media owners manage to finance their companies using their own money.

The original private media in the country were newspapers, which were first published in Mogadishu immediately after the collapse of the military government. However, panelists said that all newspapers in Mogadishu have stopped operating, mainly due to lack of income to pay staff salaries, utility expenses, and the cost of vendors; very few people want to, or can afford to, read newspapers.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Somalia Objective Score: 1.67**

Nearly all indicators fell as increased violence hindered the role of supporting institutions, resulting in a decrease in the overall score from 2.23 to 1.67. Only Indicators 1 (trade associations), 3 (the work of media support NGOs), and 4 (academic journalism programs) did not change. These three indicators were the lowest last year, and it would appear that the state of other indicators fell to their level: all indicators scored very close to the overall objective score.

Several organizations are supporting media development in Somalia. They include the National Union of Somali Journalists, Somali Women Journalists' Association, and East Africa Media Institute—Somalia Chapter. Newspaper owners established the Somali Independent Newspaper Association to represent the interests of newspaper companies, but given

the difficulties that shut down newspapers in Mogadishu, the association has become dormant. Broadcast media owners have tried but failed several times to establish their own association.

The National Union of Somali Journalists has developed systematic monitoring of the media freedom situation. Cases of attacks on journalists are reported locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally through postings on the union's website, distribution to local media, and through its membership in the International Federation of Journalists and International Freedom of Expression Exchange.

Other media NGOs with foreign funding are present in Somalia, defending freedom of expression and the right to a free press. These organizations provide training courses, workshops, and seminars for all media professionals. To date, the longest training session has lasted seven days, but many journalists are not interested in being absent from work for more than seven days.

Although Somali media do receive assistance, Abdi said that aid is not given equitably across the country. "Always, Puntland is underrepresented in all opportunities of capacity building for media. The concentration is in Mogadishu and Somaliland. We feel that Puntland media is booming but is not given the attention it deserves," he said.

Internet service providers, including Global Internet in the southern regions and Golis Telecom Somalia in Puntland, are privately owned. As independent companies, they are neither influenced by politics nor subject to censorship.

Each newspaper owns its own printing facilities or shares costs with other newspaper. Printing is not influenced by politics in the country.

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

## List of Panel Participants

**Muktar Mohammed Hirabe**, director, Shabelle Radio, Mogadishu

**Zaynab Abukar**, reporter, HornAfrika, Baidoa

**Hilal Sheik Shueyb**, deputy director, Radio Warsan, Baidoa

**Sahro Mohamed Ali**, executive member, Freelance Journalists, Kismayu

**Abdiqani Sheik Mohamud**, editor, Radio Jowhar, Jowhar

**Muna Hassan**, freelance reporter, Journalist Radio, Beledweyn

**Abdi Adan Guled**, editor-in-chief, Xog-Ogaal newspaper, Mogadishu

**Wilu Ali Bulhan**, assistant editor, Aayaha Nolosha newspaper, Mogadishu

**Mowlid Haji Abdi**, editor, Somali Broadcasting Corporation, Bossasso

**Idle M. Moallim**, director, Puntland Journalists Club, Bossasso

**Mohammed Hussein**, reporter, Jantile Allpuntland, Bossasso

## Moderator

**Abdirashid Abdullahi Haidar**, secretary of labor, National Union of Somali Journalists, Mogadishu

## Observer

**Ali Moallim Isak**, organizing secretary, National Union of Somali Journalists, Mogadishu

*The Somalia study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the National Union of Somali Journalists, Mogadishu.*