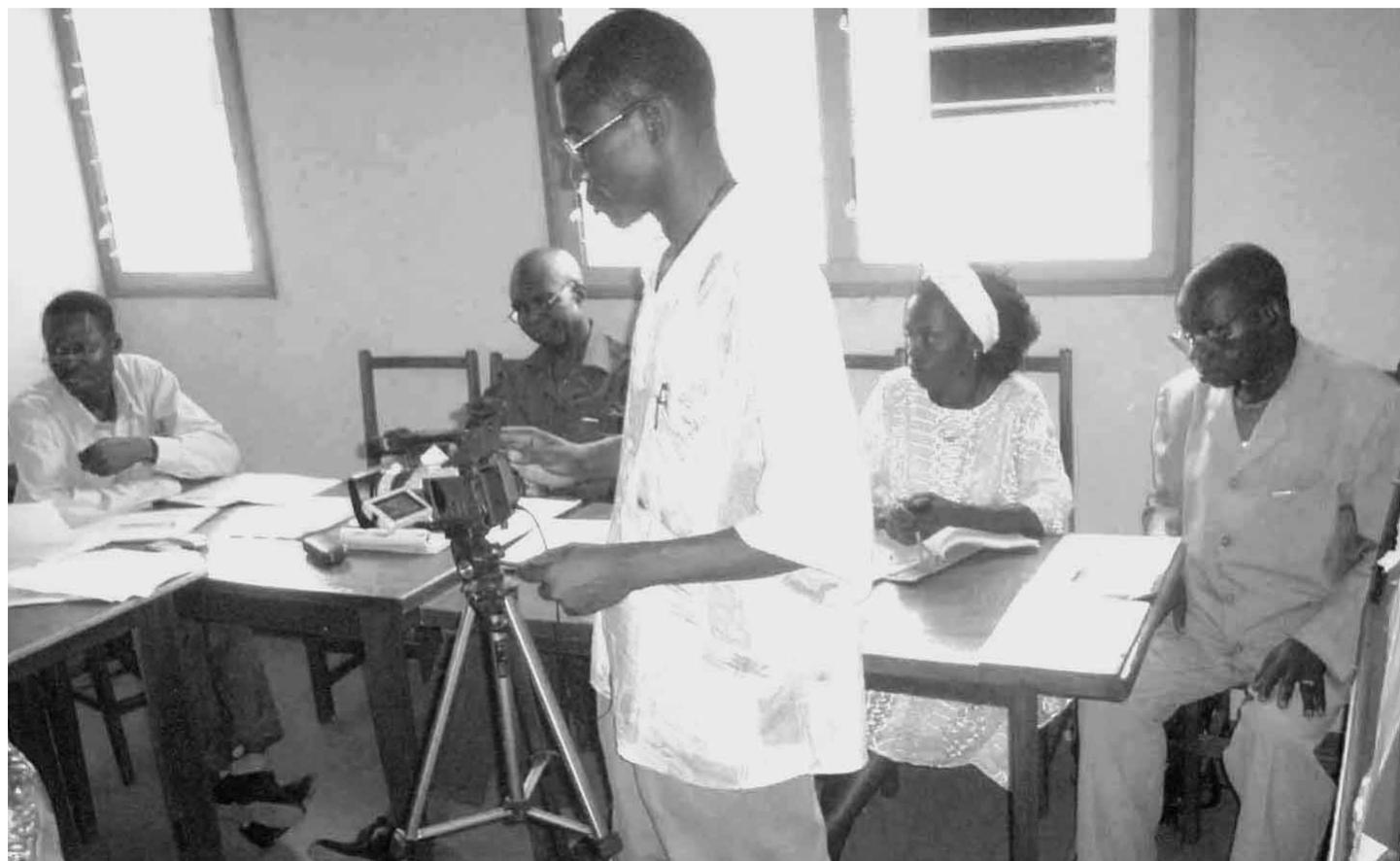

The overall score reveals that the media sector in CAR barely meets the objectives. Objectives 3 and 5, plurality of news and supporting institutions, fared the best, with scores of 1.50 and 1.70, respectively. However, Objective 4, business management, scored very low, at 0.24.



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The media landscape in the Central African Republic (CAR) was long dominated by the monopoly of state-run media, including Central African Radio, Central African Television, and the Central African Press Agency. Private-sector media began to flourish in 1997, particularly due to the development of rural and community radio stations.

CAR is one of the few countries in Central Africa where press offenses have been decriminalized. Order No. 05.002 concerning freedom of communication was given on February 22, 2005 and amended by Bill No. 06.008 passed on June 28, 2006, and it eliminated prison sentences, but not fines, for any press offense.

Despite this slight legal improvement, journalists continue to bow down to successive military regimes. This often leads to tensions between the authorities and the press, which tries to claim its freedom ever louder. For example, on April 2, 2007, Michel Alkhaly Ngady, president of the Central African Independent Press Publishers' Group (CAIPPG) and manager of the daily paper *Temps Nouveaux* published in Bangui, was sentenced to two months in prison and a fine of FCFA 300,000 (about \$600) by the Magistrate's Court of Bangui. Despite the changes to the law noted above, he was found guilty of "disobedience to the law and hindrance to the Higher Communication Council [HCC]," which is the public authority regulating the Central African media. The complaint was filed by HCC President Pierre Sammy-Mackfoy.

To curb these tensions, a convention of the CAR press was organized in July 2007, with representatives from all media partners in attendance. A number of measures were decided upon, such as journalists' access to news sources (particularly from public authorities), the independence of the state-owned media, inclusion of the state subsidy for private media in the annual budget, etc. However, many of these resolutions are still not in effect.

The overall score reveals that the media sector in CAR barely meets the objectives. Objectives 3 and 5, plurality of news and supporting institutions, fared the best, with scores of 1.50 and 1.70, respectively. However, Objective 4, business management, scored very low, at 0.24.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE

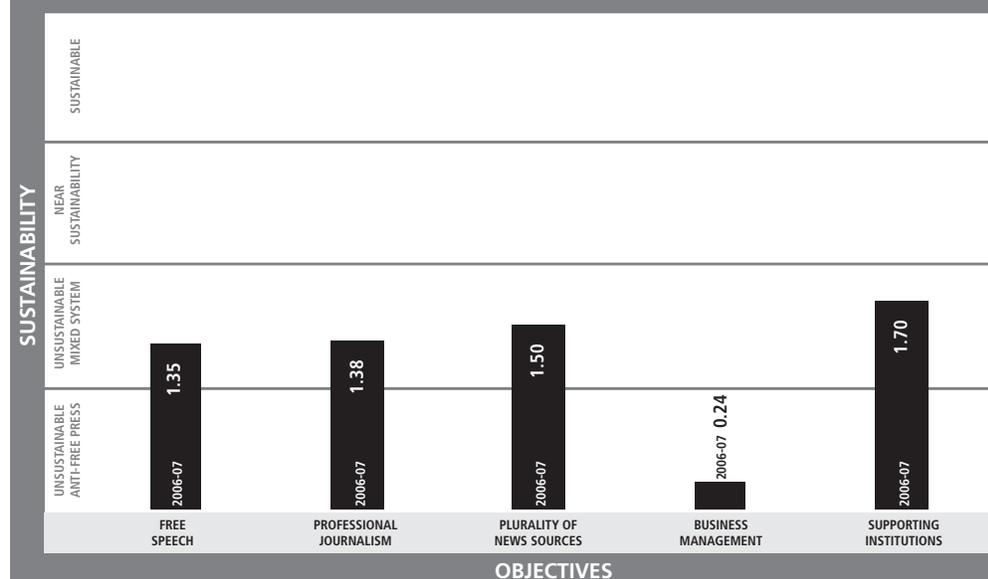
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,369,038 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bangui
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Baya 33%, Banda 27%, Mandjia 13%, Sara 10%, Mboum 7%, M'Baka 4%, Yakoma 4%, other 2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** indigenous beliefs 35%, Protestant 25%, Roman Catholic 25%, Muslim 15% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), Sangho (lingua franca and national language), tribal languages (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$1.493 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,280 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 51% (male 63.3%, female 39.9%) (2003 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Francois Bozize (since March 15, 2003)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 43 newspapers; Radio: 2 main stations (Central African Radio, Ndeke Luka Radio); Television stations: 1 (CATV (Central African Television)) (Source: HCC)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three most popular: *Le Citoyen*, *Le Confident*, *L'Hirondelle*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** CAPA (Central African Press Agency)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 13,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC



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

CAR Objective Score: 1.35

Overall, the indicators that make up this objective received low scores. Only Indicator 9, restrictions on entry into the journalism profession, received a high score, coming in nearly two points above the average.

The Central African Constitution (effective December 27, 2004) and Order No. 05.2002, given on February 22, 2005, recognize freedom of communication and guarantee freedom of the press. These texts meet international standards but suffer from lack of enforcement, particularly in the inland territories, where prefects and local administrators ignore such standards and violate freedom of speech with impunity. The issue in question is mainly the decriminalization of press offenses. "Judges disregard [the constitution] and use the criminal code to sentence journalists," said Michel Akhaly Ngady, president of the Press Publishers' Group and, as mentioned in the Introduction, a victim of such a penalty.

Momet Mathurin, manager of *Le Confident*, believes that journalists suffer constant threats, pressure, and aggressions. One example is the case of Jules Yanganda, the editor-in-chief of the daily paper *L'Hirondelle*. He was attacked by the first vice president of the National Assembly and a communication advisor to the head of state for having published a critical article.

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.

The panelists pointed out that the main obstacles to upholding the freedom of the press are impunity, ignorance of the law, an exaggerated zeal manifested by authorities, and the dependence of the judicial power upon the executive power.

Granting licenses to broadcasters is a legally fair and competition-based process. One panelist explained the licensing process: "At first, licenses used to be granted by the Department of Communication. Since 2005, the Higher Communication Council is in charge, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Post and Telecommunications, the Ministry of the Interior and Public Safety, and the Ministry of Defense."

Of the nine members that make up the HCC, three are appointed directly by the president of the republic. So far, no case of discrimination in terms of granting licenses has been noted. A press outlet that is not granted a license has the right to appeal the decision with the Administrative Court. Radio station licenses are valid five years and television channel licenses are valid for 10 years.

Press outlets are not taxed, because no law defines their legal status.

Threats are the most frequent form of harassment of the media. For example, in November 2006, the minister of mining (the nephew of the president) threatened during a public event to kill "like flies" journalists he viewed as spokespersons of the rebel movements. The perpetrators of such threats have never been prosecuted.

The law guarantees the independence of journalists. However, the public media are completely under the supervision of the Ministry of Communication and often enjoy the favors of political authorities. They are the first access to public information, they enjoy exclusive coverage of certain public events, etc.

Defamation is covered the criminal code, but burden of proof lies with the plaintiff. Corruption of judges is a known fact that is disparaged by society. In CAR, trials against journalists always end either in prison sentences or fines.

Access to public information is free both for the public and private media. There are cases (e.g., national security) in which access to information is strictly forbidden or reserved for the public media. However, accessing information is naturally easier in the capital Bangui, rather than in the provinces. Journalists attempting to obtain information encounter many difficulties, among them authorities withholding information and financial hardships that prevent extended efforts.

Central African media freely access and broadcast or relay the news appearing in the foreign media (e.g., RFI, BBC). Access to the journalistic profession in CAR is free and the government imposes no licensing or other restrictions.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

CAR Objective Score: 1.38

Most indicators in this objective scored near the average. The exceptions were Indicator 5, pay levels for journalists, which was the low; and Indicator 4, journalist coverage of key events, which was the high.

From the tendencies observed among the panelists, it appears on the surface that journalism in CAR complies with professional quality standards. Ethical and deontological standards are in effect and accepted by all the media players. However, journalists have difficulties: low salaries, financial difficulties in terms of access to news sources, self-censorship practiced in the public media, and obsolete equipment. On top of these factors, certain political and economic players curry favor among journalists by offering gifts.

As a general rule, reports are documented insufficiently, especially when they address official information. Journalists usually present one side of the facts. Balance is achieved in some fields by appealing to the voices and opinions of the public. The panelists justify this situation by stressing the difficult access to some news sources and the lack of logistical and financial means to conduct objective investigations. Some media often appeal to experts, but when the topic is even somewhat politically sensitive, the experts usually do not like to be quoted in the press for fear of suffering repercussions from the regime.

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).

All of the panelists recognized the ethical and deontological code of the Central African press, published in 2002 by the Union of Central African Journalists (UCAJ). Also, Order No. 05.2002, promulgated on February 22, 2005, has 19 articles on aspects of ethics and deontology. Despite these professional standards, the panelists lamented the questionable practices existing within the profession in CAR. In particular, they mentioned the phenomenon of "Gombo journalism," referring to those journalists who accept gifts in exchange for producing a certain kind of event coverage. Panelists noted that this practice is more widespread among younger journalists.

Self-censorship exists, especially in the public media. "Any news that might affect the president or the government is first examined by the minister of communication, who, in most cases, does not authorize its processing or heavily modifies its content," one panelist remarked. This practice is justified by the fear of hurting political authorities or losing one's job.

In CAR, all news events are covered, albeit in different ways, according to the political contacts of the decision-makers of the respective media. It must be pointed out that the treatment of subjects related to public safety or the rampant rebellion in the northeast of the country might cause problems for the author of such news. To illustrate, a panelist reported that "the residence of Zéphyrin Kaya, a journalist with Ndéké-Luka, a radio station sponsored by the Swiss Association Hironnelle, was recently raided by the military in search of said journalist, who was in Cameroon. Three days before, that journalist had criticized one of the nephews of president Françoise Bozize, who had accumulated several public offices simultaneously."

Salaries of journalists are very low. In the private sector, the monthly salary varies between FCFA 50,000 and FCFA 60,000 (\$100 and \$120, respectively). In the public sector, salaries range from FCFA 25,000 to FCFA 100,000 (\$50 to \$200), according to rank and functions; and vary between FCFA 30,000 and FCFA 50,000 (\$60 and \$100) each month.

The CAR press has a strong tendency to favor music and entertainment. Cultural shows are almost non-existent. Newscasts make up about 15 percent of scheduled audio-visual time, while entertainment makes up almost 60 percent.

CAR media are mainly concentrated in the capital, Bangui. No outlet covers the entire national territory, due to obsolete facilities and equipment at the press outlets. Some private media (Ndéké Luka Radio, Notre Dame Radio, Néhémie Radio) recently received computers, cameras, and other modern equipment from the European Union, and can now cover half of the territory. The transmitters still in use are

of very low capacity. Replacing the transmitters with newer equipment could remedy this situation.

CAR media do offer some quality niche programs. According to their editorial policies, the media process some news stories better than others. For example, the printed press does a better job processing news, particularly economic news, than other media; and private broadcasters do a better job than public media in covering newsworthy events.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

CAR Objective Score: 1.50

This objective's average was influenced by the scores of four indicators in particular. On the low side, Indicators 4 and 7, independent news agencies and a broad spectrum of social interests reflected in the media, came in nearly a full point below the average. On the high side, Indicators 2 and 5, citizen access to media and in-house production of broadcast news, came in about one point above the average.

CAR has a plurality of private and public news sources (television, radio, newspapers, Internet). Most of these media are based in Bangui. However, rural radio covers parts of the country. The private printed press is often bought by state agents and political authorities. In the rural areas, community radios are much more influential. CAR has a total of eight community radio stations, based in six cities throughout CAR's 16 prefectures.

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.

CAR media are mainly concentrated in the capital, Bangui. No outlet covers the entire national territory, due to obsolete facilities and equipment at the press outlets. Some private media received computers, cameras, and other modern equipment from the European Union, and can now cover half of the territory. The transmitters still in use are of very low capacity.

Citizen access to national as well as international media is only limited by the poor living conditions. No legal measure restricts or forbids the population from accessing news and information.

As in many other African countries, in CAR, the public media first and foremost are in service of the government, faithfully presenting the government's opinions on every issue. However, Decree No. 92.207 allows any politician to have access to the state-owned media. However, often the leaders of the political opposition and the civil society prefer the private media.

Private broadcasters produce their own shows and also rebroadcast foreign media productions. For example, Ndeke Luka Radio rebroadcasts BBC Africa programming. The productions of the private press are not substantially different from the state-owned media productions.

Media programs address a large area of social interests, with a more keen focus on issues concerning current political and economic events. CAR media do not broadcast programs covering minorities. Only the rural radio station Voix de la Sangha in Nola regularly broadcasts programs in all the languages spoken in the country. The other media only use French and Sango, the official languages.

CAR has only one press agency: the Central African Press Agency (CAPA). Its activity is now suspended due to the lack of financing. Press outlets often use news appearing in the foreign press (AFP, Reuters, etc.) without quoting the source.

No official information concerning media ownership is available, but CAR also has no media conglomerates. Only the Catholic Church owns, through its dioceses, six radio stations throughout the country. But because the dioceses are independent from one other, the radio stations are not a network.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

CAR Objective Score: 0.24

All indicators in this objective scored poorly. Each scored below 0.50, except for Indicators 1 and 2.

CAR press outlets are not organized as true business operations. Media outlets are professional in nature but are not constituted as profitable businesses. These media only survive because of their owners' sacrifices. They never use balance sheets or other professional accounting practices. Only the public media management practices can be considered approaching professional.

CAR has no distribution network for print media. In the past, travel agencies were charged with press distribution from Bangui into the inland territories. But today, distribution is non-operational due to decay of the roads linking the capital to the rest of the country.

The most important revenue for private media comes from commercials (from United Nations agencies) and, for the printed press, from newspaper sales. It is stipulated by law that the state must grant subsidies to the private press, but this obligation is often disregarded. In 2005, of the total amount of FCFA (10,000,000, or \$20,000) that was promised to the press, President Bozize only granted half; none has been disbursed since.

According to the law, local communities must support community media. Since communities have no means to do so, these media are left to find their own support and can only survive thanks to donations and the help of international

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.
-

organizations. Only the radio station Voix de la Sangha manages to attract contributions within the Nola community. The public media do receive governmental subsidies, but given the widespread corruption, the funds almost never reach their intended destination.

CAR has no advertising agency or market. Advertisements in the CAR press are extremely rare. There are only announcements and communiqués from certain organizations, but they are often published or broadcast in exchange for an in-kind benefit to the respective media. For example, some newspapers accept ads for travel agencies, and the travel agency will distribute that newspaper's copies towards the interior of the country free of charge. Announcements often come from the UNDP, the EU, or the Central African United Nations Observation Bureau, which are the main sponsors of the media.

The advertising market being non-existent, commercial advertising receipts are equally insignificant, if not null, for many outlets. No market research is available in CAR, nor are audience ratings or circulation figures.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

CAR Objective Score: 1.70

The indicator scores varied quite a bit within this objective. Panelists appreciated the role of NGOs and awarded Indicator 3 a very high score. All other indicators scored low, in particular those related to journalism education and media distribution.

Among the business associations, the Private Independent Press Publishers' Group of Central Africa is noteworthy, representing printed-press managers. Apart from its main mission to protect the interests of the press owners, this association has become an influential union movement in CAR and has campaigned for the creation of the HCC and the holding of the press convention in July 2007, among other improvements.

CAR's largest professional association of journalists is the Union of Central African Journalists (UCAJ), which includes all the media professionals in the public and private sectors. Apart from the UCAJ, journalist associations (Union of Central African Sports Journalists, for example) are active in specific fields. These associations offer services in professional training, lobbying, teaching the rules of ethics and deontology, etc. Their membership numbers are constantly growing.

CAR has supporting associations that, with the help of international organizations, protect journalists' interests by pressuring public authorities, although CAR has no organization specializing in advocating freedom of speech. Usually, the associations mentioned above as well as human rights NGOs (Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture

and the Death Sentence, the Central African Human Rights League, the Central African Human Rights Institute, the Movement for the Defense of Human Rights, etc.) are also involved in the defense of the freedom of the press. International NGOs such as Reports Without Borders, JED, etc., fight actively for the reformation of press legislation.

The quality of education in CAR has dropped significantly in recent years, and this affects the quality of young graduates. Typically, they come to newsrooms with no practical experience and poor skills. CAR has no school of journalism; however, at the press convention of July 2007, some attendees proposed the creation of a sub-department of communication within the Department of Language and Literature at the University of Bangui. This department should begin its activity next year. Journalists are often trained in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, or Côte d'Ivoire.

Free, short-term training programs are offered by foreign and local organizations. They focus on reporting; editing techniques; and news gathering, processing, and publishing techniques, thus allowing journalists to retrain and work at the same level as their foreign counterparts. The panelists expressed a wish that journalists also focus on studying ethics, journalistic writing, and news processing.

CAR has four printing houses: AKRAM, Central African Printing House (CAPH), Saint-Paul Printing, and EDI-FAMADI. CAPH and EDI-FAMADI are state-owned but there are no restrictions on accessing them.

The print distribution network is not organized. Each press outlet finds its own way to distribute its products. The public media transmitters belong to the state, whereas those of the private media belong to private owners. As noted above, no broadcaster covers the entire territory of 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

Ferdinand Samba, journalist, *Le Démocrate*, Bangui

Jean Ignace Manengou, journalist, Catholic Media, Bangui

Sylvie Jacqueline Panika Benguere, journalist, Ndeke Luka Radio, Bangui

Eloi Bellonghot, journalist, Central African Radio, Bangui

Chérubin-Raphaël Magba-Totama, freelance trainer, Bangui

Judes Zosse, journalist, *L'Hirondelle*, Bangui

Pierre Debato II, journalist, Media Observatory of Central Africa, Bangui

Firmine Lea Badou, journalist, Maïgaro Radio, Abouar

Blanche Elisabeth Olofio, journalist, Bé Oko Radio, Tossangoa

Gaston Placide Lamer, publisher, *Le Confident*, Bangui

Michel Alkhaly Ngady, manager, *Temps Nouveaux*, Bangui

Anicet Goue Moussangoe, journalist, Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture in the Central African Republic, Bangui

Moderator

Mathurin Momet, manager, *Le Confident*, Bangui

The Central African Republic study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, *Journaliste en Danger*, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.