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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Plagued by decades of instability and political turmoil, the war-ravaged Central African Republic (CAR) has not yet managed to climb out of poverty and conflict. Ongoing rebellions have created a climate of insecurity. Paradoxically, this former French colony is rich in natural resources, including diamonds—yet its people are among the poorest in the world. The current president, Francois Bozize, seized power in a coup in 2003. He then won the 2005 presidential election and has repeatedly postponed efforts to hold another election.

The media have suffered tremendously through the years of war, instability, and poverty. Despite constitutional guarantees for the freedom of the press, the authorities have failed to uphold these laws. Censorship is common, and journalists endure threats and intimidation. For example, in 2009, Reporters sans Frontières condemned the suspension of two CAR dailies, *L'Hirondelle* (for publishing an article that allegedly called for sedition by the armed forces) and *Le Citoyen* (suspended for one month). In a show of solidarity, however, other CAR newspapers canceled issues in protest.

In addition to this insecurity, journalists face extremely poor working conditions and pay. The state cannot pay its workers, and in both private and public sectors journalists who are paid anything are a lucky minority. There are virtually no sustainable press companies in CAR. Media outlets are managed loosely; they often operate without licenses and do not pay taxes, and many do not even have accounting departments. In the absence of any real advertising market, the media live hand-to-mouth. Against this backdrop, most media professionals with formal training have long since left their jobs for better opportunities.

There are multiple public and private news sources—but only a small portion of the population have access. Print media are available only in the capital, Bangui; this is not only due to poor roads and the lack of a distribution system, but because of political insecurity. Broadcast media outlets fare no better. The state-run radio station that used to cover the entire country 24 hours a day has deteriorated; now, some areas only get reception for about six hours each day. For most of the population, the Internet is still a luxury—even for residents in Bangui. Only a handful of media outlets have websites.

Despite these obstacles, there were several important developments for the media in 2009. One major advance for the media came with the February 2009 court order decriminalizing press offenses. The panelists also praised the 2009 creation of a journalism department at the University of Bangui. Furthermore, journalists have set up agencies and are exploring hosting a convention to help them meet professional standards, which constitutes an important advancement.

These significant changes in the media landscape help explain CAR's improved MSI score, up from the 2009 score of 1.47. However, the score still falls in the unsustainable, mixed-system range, reflecting an ongoing failure of the state to adequately support freedom of the press and the problems the media themselves face with professionalism, management, and developing supporting institutions.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE

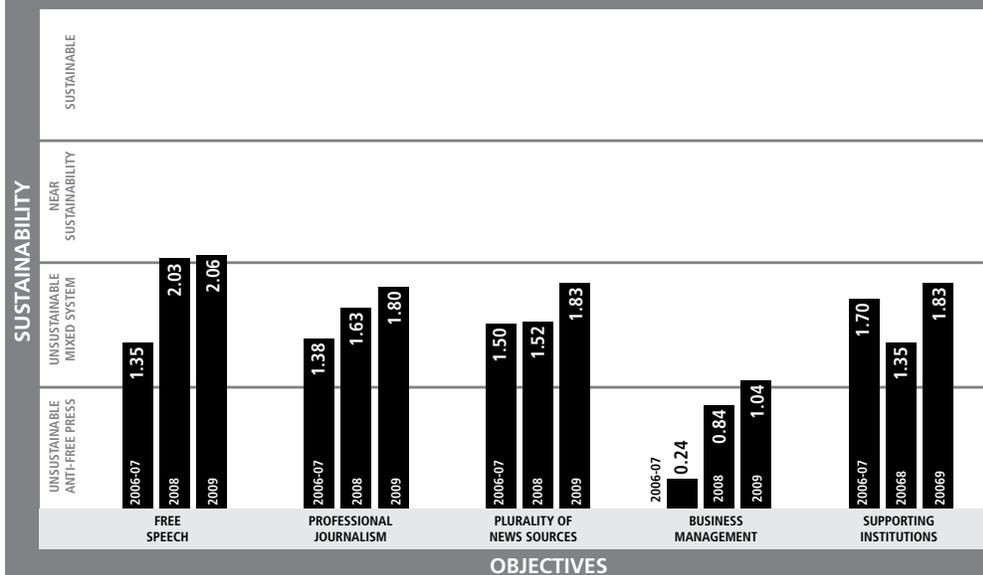
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,844,927 (July 2010 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:** French (official), Sangho (lingua franca and national language), tribal languages (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$1.975 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$750 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 48.6% (male 64.8%, female 33.5%) (2000 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** 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, Central African Television (Source: HCC)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three most popular: *Le Citoyen*, *Le Confident*, *L'Hirondelle*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Agence Centrafrique Presse (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 22,600 (2009 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: 2.06

The CAR constitution, along with other legislative and social provisions, upholds freedom of speech and free access to public information. Additionally, a February 2, 2009, court order decriminalized press offenses. Furthermore, Maka Gbossokotto, of the Central African Journalists' Union, noted that CAR's laws reflect international legal standards. But when it comes to putting all the standards into practice, there are many obstacles. Sammuél Bogoto, a journalist for ICDI (Integrated Community Development International) Radio, agreed that there has been significant legislative progress. However, he said the challenge lies in enforcing this legislation. Prospert Yaka Maïde, a webmaster for the Central African Press Agency, added that the government lacks the resources to guarantee that the law is enforced properly.

Gbossokotto commented that ordinary citizens are free to speak their mind—about everything except politics. The political opposition behaves similarly and appears to be afraid of the microphone. As a result, major decisions involving the country's future are not discussed publicly, although the media could play a strong role in helping the population to understand some of the key issues facing CAR.

Regarding the independence of the judiciary, Gbossokotto said that the right to defense is guaranteed, but sometimes judges also play the role of advocate for the executive branch. This occurs to such a degree that in lawsuits against the press, CAR's judicial system does not seem to dispense justice but instead renders service for the executive branch.

Other panelists expressed concern over the lack of awareness and understanding of media laws. Pierre Debatto II, of the Central African Media Observatory, said, "The existing legislation in support of the freedom of speech is either ignored or undisclosed. Nothing is done to promote or popularize it."

Chérubin-Raphaël Magba Tutama, a freelance journalist and trainer, commented that the license-granting process seems overly long. The panelists do not believe that the process is selective. The High Communications Council is in charge of granting operational licenses, and in principle it should guarantee the freedom of the press. In reality, according to the panelists, this regulatory institution has turned into the opposite and is subservient to the government.

The media pay the same amount of taxes as other industries, but Tutama noted that increasing taxes on the still-vulnerable

Regarding the independence of the judiciary, Gbossokotto said that the right to defense is guaranteed, but sometimes judges also play the role of advocate for the executive branch.

media threaten the media's very sustainability. Debatto argued that taxes are used to muzzle the private press.

Although crimes against journalists are rare, journalists' safety is not guaranteed. Journalists in the private sector are vulnerable to all forms of aggression, particularly when they do their jobs well. Journalists endure aggression and intimidation. Gbossokotto said that journalists receive threats from all directions: government officials, the military, rebels, even healthcare providers. Furthermore, Debatto noted, the complaints about the offenses committed by the authorities are never followed up; aggressions by the military go unpunished.

According to the panelists, the public does not react consistently when journalists are victims of aggression. Mathurin Momet, manager of *Le Confident*, added that threats against journalists are not appreciated by the human-rights organizations that support the private press and the community radio stations that continue to denounce and criticize the government.

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.

Although Tutama acknowledged the court order decriminalizing libel and slander, he noted that the authorities use tricks with the criminal code to sentence journalists—and he is not convinced that the court order erases that threat.

Some panelists charged that the government favors the state-owned media, and its journalists serve the state authorities and sidestep journalistic principles. The state-owned media are protected under the law guaranteeing the independence of journalists, and Bruno Hyacinthe Gbiegba, president of Christians for the Abolition of Torture and the Death Penalty, argued that the public and the private press are not treated differently under the law. Other panelists disagreed, noting that the government reserves the right to appoint public media managers. Gbossokotto said that the public media continue to reflect the government point of view and fail to give the opposition and civil society a chance to be heard. Julie Ewango-Ndouwa, a producer for Radio Centrafrique, noted that political parties avoid coverage in the public media for fear that the government might bother them, although the legislation authorizing their access to the public media is available and technically in force. NGOs, unions, and civil society enjoy free access to these media.

Although Tutama acknowledged the court order decriminalizing libel and slander, he noted that the authorities use tricks with the criminal code to sentence journalists—and he is not convinced that the court order erases that threat. Furthermore, despite the decriminalization of press offenses, the burden of proof still rests with journalists. However, at the time the MSI panel convened, no journalists were under arrested or imprisoned.

Private media face great challenges accessing public information. Frequently, ministers organize press meetings where they invite only the representatives of the official press. As an example, the panelists pointed to a press conference organized by the minister of land administration that excluded the private press.

While the government does not restrict access to the Internet, Tutama noted that authorities simply do not have the resources to control Internet use. Bogoto said, however, that even though Internet access is free, journalists typically do not conduct their research online. Noting that not even the state-owned media have Internet connections, B. Sylvie Jacqueline Panika, editor-in-chief of Radio Ndeke Luka,

commented that Internet subscriptions are very far from becoming a habit for the CAR's media. Gbossokotto noted that despite having paid the amount requested by the telecommunications company since 1997, the independent daily *Le Citoyen* still does not have a website. Additionally, Ndouwa said that while journalists can freely access the Internet, they do not have the necessary resources to build personal websites. Nonetheless, the media are allowed to distribute or rebroadcast foreign media production or news from press agencies.

Entry into the profession is relatively free; anyone can attend journalism school, become a journalist, and create supporting associations.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

CAR Objective Score: 1.80

Adherence to professional standards is low. Though standards vary from outlet to outlet, in general journalists rarely cross-check their facts or conduct preliminary research, and they often fail to observe CAR journalists' statement of principles adopted by the Central African Journalists Union General Board—compromising the media's reliability. As a result, blunders appear in both the written press and the broadcast media. Precision, balance, and documentation are often replaced by highly subjective commentaries, and one panelist charged that rumors take precedence over news. Maïde said that the press reverts to sensationalism and lacks a sense of rigor since their main preoccupation is to fill the pages instead of checking the quality of reports and investigations.

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).

However, Tutama said that he believes that journalists do what they can with the scant resources they have to cover events. Clearly, CAR journalists work under difficult circumstances. They do not have the proper resources or compensation to carry out their jobs, and they are often exposed to physical and verbal harassment and receive a lot of redaction requests. But Gbossokotto blamed journalists' failure to meet professional quality standards largely on the poor training options available for journalists. Bogoto said, "Meeting professional ethical and quality standards is a huge problem in CAR, for the simple reason that most of those who practice journalism do not have the appropriate degrees."

Despite these shortcomings, some journalists are devoted to their trade and want to elevate standards. Momet noted that a group of journalists have been granted permission to organize a general media convention to propose improvements in the profession. Gbiegba noted also that journalists have set up agencies to help meet professional standards, a significant advance.

Regarding ethics, Bogoto noted that even though professional organizations have established ethical standards, adhering to them is a challenge. Benguere summarized that generally, in the CAR, journalism does not meet professional or ethical standards, and a lack of professionalism leads journalists to disregard professional ethics. Although it may seem paradoxical, some graduates from higher journalism schools do not respect ethical standards and function more as propagandists than journalists.

Journalists fear they will be arrested or lose their jobs if they criticize the government, so self-censorship is common. As an example, Simon-Pierre Ndouba Beret, director of the Central African Press Agency, described a publication manager who, fearing potential aggressions from the authorities, decided to stop printing all of his publications. However, according to Tutama, there is no self-censorship in the independent media, but it is the norm with state-owned media and the newspapers close to the government.

In addition, Gbossokotto said that fear holds back journalists from reporting on major issues such as rebellions and human rights. Beret added that major events can only be covered in Bangui, due to the inaccessibility of the provinces.

As for salaries, Tutama agreed that the journalists working for nongovernmental media receive very low pay—and some media outlets provide no salaries at all. Another panelist described public media salaries as ridiculously low. In fact, very few newspapers (*Le Confident*, *Le Citoyen*) pay their employees on a monthly basis. Others prefer to use vaguely qualified freelancers, who some consider a threat to

professional standards. Overtime is not compensated. Several panelists commented that media professionals, in both the public and private press, are employed without a collective contract that could provide some much-needed protection, for the state-run as well as the independent private press.

Gbossokotto described the living and working conditions of journalists (in both the public and private sectors) as appalling. He cited several examples, including a journalist who died because the publication manager of a private newspaper could not honor a XAF 5,000 (\$10.50) prescription, and a television news editor who lost his life because he was forced to choose a cheaper treatment of self-medication, lacking financial means for better care.

Confronted with such poverty, journalists fall easily under the spell of corruption and throw away their professional standards. For example, Beret mentioned that organizers of major events pay journalists to cover their events. Bogoto also highlighted the link between low ethical standards and low pay, noting that journalists frequently accept gifts for favorable coverage—and this happens at all levels of the profession.

According to Maïde, most media professionals with formal training in journalism have left their jobs for better-paying opportunities. Blanche Elisabeth Olofio, a reporter with Radio Bê, noted that many high officials and dignitaries in the CAR are former journalists who abandoned the profession for better-paying jobs.

In the broadcast media, a high preference for musical shows and entertainment is evident. Tutama noted that a market study has yet to be conducted, but it is safe to say that entertainment sometimes outweighs news by 70 percent on some stations, including the national radio.

Across all sectors, the media make do with obsolete equipment. As there is no printing house, newspapers are processed on computers, then printed on risograph printers. The broadcast media outlets do not fare better. The outdated state of broadcast media equipment is reflected in show quality; it is nearly impossible to produce shows of high cultural or investigative value.

Ndouwa commented that working conditions differ between the public and the private media. She said that the public media face very difficult conditions; for instance, at the national radio station, there are only three computers for content production and distribution, and its equipment is outdated. This station switched from analog to digital a mere five years ago.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

CAR Objective Score: 1.83

Theoretically, in CAR there are multiple public and private news sources capable of providing citizens with objective and reliable information. But only a small portion of the population, including journalists, has access to these sources. CAR media as a whole (television, radio, press agency, written press) do not cover the entire national territory. Only the capital has wide access to news, including print media and national television (the only television station). There are community radio stations in some provincial cities, and Debato said that the community media is thriving and puts out shows that meet the locals' needs.

Although panelists said that the Internet is sometimes used as a news source, it is still a luxury for most people—even for residents in the capital of Bangui. Benguere said that except for *Le Confident*, the Agence Centrafrique Presse, and Radio Ndeke Luka, media outlets do not often have websites.

Other panelists felt that despite the presence of multiple news sources, media outlets are singular in their point of view. Momet noted that while some private outlets may try to cover multiple points, reporters working in the private sector are often barred from official events, and political personalities tend to refuse to answer questions coming from the private media. Gbossokotto agreed that the opposition's access to the state-run media is minimal, and the opposition leaders and the public do not force the government to enforce the appropriate legislation that would allow access.

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.

Gbossokotto pointed to the private, Swiss-funded radio station Ndeke Luka, which recently became a private commercial organization, as an example of an outlet that gives everyone the opportunity to speak—individuals within the political majority, the opposition, and the public.

Citizens have free access to domestic and international media; the government does not restrict access to international media. However, not all CAR citizens are able to easily access multiple news sources due to technical and financial difficulties. There is an acute economic slump in the country, which has placed media out of reach for many. Only people with jobs can afford to buy newspapers—and even then their purchasing power is limited. Some foreign newspapers are available, too, but only in a single bookstore. Broadcast media may reach a large part of the population, but print media are available only in Bangui—and this is not only due to poorly maintained roads and the lack of a distribution system, but especially to the general sense of insecurity (e.g., rebellions). Tutama said that provincial officials—avid readers all—stock up on newspapers when they visit the capital.

The state-run radio station that used to cover the entire country 24 hours a day has deteriorated, and its equipment has become obsolete. Tutama said that the national radio station broadcasts in decametric wavelengths to the provinces and does not always cover the entire country. Some areas only get reception between about 8 a.m. and 3 to 4 p.m. The state-run television channel covers only Bangui.

In addition to the national radio station covering the entire country at certain times and Radio ICDI (developed by Integrated Community Development International and airing programs on AIDS prevention, orphan care, well repair programs, and many other community development initiatives), there are local radio stations based in the Central African cities. However, Ndouwa noted that the local radio stations do not cover all 166 prefectures and 77 sub-prefectures. The government is currently working to ensure that the other prefectures have local radio stations. The well-to-do population subscribes to cable or satellite television.

According to the panelists, the public or state-owned media do not reflect the entire political spectrum and do not serve the public interest. A decree providing for access by political parties to the public media is disregarded, and the public media reflect disproportionately the voices of the establishment. Bogoto said that the state-run radio stations and television channels are seen as subservient to the government, and people with views that differ from the government's rarely find opportunities to speak in the public media. Benguere agreed that the government maintains

tight control over the public media but also criticized media professionals for lacking bravery.

There are no independent press agencies in CAR. The only press agency providing news services is the stagnating Agence Centrafrique Presse (ACAP). Beret commented that ACAP does not have a network of correspondents in the provinces. Gbossokotto added that it is completely devoid of resources and unable to fulfill its mission, and the media have never relied on its services.

Furthermore, international press agencies are seriously underrepresented, and Debato said that none are physically present in the country. Maïde noted that very few media outlets (less than 10 percent) use the Internet for news reporting, although the government does not limit access to or block foreign news sources. Olofio added that news taken from the Internet is problematic because it is not always verified.

Religious broadcast outlets and Radio Ndeke Luka produce original programming. Media ownership is fairly transparent.

National, rural, and private radio stations produce shows in the national language, Sango. According to CAR's constitution, French is the official language, and Sango is the national language. The statutes of the community press organizations allow the use of local languages, but panelists said media outlets encounter resistance from the authorities.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

CAR Objective Score: 1.04

The panelists generally agreed that CAR media enterprises are not sustainable or professional, and the prospect of profitability is far off. Most of the religious radio stations are nonprofit, community radio stations.

According to Gbossokotto, CAR media lack the knowledge and ability to apply even the simplest rules of management, an essential step to building media sustainability. Publication managers or administrators lack the necessary skills and experience to manage their media companies and often confuse the company's funds with their own pockets. Many companies do not even have an accounting office. According to Gbossokotto, media are managed informally, with the exception of four daily newspapers and Radio Ndeke Luka. They are not registered with the Chamber of Commerce, do not have licenses from the High Communications Council, do not pay taxes, do not have articles of incorporation, etc.

Beret agreed that there are virtually no sustainable press companies in CAR and added that most were created without

prior research or a business plan. Furthermore, since they do not receive subsidies from the government and there is no real advertising market to speak of, the media live from hand to mouth.

Maïde said most print media outlets are disorganized and noted that, ideally, a press outlet should not rely exclusively on a publication manager who only works with freelancers. Debato concurred that there is no sense of professionalism or structure. Tutama noted that the lack of advertising, except for a few commercials, makes it impossible for newspapers to be profitable.

Gbiegba agreed that the lack of resources at all levels has kept the media from becoming profitable, and the independent media are in particularly rough shape. He warned, however, against linking poor management and the journalists' independence. Independence is a state of mind that cannot be subject to any technical or financial situation. It is the journalists' task to meet professional ethical standards and fight for independence.

While public media outlets are owned by the government and funded from the state budget, private media outlets, in particular, do not receive financial support from multiple sources. There are no subscriptions or commercials. Bogoto said, "Except for the government-funded national radio station and Radio Ndeke Luka, which has multiple funding sources, the private press—the newspapers, in particular—barely get by based on newspaper sales, which do not bring in much income to the publishers."

Maïde noted that international partners subsidize some community media, but these funds are not significant,

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.

aside from Radio Ndeke Luka, run by the Swiss-based Fondation Hirondelle.

The advertising sector is underdeveloped in CAR, and advertising income is minimal. International organizations only sporadically provide the private media with commercials and advertising. Despite the meager advertising market, businesses prefer to use the public media and agencies to distribute or publish their commercials. International organizations only rarely provide commercials. There are no advertising agencies in the country.

The private press does not receive subsidies from the government. Tutama noted that a legal decree paving the way for government subsidies for the private media was created in 2005. However, according to Maïde, the decree that regulates the conditions to grant the subsidies has not been signed yet, and the government has never given subsidies to the private press. The panelists did not discuss whether such subsidies could give the government undue influence over independent outlets.

News outlets do not have access to or conduct market research. Debato commented that as a result, there are no strategic plans, advertising income cannot be improved, and the product cannot be personalized according to the needs and interests of the public.

According to the panelists, there are still no audience studies, ratings, circulation statistics, or Internet-news user statistics, nor is there any agency to support such efforts.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

CAR Objective Score: 1.83

Both the public and private media have a publisher's association to support media professionals in CAR. Their roles revolve around training, professional ethics, support, and sometimes lobbying. While some find these associations ineffective, Gbossokotto said that the Central African Private Independent Press Publishers Group (known by the French acronym GEPI) fights for the advancement of the trade and lobbies for direct and indirect aid from the government and international organizations. It is also working to acquire modern printing facilities and advocates for the creation of a distribution service, as well as an advertising agency. However, according to Tutama, GEPI is not really operational; moreover, it is suffering from a management crisis. An ad-hoc committee has been created and tasked with preparing elections meant to give a new boost to the organization.

There are professional associations protecting journalists as well, but the panelists said that they suffer from a lack of resources that renders them inefficient. The Central African Journalists Union (known by its French acronym UJCA) is the largest association for the protection of journalists in CAR. According to Gbossokotto, UJCA upholds journalists' interests by working to decriminalize press offenses, providing a press and journalist house that hosts seminars, and organizing training sessions with the assistance of UNESCO, Institut Panos, etc. It is also working to equip journalists in the private press with a collective work contract. However, Tutama said that UJCA is supposed to represent all journalists but has been taken over for other purposes—echoing charges from last year's MSI panelists that it is packed with journalists working in the state media. Its statutes are disregarded—so much so that journalists have started to turn away.

The Media Observatory in Central Africa is a court of peers created by the General Board of UJCA to uphold professional ethical rules. However, Gbiegba said that the UJCA does not provide the resources necessary to ensure it fulfills this role, and the organization is not active enough. In Gbiegba's opinion, this is a significant reason behind the weakness of the independent media—which remain vulnerable to the authorities despite the apparent freedom they should enjoy under the law.

The Central African Association of Professional Women in Communication is another organization that works alongside the human-rights organizations and the Bar Association of Bangui. Finally, there are also around 10 smaller organizations upholding the interests of journalists that specialize in economics, culture, sports, human rights, the fight against corruption, etc. However, Beret emphasized that these professional organizations suffer from a lack of resources—

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.

particularly when it comes to dealing with unqualified labor, the lack of technical equipment, and hardships in media development.

Momet commented that professional organizations used to be very active in advancing freedom of the press. However, since they obtained the decriminalization of press offenses and managed to put together general norms for the media, they have grown apart and weaker, and also less focused on uniting for the good of the entire media community.

Agreeing that professional associations lack adequate resources to help journalists, Debato said that, fortunately, there are international organizations that also help the media. They champion the fight for the freedom of the press, act as lobbyists, and uphold the freedom of the press and independent media.

The panelists said that in CAR, human-rights NGOs, such as the Central African Human Rights League, are the most active in defending the freedom of speech and the independent media. As noted last year, human-rights NGOs provide constant support by helping journalists when they are arrested, and they have earned a reputation for coming through on behalf of the media.

There are international NGOs as well, such as Reporters sans Frontières and Journaliste en Danger. However, without permanent correspondents based in CAR, it is nearly impossible to hear of violations in the country.

Many journalists have learned their profession on the job and have no formal training in journalism. Both in the private and public media, journalists received primarily on-the-job training. Gbossokotto said that in CAR, journalism does not meet professional quality standards because for more than 30 years, the country had stopped training journalists. Therefore, the creation in 2009 of a journalism department at the University of Bangui for the training of journalists was a major advance for CAR. Created with UNESCO support, Momet noted that it fills a great void in upgrading skills and fostering greater adherence to professional standards.

In terms of short-term training opportunities, seminars are organized regularly. In addition to UNESCO training efforts, the Institut Panos Paris provides training to strengthen the capabilities of community radio stations and professional organizations.

The state of printing in CAR continues to be deplorable. While the few existing printing houses are for-profit and not subject to government control, the panelists said they

do not meet acceptable standards, and newspapers are still photocopied. The UJCA is fighting for the creation of a printing press at the Press House, but so far this has not materialized.

Although the need is great, there is still no print media distribution service in CAR. Internet access is under private management.

List of Panel Participants

Joseph-Vermond Tchendo, advisor, High Communications Council, Bangui

Chérubin-Raphaël Magba-Tutama, freelance journalist and trainer, Bangui

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