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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Independent observers of the media landscape in the Central African Republic (CAR) agree: while not perfect, the media environment and the freedom of the press are far from alarming. Much has changed since the days when former president David Dacko (1960-1966) and Emperor Jean Bedel Bokassa (1966-1979) kept tight control of the press and systematically repressed any “subversive text.” Under Bokassa’s regime, for example, criticizing the government or simply publishing a cartoon was unimaginable and the press was limited to photographs that largely sang the government’s praises.

With the advent of a multiparty system in 1992, the population was free once again to speak out. Small opposition newspapers, with circulations in the thousands of copies, boomed, and political cartoons were excellent. When the tenure of President François Bozize began in 2003 and press offenses were decriminalized in 2005, the media environment improved further, despite a few but consistent attacks and threats against the media and journalists.

Improvements notwithstanding, the MSI panelists reported that the state of the media still reflects a country marked by repeated conflict and severe economic hardship. The media landscape that experienced significant growth in the 1990s is now limited to a handful of media, most clustered in the capital, Bangui. The government does not have an official press outlet, other than the state-run news agency. Most newspapers, often linked to political trends in the country, favor the opposition but maintain “gracious neutrality” toward the government, one MSI panelist said.

To weather the tough economic environment and meet extremely high production costs, newspaper managers are forced often to resort to governmental assistance. Publications from the capital do not reach the provinces, sales are low, and they have almost no impact on the population outside of the cities. According to Albert Mbaya, chair of the Groupement des Editeurs de la Presse Privée Indépendante de Centrafrique (GEPPIC), “French is the language of the written press despite a majority of people who cannot read the language, not to mention that buying newspapers in such a poor country is definitely not a priority for most households.”

On the new media front, CAR remains a country where many journalists still do not have an e-mail address, and many citizens do not yet know how to use the Internet.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE

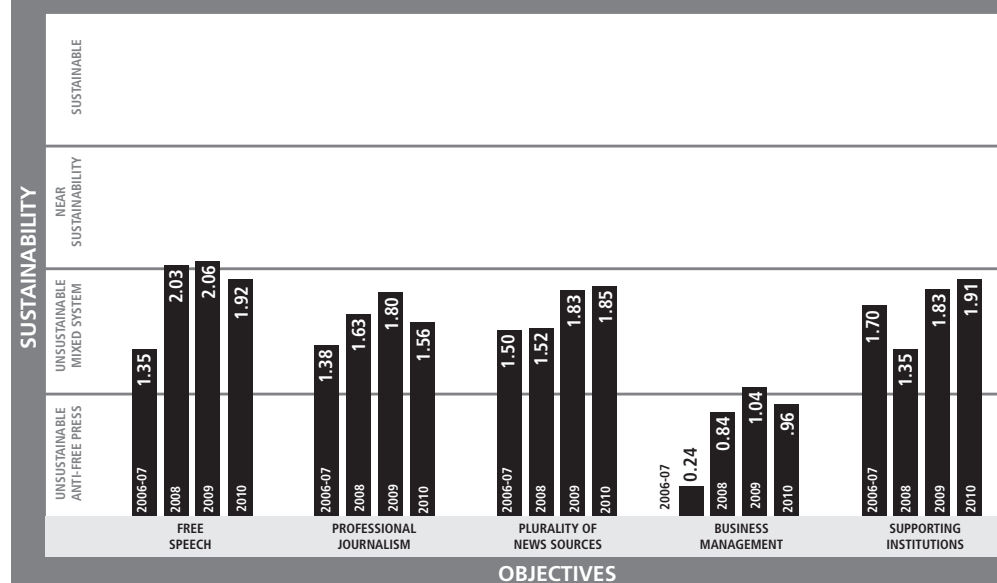
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,950,027 (July 2011 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 (2010-Atlas):** \$2.067 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$760 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **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: 1.92

Gains in the freedom of the press in the CAR are widely accepted. “No journalists in prison. No murdered journalists. These are facts. But still, there are threats, fines, various kinds of pressure and harassments,” the panelists stated almost unanimously.

The panelists also recalled that the violations of the press laws were decriminalized in 2005 and that other laws officially recognize the freedom of the press. And yet, people complain that the reality does not match the words on the paper. Mathurin Momet, the publication manager of *Le Confident*, remarked, “There is a huge gap between the law and its enforcement. Journalists are arrested by political-administrative authorities and kept in jail with the approval of the judicial authorities. Pascal Chirhalwirwa, the coordinator of the Institut Panos Paris, pointed out that there is much political interference in the media. The politicians in government who are supposed to enforce the law are instead the first to break it.

As for broadcast licensing, Tchendo Joseph-Vermond, a member of the Haut Conseil de la Communication (HCC), explained that the HCC guarantees the freedom of communication in the CAR and is the sole issuer of broadcast and publication licenses, while also methodically ensuring the maintenance of professional ethics. Chirhalwirwa, however,

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.

Bogoto said that the state-run media are subject to a different set of rules, he said, which leads to unfair advantages for the state-run media.

said that operating licenses are not fairly granted by the size, context, and purpose of each media. Nevertheless, anyone may create a media outlet, but the time to market can vary greatly according to how many “friends in high places” one has.

Sammuel Bogoto, a journalist with Radio Integrated Community Development International (ICDI), denounced attempts to suffocate private papers with high taxes, adding that the media companies are subject to tax laws at the same rate as any other businesses.

Joseph-Vermond expressed regret that the private print outlets must pay enormous taxes to the state, despite the low circulation and an acute lack of advertising. Ewango Ndouwa, head of the Media Resource Center with Radio Centrafrique, disagreed with that assessment, however. According to him, there are privately owned press companies that are operational and papers in print every day. What they lack is an office—meaning they pay no taxes.

Ndouwa said that criminal acts against journalists or media outlets are consistently prosecuted, but such crimes are quite rare. For example, a woman journalist was raped as she was returning from the provinces where she was on assignment to raise awareness on Independence Day. Her fellow journalists and the civil society rallied to demand that the perpetrators be prosecuted and tried. Simon-Pierre Ndouba Beret, recording secretary of the Observatoire des Medias, countered with a few cases that show, in his opinion, that the enforcement of the legislation is not only questionable, but the authorities themselves are sometimes behind attacks. For example, in August 2010, men in military uniforms attacked a television camerawoman. Furthermore, according to last year’s MSI, the public does not always react with outrage when journalists are victimized.

In practice, Felicite said, journalists face many difficulties, not excluding mistreatment at public events by the presidential bodyguards. “One radio journalist was assaulted by a security agent and was hit on the forehead,” she recalled. Chérubin-Raphaël Magba-Tutama, a freelance journalist and trainer, noted that the authorities were also harassing fellow journalists Jean Claude Gnapougo and Mathilde Gbate of the local Berberati (community) radio station at the time the MSI panelists met.

Journalists also endure arbitrary arrests; Magba-Tutama pointed to the case of his fellow journalist Alexis Remangai, who was recently arrested without good cause. He was released without trial by the state prosecutor. Also, in September 2010, an editor from the private paper, *Le Confident*, was held unlawfully by police for publishing a letter written from the mining associations protesting the actions of the principal private secretary of the Minister of Mines. In another incident, the Minister of Communications was accused of suspending a national radio program after its anchors made statements critical of several politicians.

Charges of official favoritism of the state-owned media persist, along with charges that public media journalists serve the authorities, reflecting the official point of view and failing to give the opposition and civil society any airtime. Bogoto said that the state-run media are subject to a different set of rules, he said, which leads to unfair advantages for the state-run media. Furthermore, the government reserves the right to appoint public media managers, and Bogotonoted that the local authorities in the provinces go so far as to interfere with the local community radio stations by appointing subservient managing committees.

Momet commented that the public media are privileged over privately held media at events and in access to news sources. Sometimes, the private media are blocked from covering events sponsored by the president. Members of the cabinet and high-ranking administration officials withhold information from journalists in the private sector.

For most, the 2005 decriminalization of press offenses in the CAR is seen as a significant development. And yet, despite official protection, Albert noted that journalists are still questioned, harassed or threatened, and accused of "libel." Félicité Gakara Virginie, an editor with Radio Télé Centrafrique, denounced the fact that when a journalist is tried, magistrates still refer to the criminal code, a legal maneuver that is no longer possible under article 71 of the 2005 law on freedom of the press. And, the burden of proof still rests with journalists.

Mbaya emphasized that journalists' access to public news sources is an important indicator of freedom of speech. On the one hand, access to news is extremely limited nationally. On the other, the rise of the Internet has removed certain difficulties and roadblocks. But many doors remain shut to journalists, even as they are officially described as open.

As noted in last year's MSI, while the government does not restrict access to the Internet, it may be a case of the authorities simply not having the resources to control Internet use. Furthermore, there are signs that journalists continue to underuse the Internet as a research and reporting tool; many

do not even have e-mail addresses. Nonetheless, the media are allowed to distribute or rebroadcast foreign media production or news from press agencies.

Entry into the profession is fairly free; anyone can attend journalism school, become a journalist, and create supporting associations. Some panelists noted that in November 2009, President Bozize issued two decrees regulating the creation, organization, and operation of a national committee to issue press cards and a committee to grant annual subsidies to the privately owned media. But, since that date, neither committee has been operational. Joseph-Vermond noted that Central African journalists are free to organize themselves but are very slow to do so.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

CAR Objective Score: 1.56

The panelists are deeply circumspect in assessing their profession and agree that improving the professionalism of journalists in the CAR is an enormous challenge. The printed press is an opinion press, where personal comments are more important than facts. One panelist said that with the exception of Radio Ndeke Luka, managed by the Hirondelle Foundation, the other Central African media do not produce high-quality, fair, and objective news. The news-reading population complains frequently about the poor-quality, opinionated positions and lack of professionalism displayed in the two main daily newspapers, *Le Citoyen* and *Le Confident*.

Magba-Tutama noted that there is a great deal of amateurism due to the lack of qualified journalists. Balance completely

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).

escapes the public-sector media, which must sing the government's praises. But Mbaya believes that professional standards of quality are difficult to meet, mainly due to technical, financial, and logistic challenges. The need for and lack of training is another concern. Young people throw themselves into the field without training in quality standards necessary for professionalism. Ndouba Beret concluded that in general, journalists fail to meet professional quality standards due to serious deficiencies in training and equipment, but also owing to political and economic pressure. Many journalists are trained "on the job," and the country lacked a school of journalism until 2009. This explains the blunders—particularly by independent newspapers—that have touched off angry replies and arrests, and reinforced the public perception of all media as "press of opinion" rather than fact.

Magba-Tutama said that professional ethics are monitored by professional organizations, such as the Union des Journalistes de Centrafrique (UJCA), but are never enforced. This is particularly true of certain privately owned newspapers in search of sensational news/materials to improve sales. One panelist told the story of journalists who, during a training session, revealed that it was hard to write an article without "spicing" it up, to which a member of the HCC replied that those who "spice up" their stories end up with burned eyes and tongues.

News is not balanced but is delivered in "the master's voice." Self-censorship is the norm. And, Momet commented, "In the public media things are not much better; self-censorship is common, as politicians publicly discuss not wanting to pay journalists who criticize and insult them." Self-censorship in the public media is common by journalists hoping only to protect their status as state employees. As a result, public media refuse to cover events organized by the democratic opposition. In other cases, political restrictions prevent journalists from covering certain issues. A kind of moral pressure weighs on journalists, hindering their work.

However, according to some panelists, journalists at private radio stations supported by international organizations can cover all domestic and international events, and they have access to training and requalification processes. They actively observe professional ethics and rules of gathering, processing, and reporting news. The working and living conditions of media professionals at the religious radio stations are decent as well. For community radio stations sponsored by municipalities, however, professional life is an ordeal. They are badly paid and receive no training.

Salaries are a foreign concept to most, and contracts are almost non-existent. Such poor working conditions do not favor professionalism. In the few media outlets that offer salaries, journalists are overloaded to the point of inefficiency.

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The working and living conditions for media professionals in the public sector are poor, and they have asked the government for a salary increase. Momet believes each sector deserves a different approach. Journalists in the public sector face a different situation than those in the privately owned media, who are supported by international organizations without state subsidies, and those differ from the community and religious media.

Speaking of the public media, Gakara Virginie reports that management censors journalists, especially for political news. She said that, in terms of salary, journalists are the "poor relatives"; they are badly paid and enjoy no perks of the trade or social status. They work in "appalling" conditions, especially at the national television channel, rendering them vulnerable to corruption.

Momet said that, with respect to salaries, journalists in both the public and private sectors are "thrown nickels and dimes" comparatively, exposing them to corruption. Panelists also described two incidents that they said reveal the sorry state of journalism in the CAR. Two years ago, a trainee at a privately owned media outlet stole the cell phone of a diplomat, and, more recently, a journalist from the public press was held in custody for taking money from a lost-and-found bag that had been returned to the station.

As last year's MSI reported, the preference for entertainment programming is clearly evident in the broadcast media; last year a panelist estimated that entertainment outweighs news by 70 percent on some stations, including the national radio.

Furthermore, technical equipment is outdated and insufficient. Gakara Virginie commented, "I confirm that in the public-sector media it is obsolete—particularly at the Television Centrafricaine, where the equipment is still analog." The lack of funds, equipment, and training all hinder the development of investigative reporting and specialized reporting; many journalists cannot even access the Internet or conduct proper investigations.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

CAR Objective Score: 1.85

The Central African printed press has a lot of small publications, but only half a dozen or so titles appear regularly. The two main dailies, *Le Citoyen* and *Le Confident*, print fewer than 2,000 copies, distributed only in the capital of Bangui. In the audio-visual sector, CAR public television broadcasts only four hours a day. The country has relatively few television sets. Two satellite television packages are available, but only the wealthy can afford it.

As in most African countries, radio is the preeminent medium. An estimated two-thirds to three-quarters of households own a receiver. There are three core branches of radio in the CAR: public, religious, and independent stations comprised of Radio Ndeke Luka and three FM community outlets.

The religious branch is made of Catholic stations that broadcast evangelical and educational programs (such as Radio Notre Dame) and Protestant stations that focus on evangelization, broadcasting in FM in Bangui and the larger provincial towns. The public branch includes the state-run radio station and rural stations, but the latter are having technical difficulties of late. The national radio station broadcasts in FM from Bangui, while in the rest of the country it broadcasts in short-wave (HF) and hectometer-wave (MF) bands between 6:00 am and 5:00 pm only. Aside from the national station, only Radio ICDI, the local station of Boali, and Radio Ndeke Luka are broadcast on shortwave and only for a few hours each day.

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.

In the provinces, the population enjoys access to one or two local radio stations, the national station, and Radio ICDI and Radio Ndeke Luka via shortwave. Only a few have access to television, and newspapers are non-existent.

Momet said that since the law on the freedom of communication was passed, there has been an explosion of newspapers and private, religious, and community radio and television channels, plus free online access to news agency dispatches. Citizens are free to choose which newspapers and which radio stations to follow. Competition forces the private media to work harder to improve their productions and to strive for fairness and objectivity.

In the same vein, Magba-Tutama expressed satisfaction with the existence of multiple news sources, such as radio stations, a television channel, and newspapers with diverse editorial policies, offering a variety of news.

And yet, Bernadette Doubro Sekamaboyo, vice president of the Association de Femmes Professionnelles de la Communication (AFPC), said, "The population's access to domestic and international media is unrestricted, but despite a plurality of private and public news sources, there is a big problem: information does not penetrate far enough beyond the capital and large cities. Not many citizens have access to the Internet or know how to use it." Mbaya commented, "If the public media have limited reporting possibilities, the privately owned media are free and largely manage to fill that gap. Nonetheless, there is no national coverage, as the private media are not equipped to spread beyond a certain limit. One cannot truly speak of universal access to news so long as it essentially covers only the capital, Bangui, while more than 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas and are generally cut off from news."

Large areas of the country are virtual media deserts reachable only by shortwave. Unfortunately, the national television channels do not cover the entire country, and the media have only a handful of local correspondents spread across the provinces. There is no media distribution service—newspapers are available only in Bangui. Cell phones provide users the freedom to communicate focused information. The lack of telecommunication networks also complicates news distribution: there are just six cybercafés in the provinces, and those are available only thanks to a sponsor. Since new information and communication technologies are lagging in the CAR, blogs are as yet out of the question.

Meanwhile, the public media serve the interests of the ruling party in all their activities, panelists said. The opposition leaders are systematically excluded from public media despite a 1992 law that guarantees access by all political parties. The public media are not independent but beholden to

government as state employees. However, there are signs that the government would like to change this image, at least; panelists commented that on October 19 of last year, the chair of the Assemblée Nationale went so far as to ask publicly that diplomats ignore claims that the press is a government tool and instead champion training initiatives to improve.

There are no foreign news agencies active in the CAR. Foreign investors do not view the market as lucrative enough to invest. RFI is the most widely used news source in the CAR. The community radio stations broadcast RFI programs live, particularly the news bulletins, and newspapers reprint some RFI programs. Some media use news from the Internet, but they fail to check facts and sometimes simply copy and paste the news. However, despite modest resources, the privately owned radio stations are able to produce original programs, according to the panelists.

The privately owned media—the newspapers, in particular—actively cover political issues but rarely address other social issues. Ethnic minorities receive very little media coverage. It remains difficult to publish in Sango (the national language) or in the various minority languages. Nonetheless, there are occasional programs on the Ba Aka pygmies supported by NGOs.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

CAR Objective Score: .96

While all the panelists are satisfied that the Central African constitution guarantees freedom of the press and the government claimed rehabilitation of the media as one of its priorities, none dispute that the media face an unfavorable economic context and a glaring lack of human and technical resources. Chirhalwirwa pointed out that management is a primary weakness of the Central African independent media. Besides Radio Ndeke Luka, *Le Confident* is the only media with a reasonably organized administrative structure, he added. Press companies are not profitable because they lack management and resource-use policies. Chirhalwirwa also reminded the group that from 2006 to 2009 RFI offered management training to the community media, with few real results.

According to Magba-Tutama, it is a widely held belief that the Central African press does not provide for its people. The community radio stations likewise walk on crutches and long ago were abandoned to their own means. As for print, panelists pointed out that newspapers cannot live off sales and subscriptions. They rely on advertising from UN agencies

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and some NGOs. The lack of advertising and distribution makes commercial management difficult and unfair, and the presence of new income sources might keep the independent media afloat and shelter their employees from the temptation of unethical practices.

Momet denounced the failure of attempts to unite newspapers to seek financial support from their partners, which fell apart due to the individualism of their managers. To stay afloat, certain papers must serve political figures or commercial interests.

The advertising market offers little hope of a solution. The prevalence of monopolies in many economic sectors means it is unlikely that advertising will flourish. Advertising has fallen through the cracks, exacerbated by a general lack of advertising agencies. Chirhalwirwa pointed out, however, that Radio Ndeke Luka created an advertising department whose receipts are now close to 30 percent of its operation budget. This success is the fruit of good organization and consistent management.

In the view of the panelists, the professional challenges to the media field are exacerbated by the lack of government subsidy for privately owned press. The panelists favored speeding up the granting of this subsidy and enforcing the recommendations of the first general assembly of the Central

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.

African media held in 2007. The government accepted the subsidy in principle and opened a CFA 5 million budget line for it in 2010. As noted earlier, in 2009 President Bozize issued a decree on the organization of a committee to grant annual subsidies to the privately owned media, but the committee has not yet materialized. Gakara Virginie noted that the government does offer subsidies to the independent media—for instance, on international press day and similar occasions. The panelists did not discuss whether such subsidies could give the government undue influence over independent outlets.

Ndouba Beret concluded that sustainability of the independent media is questionable and noted that most privately owned newspapers have no market research or business plan in an environment that is rather hostile. 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: 1.91

On May 3, 2010, as the world celebrated World Press Freedom Day, the chair of the Union des Journalistes Centrafricains (UJCA) thanked UNESCO, BINUCA (Bureau Intégré des Nations-Unies pour le Centrafrique), OIF, the European Union, the Institut Panos, Cordaid, France, and all the countries friendly to the CAR for their support of professional associations and their efforts to improve Central African media, such as training and equipment supplies.

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.

The panelists were pleased that, as part of this support, a Press House opened in a building in Bangui that was renovated thanks to a UNESCO project co-financed by Canada. The Press House offers media organizations and journalists a common space complete with Internet access and production equipment. The Press House is also a place of collaboration where exchange of ideas is free and where domestic media and journalists can connect. The Press House also organizes short-term training and skills-development activities for media professionals.

Many media professionals attended the inauguration of the Press House. Joining them were the chair of the UJCA, Maka Gbossokotto, the state minister for communications; Abdou Karim Meckassoua, the UNESCO representative for Central Africa; Bernard Hadjadj, the representative of Canada in the CAR; and Ambassador Jean Pierre Lavoie. While an important day for CAR media, the inauguration was only the first step toward the ultimate goal of securing a "framework for media support and strengthening the freedom of the press in the Central African Republic," envisioned by UNESCO in partnership with media associations and domestic and international associates.

According to several panelists, most of the associations supporting journalists and press owners are weak and vulnerable, and their members are divided by petty leadership conflicts that hinder media solidarity. There is the Groupement des Editeurs de la Presse Privée Indépendante de Centrafrique (GEPPIC), a private press owners' group; UJCA, the Association Centrafricaine de la Presse Indépendante (ACERI); and the Association des Radios Communautaires (ARC), a product of the Catholic media, which supports community radio stations. For Magba-Tutama, GEPPIC and ACERI are the most important national press associations in the CAR. GEPPIC defends the interests of private media, their owners, and their members, and trains journalists. GEPPIC also protests violations of the freedom of the press. While very active in the beginning, GEPPIC lost power due to systematic problems, and the two domestic associations have failed their lobbying role. Momet mentioned that GEPPIC faces a credibility crisis because its leaders are not the managers of the well-established papers. On the other hand, many snub the media professionals' union due to the perceived lack of management transparency. In general, Magba-Tutama said, the associations for communications professionals appear so apathetic that it cannot be said they are defending the rights of journalists.

In conclusion, Ndouba Beret believes that professional associations have structural difficulties that make them less effective. GEPPIC, for instance, which includes twenty newspapers, has just moved into a new office after a

two-year transition imposed by a crisis. The UJCA faces a similar problem, as its lease has expired. And yet, they were able to organize, in August 2010, a peaceful rally supporting the implementation of a specific status for journalists in the public media. Despite structural weakness, the professional associations somehow manage to make themselves heard, however, thanks to the constant support of the human-rights organizations. Nonetheless, there is work to be done to secure that specific status and a collective work contract to improve salaries and advanced training programs for the media professionals.

Since 2009, the Institut Panos Paris has developed a project to support the Central African media. The project has three components: support for media regulation, support for the organization of the media landscape, and an enhanced interaction among the media, authorities, and civil society. While these needs are huge, the Institut Panos Paris remains the only support organization involved in the sector. Despite progress, the gap between hope and reality is enormous.

In addition, the Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme and the Central African Bar Association collaborate in support of the media, denouncing arrests of and attacks against journalists. These groups, and the School of Communication at the University of Bangui, offer short-term training to instill the fundamentals of journalism, strengthen reporting techniques, and provide other pro-journalism programs. The cartoonists at the Press House have benefited greatly from these programs, but so have some journalists.

During the Press House inauguration, a call arose for funding other projects to further support the Central African media and strengthen the freedom of the press. Suggested projects include the creation of a university radio station in the Department of Journalism at the University of Bangui, a monitoring network for attacks on the press and professional printing equipment for the Press House to standardize the A4 format for the first time in the country.

Momet informed the panel that UNESCO will also help with technical support in training news journalists as part of the new Department of Journalism at the University of Bangui. That department is an outgrowth of the South-South cooperation project in partnership with the sub-regional excellence center, the École Supérieure des Sciences et Techniques de l'Information et de la Communication de Yaoundé (ESSTIC), in Cameroon. In its most recent meeting, the PIDC office funded a project to create a pilot community radio station in the CAR. UNESCO also announced a continuous training program for media professionals funded by the Japanese through the Programme International pour le Développement de la Communication (PIDC).

Most papers, if not all, are in the private sector but lack a quality printing house. In Bangui, for instance, there is only one state-owned printing house; the others are privately owned and apolitical. The private audio-visual media own their own studios, antennas, and transmitters, and technical failures are fixed by their own technicians. Such technical autonomy allows the private radio stations to avoid the politicization of their editorial policy.

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