

CAR - Media Landscape

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Overview

The developments of new communication technologies, the liberalisation of the media market and the popularisation of Internet connectivity, have brought significant progress to the media sector of the Central African Republic (CAR), a landlocked country with a population of about 5 million. However, this rapid evolution of the media market has had its drawbacks. Some private companies of the so-called traditional media, not having prepared for this change, were therefore forced to play a peripheral role or simply to shut down.

Since independence in 1960, radio is the national media with the highest audience and market share. Thanks to the low acquisition cost of receivers and the fact that their use does not require particular skills, radio plays an important role in the daily life of the Central African people. In addition to linking rural and urban areas, it affects virtually all social strata of the country. Moreover, politicians, whether from the majority or the opposition, use it regularly to reach the rural population.

Television, which is largely dependent on electricity, is still perceived as a luxury media reserved for the wealthy and middle classes who can afford alternatives to public electricity, known for its constant disconnection. Television appeared in the early 1970s and has often been linked to the ruling government. It only reaches a tiny part of the Central African population, mostly located in the capital Bangui. Also the written press, which emerged as a new media player in the 1990s, only covers part of the capital. Nevertheless, its appearance has made it possible to free up the media landscape and force the country's leaders to become more accountable for their actions. Due to structurally weak readership, low circulation, scarce investments and low economic profitability, print media companies have not been able to establish themselves as reference media accessible to the general public.

Online media began to be visible in the early 2000s through static blogs and surpassed radio in less than 15 years, thanks to the popularisation of mobile Internet and the phenomenon of social networks. Central Africans, anxious to be updated minute by minute, particularly about local news, are very quickly turning to online media for information.

Traditional media, especially print, radio and TV suffer from a chronic lack of visibility on the Internet and are giving way to various private blogs dealing with national and international news on an ongoing basis. However, the lack of funding and professionalism of online media leads Central Africans to be considerably suspicious of the reliability of the information they circulate, despite their growing interest.

Before the 1990s, public audiovisual media, which monopolised the media market, were subject to political pressure from the current regime, while private media, mainly the written press, were considered as an instrument of counter-power and democracy. They had appeared in the national media landscape after the famous speech of the French President François Mitterrand in the city of La Baule, on 20 June, 1990, calling on African leaders, particularly those in French-speaking sub-

Saharan Africa, to orient themselves more towards the principles of democracy and freedom of expression. From that time, the practice of journalism evolved considerably in the CAR. From the cult of personality and state propaganda to critical, divergent or even engaged narratives, media content has changed and is much more oriented towards the concerns of the population.

In the field of citizens' rights to information, significant progress has been made after many years of democratic experience. Legal and regulatory frameworks have emerged. The first texts regulating the media were law N 98.005 of 1998 (on the creation, organisation and functioning of the High Communication Council) and law N 98.006 of 1998 (on the freedom of communication). These two texts, considered as liberticidal by media professionals, were revised in 2003. Thus, laws N 03.002, relating to freedom of communication and N 03.003 of 2003 on the creation, organisation and functioning of the High Communication Council were promulgated. With the promulgation of the new laws on freedom of the press, including Ordinance N 05.002 of 2005, there has been a second emergence of independent private media outlets in the country. Many of these entities appeared without fulfilling all the provisions of the 2005 legislation. In addition to their embryonic state, it should be stressed that they lack material, human and financial resources. This means that even though they are officially recognised, these publishers are not easily traceable. They have no fixed offices, or a newsroom where they can be found. They walk around the streets looking for events to cover from which they could earn some money. That said, their primary goal is to generate revenue and not to inform. That is why they are sometimes called "okra journalists" in Bangui, meaning they are constantly searching for something to eat. The corollary of this phenomenon is the public's contempt for media professionals in general and for print media in particular.

Media

Print

The print media of the Central African Republic has low geographical representativeness. There are at least 30 titles, published exclusively in the capital Bangui and leaving the country's rural regions to more accessible audiovisual media. Written exclusively in French and not in Sango, the native and second official language, newspapers have their main target groups: civil servants, students, international organisations and diplomats. They have a very limited influence on the population, the vast majority of which is illiterate (80 percent according to the 2018 study of the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP).

Unlike other African countries, particularly the English-speaking ones, where powerful press groups with several titles are present, the written media in the Central African Republic have often remained relatively unstructured one-person companies and often have only one outlet with a small circulation in A4 format. Of the ten or so titles that appear daily on the market, only six, including *Le Confident*, *Le Démocrate*, *Le Citoyen*, *L'Hirondelle*, *Le Média Plus*, and *L'Agora*, print 400 copies daily. The others, which come out according to the funds available in their cash register, print an average of about 100 copies per issue.

Due to an insufficient reader base and a very narrow market, print media companies find it difficult to access financing. This has a huge impact on both the quantity and quality of their content. This situation of financial instability partly explains the use of "sidewalk" journalism, ie accepting or requesting payments to write articles that deal favourably with a person, organisation or issue.

Despite their very limited circulation at national level, the written media are strictly monitored by the country's authorities. Since the outbreak of the military and political crisis in 2013 with the dismissal of former President François Bozizé and the multiplication of armed groups on the national territory, the press, which was one of the belligerents' favourite targets, has had difficulties working independently. If a newspaper, for example, attempts to publish an article or press release from armed groups, it is systematically described by Bangui authorities as a troublemaker or enemy of peace. This could result in a suspension of several weeks. On the other hand, if it is the other way around, armed groups will similarly claim that the newspaper favours the authorities and is an enemy. A more than embarrassing situation that pushes many of the local newspapers to adapt their content according to the moment.

Since the print media only appear in the capital, they are more likely to be subjected to the regular pressure of political power rather than attacked by armed groups that are in the hinterland. Thus, a large number of print media companies in the country operate according to the degree of their relationship with the government in power, which from time to time gives them funds through the purchase of advertising space in their newspapers. In the meanwhile armed groups, which have no possibility of publishing in the written press, turn to online media and social networks to issue their press releases or make public statements.

Radio

Radio has been the most popular and important media in the Central African Republic from the 1950s to the present day. Easily accessible and less expensive, radio reaches almost all social strata. Whether in the provinces or in the capital Bangui, almost all of the broadcasting is in Sango or in French, with varying proportions. Thanks to base stations installed in several provincial cities, more than 75 percent of households have at least one receiver (data published by UNDP in 2003). There are four types of radio stations in the country, namely community, public, confessional and private ones.

Radio stations such as *Radio Ndeke Luka* (funded by the Swiss Hirondelle Foundation), *Guira FM* (UN-Minusca Radio), *Bangui FM* (private), *Lengo Sango* (funded by Russian capitals) and those united in the *Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme* (Human Rights Journalists Network - RJDH) are the most listened-to in Bangui. In provincial towns, by contrast, their reach is more measured in terms of geographical coverage. Thanks to the relays of about ten locally-based community radio stations, with a wide reach in the interior of the country, people in rural areas have access to information. In almost every major city there is at least one local community radio station.

However, with the political-military events in the country after 2012, the premises of some radio stations in the provinces or in the capital Bangui have been damaged and looted by armed groups. In Bangui, this is the case of the Catholic Church's confessional radio stations *Notre Dame*, *Radio Nehémi*, the *Voice of Grace* of the Evangelical Church, the *Voice of Peace* (Muslim radio) and *Radio Operation Jericho*. Other public or private stations have not been spared like *Radio Ndeke Luka*, which has been able to keep broadcasting its programs 24 hours a day thanks to its mobile application and website, and *Radio Central Africa*.

In the provinces, half of the community radio stations such as *Radio ICDI* in Boali, *Radio Yata de Redina* in Birao, *Radio Maria* in Bossangoa, *La Voix de la Kaga* in Bandoro, *Radio Mbari FM* in Bangassou, *Radio Magbadja* in Alindao, from *Radio Be Oko* and *Radio Linga* in Bambari, *Radio Maigaro* and *Radio Siriri* in Bouar, *Radio Zereda* in Obo and many others have been partially or completely destroyed before being gradually restored after 2017.

Armed groups regularly demand community radio stations in the provinces to broadcast messages to the local population, as they have difficulty accessing the national public radio station reserved exclusively for the propaganda of the ruling party.

Television

The Central African Republic was one of the first Central African countries to set up a public television station at the beginning of 1974. Yet, more than 40 years later the country's television reach is practically limited to major cities, and not throughout the national territory as seen in neighbouring countries. The CAR still lags in the use of television as a tool for social recovery, awareness, information, education and leisure on a national scale. Inaugurated on 22 February 1974, the *Télévision Centrafricaine* (Central African Television - TVCA), equipped with a transmitter with a power of 5KW, only covers the capital Bangui and other cities less than 200 kilometres away. Its performance does not meet the expectations of the Central African viewers due to an obsolete and poor system of production and distribution.

However, since 2011, international private televisions have appeared on the media market. This is the case of the American *Direct TV*, the Cameroonian *Vision 4* and the French *Canal+* channels. This international opening, although late, has now enabled the Central African diaspora to follow the news of their country in the sub-Saharan region and in Europe. According to a study of the Francophonie in 2014 there were about 6000 households equipped with at least one television. That said, with a population of about 4.5 million, 6000 households represent a very negligible percentage rate compared to other African countries. For this, the television audience is very limited in the Central African Republic.

In addition to the problems of acquiring television sets, which are unfortunately very expensive in the Central African Republic, there is also the already mentioned problem of access to electricity, which is largely lacking throughout the country. As television is largely dependent on electricity, only middle- and upper-class households that are able to use alternative power sources such as generators or solar panels can have easy access to it.

Digital Media

Like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Central African Republic has been switching to the Internet since the late 1990s. At that time, Internet connection was almost non-existent and practically reserved for a fringe category of the Central African population. However, in the years 2000-2005, the first private static blogs dealing with the country's information appeared, such as *Sangonet*, *Centrafrique presse* and *Journal de Bangui*. Created by individuals who have no journalism knowledge, these blogs are mostly based abroad. The quality of their content remains questionable and they are rather more similar to political propaganda sites.

Traditional written media, due to a lack of technical and financial resources, are almost absent on the web. Only one daily newspaper from Bangui, *Le Confident*, manages to keep a small presence on the Internet but its content is not often updated. It was not until the end of 2012 that a multitude of blogs and websites dealing with continuous information on the CAR appeared. This is the case of sites such as RJDH, *La nouvelle Centrafrique*, *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, the site of *Radio Ndeke Luka* and many others. Among these Central African sites, only *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, *Radio Ndeke Luka* and RJDH have a consistent readership and cover the news of the entire national territory through their correspondents all over the administrative provinces.

Even if access to Internet connection is still very limited in the interior of the country (10 percent penetration rate according to the Central African Telecommunications Regulatory Agency), people in rural areas, particularly civil servants, international organisations, armed groups and students still have access to information published online in real time. However, the content published on websites, which is exclusively in French and not in the native Sango language, is a serious obstacle for many people. In addition, there are serious funding problems: Advertisements and announcements are rare online. If there are any, they are reserved for sites close to the government in power. Many advertisers do not want to deal with sites that criticise the

government, for fear of being accused in turn of supporting troublemakers. This has a negative impact on the quality of their online content. CAR Internet users are very suspicious of any information published on Central African sites and turn to international sites such as RFI, BBC, AFP, Reuters, CNC, etc to gather information.

Social Networks

Highly monitored by Bangui authorities because of their ability to convey information very quickly, social networks are one of the main means of communication in the Central African Republic and they play a key role in the daily lives of Central Africans, despite the country's low Internet penetration rate. Although social networks are popular among a fringe of the young population in the country's major cities, their influence on the informative behaviour of Internet users is constantly growing. While no official study has been conducted to determine the rate of social network usage in the country, Internet service providers estimate that about 40 percent of Internet users are social media users. Among them, 90 percent connect from mobile phones.

Facebook, widely used by the majority of Internet users, is by far the most popular social network in the country and is open to everyone, including disadvantaged or small groups. After 2017, Facebook pages linked to armed groups have also appeared.

The second most popular social network is Twitter, used increasingly by all social categories, yet remaining the favourite tool of journalists, politicians, staff of international organisations, civil society and civil servants. Networks such as YouTube or LinkedIn have a very limited popularity.

Through live videos and discussion and information sharing groups, the influence of social networks reaches the heart of power in Bangui. This leads some advisers to the President of the Republic, government ministers and selected officials, to be present on social networks in order to interact directly with Internet users on important topics of the moment.

Opinion Makers

Over the past decade, social networks have been an important, if not indispensable, tool for freedom of expression and communication. However, as they are not fully accessible in the interior of the country, they do not reach the vast majority of the population. Despite the limited influence in the provinces, they remain closely observed by the country's authorities due to their ability to create influent public debates on government policy, domestic politics, cultural activities and sports.

People such as Christian Aimé Dota alias Cris Can (former journalist), Henri Grothe (teacher), Fidèle Gouandjika (political advisor to the Head of State Faustin-Archange Touadéra since 2016) and Axime Césaire Oronondji, alias ACO (former rapper), are trying in their own way to influence the public or cultural opinion of their Facebook followers. On Twitter, Douaclié Ketté Orphé (teacher), who is very active, tries to draw the public's attention to his activities.

In addition to the above-mentioned persons, the current spokesperson of the *Groupe de Travail de la Société Civile* (Civil Society Working Group - GTSC) Crescent Beninga and his predecessor Gervais Lakosso are considered as true opinion leaders in the country, as they are able to mobilise people in mass both on social networks and on the field. Upon instruction of the Attorney-General of the Court of Appeal, they were arrested on 18 April, 2019 for asking the citizens of Bangui to take the streets of the capital to protest against the shortage of water and the appointments of rebel leaders to posts of responsibility within the national army.

For many Central African Internet users, social networks are like a public space where it is possible to denounce the abuses of the authorities. But this cannot be done without consequences if one is identified as whistleblower. Others, already

threatened on Facebook, are forced to hide behind anonymous avatars. This can lead to sharing messages of hatred or fake news in popular public discussion groups such as the "Coalition for the Re-foundation of the Central African Republic" on Facebook.

Sources

Please note most outlets do not have an official online presence and are listed for reference only. The sources link to official websites (when available), social media pages or media directories.

Newspapers

- [Le Citoyen](#) (Facebook community)
- [Le Confident](#) (Twitter page)
- L'Agora
- Média Plus
- [Centrafrique Matin](#) (Facebook community)
- Le Démocrate
- L'Expansion
- [Les Collines de l'Oubangui](#)
- Nouvelle Vision

Radio

- [Radio Centrafrique](#) (generalist radio)
- [Radio Ndeke Luka](#) (RNL)
- [Guira FM](#) (UN mission - MINUSCA)
- [Radio Réseau des Journalistes de Droit de l'Homme - RJDH](#) (Network of Journalists for Human Rights)
- [Voix de la grâce](#) (Facebook page of the Confessional radio of the Evangelical Church)
- [Radio Linga](#) (community radio in Bambari)
- Maïgaro (community radio in Bouar)
- [Radio Siriri](#) (community radio in Bouar)
- [Radio Notre Dame](#) (Confessional radio of the Catholic Church)
- Voix de Pendé (community radio in Paoua)

Television

- [Télévision Centrafricaine - TVCA](#) (Governmental)
- [Vision 4](#) (Cameroonian private TV)
- [TV5 Afrique](#) (French satellite TV)
- [Direct TV](#) (American TV)

Digital media

- [Agence Centrafrique Presse](#) (ACAP)
- [Centrafrique Presse](#)
- [Corbeau News Centrafrique](#) (CNC)
- [Radio Ndeke Luka](#) (ONG, Fondation Hirondelle)

Opinion makers

- [Christian Aimé Ndotah alias Cris Can](#) (Facebook)
- [Henri Grothe](#) (Twitter)
- [Fidèle Gouandjika](#) (Facebook)
- [Axime Césaire Oronendji](#) (Facebook)
- [Douaclé Ketté Orphé](#) (Twitter)

Organisations

Trade Unions

With the multiple political and military crises that have hit the Central African Republic since its independence in 1960, especially the traditional media sector (written press, radio and television), has experienced extremely difficult times that have considerably disrupted its functioning. Several outlets suffered looting and vandalism during the latest military-political crisis in December 2012, which led to the forceful seizure of power by a coalition of rebel groups known as Seleka on 24 March, 2013. Some journalists have even been murdered, others imprisoned for facts related to their work.

In order to defend their rights, the freedom of association is guaranteed by the Constitution, which stipulates that: "any worker may join the trade union of his choice and defend his rights and interests through trade union action." The only unions of media professionals that carry out this task are two: the *Union des Journalistes de Centrafrique* (Union of Central African Journalists - UJCA) to which all Central African journalists are affiliated and the *Groupe des Editeurs de la Presse Privée Indépendante en Centrafrique* (Editors of Independent Private Press of Central Africa - GEPPIC), that unite all the private press publishers.

Journalist Associations

In addition to the trade unions of communication professionals, there are also associations of media operators such as the *Association des Radios Communautaires de Centrafrique* (Association of Community Radios of Central Africa - ARC Centrafrique), the *Association des Femmes professionnelles de la Communication* (Association of Women Communication Professionals - AFPC), the *Maison de la Presse et des Journalistes* (House of Press and Journalists - MPJ), the *Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme* (Network of Journalists for Human Rights - RJDH), the *Réseau des Médias Africains pour la Lutte contre le Sida, la Tuberculose et le Paludisme* (African Media Network for the Fight against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria - REMASTP) and the latest, the *Consortium des Médias Privés de Centrafrique* (Consortium of Centrafrikan Private Media - COMECA), created in October 2017. Coordinated by Mr Jules Yanganda, COMECA, like the other associations of communication professionals in the Central African Republic, is committed to bringing together all the private media with the aim of reorganising and revitalising the sector.

In order to avoid excessive intervention by public institutions regulating society and the media, the Media Observatory was created in December 2005 at the initiative of the *Union des Journalistes Centrafricains* (Union of Journalists of Central Africa - UJCA), as a body for self-regulation of the media by journalists themselves. The objective of this association of journalists is to best protect independence and pluralism by making the journalistic profession credible and capable of

promoting good standards. In addition, the *Observatoire des Médias Centrafricains* (Central African Media Observatory - OMCA), with the support of the American NGO Internews, periodically publishes its reports on the state of the media in CAR.

Besides the above-mentioned associations, some journalists and bloggers have created the *Association Blogueurs Centrafricains* (Association of Central African Bloggers - ABCA). This community of journalists, bloggers, web activists, committed artists and social-network users from the Central African Republic is dedicated to fighting hate messages online. ABCA periodically launches campaigns to fight fake news and hate speech on social networks. For lack of resources, its mission is limited exclusively to campaigns against hate messages on the Internet. Moreover, hate messages conveyed by the supporters of the President of the Republic have never been the subject of criticism on their part. This is a way to avoid pressure from the government.

News Agencies

The *Agence Centrafricaine de Presse* (Central African Press Agency - ACAP), created in 2012 and attached to the office of the Minister of Communication and Media, is the country's only news agency. This public entity, which operates only online with a very limited audience, is headed by Simon Pierre Ndouba and has only 10 employees (journalists, civil servants and cameramen). It has no local correspondents in provincial cities. By definition, a news agency is an organisation that sells information (texts, photos, videos, etc) to media in the same way as a wholesaler provides retailers. Instead ACAP operates as a simple website serving the authorities.

Apart from ACAP, there is no private organisation in the country that organises itself as a real news agency. On the other hand, on the Internet, the websites of *Corbeau News Centrafrique* and of RJDH operate as small online news agencies, because their news are regularly published by other Central African sites and even by some print newspapers in Bangui.

Audience measurement organisations

As the media sector of the Central African Republic is not made up of strong and well-managed companies, there is simply no national audience measurement agency that allows audiovisual media not only to manage their programme offerings, but also to know their competitive environment.

While since 1976 no official national audience survey has been conducted, some private organisations, such as Internews and *Radio Ndeke Luka*, have conducted their own audience surveys among the local population in some parts of the country. Their aim was to accurately calibrate their programme offers.

There is no formal regulation of advertising in CAR. Thus, prices are generally charged according to personal relationships.

Sources

Please note the following organisations have limited online presence. Names are provided for reference only.

Trade Unions

- Groupement des Editeurs de la Presse Privée Indépendante en Centrafrique (GEPPIC)
- Union des Journalistes Centrafricains (UJCA)

Journalist Associations

- Réseau des Médias Africains pour la Lutte contre le Sida, la Tuberculose et le Paludisme (REMASTP)
- Association des Radios Communautaires de Centrafrique (ARC – Centrafrique)

- [Association des Femmes Professionnelles de la Communication](#) (AFPC). Facebook page only.
- Consortium des Médias Privés de Centrafrique (COMECA)
- [Maison de la Presse et des Journalistes](#) (MPJ)
- [Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme](#) (RJDH)
- [Observatoire des Médias Centrafricains](#) (OMCA)

News Agencies

- [Agence Centrafricaine de Presse](#) (ACAP)

Policies

Media legislation

In the aftermath of independence and throughout the single-party period (1960-1990), social communication and freedom of expression were controlled by the authorities. Any independent press was strictly prohibited. By claiming to liberalise public life in 1990 under pressure from Paris, which now intended to make official development assistance conditional on democratic openness, a law was passed in 1992 to liberalise the media sector. Since then, progress has been made in citizens' rights to information. Additional legal and regulatory frameworks have emerged. The first texts that regulated the media were laws N 98.005 of 1998, on the creation, organisation and functioning of the High Communication Council (HCC) and N 98.006 of 1998, on freedom of communication.

These two texts, which were considered as liberticidal by media professionals, were revised in 2002 and 2003. This is how laws N 03.002 on freedom of communication and N 03.003 on the creation, organisation and functioning of the HCC, were promulgated. Subsequently, Act N 03.002 of 2003 and Ordinance N 05.002 of 2005, amending the penalties for press offences, were also passed. These texts concern the right of communication in a broader sense.

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by article 1, paragraph 2, of the Act of 14 January, 2003: "Freedom of communication and the pluralism of information, ideas and opinions are essential values in any democratic society." Article 1 stipulates that "freedom of communication is recognised and guaranteed by the Constitution." Moreover, article 3 of the Act stipulates that "limitations on the exercise of the freedom of communication may be justified only in the cases authorised by law." In terms of digital communication, no law has been officially passed in the Central African Republic. In a statement of 2018, the Minister of Communication, promised a draft law on digital regulation, but this has not been put in place.

Despite this array of laws on freedom of expression and the decriminalisation of press offences, journalists in the Central African Republic continue to face political pressure, including harsh prison sentences. This was the case of Faustin Bamboo, editor of an independent weekly, charged in July 2011 with incitement to hatred and disorder among military forces and contempt of government. The same happened in January 2012 to Ferdinand Samba, Director of *Le Démocrate*, one of the four main daily newspapers in the country, who was sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of CFA10m. The daily was suspended for one year. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) expressed dismay at the case, especially because press offences have been decriminalised since 2005.

In March 2018, the President of the HCC José Richard Pouambi was summoned to appear in front of the Court of Auditors on

9 March, 2018 for a case concerning him, while he fiercely opposed President Touadera's support for taking public media as their tools for abusive propaganda. This summons sounds like a disguised form of political pressure on the HCC in its battle against the ruling power.

Accountability systems

Information is a crucial element in the pacification of the Central African Republic, a country shaken by repeated political and military crises since its independence. In order to enable the media to play their role of rigorous rapporteurs of facts and analyses, concrete measures have been taken by the public authorities through the creation of the HCC.

This public institution, in addition to issuing authorisations for the publication of print media on behalf of the state, deliberates on all matters concerning written and audiovisual media and communication. The mission of the HCC is to guarantee and assume the protection of the press, to ensure compliance with information and communication ethics and to ensure that print media and radio and television programmes do not contain incitement to hatred. However the council claims to be unable to pursue its mission independently, due to lack of technical and financial resources. In addition, the Vice President of the HCC, Mrs Isabelle Édith Vackat, stated in March 2019 that the major problem faced by her institution is the Law on Freedom of the Press, an ordinance dating from 2005 and made obsolete by the advent of online media. To get around this situation, the audiovisual media regulator has undertaken to propose a law in which the online press and social networks will be taken into account.

Regulatory authorities

State-controlled audiovisual media, online media and social networks are at present completely outside the control of both the HCC in its regulatory functions and the *Observatoire des Médias Centrafricains* (Observatory of Centrafrican Media - OMCA). In an attempt to remedy this deficiency, some international organisations such as Internews and the French Institute Panos Europe offer training workshops on current media issues to journalists, through their projects to support Central African media and inform vulnerable populations.

Sources

- [Assemblée Nationale Centrafricaine](#) (ANC)
- [Haut Conseil de Communication](#) (HCC)
- [Ministère de la Communication et des Média](#)

Education

Universities and schools

Given the central role of journalists in the development of a peace culture, the government was anxious to train professionals in this field. Therefore, in 2007, it promoted the first general assembly of media in the Central African Republic, held in Bangui from 28 August to 1 September of that year and in 2008 it was able, in partnership with UNESCO, to create the Department of Information and Communication Sciences (DSIC), which has a professional character even though it is under the auspices of the Faculty of Humanities (FLSH) of the University of Bangui. The DSIC is the only university department in the country

training media professionals over three years and recruiting students on the basis of an admission exam. Like other professional institutions, each year it sends all end-of-cycle students on internships to both public and private media outlets in the marketplace for a period of three months, in order to combine practice with the theoretical knowledge acquired at school. It should be noted that at the end of the internship, the students must write a report that must be discussed before an academic panel in order to obtain a professional degree in journalism. Even though it doesn't indicate a minimum quota allocated to women each year during its admission examinations, the DSIC clearly indicates that female applicants are encouraged. Since its creation, the school has already trained about 100 media professionals.

Professional development

Entities such as the above-mentioned HCC, UJCA, OMCA and the Press and Journalists' House, organise dozens of workshops and training courses on capacity building for journalists. Professional development opportunities, such as symposia, courses, webinars and special workshops, can help journalists advance in their careers. This is of critical importance, especially since in the Central African Republic, rumours can easily turn into large-scale intercommunity violence. Thus, to avoid setting the powder on fire, several training workshops are organised each year for media professionals.

In addition to these national organisations, each year Internews and Panos Europe organise basic and advanced thematic training sessions for groups of 10 Central African journalists per session.

Media Development Organisations

Several international organisations have arrived in Central African Republic in order to help the media with technical and financial support. Others have been on the ground since the early 2000s, such as the Swiss *Foundation Hironde*, which supports *Radio Ndeke Luka*, *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) which has been supporting several community radio stations since 2006, and Panos Network, which has been present since 2009.

The other organisations are relatively new, such as Internews, which has been present in the CAR since 2010 and supports the networks of journalists in Central Africa and the United Nations (UN), which has been supporting *Radio Guira* since 2017.

In addition to these international agencies, UJCA and OMCA have also provided some support to local media, but their activities are limited to training and further training of journalists. Furthermore, some associations and political parties are suspected of discreetly supporting specific local media. But this has not always been clearly established.

Sources

Universities/Schools of journalism

- [Département des Sciences du Journalisme et de Communication](#) (DSIC), Banqui University.

Media development organisations

- [Fondation Hironnelle](#)
- [Panos Network](#)
- [Internews](#)
- [ONU](#)
- [Radio France Internationale](#) (RFI)

Telecommunications

Mobile network ecosystem

In 2000, the Central African Telecommunications Company (SOCATEL), led by Mr Joseph Zouketia, officially launched its first ever Internet connection service for the general public. However, with the increase in Internet access licenses in 2008, mobile operators have all obtained so-called "Global" licenses for "Mobile, Internet and Images" services. The market for Internet access supplies is now open to competition with the popularisation of mobile networks on the national territory.

While no official national data has been published on Internet penetration rate since then, in 2019 SlideShare indicated on its website that about 5.4 percent of Central Africans had Internet access. Angel Telecom, one of the country's four Internet service providers estimated instead the number of Internet users in the Central African Republic at 0.4 percent of the population.

Even if Internet penetration is mainly confined to Bangui, thanks to mobile networks, most of the country's major cities are now connected by satellite. Four mobile and one wired Internet providers operate in the CAR. With a maximum speed of 126 to 250 bits/sec for wireline connection, and 128 Mbit/second for mobile networks, the country will soon connect to fibre optic networks as part of the regional CAB project funded by the World Bank. However, mobile phone operators, which are the main Internet service providers in the country, have been offering connections up to 3.5G via WIMAX technology since 2018 with a competitive price of CFA3,000 to 5,000 per Giga depending on the provider.

While young people aged 18-35 are the most connected via mobile phones, there is no gender-based divide in the rates of Internet access in the country. On the other hand, access to electricity is the first major obstacle to mobile networks in the interior of the country. In large connected cities, people use generators to charge their phones. This is very discouraging, especially since this alternative method of electricity is very expensive for a user in financial terms.

Company profiles

According to the government, the democratisation of access to telecommunications services and information and communication technologies (ICT) is one of the fundamental reasons for the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in the Central African Republic. However, its aim is to open up the sector to private capital in order to make it more competitive and thus turn it into a growth lever for the national economy.

Since 2007, four private operators and one parastatal company have been competing for the mobile phone segment in the country. This increasing competition in turn promotes strong growth in the number of subscribers as well as the development of new services. The number of subscribers to mobile telephone networks in the Central African Republic increased from 24,000 in 2000 to more than 1.5 million in 2017. According to data collected by the author in April 2019, with approximately

550,000 subscribers and national coverage in more than 50 cities, Telecel Centrafrique, a subsidiary of the Niel Telecom group and the first operator to establish in the CAR in 1994, is the market leader. It is followed by Orange Centrafrique (a subsidiary of the French group Orange, active in the country since 2007), Moov Centrafrique and Azur Centrafrique.

While mobile operators officially claim not to have shared any of their confidential data with the government, the *Agence de Régulation des Télécommunications* (Telecommunications Regulatory Authority - ART), a public office mainly under the supervision of the Ministry of Telecommunications, explains that it only collects statistical data concerning their traffic, the number of their subscribers, etc, for market monitoring purposes.

Main trends

The adoption of mobile connectivity in the Central African Republic is increasing thanks to mobile applications from social networks and instant messaging. According to a 2017 World Bank report on the AFCW3 Economic Sheet, the most widely used mobile applications in the country are Facebook Messenger, far ahead of WhatsApp and Skype. However, applications such as Yahoo Mail, Gmail, Google, and Opera Mobile are also widely used.

Yet, due to some persistent rumours circulating in the country about the hacking of Facebook Messenger accounts by the authorities, since 2018, more and more people have been turning to WhatsApp.

Unlike other African countries, access to financial services through mobile money remains very limited in the CAR. This payment method for transferring money from a mobile phone, arrived in the country in 2016 through Orange Money, with approval of the Central Bank, but has not yet been successful due to the general commitment to cash payment.

Other applications have been created locally, but their use remains almost non-existent. This is the case with the Ketté-Gala application, a digital market platform for ordering and express delivery and the Banguiwood TV application for sharing online videos on demand.

In addition to these mobile applications, the news and music app developed by *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) and the one created by *Radio Ndeke Luka*, are very popular but there is no statistical data on the rate of downloads at national level. This may be explained by the constant search for information on the country by Central Africans.

Mobile coverage

According to data collected directly from mobile operators and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, as of April 2019, the total number of active mobile telephone subscribers in the Central African Republic is 1,228,554 for an estimated population of 4.5 million. This represents a penetration rate of about 27 percent. According to this data, Telecel, which covers about 60 cities (the 50 percent of the market share), is the largest mobile network provider with 618,391 active subscribers, followed by Orange with 501,181 (in about 50 cities), Moov with 65,588 and Azur with 43,394.

ART's technical services state that the low penetration of telephone networks in the interior of the country is partly due to the lack of the electricity network, which only covers the capital Bangui. And so telephone operators must make permanent use of electricity generators to supply their sites in the provinces. This is very costly in financial terms. In addition, the degradation of their installations in the provinces by armed groups considerably weakens them.

Mobile ownership

Always at hand, the mobile phone has become an indispensable tool in the daily lives of Central African people since the liberalisation of the private equity sector in 1996. Since the entry into service of Orange in 2007, the telecommunications

landscape has been growing and competition is in full swing, encouraging an increase in the number of subscribers.

According to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, in 2017, approximately one in three Central Africans used a mobile phone, while in 2007 the ratio was one in forty, and incredible rise in just 10 years. An exclusive or luxury item just years ago, mobile telecommunication devices are now considered an easy and affordable means of communication in the country, and in some cases an easy tool for financial transactions. Moreover, in the hinterland, mobile phones are seen as an excellent way to maintain permanent links with relatives in other cities, especially in the capital. Also, mobile phones are a parental control tool, allowing parents to keep track of their children. The popularity of mobile phones has increased as it fulfills the needs to maintain family unity and provide reinsurance. For traders and other business people, it is a precious tool to save money and time. Some of the users onboard by trend or for the desire to be able to do without their laptops. Despite the inflationary cost of consumption, these users do not hesitate to spend. In general, the trend in mobile phone use varies according to the age and social category of the user.

Even if no government project to extend mobile networks in other cities in the country is planned in the short term, telephone operators such as Orange Centrafrique and Telecel Centrafrique explain that they will be able to continue extending their network coverage in other provincial cities during 2019.

Sources

- [Agence de Régulation des Télécommunications](#) (ART)
- [Azur Centrafrique](#)
- [Moov Centrafrique](#)
- [Orange Centrafrique](#)
- [Telecel Centrafrique](#)

Innovation

Landscape analysis

Authorities are aware that the country must acquire newer and more efficient technologies to produce life-saving treatments, increase access to modern energy and communication services, develop its industrial base and create wealth and jobs. On 24 November, 2010, in the midst of an African wave of unprecedented economic and social growth, fuelled in part by the diffusion and rapid adoption of new technologies, the government organised the first National Exhibition of Invention and Technological Innovation (SANIIT) in Bangui. A few months earlier the first national forum on science, technology and innovation for development was organised by the Ministry of National Education, in partnership with UNESCO and the Kamach group. According to the government, the objective was to adopt recommendations to develop and implement a science, technology and innovation (STI) policy, a national research system and a mechanism for funding scientific research and innovation, to increase the potential in science and technology of the country. After nine years, nothing seems to be moving and no funding is on the agenda.

However, after the establishment of the new government of Prime Minister Firmin Ngrébada on 22 March 2019, the Minister of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation, Ms Ginette Amara Ali Mazicki, said that her department was currently working on a few projects, especially their reformulation in order to align them with the guidelines of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan (RCPCA) in order to facilitate their funding by partners from the Central African Republic.

In addition, the Minister believes that it is necessary to define "in a concerted manner, research priorities and the creation of strategic alliances between researchers, decision-makers, politicians and social actors for the sustainable development of the Central African Republic."

Profiles of main tech parks, accelerators, hackathons

In a difficult sociopolitical context, where the State controls only about 30 percent of the national territory, the priorities seem to be elsewhere than in technological innovation. Despite the absence of an integrated system of technological innovation at the national level, in December 2015, the Ministry of National Education, in partnership with UNICEF, officially launched *EduTrac*, a system for collecting data on schools through SMS. According to UNESCO, EduTrac will enable the Ministry of Education to collect timely and regular ad hoc data on schools in complementarity with the existing system.

Thus, all school principals in the country will be able to register in the system and answer questions that will be regularly sent by the Ministry of Education. However, due to the telephone coverage and electricity networks issues in the hinterland, this tool will be limited to large cities where mobile networks exist.

Sources

- [EduTrac](#)
- [UNICEF](#)

Traditional forms of communication

Summary

In the Central African Republic, as in other African countries, the vast majority of people live in communities, whether ethnic or religious. At times the government and some international organisations established in the country, use traditional chiefdoms, such as district chiefs, group chiefs or commune chiefs, in order to transmit their directives to the population. For example, neighbourhood or village leaders are often used to link information to the population by megaphone very early in the morning during campaigns to vaccinate children in a specific areas.

In addition to health campaigns, the government regularly uses the same approach for the electoral census or to raise awareness on peace and social cohesion in times of crisis. More specifically, with the latest crisis in the country, the authorities are increasingly using religious leaders to try to convey messages. This is the case of the Muslim community, which considers some media to be hostile towards them. To this end, the Imams appear to be the main interlocutors of the authorities, including some international humanitarian organisations.

While public authorities are increasingly using religious and traditional leaders to provide guidance to the Central African population, musicians and artists encourage the new generations. For instance, the musician Ozaguin OZ, sponsored by the

United Nations Integrated Mission for Stabilisation in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the wife of Head of State Tina Touadera, toured several cities across the country with the song *Poupou Ti Siriri* (Wind of Peace). The objective, according to MINUSCA, is to launch awareness messages, inviting Central Africans to respect public authority and not to be subjected to violence.

In each ethnic community, signs and codes are still used to transmit messages very quickly. In most Central African villages, group leaders use the whistle or tam-tam to announce important news or imminent danger in their community. In Obo, a town in southeastern CAR that is plagued by violence from Ugandan rebels of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, residents were using tam-tam to alert the local population of the danger if the rebels were seen in the area. In Kpakou, a village 30 km from the town of Sibut on the axis of Dékoa, on the night between 30 and 31 July, 2018, the leader of the group, after hearing gunfire about 5 km away from his town, immediately alerted the whole village with whistles. This allowed the inhabitants of Kpakou to leave their homes in a matter of minutes. As a reminder, it was on the occasion of the murder (by unknown assassins) of three Russian journalists

Sources

- [Mission Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Centrafrique](#) (MINUSCA)
- [VOA Afrique](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

Since the democratisation of Africa following the Windhoek Declaration in Namibia and the Baule speech in the early 1990s, the practice of journalism has been a major challenge throughout the African continent. The repeated upheavals that the Central African Republic is constantly experiencing make it difficult for media professionals to carry out their work independently.

With the advent of digital technologies, particularly social networks, Central Africans are increasingly turning online to get information in real time, while the absence of a law to regulate the sector could lead to the dissemination of false news and hate speech. However, radio remains the most important mass media. Thanks to it, people living in the most remote areas of the country can obtain information.

Ranked 145th in the 2019 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, press freedom is still a matter of concern in the CAR. As previously explained, the lack of electricity networks in the country is a major obstacle for Central Africans to access information. Yet, the rise of connected mobile networks has allowed audiences to free themselves from the dominant current of communication. For example, WhatsApp alone could become a preferred digital communication platform in the coming years due to persistent rumours about telephone line piracy by the country's authorities.

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