The Central African Republic:

Media in a complex emergency

Map of the Central African Republic

Based on OCHA/ReliefWeb

Acronyms

CAR	Central African Republic
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN)
FH	Fondation Hirondelle
HCC	Haut Conseil de la Communication (High Council for Communication)
HIFC	Humanitarian Information Facility Centre
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally displaced person
IPE	Institut Panos Europe
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
IVR	Interactive voice response
MDI	Media development indicator
MPJ	Maison de la Presse et des journalistes
MSI	Media Sustainability Index (IREX)
OMCA	L'Observatoire des Médias Centrafricains
PSA	Public service announcement
RFI	Radio France International
RJDH	Association of Journalists for Human Rights
RNL	Radio Ndeke Luka
RSF	Reporters without Borders
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SMS	Short Message Service
UJCA	L'Union des Journalistes Centrafricains
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VOA	Voice of America
WFP	World Food Programme

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Introduction

This desk study was commissioned by International Media Support (IMS) for the purposes of providing information to colleagues in both the humanitarian information and media support sectors so that they may be better informed when devising and deciding on appropriate intervention strategies.

IMS advisers Michelle Betz and Suzanne Moll were tasked with the assessment and the recommendations. Both are cognisant of the ever-changing situation on the ground in the Central African Republic and readers of this report should bear the fluidity of the situation in mind.

Research for this report was conducted from late December 2013 through 10 January 2014 in the form of interviews and a consultation of reports. This report was updated in late February 2014.

1. Context

"It's not just a humanitarian crisis but also an information crisis. Central Africans are living in complete darkness as they have no access to information."

– Pascal Chirha, National Coordinator, Institut Panos Europe in CAR[1]

One of the poorest countries in the world, the Central African Republic (CAR) has a population of close to 5 million. According to the World Bank, CAR is the world's sixth poorest country and ranks 180 of 186 on the 2012 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index. Christians make up about 80 per cent and Muslims about 15 per cent of the population with the latter mostly concentrated in the far northeast. Sango and French are the official languages though many (ex)-Seleka fighters are Muslim and speak Arabic.

Seleka means coalition or alliance in the Sango language – one of the country's national languages and refers to an alliance of predominantly Muslim rebel groups from CAR's marginalised northeast.

CAR became independent in 1960 and has faced security issues on a near-continuous basis since then.

"The northern savannah regions of the CAR geographically and culturally have much in common with southern Chad and have been destabilised since the 1970s by civil wars in Chad and, latterly, Darfur."[2] Indeed, in the past two decades no country has experienced more military "peace support" interventions than CAR.[3]

Much of the country's wealth derives from extractive industries, "notably diamonds, gold and timber, mainly from the southwest. Potential wealth in oil and uranium reserves is unexploited."[4]

One cannot discuss CAR without examining its geographic placement within the region. "The CAR is where the chronic conflict zones of Africa's Great Lakes and Eastern Sahel (Chad, Sudan and South

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[1] Interview, 4 January 2014.

[2] Reeve, Richard. "Sustainable Peace and Security in the CAR 2013", Oxford Research Group. December 2013, p.2.

[3] Reeve, p.1.

[4] Reeve, p.7.

Sudan) converge. No solution to the CAR crisis is possible without a regional peace process and regional cooperation" in the wider Great Lakes and Sudans regions.[5]

Regional considerations should not be ignored: most of Chad's wealth comes from the oil-producing southern region which straddles the CAR while the southeast, bordering South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is subject to frequent incursions by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and is during the rainy season virtually isolated as the roads are washed out. Borders are not secure. The East, an area rich in minerals, has seen pastoralists come with their cattle creating new opportunities for conflict over land use.

"The CAR, through a Seleka proxy, could potentially offer Khartoum a new revenue stream through oil, diamonds, gold, uranium, timber as well as an opportunity to expand Muslim influence in the region."[6]

1.1 The current crisis

While the country has gone through various periods of instability and violence, the current crisis started on 10 December 2012, when the Seleka began a military campaign against the government of President François Bozizé. On 24 March 2013, Seleka rebels (a loose alliance of Muslim fighters from CAR, Chad and Sudan) took control of the capital Bangui and ousted Bozizé.

Michel Djotodia, one of the Seleka leaders, "suspended the constitution, and installed himself as interim president—a role to which he was subsequently appointed by the transitional government."[7] In September 2013, Djotodia disbanded Seleka which resulted in "a wave of widespread violence with no effective national army in place to stop it."[8]

Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch (HRW), most recently visited CAR in December 2013. Bouckaert reports that "many now "ex-Seleka" fighters continue to operate across the country. Nominally integrated into the national army, ex-Seleka continue to exert their power through violence in much of the country, terrorizing local populations. They have increasingly been opposed by predominantly Christian militias known as anti-balaka ("anti-machete" in Sango), which in September began to strike back at the ex-Seleka forces."[9]

"A particular characteristic of the current conflict is targeting of civilians and violence that polarises Christian and Muslim communities. Identified with Séléka, Muslims comprise about 10-15% of Central Africans. There are Muslim minorities within some of the larger, mainly Christian ethnic groups of the north and center. Only in the northeast is Islam the main religion. Peoples of Séléka's home region are also distinct physically and linguistically to most Central Africans. Other distinct Muslim groups sometimes resented in the CAR are Chadian traders and Peul (Fulani) pastoralists, who range with their herds from Nigeria and Cameroon across the CAR and Chad to Sudan and often come into conflict with farming communities. Thus, in the CAR the term 'Muslim' is often conflated with 'foreigner' and disputes over livelihoods."[10]

Louise Arbour, President of the International Crisis Group (ICG), believes the international community missed an important window of opportunity to respond. "The United Nations and

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[5] Reeve, p.1.
[6] David Smith, "CAR: Out of the Frying Pan into the Furnace,"
http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=467138&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389
[7] Peter Bouckaert, "They Came to Kill: Escalating Atrocities in the Central Africa Republic", Human Rights Watch. December 2013. p. 11.
[8] Louise Arbour, "Next Year's Wars," in Foreign Policy, 30 December 2013
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/30/next_year_s_wars#sthash.4rrzL7Rx.albzDpH5.dpbs
[9] Bouckaert p 11
[10] Reeve, p.4.

Western powers were slow to respond, in part because they thought Djotodia could control Seleka fighters and that the African Union-led International Support Mission in the CAR (MISCA) could secure the capital, Bangui. They were wrong on both counts. The transitional government and the regional security force have failed to prevent a free fall into chaos. The "wait and see" approach of the United Nations and Western powers now has them breathlessly trying to catch up."[11]

According to Reporters without Borders (RSF): "The situation has worsened since the events of 5-6 December, when coordinated attacks allegedly carried out by "anti-balaka" Bozizé supporters triggered violent reprisals by former Seleka militias, a process accompanied by growing polarisation around religious identity – the "ex-Seleka" being mainly Muslim and the pro-Bozizé forces being mainly Christian."[12]

Some analysts warn about the dangers of identifying the crisis as one of Muslims versus Christians, however, "analysing the current manifestations of violence as a single nationwide struggle between Muslim and Christian communities or as a discrete conflict arising from the March 2013 seizure of power by Séléka is likely to be counter-productive. The CAR state has not collapsed suddenly. Its cycle of conflict and decline has fostered many inequalities and grievances within a complex nation and region."[13]

As of 2 January 2014, close to one million people were displaced within CAR. That is one in five Central Africans and according to the UN, 100 per cent of the population has been affected by the current crisis.

Meanwhile, the international community is still weighing its options. One report on a transition from African Union forces to UN command is due early March, "making a larger UN mission with a more comprehensive stabilisation and peace-building mandate likely in the second quarter of 2014. Such a force might be comparable to the complex UN Missions in Liberia (UNMIL) or Haiti (MINUSTAH), essentially overseeing the reconstruction of CAR state institutions, and would be likely to last many years."[14]

Such a mission would likely also have implications for a possible UN radio and indeed there have been discussions in New York concerning this already. However, many of those in the media development sector would prefer that such a radio was not set up but would prefer a focus on reinforcing local media.

In any case, the current 18-month transition period is supposed to culminate in elections in February 2015. Meanwhile, the parliament and the constitution have been dissolved resulting in no rule of law, and no state structures or services are working including the police and army. The head of Institut Panos Europe (IPE) in CAR, who has also worked extensively in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has said that the current situation is vastly different from that in the DRC. "At least in that country the country still ran, banks were still open. That is not the case in CAR – state services, including the police and the army, no longer exist."[15]

The situation changes from hour to hour and with almost one million displaced persons, the humanitarian situation is critical. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has been working in CAR for several years and is currently present in two camps outside Bangui. They report that humanitarian workers face significant risks. The DRC staff, for example work under heavy security backup. The

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[11] Arbour, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/30/next_year_s_wars#sthash.4rrzL7Rx.albzDpH5.dpuf
[12] Reporters without Borders, "Freedom of Information Buffeted from All Sides", 23 December 2013. http://en.rsf.org/car-freedom-of-information-buffeted-23-12-2013,45664.htmll
[13] Reeve, p.8.
[14] Reeve, p.5.
[15] Pascal Chirha, interview. January 2014.

staff "have been forced to seek refuge in public toilets because they were approached by young men dressed in battledress wearing wigs and bras clearly high on God only knows what".[16]

On 10 January 2014, interim President, Michel Djotodia, along with Prime Minister Tiangaye stepped down while attending a summit aimed at restoring peace in Chad. It is unclear who will take over though the entire cabinet was in the Chadian capital of Ndjemena for these talks.

1.2 The current crisis and the media

Reporters without Borders have perhaps provided most of the information pertaining to the situation of the media in the current crisis. In a recent report they write:

> "As physical attacks and threats to media and journalists increased during 2013, many newspapers radicalised their discourse and failed to maintain journalistic objectivity. In an attempt to prop up Bozizé's crumbling regime, *Radio Centrafrique* and other state-owned media at first targeted the Seleka rebels with divisive messages and hate messages. *Radio Centrafrique* subsequently concentrated on broadcasting details of Seleka exactions.

> Christophe Gazam Betty, the communication minister appointed after the Seleka takeover, banned the media from talking about Seleka's actions, notifying them that every report needed authorisation by his office and reminding the state media that they were required to support government policy under an existing decree.

> The print media's behaviour has been dominated by financial interests, with the main newspapers such as *Le Citoyen*, *Le Confident* and *Hirondelle* allying themselves with the politicians who offer them the most money.

> *Radio Ndeke Luka*, a radio station supported by Fondation Hirondelle, a Swiss NGO, and by international donors, is the only news outlet to have remained relatively neutral during this period, limiting itself to reporting atrocities without comment."[17]

In the current situation, many reporters are self-censoring as it is assumed that any act of reporting constitutes taking a political position. As a result, most simply do no reporting at all.

According to Fondation Hirondelle (FH), Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) was the first media back on air 8 December 2013 after the attacks, followed by Radio Centrafrique and Radio Notre Dame; the local newspapers have not yet resumed print.[18]

1.3 The current crisis and humanitarian information and communication

On 11 December, the UN activated a System-Wide Level 3 Emergency Response. InterAction, a U.S. umbrella organisation for more than 100 NGOs, also declared CAR a level 3 emergency (the most severe). This move obligates member agencies to immediately and dramatically increase their

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[16] Interview.

[17] http://en.rsf.org/car-freedom-of-information-buffeted-23-12-2013,45664.html

[18] http://www.hirondelle.org/home-page/in-bangui-a-trusted-source-of-information-in-a-time-of-uncertainty/?lang=en

staffing and funding levels to respond to the crisis."[19] As people abandon their villages along the main roads for fear of attack from marauding militias, they are forced to find shelter in their fields, where without adequate housing they are exposed to malaria and illnesses due to rough living conditions. Others are sheltering in churches and mosques.

According to the "*100 Day Plan*", a strategic response plan is being prepared for January 2014.[20] The priority needs are identified as:

> » Multi-sector assistance to IDPs, meaning food, shelter, water, etc.;

> » 17 administrative units have been identified as "priority areas";

> » The priority population is the IDPs, in particular women and children, but also vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, refugees from the DRC and South Sudan and stranded migrants;

> » The cross-cutting priority is protection, and this must be the main driver of the response. Protection concerns must inform all sectors and be taken systematically into consideration when implementing assistance.

There are at least 43 organisations involved in the delivery of aid; however, there is no specific mention of humanitarian information efforts.[21] Nor does the humanitarian community "have a complete picture of needs, particularly for the hard-to reach northern and eastern regions of the country."[22]

2. Media landscape in CAR

Today most journalists have no formal journalism education while the previous generation is no longer working. Working conditions are poor and characterised by low (and lack of consistently paid) wages, lack of resources, lack of access to professional training, and corruption. Despite this, the CAR still managed to rank 65th out of 179 countries in 2012 in the most recent Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. However, this is due to change drastically in the 2013 [to be published later in 2014] index as events after the outbreak of the Seleka rebellion at the end of 2012 during which radio stations were ransacked and one journalist was killed, "were not taken into consideration in this index, thus preventing the country from falling more than 50 places. These will be included in the 2014 version."[23]

Even prior to the current conflict, Central African media faced challenging circumstances. IREX reported in its Media Sustainability Index that: "Media professionals in the Central African Republic continue to subsist despite deteriorating working conditions, meager operating budgets, dilapidated facilities, and technical barriers to disseminating their reporting. They face government tactics of harassment, suspensions, and other deterrents, particularly in relation to the country's persisting problems of corruption and banditry in the southeast. All of these factors complicate the media scene and create a largely unsustainable environment for the press."[24]

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[19] http://interaction.org
[20] https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/CAP/100_DAY_PLAN_2014_CAR.pdf
[21] "100 Day Plan", p. 5.
[22] "100 Day Plan," p. 4.
[23] http://fr.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/classement_2013_gb-bd.pdf p.6.
[24] IREX, "Central African Republic Media Sustainability Index", 2012. http://www.irex.org/resource/central-african-republic-media-sustainability-index-msi, p. 57.

The report continues: "correspondents snap up some of the more salacious reports in order to be able to make ends meet or simply to be able to justify work. These reports are often not fair, objective, or well documented. Many journalists do not play their roles as vehicles of truth, but rather unduly alarm people by publishing rumor and conjecture."[25] This presents particularly dangerous conditions during times of conflict.

Over the past 18 months, several reports have been written examining the media sector in CAR, as such, this report will present the highlights of the sector.[26]

2.1 Legal and regulatory framework

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, but was suspended by rebel leader Michel Djotodia at the end of March 2013.

Prior to that, CAR had a "generally favorable legal environment", according to IREX's MSI.[27] Much of the work for the legal and regulatory environment was carried out in 2005. At that time, there was the promulgation of a law on media freedom, the decriminalisation of media offences and the creation of a regulatory body called the Haut Conseil de la Communication (High Council for Communication) (HCC)."[28]

The HCC was created in 2005 with the mission of guaranteeing and ensuring the independence, freedom and protection of the press and the arts.[29] The Council also is to ensure that journalistic ethics are respected and to monitor content to ensure there is no hate speech or incitement to violence. The HCC, like most bodies, has virtually stopped operating over the past year. As a result there is no organ that provides any monitoring of media in a crucial period.

Radio stations are licensed and registered using a two-step process that can be arduous and take several years before licenses are issued.

Despite these legal norms, the reality is that journalists are targeted and in the past year or two there have been several arrests of media personnel. In addition, "[j]udges apply the penal code instead of the relevant press law when rendering judgments involving media professionals."[30] Also, the news media continue to "experience the usual problems resulting from financial insecurity, a lack of equipment and training, and harassment by government officials."[31]

"Despite interim President Michel Djotodia's promise on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, that "no journalists will be imprisoned for speaking out" and that "they will be guaranteed this (...) freedom of expression by the new authorities," there were many threats from government officials and Seleka members during the following months."[32] Government harassment of media workers increased late July/August and continued through September 2013.

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[25] IREX, p. 61.
[26] In mid-2012 Internews produced a fairly comprehensive report of the media sector as did SFCG later that year.
[27] IREX, p.59.
[28] http://en.rsf.org/car-freedom-of-information-buffeted-23-12-2013,45664.html
[29] For more information on the HCC see http://www.refram.org/node/95
[30] IREX, p. 59.
[31] http://en.rsf.org/car-freedom-of-information-buffeted-23-12-2013,45664.html
[32] http://en.rsf.org/car-freedom-of-information-buffeted-23-12-2013,45664.html

2.2 Print

There are some 30-40 daily and weekly newspapers in CAR, though very few of them are published on a regular basis and all are published in Bangui "with little distribution to the interior."[33]

The six most popular papers that appear on a regular basis are *Le Citoyen*, *Le Confident, L'Hirondelle, Le Democrat, Media Plus and Agora* with *Le Citoyen* and *Le Confidant* printing approximately 500 copies. Only *Le Confident* and *L'Hirondelle* print their own papers at commercial printers on photocopies in A3 format folded in half. Virtually none of the newspapers have published since 20 December 2013 because of the violence.

There is a state-run press agency l'Agence Centrafricaine de Presse (ACAP) (www.acap-cf.info) as well as a private press agency, Be Afrika (www.beafrika.net).

International newspapers and magazines are almost impossible to come upon in the CAR and very expensive when found.

2.3 Broadcast

As in much of sub-Saharan Africa, radio is the most popular and most important medium. There are four types of stations: state-run, independent/private, confessional/religious, and community totalling some 20-30 stations in total.[34] The religious stations are primarily Catholic; however, there are also Protestant stations and one Muslim station. Most of these stations began in 2007-2008 with state radio and Radio Ndeke Luka the only stations available prior to that.

Today, the two main private radio stations are Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) and Radio Tropic FM. In addition to broadcasting on FM, Ndeke Luka also broadcasts for several hours each day on shortwave. RNL was originally started by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) during its peacekeeping mission in CAR and when DPKO left in 2000, Radio MINURCA was left to the Swiss NGO Fondation Hirondelle becoming Radio Ndeke Luka. Since then, RNL has been independent from DPKO.

"From 2000 to 2008, it was in a partnership with UNDP but that has stopped too in 2008. No formal partnership for RNL with the UN family. Today, the current BINUCA or other UN agencies sometimes buy airtime on RNL and we have daily programs covering the actions of the UN in CAR as part of the coverage of development and humanitarian activities in the country."[35] The station's mandate is to contribute to and to reinforce pluralism of the media sector in CAR.

Currently, RNL is doing minimal programming; most of the provincial community radio stations were ransacked either in December or early in 2013. The population is essentially living in the dark when it comes to information: "It's not just a humanitarian crisis but also an information crisis. Central Africans are living in complete darkness as they have no access to information," said Pascal Chirha, National Coordinator at Institut Panos Europe in CAR. The only station you can rely on, Chirha says, is RNL.

State-run Radio Centrafrique (Central African Radio) has limited capacity and few resources and, it too, for the most part, is currently off-air; its staff are simply too afraid to go to the station.

There are additional private and community stations. The community radio stations are typically part of a small community with very basic infrastructure and extremely limited coverage with

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[33] IREX, 2012 http://www.irex.org/resource/central-african-republic-media-sustainability-index-msi
[34] For a comprehensive list of radio and television outlets, see Internews' report from 2012.
[35] Caroline Vuillemin, interview, December 2013.

programming in the local language and addressing issues of importance of the individual community. Most of those working at these stations are volunteers. Some of these stations are also religious, thus falling into two of the four categories. Some of the community radio stations were set up by different organisations, including environmental organisations.

Radio ICDI, for example, was set up by the U.S.-based NGO Water for Good at the end of 2005 and was the first station to be granted a private shortwave license. Radio ICDI was the only station covering a vast area to the north of the capital. Unfortunately, like most stations across the country, Radio ICDI was looted in March and is now off air due to instability and repeated threats by Seleka, most recently in December 2013.[36]

In some cases, radio stations are supported by politicians as they receive no subsidies from the state. Clearly, this can, and likely will, result in politicised media.

Satellite television is available but out of reach of most of the population due to the expense and the reality that most people do not have television.

BBC, Radio France International (RFI) and Voice of America (VOA) are also available. VOA, for example, has an FM transmitter in Bangui which is running 24/7. VOA also has reporters on the ground filing reports. One VOA staff-member, Idriss Fall, left Bangui at the end of December, as he was the target of at least one attack.

2.4 Online

The first internet service came to CAR in 2000 and was provided by la Société centrafricaine des télécommunications (SOCATEL). Around 3 per cent of citizens were online by 2012, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Internet penetration is mainly confined to Bangui. There are three mobile internet providers in CAR and one providing fixed line service.

According to a 2012 report by Internews, the number of internet users in CAR is 0.4 in 100. With a maximum speed of 128 Mbits/second for the entire country, CAR is among the last countries in the world to have internet access.[37]

2.5 Mobile telephony

There are four mobile operators in CAR with approximately one in three Central Africans using mobile phones. This has grown substantially as it was only 1 in 40 as recently as 2007.[38] In addition, the cost of making calls has decreased almost 40 per cent since then.[39]

Some humanitarian information programmes have relied on the use of mobile phones in the CAR over the past few years. However, the efficacy of the use of mobile telephony in humanitarian communication work has proven to be less than hoped. A report produced for the U.S. Institute for Peace examined one such programme in CAR. "[Internews Country Director Jeroen] Corduwener shared his own challenges with ICTs. His team was able to set up a system to get information from isolated areas to central locations, to be distributed to humanitarian groups, but an evaluation part way through implementation revealed that much of the public was not using the SMS

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[36] http://icdinternational.org/2013/12/trouble-at-the-radio-station/
[37] Internews, "Répertoire des médias et de la communication en Centrafrique", July 2012.
[38] Internews, p.6.
[39] Internews, p.6.

messaging system. This was partly because of illiteracy, partly because of the cost of sending an SMS message, and partly because the population was distrustful of the device itself."[40]

2.6 Journalism education

There is a new information and communications department at the University de Bangui which saw its first class graduate in August 2012. More than 50 students are expected to graduate from the three-year diploma program in the next two years, although it is likely that the current crisis will cause some delays. Institut Panos Europe has been supporting the department financially though it is unclear what kind of capacity and facilities the department has at its disposal.

2.7 Media associations

There are several media organisations in CAR; however, due to their weak financial resources they are rather limited in being effective in their roles. In addition, the current crisis has made it virtually impossible for the leadership of such organisations to meet or provide support to their constituents. In addition, many of these organisations are rather new – set up with assistance from INGOs – and as such face issues of both sustainability and capacity.

Prior to the current crisis, according to one panelist for the IREX Media Sustainability Index (MSI) report "NGOs are more effective at supporting free speech and the independent media. NGOs are involved in evaluating the legislature's efforts to modify the media, CAR's basic laws governing freedom of communication, and HCC's organic law."[41]

Current organisations in the CAR include the following:

Association of Community Radio of CAR (ARC) / Association des radios communautaires de la RCA

This community radio alliance was created in June 2009 with the goal to work together to support their member stations, protect their common interests and share resources, including programming, to reinforce capacity. There are 23 member stations across the country of which most are not officially recognised nor do they have licenses; this makes it difficult for them to operate. In addition, they are often pressured by politicians who try to co-opt the stations and use them for their own benefit. In addition, the association organises training programs for journalists and managers of its member radio stations. ARC has largely been supported by Fondation Hirondelle and IPP.

Association of Journalists for Human Rights (AJHR) / *Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RDJH)*

This association was set up in December 2010 at an Internews training session. The Association connects radio stations with one other and enables humanitarian agencies to learn what is happening in hard-to-reach areas and quickly exchange information with communities throughout the country.

Maison de la presse et des journalistes (MPJ)

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[40] United States Institute of Peace, "Communication for Peace Building Priority Grant Program: Learning Group Report", September 2012, p. 10.
[41] IREX, p.65.

The MPJ was set up in 2009 by IPP with the aim of providing concrete solutions and a central organisation to assist media outlets and organisations to organise workshops. The MPJ houses several organisations including l'Association des Femmes Professionnelles de la Communication (AFPC), l'Observatoire des Medias Centrafricains (OMCA) et l'Union des Journalistes Centrafricains (UJCA).[42] The MPJ has several challenges – financial as well as a lack of ownership on the part of journalists who, for example, do not use the facility for press conferences and the like.

Association des femmes professionnelles de la communication (AFPC)

The AFPC was set up in 2008 with the aim of building capacity of women in the profession and attracting women to the media sector, however, unfortunately the Association exists largely in name only.

Central African Journalists' Union (UJCA) / Union des journalistes centrafricains

UJCA is perhaps the most active of the organisations. It mobilises for its constituents, raises funds and helps to organisation workshops.

L'Observatoire des Médias Centrafricains (OMCA)

Created in 2005 by the UJCA, the OMCA was intended to serve as a monitoring body to ensure journalistic ethics are adhered to. Lack of resources means the OMCA has pretty much come to a halt. A new code of ethics was written in 2012 and the OMCA has managed to circulate this to journalists across the country.

The OMCA "enforces rules of professional conduct and ethics to avoid inciting tribal, religious, or racial hatred and cites and punishes any journalist when professional misconduct is proven. The Central African Journalists' Union (…), OMCA, HCC, and the Association of Independent Private Press Publishers all function to hold media professionals to account in case of non-compliance with ethical standards."[43]

Association of Independent Private Press Publishers (GEPPIC)

This is the only group representing publishers, however, according to one report the "group has been divided from within. This body has not been independent vis-à-vis the government."[44]

Réseau des médias africains pour la lutte contre le sida, la tuberculose et le paludisme (REMASTP)

Another new organisation, which as its name implies is devoted to journalists covering health issues. It is currently not active.

2.8 Sustainability

Issues of sustainability are paramount for all types of media in CAR. There is no advertising agency (except for the recent work of Fondation Hirondelle to set up an agency specifically for RNL) and there has been no audience surveys carried out since 1976 (though the radio Ndeke Luka did

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[42] Search for Common Ground, "Rapport sur la situation des Médias en République Centrafricaine", December 2012, p.7.

[43] IREX, p. 59.

[44] IREX p. 64.

conduct an audience survey in parts of the country in 2010). In the 2012 MSI report (before the current crisis started), the panellists agreed "economic stagnation has hampered the media sector for two decades, and that CAR media sector is not made up of well-managed companies."[45] Given the current situation, it is inevitable that this stagnation has worsened.

There are no formal advertising regulations so prices are often based on personal relationships. The biggest market for advertising has come from mobile phone companies but it is clear this sector needs to be developed and diversified.

"The 2005 ordinance on the press mandates that the government include a press subsidy in each annual budget. The subsidy is never allocated, however, except for occasional assistance that the president makes to some leading newspapers—which influences the editorial line of the newspaper. Occasionally, the state makes a gesture to help during the celebration of World Press Freedom Day. "[46]

3. Challenges facing journalists and the media sector

The current crisis has made it virtually impossible for journalists to do their jobs, as they simply cannot move around due to security concerns. Several sources have said that journalists, by and large, face the same security issues as the population at large – there is no freedom of movement. In addition, these sources also emphasised that some journalists have been targeted due to reporting that was perceived as even slightly political. As a result, there is significant self-censorship.

IMS has chosen the UNESCO Media Development Indicators (MDIs) as a starting point for a framework for assessments such as the current one.

3.1 Regulation, pluralism and diversity of media

As discussed above, a regulatory system does exist, as does plurality of media. However, given the current crisis and the lack of any state structures it is impossible to enforce regulations. Most media outlets have either been destroyed, are too fearful to cover anything that hint at politics or simply cannot get around to cover stories.

3.2 Pluralism and diversity of media and level economic playing field and transparency of ownership

Long before the current crisis it was difficult for the various media outlets to survive. Many of the community radio stations were run by volunteers, others received so-called subsidies from politicians compromising their independence. As such, while in theory there are numerous radio

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[45] IREX p. 63.
[46] IREX, p. 64.

stations and newspapers, the reality is much different. Access to equipment (particularly for those radio stations that have been ransacked), advertising and/or other revenue is virtually non-existent. The most successful radio station is clearly RNL, which was originally set up by the UN, and which over the past dozen years or so has successfully managed to raise funds through its implementer, Fondation Hirondelle.

3.3 Media as platform for democratic discourse

One could well argue that the idea of media as a platform for democratic discourse is currently a foreign concept to most of the media outlets in CAR. On one hand, most journalists have resorted to self-censorship thereby leaving a vast hole where any kind of political coverage was in the past. On the other hand, politicians are moving in and co-opting outlets and some radio presenters are resorting to hate speech.

3.4 Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpin freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity

The media sector in CAR has always been woefully short in capacity building activities and has, until the past couple of years, been largely ignored by those working in media development. Recent attempts at setting up various associations (see above) seeking to organise the community and also build capacity have also served to fragment the community. The current crisis has seriously harmed what had been efforts to build capacity in the sector as well as prevented association members from meeting due to the dangers of moving around.

3.5 Infrastructure capacity sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media

Even prior to the current crisis, there was a tremendous lack of infrastructure. The events since March 2013 saw the ransacking of various radio stations and means that many stations simply cannot go on the air, as they no longer have any infrastructure left.

Clearly, these indicators are a starting point and do not look at other factors such as the overall socio-political and economic environment in a particular context (as discussed above), nor are issues of safety and security (physical and online) considered, even if physical safety is of tantamount importance in the current situation.

One American freelance photojournalist, for example, reported on 2 December 2013: "Over the last few days many journalist vehicles have been attacked by angry mobs all around even and near the airport. Today in Central African Republic most streets are empty.… Fixers and there [sic] families and lovers bunk on the floors, bed, and couches of a handfull of journalists. Today at a random road block in PK12, an angry mob swinging machetes and holding hand grenades attacked the car and one guy attempted to pull me out of the car. After the calmer heads prevailed the situation was defused. If you are planning on coming into CAR best bring your med kit and in retrospect I would bring a few more depending on the size of your news team. It seems these random roadblocks are

not friendly towards local and international journalists. Due to the nature of a mob it is easy for them to explode and all it takes is one person to unleash their collective anger."[47]

In October 2013, Reporters without Borders reported that the editors of three Bangui-based dailies[48] had all been subjected to heavy-handed interrogation in the past month after publishing stories criticising the CEDAD's (Extraordinary Committee for the Defense of Democratic Achievements) activities. None of these interrogations was sanctioned by judicial procedure.[49]

It is clear that the challenges facing journalists and the media sector are massive.

4. Challenges facing humanitarian information and communication

Considering the magnitude of the crisis there is very little information on what is being done in terms of humanitarian information and communication. High illiteracy rates, low mobile and SMS use suggest that radio remains the most important tool in reaching affected communities. Mobile technology will need to be used creatively and thoughtfully. Weak infrastructure and 25 per cent of the population displaced makes communication on humanitarian issues a challenge but clearly one of vital importance.

Activities dealing with humanitarian information and communication with regards to the IDPs are very hard to identify at this moment, even though there is a clear need for this. Cases of sexual violence and rape against girls have been reported to the UN, and children are increasingly victims of violence and targeted for forced recruitment.[50] The presence of French troops has done little to constrain a "tit-for tat" violence present in the area of Bangui.[51]

Prior to the current crisis in CAR, radio served as the main medium for information however there is no record of radio stations providing information on humanitarian issues; nor has it been possible to find any other reliable information on this topic. With almost 25 per cent of the population displaced and living in camps, relief organisations are struggling to provide food, water and shelter. There is no clear indication on efforts on who is providing information and how. The US State Department announced in mid-December it would provide humanitarian support.[52]

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has for several years had a hotline service aimed at women and children exposed to violence. However this hotline has not been integrated in present initiatives according to Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen, Chief of Division of Emergency, Safety and Supply at the DRC.

Given the security situation, it seems unlikely at this point to set up any sustainable information and communication system. Internet and phone lines work very unpredictably. However, according to the OCHA humanitarian response site for CAR there are two-way radio connections between the camps for aid workers to use. See Annex I for a map of these activities.

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[47] Interview.
[48] Julien Bella of *Centrafrique Matin*, Maka Gbossokotto of *Le Citoyen* and Ulrich Landry Ngopkele of *Quotidien de Bangui*
[49] http://en.rsf.org/rca-seleka-disbanded-but-journalists-15-10-2013,45341.html
[50] http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_71659.htm
[51] http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/04/us-centralafrican-france-idUSBREA0306M20140104
[52] http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/19/fact-sheet-us-assistance-central-african-republic

There are currently five coordination hubs for the humanitarian efforts: Bangui, Bambari, Paoua, Zemio and Ndele; all are equipped with two-way radio connections. Meetings take place on a weekly basis for different clusters and could provide an opportunity for information management.[53]

The "*100 Day Plan*" has identified ten operational priorities to be upscaled over the coming months. Information management is one of the priorities and there are plans for an upscale of activities in this area as well. By January "effective information management (…) and common information platforms" should be established.[54]

Currently, one nationwide radio station is active, but community radios should play a vital role in this crisis and immediate actions must be taken to restore, strengthen and secure them.

In December, the inter-cluster coordination group in Bangui (led by WFP) highlighted the need for systematically engaging in two-way communication with affected communities.[55] Taking the needs identified by WFP as a starting point, some elements concerning humanitarian information could be considered:

» In order to build trust between humanitarian organisations and the communities in which they are working, it is essential that there is free access to relevant and objective information;

» Capacity building in "objective" reporting in order to prevent hate speech or stigmatisation is needed;

» Involvement of local leaders and communities in media production is essential;

» Information and sensitisation campaigns should be strengthened with simple and clear messages;

» It is important to ensure possibilities of dialogue between communities and individuals with regards to complaints and transparency.

Internews created a community-based network in 2012 with 13 community radio stations. One of their recent projects, "Integrating local media and ICTs into humanitarian response in CAR"[56] was a collaboration between Internews, Ushahidi, the Association of Journalists for Human Rights in Bangui and UNOCHA-RCA. However, there is no news on the present broadcasting structure given the chaotic circumstances. Internews is currently setting up their news humanitarian information and communication program in CAR.

Local communities, their chiefs and local leaders must be involved in humanitarian information and communication efforts; it is vital to engage and ensure broad engagement. Media should be considered a "loyal but neutral friend" in conveying messages, and it would be ideal to start nourishing a culture of debate. The experience of discussing from different viewpoints without the use of violence is vital and can be developed in several radio formats. In addition, careful monitoring of media to prevent any attempt (deliberate or not) to convey rumours or hate speech must be present.

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[53] See https://car.humanitarianresponse.info/en/calendar ac
[54] United Nations, "100 Day Plan for Priority Action in the Central African Republic", December 2013 p. 6.
[55] Central African republic: AAP, CwC & PESA issues paper: Preliminary Findings and Report, 04/01/14
[56] The final report can be accessed here:
http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/HIF_CAR_FinalEval_October_2012_PV_Internews.pdf

5. Local, regional and international media development organisations active in CAR

Most of the international organisations, with the exception of Fondation Hirondelle and Institut Panos Europe, are relative newcomers to CAR. As is always the case, interventions are dependent on funding streams from donors, and CAR has up until recently not managed to grab much of the international community's attention in this regard.

There has been some coordination among several of those working with the media sector in CAR. Most notably, Catholic Relief Services (through SFCG), Invisible Children (with SFCG), SFCG and Fondation Hirondelle have held several coordination meetings, most recently in July 2013. These meetings have largely centered on their work in the southeast of the country.

Radio France Internationale (RFI)

RFI was one of the first international operators to work in CAR and has been working in-country since 2006.

RFI has worked with numerous radio stations since that time to train journalists, build station technical and management capacity, equip and train personnel on digital tools, election coverage and conflict sensitive journalism. RFI has also worked to set up networks of radio stations and journalists. Their current project is focused on setting up three community radio stations in Bayanga, Alindao and Bangassou and to boost capacity of ARC, to set up a training studio at ARC and to support the creation of support funds for community radios.

Institut Panos Europe (IPE)

The French NGO, IPE, has been working in the CAR since 2009. It plays an important role largely due to the head of the CAR office, Pascal Chirha. Their programme, "Independent Media for the Consolidation of Democracy" is being adapted to the circumstances of the crisis and continues in 2014 with funding from the EU.

Their office in Bangui was looted and completely destroyed by Seleka in March 2013. Their national coordinator, Pascal Chirha, barely escaped an assassination attempt shortly after.

IPE has been working to improve the legal and regulatory framework as well as to improve the viability and sustainability of media outlets but also organising a central warehouse/store to purchase material. IPE works primarily with the HCC, OMCA and MPJ.

Fondation Hirondelle (FH)

The Swiss NGO has been working in CAR and with Radio Ndeke Luka since 2000. FH received funding from the EU in November 2013 to expand their activities beyond RNL and to work with ARC "on the rehabilitation and capacity building of 10 to 12 community radio stations. The assessment is currently taking place, under very difficult circumstances in the country. On the UN, FH has been approached by DPI to see what is needed in the field of communication in the country. The UN has yet to send their expert to come up with recommendations about what to do. A UN radio at this

stage is an option that we have respectfully discouraged, but we do not know the outcome of the UN assessment."[57]

Internews

Internews has run several projects in CAR since 2010 funded by the USAID, DFID's Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), the US State Department and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

For the past three years, Internews and its local partner, the Association of Journalists for Human Rights (le Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme – RJDH), have worked to connect and support a unique network of 13 community radio stations with one another and create and set up a Community Radio Correspondents Network (CRCN) through a Coordination Centre in Bangui run by the RJDH.

One of their humanitarian information projects (which ended in 2012) was to assist the humanitarian community to be more effective, transparent and accountable by enabling communities to better access relief services, understand aid operations and communicate with aid providers.

Since the beginning of the current crisis in December 2012, the RJDH has consistently reported on the crisis and produced scores of stories on the rebellion, the ensuing humanitarian crisis, its impact on communities across the country and the efforts made by the humanitarian community to address some of the most pressing humanitarian needs in CAR.

Internews has received funding to reactivate their work with the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) and will be starting their humanitarian information and communication project in February 2014.

Search for Common Ground (SFCG)

SFCG has been working in CAR since December 2012, exclusively in the country's southeast and the capital Bangui. SFCG is "part of a consortium with CRS currently (on USAID grant), which targets the areas in the LRA-affected parts of the country, including Zemio and Obo in the southeast. However, we have been consulting and advocating widely, and are hoping to scale up our work very soon, in response to the crisis."[58]

SFCG has also been partnering with the Association of Women Media Professionals (AFPC) though this work has been suspended due to the current crisis.

SFCG has funding to support radio stations in Rafai, Zemio and Obo and to support Invisible Children's radios.

SFCG is currently seeking additional funding to support a response to the crisis with radio stations in Bangui, Bossangoa and elsewhere in the country. Some funds have already been committed and should start by late January.

Voice of America (VOA)

VOA is currently airing its French-language programming in addition to some humanitarian public service announcements (PSAs). VOA would like to conduct some training but do not have any plans to do so at the moment due to the current situation.

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[57] Interview with Caroline Vuillemin, ED at FH, December 2013.
[58] Lena Slachmujlder, VP of Programs. Interview.

VOA is currently running numerous PSAs and promos on the Bangui FM stream addressing humanitarian and peacebuilding subjects (e.g. how to make water safe to drink, safe food preparation, dealing with aid workers, family reunification).

VOA is also running three newsmaker/promotional announcements, with actualities, in which community leaders speak out on CAR's future, non-violence, rule-of-law and reconciliation. VOA will be running 19 news promos per day.

VOA is also moving ahead with SMS and Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) programs. They are planning to send from one to three daily SMS messages dealing with news and health although they are unclear as to when this will start.

Finally, VOA also has plans to increase their programming in Sango.

Invisible Children

This organisation focuses exclusively on working to end the conflict involving the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). As part of those efforts they support a radio in Zorobo in the country's southeast.

Donors

The US Government will provide up to $101 million in assistance to CAR.[59] This funding will include, nearly $7.5 million in funding to support conflict mitigation, reconciliation and peacebuilding, including interreligious peacebuilding efforts and using community radio to amplify peace messages and dispel rumors, through the Complex Crises Fund and the Human Rights Grants Fund (subject to Congressional notification).

The European Union will host a high-level meeting in Brussels on 20 January aimed at securing greater humanitarian assistance for the CAR.

6. Recommendations

There is a clear need for both humanitarian information and communication and media support interventions in CAR, with humanitarian information and communication support constituting the most immediate need. It is relevant and timely to provide assistance, however, the needs are so immense and the task so great that it will take significant coordination to ensure that projects pursued will address these needs together.

There is a need to ensure sustainability. It is likely that any funding currently allocated to the country will be short-lived. As such, any intervention must be very strategic and undertaken in a coordinated approach with other actors and initiatives in order to ensure maximum impact and build sustainability.

The significance of the regional aspects and possible ramifications of the current crisis in CAR cannot be underestimated. This is significant not only for humanitarian information and communication and media support efforts but is perhaps even more crucial for long-term peace-building efforts in which both media and humanitarian information and communication have the potential to play significant roles. Any intervention in the CAR should seriously consider taking a regional approach in at least some aspects of its programmatic design.

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[59] http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/19/fact-sheet-us-assistance-central-african-republic

Many of the sources consulted for this study agree that the media will play, or needs to play, an important role in reconciliation efforts in CAR. This must be taken into consideration for any media development or humanitarian information and communication efforts that may be undertaken in the shot and medium term.

At this time, IMS recommends the following:

6.1 Humanitarian information and communication recommendations

General:

» There should be strict and accurate coordination by international organisations to ensure relevant information reaches as many as possible. Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities (CDAC) and its member organisations can play an important role in ensuring this.

» Information and communication should address three distinct areas: 1) the information and communication needs of affected IDPs where they are (e.g. where to obtain clean water, food, health care; 2) information and communication possibilities related to the conditions at their place of origin, in order to provide grounds for sound judgment on when it is feasible to return; and 3) information and communication efforts addressing potential tensions between IDPs and their hosting communities.

» Ensure participation of local chiefs and leaders for discussion on relevant issues and general debate and sense of ownership.

Immediate actions:

» A general and immediate upscale of support to any media on air, be it nationwide or community-based, which will allow for provision of relevant information for people displaced and otherwise affected.

» Assess possibilities for the establishment of small radio units so they can broadcast (e.g. Radio in a box / First radio).

» Mapping of the information and communication needs of the affected population and an assessment of the media sector and its capacity and ability to support humanitarian information and communication efforts.

Short-term actions:

» Address the needs for restoring media and to ensure their capacity to deliver on humanitarian reporting, information and communication. This could include:
  o Basic infrastructure support
  o Basic training in newsgathering and simple reporting of small clusters of reporter teams to provide input to media. The training must be on the ground and with focus on gathering information and unbiased reporting.
  o Capacity building in humanitarian reporting
  o Upscale of provision of basic technical needs such as mobile phones and credits, pens and notebooks for writing down facts.

» Assess options for setting up humanitarian information facility centres that can boost the flow of humanitarian information and communication. Such hubs could ideally work out of the five information hubs already established by humanitarian actors (see section 4).

6.2 Media support recommendations

General:

» Ensure effective coordination efforts in the sector to avoid overlap and ensure complementary efforts are undertaken.

Short-term/medium term actions:

» Organise a meeting in Yaoundé (or another regional hub) with representation of INGOs and local media support organisations as well as journalists. Such a meeting would serve to bolster coordination efforts and would also provide some much-needed moral support to the Central African media community. Finally, such a meeting could also provide additional input on possible support and how to best provide support to the community.

» Several people have pointed to the importance of training on conflict sensitive reporting[60], since most journalism is opinion-based and this even more risky given the current climate in-country. There have also been hate messages broadcast on radios. While such training could be considered an immediate need to stave off future hate messages, additional capacity building efforts (such as management, fact-based reporting) must also be addressed in the future. The current situation on the ground is such that it is simply unsafe to conduct workshops on the ground. As such, it is recommended that should such work be undertaken it be done in Douala. In this case, it may be possible to organise with the UN to fly journalists via UN flights to Douala.

» While journalists, for the most part, have not been specific targets, it is clear that in order to do their jobs they face inordinate security risks. As such, it is recommended that some safety training be conducted as well. This could be done in Douala.

» The "100 Day Plan" discussed promoting peace, social cohesion and community reconciliation as well as strengthening the capacity of mediation committees and while the media are not mentioned specifically, these are clearly areas in which radio could play a vital role.

» Many community radio stations were ransacked and in some cases completely destroyed and as such there is a need for infrastructure and equipment for these stations so they can get back on the air.

» There is a significant level of self-censorship so there is a vast need for OMCA. The organisation's capacity to monitor and address issues of hate speech and such needs to be bolstered. One option may be to bring in colleagues from the monitoring bodies of either Benin or Togo.

» Due to the severity of the current crisis, there is a clear focus on short-term and immediate needs. There is, however, also a need to think longer term – to the planned elections of early 2015 and beyond as electoral and post-electoral periods have long proven to be flashpoints in conflict, post-conflict and transitional countries.
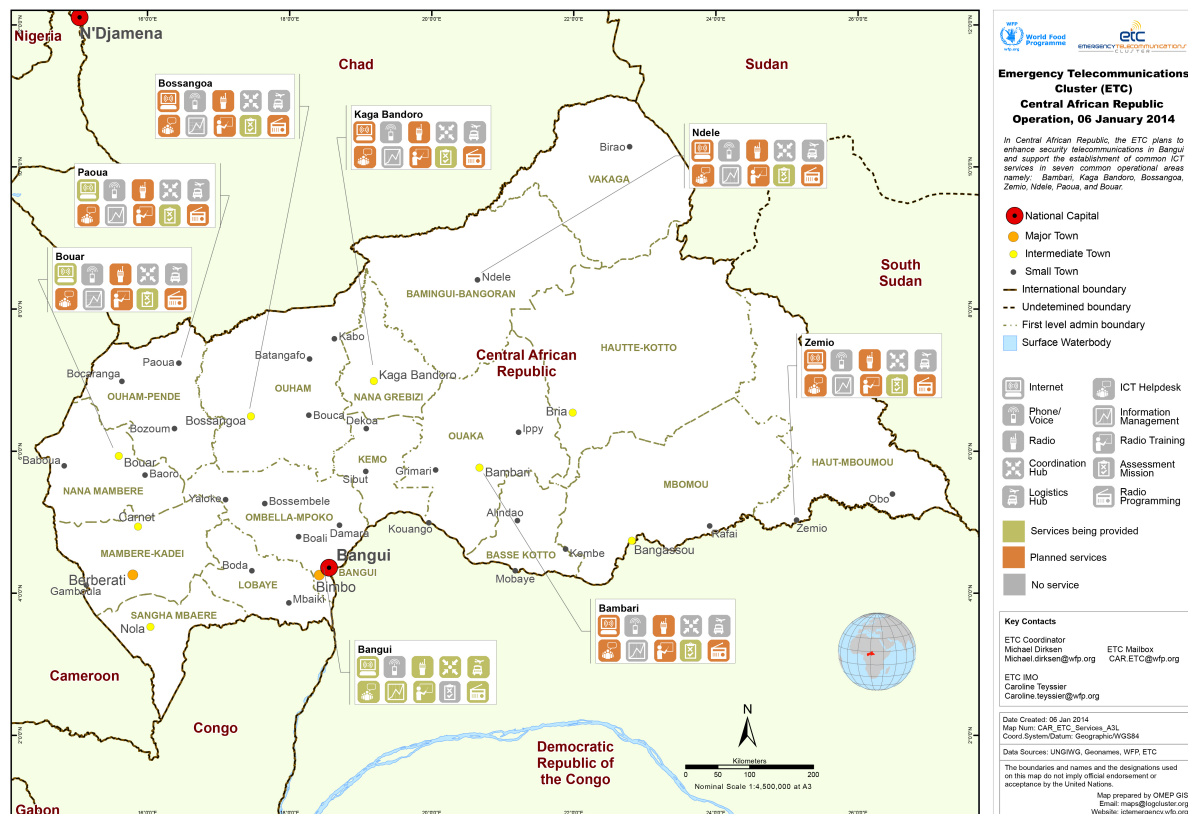
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[60] Reeve (p.7), for example, wrote: "The media and political characterisation of the CAR conflict as primarily a binary Christian-Muslim struggle needs to be countered by a more nuanced representation and conflict-sensitive reporting."

Annexes

Annex I: Emergency telecommunications cluster map

6 January 2014. Courtesy of WFP:
http://ictemergency.wfp.org/web/ictepr/emergencies2013/central-african-republic

Annex II: Persons interviewed

Ian Noble, Internews

American freelance photojournalist in the CAR

Caroline Vuillemin, Fondation Hirondelle

Hannah Storm, INSI

Jacobo Quintanilla, Internews

Mike Jobbins, SFCG

Pascal Chirha, IPP

Joan Mower, BBG/VOA

Anne Poulsen, Nordic Director, WFP

Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen, Chief of Division of Emergency, Safety and Supply (DESS), Danish Refugee Council

Mathurin Momet, *Le Confident*

Annex III: Reports consulted

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Second edition: February 2014

Cover photo: People line up at the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) clinic at the airport in Bangui in December 2013. As of January 2014, the CAR has an immense need for humanitarian assistance, including that which relates to information and communication. Photo: UNCHR / S. Phelps