

Radio Centrafrique: Institutional and Technical Assessment – May 2014

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Executive summary

Radio Centrafrique was established in 1958. In its roles as the nation's public broadcaster, it is run like a state media. However, since 2013, Radio Centrafrique has tried to preserve a neutral tone and its focus on public interest information. However, its status within the Ministry of Communication and Reconciliation limits its independence and its capacity to diversify its supply of programs, to develop new types of content and to adjust its human resources.

Radio Centrafrique was the only Central African media outlets to cover the whole country in Middle Wave (MW). Affected by pillages after Bangui was seized by the Seleka militia, its two transmitters (MW and Short Wave) were stolen. They could be replaced by a 25 kW transmitter which will not ensure coverage to all the rural areas. Its equipment is obsolete. The government is currently being negotiating an agreement to strengthen capacities of production with Teleconsult, an Italian telecommunications company. At the same time, RFI Planete Radio conducted an assessment focused on technical equipment and competencies of technicians.

Since Radio Centrafrique is run as a state media due to its status (department of the Ministry of Communication), more than half of its broadcasts are produced by the communication departments within the public administration. However, since March, the content has not included any propaganda. Radio Centrafrique's news and information content mainly focuses on the activities and the agenda of the government. The pro-government bias is not characterized by the expression of opinions, but by a quasi-absence of critics: journalists do not give a voice to opponents.

News and information represents more than 80% of the schedule. The lack of capacity of journalists and aging staff severely limit the evolution of the content: Radio Centrafrique is the less innovative than the Central African media sector. The Rural Radio department provides news and information from the 11 provinces: 11 correspondents and 5 staff at the central desk provide news to Radio Centrafrique and produce a 30' weekly program on rural areas.

Assessment conducted from 19th April to 18th May 2014 (media monitoring) and from 8th to May 13th 2014 for interviews (Radio Centrafrique management, Ministry of Communication).

1. Institutional assessment

Radio Centrafrique is the national public broadcaster. Radio is the main media in the Central African Republic. The role of Radio Centrafrique for the information of Central African is central. It was the only media to be able to broadcast all day long throughout the country with its 50 kW short and middle wave transmitters before 2013 looting¹.

1.1. Organization

Radio Centrafrique includes four departments:

- 1- “Direction des programmes” (programs and magazines department)
The department is in charge of the production of all the programs, not related to news: education, health, civic education, gender, music, sport.
- 2- “Direction de l’information” (news and information department)
The department, also called the desk (“la redaction” in French) is in charge of producing the news, debates and news magazines.
- 3- “Direction technique” (department of equipment)
The department of equipment is in charge of the management and the maintenance of the equipment (broadcasting and production).
- 4- “Direction de la radio rurale” (rural radio programs department)
A central desk in Bangui and the 11 correspondents located in the provinces are in charge of producing news and programs from and dedicated to rural areas (see 2.4 page 8). le rapport sur Radio Centrafrique

A general manager (Directeur général) oversees Radio Centrafrique. There is no financial department as Radio Centrafrique is a department within the Ministry of Communication. There is therefore no autonomy in financial management nor in human resources management.

1.2. A public sector media outlet managed like a state media

Radio Centrafrique has no autonomy of management. Created in 1958 as a department within the Ministry of Information², its status has not been modified since, even during the political liberalization in the 1990s. The media law has been modified to improve the protection of press freedom in 1998, 2003 and 2005. However, the status of the main public media outlets is never changes.

Radio Centrafrique’s annual budget is included in the governmental allocation to the Ministry of Communication. As stated above, there is no autonomy in the management of the station. Each and every single decision has to be approved by the Ministry (for example, acquisition of equipment, recruitment of journalists). Incomes (advertisement, broadcasting of communiques etc.) are collected by the National Treasury, which places dedicated staff in the office building of the Ministry of Communication and then inserts these funds into the Ministry of Communication’s budget.

All important ministries produce their own programs according to a schedule negotiated between the different public administrations. Each ministry has its own communication/raising awareness department. The President’s office has its own media/communication department (“presse

¹ Radio IDCI, a protestant community radio in Boali (Ombella Mpoko, 90 km north of Bangui), has a 1 kW short wave transmitter. Radio Ndeke Luka broadcasts a 2 hours news and information program through Radio ICDI short wave transmitter.

² The Ministry of Information became the Ministry of Communication during the political liberalization in 1990s and beginning of the 2000s.

présidentielle”). These radio programs are not produced by Radio Centrafrique but by the staff within each of these ministries. The main programs are related to education, health and reconciliation. As the Ministry of Communication is in charge of the reconciliation, the program “Réconciliation” is supposed to be daily produced and broadcast.

Journalists and other Radio Centrafrique staff are public servants of the Ministry of Communication. Radio Centrafrique must therefore follow the government human resources policy. As for the entire civil department in the government, no recruitment has been allowed for many years.

1.3. Human resources

Radio Centrafrique has not been allowed to recruit for more than ten years. Its official number of staff dedicated to human resources has never been sufficient to keep the radio station operational.

The solution found by Radio Centrafrique management is to hire trainees and stringers, which eventually serve as full time positions. Radio Centrafrique has no official budget to pay them. The management uses unofficial incomes to provide compensation to unofficial staff. Some advertisement contracts and payments from senior officials and organizations to see reports or magazines about them broadcast by the public radio station are unofficial income used by the management to keep Radio Centrafrique operational.

Twenty eight staff (public servants) are officially working for Radio Centrafrique: four at the programs production department (“direction des programmes”), six at the desk (news department - “direction de l’information”), two staff are in charge of equipment and sixteen in the rural radio department. An average of thirty trainees and stringers permanently work for the public broadcaster. In May 2014, Radio Centrafrique’s General Manager, Pauline Guerenguendo³ affirmed that “Radio Centrafrique has always been understaffed, but in two or three years, the situation will get worse: most trained and experienced journalists and producers are older and close to retirement. As we are not allowed to hire young journalists, very few people stay on long enough to gain from our experience.”⁴

Radio Centrafrique management does not always choose the trainees and the stringers which are hired. This choice may be related to political and personal relationships with politicians and high ranked public decision makers. Most of these “permanent” trainees and stringers have no sufficient capacity in journalism or audio editing. Radio Centrafrique management has no financial resources to keep promising trainees, notably those who received degrees in the new information and communication department at the University of Bangui.

Radio Centrafrique faces three serious issues regarding human resources: an aging staff, a lack of skills on new techniques of production and difficulties to rehire trained staff, which limits adaptation and innovation in radio programs. The older staff has never been trained to new techniques of production.

1.4. Radio Centrafrique and international cooperation

Radio Centrafrique has benefitted from continuous aid from the French cooperation until the beginning of the 2000s. Since then, short-term support has been provided by international organizations or donors (UNESCO, France, China and Morocco). The World Bank also provided significant aid through a project implemented by RFI Planete Radio: a support to the acquisition of transmitters and capacity building of technicians⁵. This project has been implemented after China provided support to the Bimbo transmission center in 2005. Two transmitters MW and SW were

³ Since then, she has been nominated by the government to the Board of the High Council for Communication matters (Haut Conseil de la Communication), the public media regulator.

⁴ Interview, May 9th 2014

⁵ RFI Planete Radio conducted a technical assessment of Radio Centrafrique in the last of week of May 2014.

available for Radio Centrafrique to cover the whole country. UNESCO and Morocco offered small equipment. France organized trainings for journalists (notably use of basic office software and capacity building of technicians) and supported, in partnership with UNESCO, a project aimed at preserving Radio Centrafrique's archives.

2. Technical assessment (coverage/equipment)

Radio Centrafrique suffered from severe looting in 2013. The two long-range transmitters were stolen. Seleka fighters were positioned in the building and in some offices from March to October 2013.

Capacities of technicians

France, through RFI Planete Radio, supported a training cycle targeting technicians until 2004. Radio Centrafrique technicians show great ability in maintaining the old equipment with limited resources and are considered to be very competent. For example, the head of this department is used in many media development projects funded by or implemented by international organizations (installation of transmitters, maintenance, etc.). Only technicians of the Association of Community Radios have similar skills and ability although they are more focused on the installation of studios.

Capacities of journalists and producers

Due to the lack of training, experienced Radio Centrafrique journalists and producers have a weak knowledge of new tools, notably in audio editing but also in the organization of production. Most of them have difficulties with using computers and basic software. This severely limits productivity and innovation. Trainees and stringers have a better knowledge of basic software and audio editing, but weak competencies in journalism, notably in conflict sensitive journalism.

2.1. Coverage

Radio Centrafrique covered the whole country with its 50 kW transmitter until March 2013. The only transmitter that remains is the FM transmitters, which cover an area of 90 kilometers around Bangui, the capital city (Boali, 90 km Northwest of Bangui, Damara, 75 km North of Bangui and Pissa, 50 km South are the medium neighboring cities which are covered).

The FM transmitters of the main radio stations in Bangui (Radio Centrafrique, Radio Ndeke Luka, Radio Notre Dame and Radio Nehemie) are located in the Collines des Panthères⁶ site, in the center of Bangui urban area.

The 50 kW SW and the 50 kW MW transmitters were located in the site of Bimbo, in the South West of the agglomeration of Bangui.

Radio Centrafrique is not available on satellite, or on Internet (streaming or podcasts).

However, a private-public partnership agreement is being negotiated between the government and TeleConsult, an Italian company, on Radio Centrafrique equipment, covering capacities of production and broadcasting (see Table 2, page 8).

⁶ Collines des Panthères (The Hills of Panthers) is a hill located in the center of Bangui, cutting the main urban area from the western part of Bangui urban area (Kasai, Ngaragba, Ouanga, Landjia neighborhoods) which are only accessible by two roads skirting around the hill.

2.3. Capacity of production

Five studios were available in the 1990s for production. However, the lack of investment in equipment progressively limited the availability of two studios (studio A and B) where all the equipment still available were installed.

Studio A is dedicated to the production of the news (Direction de l'information) and Studio B to the production of the other content (Direction des programmes).

Table 1: Use of Studio A and Studio B

Studio A	Studio B
Direction de l'information	Direction des programmes and magazines produced by the Rural radio department.
News content (news, reports, debates)	Magazines, debates (except those related to the news)
1 PC dedicated to broadcasting 2 PC dedicated to audio edition	1 PC
Run by the Equipment department 2,5 technicians available	Run by the Equipment department 2 technicians available

Desk offices:

Few PCs are available in the two desk offices (news and production). Some employees use their own PC for research or to editing content.

Most of content (reports, magazines) as well as broadcast templates and playlists are written by hand and therefore no archived.

No internet connection is available, except personal ones for the heads of department.

Maintenance:

The financial resources of the Department in charge of the maintenance of the equipment are not sufficient for the renewal of any Radio Centrafrique equipment. All the rare new equipment (PCs used in studio A) has been provided by international organizations.

Maintenance is done with depreciated equipment provided by individuals, other governmental departments or companies. Depreciated equipment is also bought on the informal market. Materials are taken from other machines and reuse for maintaining current equipment.

Archives:

Office and production supplies are rare due to the lack of budget. Archiving hard-copies of the content produced is difficult. However, when UNESCO and the French cooperation initiated a project aiming to strengthen archiving in 2006/2007, the objective was more to preserve hard copies of content produced before 1990s related more to the history of the country rather than establishing a real system for archiving the media content produced by the public broadcaster. Currently, content is not kept in hard drives for more than few weeks.

Playlists and broadcast templates are written by hand most of time. No system for keeping these documents is available.

Table 2: Tele Consult project (still being negotiated between the government and the Italian company)

Operator	
Teleconsult is an Italian company providing broadcasting services. The company has three offices in Italia (Castelvendro, near Piacenza), Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The company claims having developed activities in more than 30 countries. In Central Africa, the main market is the Democratic Republic of Congo. The company is in charge of the broadcasting of the national broadcaster, Radio Television Nationale Congolaise, throughout the country. Teleconsult is also in charge of the Binza Pigeon site in Kinshasa where are located most of the transmitters of the main media outlets broadcasting in the capital city (Radio and TV).	
Radio Centrafrique	A new transmitter module has been provided by Teleconsult in March 2014.
Tele Centrafrique (TVCA)	Teleconsult may build a new building used as headquarters and production center for TVCA. A temporary studio has been installed in Radio Centrafrique building. A 25 kw transmitter is expected to be installed in the next months. A new building should be built in the next years.
Unknown terms of the agreement with the Central African government	The discussions between Teleconsult and the government are characterized by a lack of transparency. Radio Centrafrique and Tele Centrafrique managers are not involved in the discussions. The agreement is discussed between the minister of Communication and her head of cabinet and the Italian firm. No technical assessment from public sector technicians has been required. The installation work of the new TVCA temporary studio in Radio Centrafrique building began in April 2014 without the terms of agreement been published or known by Radio Centrafrique and TVCA management.

2.4. Radio Rurale, a department dedicated to the production of media content targeting rural areas

The Rural Radio department produces a specific weekly 30 minutes magazine and provides news from rural areas to the news desk.

Established during a specific German media development during the 1990s, the Rural Radio department was merged with Radio Centrafrique at the end of the implementation period of the project. As of May 2014, sixteen staff are working for the Department: 5 journalists and producers work for the central desk in Bangui and 11 correspondents are located in the capital city of the 11 “prefectures”. However, these 11 correspondents were all in Bangui at the end of May 2014. For security reasons, they have not been redeployed yet. These correspondents also provide news and information to Radio Centrafrique central desk.

Capacities of journalists and producers are equivalent to competencies of Radio Centrafrique staff. Some correspondents also work for other media outlets, notably Radio Ndeke Luka.

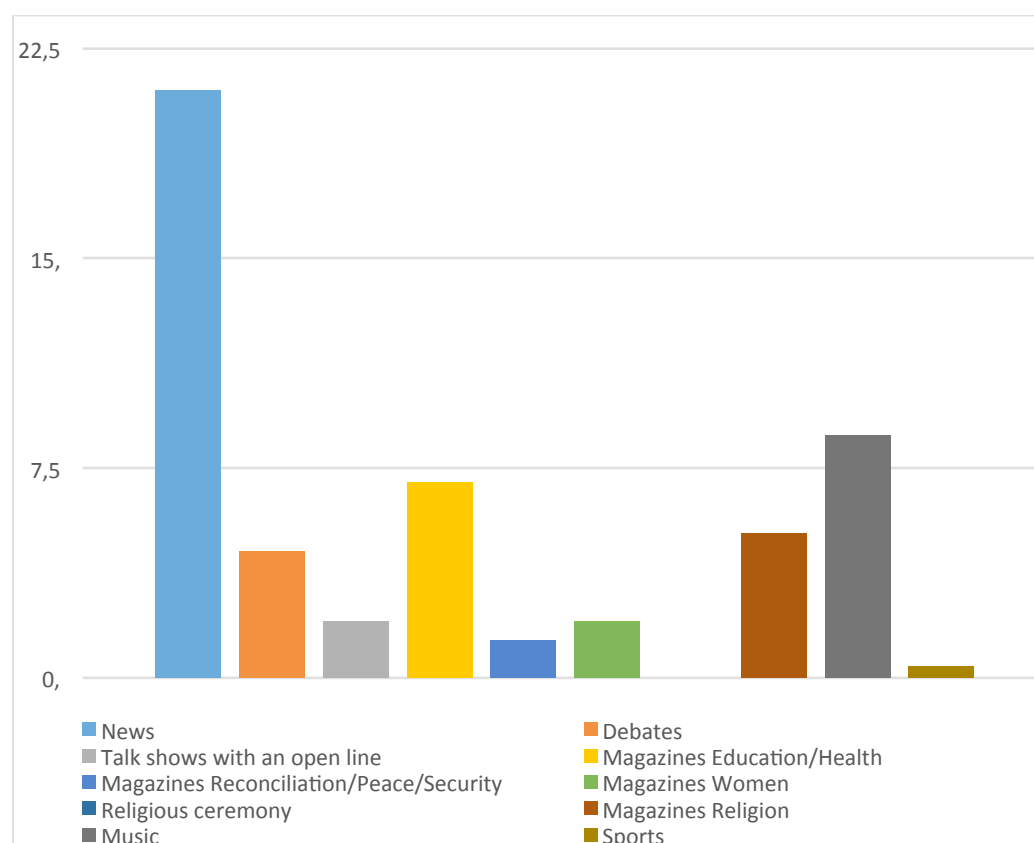
3. Radio Centrafrique media content

According to the Radio Centrafrique official schedule, the public broadcaster broadcast weekly 34 hours of programs (original broadcast only) in the two official languages of the Central African Republic: 70% in Sango and 30% in French. However, the public sector radio station is currently not able to broadcast all programs forecast in its schedule due to reduced capacity of production after the 2013 pillages and difficulties of public administrations to produce all the content as stated in agreements with the Ministry of Communication.

3.1. A focus on news and information content

News and information content represents 73% of Radio Centrafrique broadcasting. Music (16%) and religious content (10%) and sport (1%) are the only entertainment content broadcast on the public broadcaster.

Table 3: Content distribution in hours/week



3.2. A light pro-government bias

During the crisis, OMCA specific media monitoring in April/May 2014⁷ showed that the news and information content produced by Central African radio stations is not biased most of the time: more than 95% is considered as not biased. However, Radio Centrafrique does not give a voice to opponents; only 2% of people interviewed are opponents of the transitional government⁸, while government and pro-government politicians represent 80% of the people interviewed in news and

⁷ Media content in the current crisis in the Central African Republic: an overview and solutions for further peace-building and governance interventions, Karim Bénard-Dende, Internews, June 2014

⁸ Most of the time, participants to political debates

information content broadcast on Radio Centrafrique. The transitional government is a unity government. This can explain that few politicians are positioned as opponents of the transitional government. However, critical views and opinions expressed by politicians supporting the transitional government do exist yet this information is rarely present in news and information content produced by Radio Centrafrique.

As Radio Centrafrique is run as state media, the news content is often limited to the coverage of the activities of members of government. However, since 2013, the current transitional government limits interventions on the content produced by Radio Centrafrique. The broadcast of propaganda content has not been registered by OMCA media monitoring analysts. Nevertheless, journalists have no culture of investigation, and news and information content is most of time limited to report on press conference organized by the government, political actors and international organizations.

According to the official schedule, 20% of magazines broadcast on Radio Centrafrique are dedicated to reconciliation, peace and security issues and 10% on gender issues in the Central African society.

3.3. Gender

According to data gathered during OMCA specific media monitoring period (April-May 2014), Radio Centrafrique does not produce more gender-sensitive content than other radio stations, in terms of the use of women as source or interviewees in the reports broadcast in the news (main indicator of women voices in the news and information media content). However, 10% of reports and magazines broadcast on Radio Centrafrique are dedicated to gender issues by the public broadcaster.

Radio Centrafrique has historically been the first media outlet to include women as journalists, not only as presenters in the 1980s but also the first to promote women to a management position. Pauline Guerenguendo was the General Manager of the radio station from March 2013 to May 2014 and was the head of the department of programs since 2003.

3.4. Research of partnership to strengthening Radio Centrafrique's supply of news and information content

The capacity of production is currently severely limited. The management of the radio stations clearly indicated its willingness to develop cooperation and synergy with other media outlets or organizations to develop agreements on broadcasting or collaborative production.

Radio Centrafrique has already cooperated with professional organizations and civil society organizations for broadcasting public interest information content (for example, with the main women media professionals' association, Association des Femmes Professionnelles de la Communication⁹). Radio Centrafrique also participated in some synergistic activities organized by the Association of Community Radios (Association des Radios Communautaires - ARC Centrafrique), when not related to political events (World Food Day in 2011 and 2012, for example). This type of synergy is a collaborative way of producing content to cover a national event. Partner radio stations broadcast simultaneously content produced by journalists and producers working for partner radio stations through the country.

⁹ Association des Femmes Professionnelles de la Communication - AFPC : Association of women working in the communication and media sector