

# CONNECT: Engagement for Peace in CAR

In the midst of armed rebellion, government instability and division in Central African Republic, communication and information are vital.



*A group of young trainees participate in a working session with Internews-trained journalist, Boniface Lacpezion.*

The Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced serious instability and periodic outbreaks of violence since its independence from France in 1960. Its most recent and ongoing period of conflict began in 2013 when the coalition government dissolved and sparked renewed fighting between the Muslim Séléka rebels that seized power and the Christian Anti-Balaka militias who rose to fight against them. Communication infrastructure have been severely damaged by the conflict in CAR, as well as a number of media houses, with armed groups and officials often targeting journalists and media outlets.

Internews' CONNECT program has leveraged its existing work in CAR, since 2011, to engage with local media in a new direction: to inform the people about rebuilding the state and post-election political processes in an effort to create cohesion and reconciliation among communities. The project recognizes the crucial role media plays in establishing links between citizens, their members of parliament, local authorities and civil society organizations (CSOs) and encouraging debate on key issues. CONNECT has impacted the lives of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and refugees in CAR by providing them with accurate and timely information to best equip them to protect and support their livelihoods, despite security challenges, during the return to government order and civil peace.

## Program Highlights

- Twenty (20) media articles and programs on parliamentary issues were produced by the journalists involved in Internews' training and mentoring activities.
- Participants in training and mentoring sessions produced eight (8) featured stories published in local newspapers on gender-based violence (GBV), gender and the elections.
- The team also authorized a feature story of the Vice-President of Handicap Action Solidaire of Centrafrique, Payou Samuel, as a model for others with disabilities.
- At Radio Maria the team started a 20-minute weekly radio magazine on GBV because of the workshop and mentoring. They have already launched four magazines in French and Sango.
- GBV trainings and additional mentoring helped 18 journalists produce 12 ready-to-air feature stories about female genital mutilation, increased violence against women in CAR, and the prevalence of rape in CAR, which led to the launch of a GBV themed magazine in Radio Maria.

In November, Internews supervised the production of five live and pre-recorded roundtable events at various partner radio stations throughout Bangui in both French and Sango that incorporated Vox-Pop to enhance discussions amongst members of Parliament, civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens about current issues.

On NGO World Day, December 13, Internews coordinated the production of two 15-minute radio shows in French and Sango about the role and contribution of NGOs in the development of CAR that were broadcast on six partner community radio stations. Internews also led a panel discussion on the same theme on national radio Ndeke Luka.

Internews carried out an extensive assessment of 29 out of the 35 community radio stations in CAR to identify six priority radio stations to support, with equipment and mentoring, based on their location in areas heavily plagued by violence, with few information sources and a higher percentage of refugees and IDPs.

Bringing together 10 journalists from national radio, community radio stations in Bangui, and Internews' partner, the Network of Journalists for Human Rights (RJDH), Internews held various workshops on covering parliamentary activities, law-making processes, and conflict

“ Thanks to Internews because this training has helped me grow. After more than 10 years of work, it is the first time that I understand how the National Assembly works. We all hope that this will not be the last training on this subject matter.”

— Dieudonné Nzapa Danguia, Director of Publication for Le Citoyen.

sensitive journalism. Many of these journalists were receiving this training for the first time and afterward found themselves much better equipped to report on these topics. Internews' Conflict Sensitive Journalism and Gender Trainer, Sylvie Bowen, has gradually helped journalists build their self-confidence while raising their awareness on the limitations of journalism and the difficulties managing media outlets.

Internews also supported 10 RJDH partner radio stations with in-house management training that emphasized human resources, effective program planning, and compliance with media registration requirements. In future trainings, Internews will assess the stations' methods of gathering audience feedback and will work with them to design or improve SMS- and social media-based platforms that are accessible in their community.

In February, Internews installed a toll-free hotline for local radio stations in

need of technical assistance. Radio Kuli Ndunga of Nola has already received advice for repairing its transmitter and RJDH, who manages the Community Radio Network developed by Internews, received help relocating their studio.

Since the Bangui-based Muslim station Voix de la Paix (Voice of Peace) was looted during clashes in 2015, the Muslim IDP community was without its main source of news. In response Internews held an open competition to find an organization to run the station, electing as the winner, the Women's Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (CFPRCA), which brings together 50+ women's organizations and develops activities on social cohesion with the support of the UN Population Fund.

Soon Internews will implement a competitive small sub-grants program to give local CSOs working with women, youth, and IDPs the means and opportunities to engage with local media.



Internews is an international non-profit media development organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard.