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Looking for a cure

by Bram Posthumus

In November 2005, the journalist Franck Ngyke Kangundu was assassinated together with his wife Hélène, at his home in the Congolese capital Kinshasa. The reasons for his murder have not yet been established but there are strong suggestions that his death may have something to do with the rather unorthodox way in which he carried out his profession.

To understand his case (and others), we need to return briefly to the era of the late dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. Back then, politico-financial interference in the media was the norm. The president gave money to people who could be trusted to toe his political party line. The beneficiaries were basically hired hacks. When Laurent-Désiré Kabila's troops ousted Mobutu in May 1997, this system remained in place. Before he was murdered and his son Joseph took over, the elder Kabila distributed a million dollars among media people he considered politically trustworthy.

Today, there is a proliferation of political parties and politicians. All need a newspaper, TV or radio station to represent their points of view. This would not be a problem if they simply took out advertising space and paid for it. But they continue to use journalists to put stories in the press or produce documentaries that damage the adversarial party or candidate. Journalists and editors continue to piggy-back on whatever political change is taking place.

Yesterday Mobutu, tomorrow someone else.

This is the kind of environment Kangundu, himself an old Mobutu follower, understood perfectly. He was a player in the field of sensitive political information, using his own newspaper (*La Référence Plus*) and others to publish stories that could be damaging to one faction, party or candidate.

On 15 September 2005 – in the midst of a strike of education staff – a newspaper called *Pool Malebo* published a story about an alleged \$30-million presidential gift to schools in Tanzania. Four days later, Kangundu's newspaper published an anonymous refutation of this claim.

In a toxic political system and a journalistic environment where information is never double-checked, these are extremely serious matters. Subsequent local and international research has shown that Kangundu planted both articles, in an attempt to retain the currency he had gained within Kabila's party (he had become their press man) while staying close to the Mobutists he still knew. In the process, he crucially overestimated his own invulnerability and paid for this mistake with his life.

Similar things are happening constantly. In the last few months there has been a scandal about a televised documentary, featuring crimes against humanity committed in the Central African Republic by (vice president and presidential candidate) Jean-Pierre Bemba and his armed group.

The maker of this film, Kabeya Pindi Pasi, also

head of the national association of journalists, disappeared, claiming death threats, then reappeared again. The case is under investigation, amid strong suggestions that the ruling party paid for and facilitated this political hatchet job.

There is also real repression going on. Try, for instance, covering stories about the pillaging of the Congo's natural resources by foreign companies with the connivance of local officials and politicians.

Bapuwa Mwamba did just that for another newspaper, associated with the opposition, *Le Phare*. He was murdered in a similar fashion to Kangundu, on 8 July.

Still, one must be careful to distinguish between journalists who are being threatened because they have been engaged in serious investigative work and those who have become the victims of their own political and strategic machinations.

Congo has no shortage of journalists who are committed to getting as close to the truth as possible, which is how they define their work. They have played a vital role in a recent research project, which was occasioned by the Kangundu and Kabeya cases. In the course of this project it became clear that if these cases were the symptoms; attention had to be re-focused towards diagnosing the disease.

The Congolese media are used in the dance for politically-profitable positions. Journalists, their editors and media owners take politically-motivated handouts to perform hatchet jobs on

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political rivals because they have no money to run their businesses independently. The result is that the credibility of most media outlets among the Congolese is close to zero.

These insights were the results of a sensible pooling of committed local journalists and two international colleagues (Evelyn Groenink and this author). All are linked to the Forum for African Investigative Reporters (FAIR).

To conduct investigative journalism in this fashion carries important advantages. First, it creates better output. Views held by local reporters are routinely ignored or only used as soundbites in the “omniscient” BBC, CNN coverage of events; this is a way around these international filters. Second, working jointly on one or more dossiers creates a place where colleagues meet, not one where donors and recipients act out the misleading drama of their Western-African “partnerships”. Finally, it means a boost for those colleagues in the Democratic Republic of Congo who want to engage in serious journalism without having to sell their souls.

The Congolese media need clean money to get rid of the politico-financial interference. This is not available in sufficient quantities.

Government support is provided for by law but is, given the recent history, highly problematic.

International interventions carry problems too. First, their (mostly Western) perspectives may range from a complete lack of knowledge about the situation on the ground to anti-government or even anti-African prejudice.

Second, international finance creates well-run and affluent, but potentially arrogant and unsustainable, enclaves of journalistic excellence. People who are used to getting a salary up to 12 times the “market rate” will not return to that market rate once the Western bosses or donors pack up and go.

The creation of economically-viable and editorially-independent media businesses is the ideal but in the current climate this would mean that the Congolese media landscape becomes littered with twin Berlusconi: the editors and journalists plus the politicians whose bidding they do. In the meantime, the journalists who are working according to the rules of the profession need all the support they can get. ■

To read Posthumus’ DRC dossier in French, go to:

- www.niza.nl
- www.fairreporters.org
- *Journalistes en Danger* www.jed-congo.org
- *Reporters Sans Frontières* www.rsf.org



Journaliste en Danger

Fighting for press freedom

by Geoffrey Chan and Natasha Kanjee

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this war-ravaged Central African country that recently held its first elections in more than 40 years, a small but influential press freedom group is slowly planting the seeds of a culture in which freedom of the press may one day thrive.

Journaliste en danger (Journalist in Danger, JED) is a Kinshasa-based NGO that has become a leading defender of media freedom in the DRC and Central Africa since its founding in 1998.

It acts mainly as a watchdog in the region through the Organisation of Central African Media (OMAC), a network of monitors in nine countries who file reports on attacks against journalists. These alerts are distributed globally through the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), a worldwide network that re-distributes the information to an international audience numbering tens of thousands.

Through its links to IFEX and groups like the France-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the watchdog has successfully used international pressure to effect political

change.

It demonstrated this to remarkable effect in March 2006, when a JED-RSF delegation met with President Joseph Kabila and won a pledge from the government to re-open an investigation into the murders of Franck Ngyke and his wife Hélène Mpaka. Ngyke, a columnist for the newspaper *La Référence Plus*, and Mpaka were gunned down in Kinshasa in November 2005. A recent report by the Forum for African Investigative Reporters implicated the Congolese secret service in the murders.

Kabila also promised to have the murder case brought to trial prior to the 30 July elections. So far, three soldiers have been arrested and charged with the crime. Their trial began on 12 July.

JED says its appeals sent through the IFEX network have led to improved prison conditions for Congolese journalists or helped win them an early release from jail. Now, says JED’s secretary general Tshivis Tshivuadi, “no case of an attack on the press can go unnoticed. People will know as soon as a journalist is imprisoned. And that pressure contributes enormously to getting them released.”

Journalists in the DRC are frequently arrested, intimidated and physically assaulted for reporting the news. In 2005, JED recorded 108 press freedom violations in the country, of which 58 involved the jailing of journalists.

Two journalists – Ngyke and Bapuwa Mwamba – have been murdered in the past year for writing articles critical of government officials. And in the lead-up to the July elections, a spate of attacks on journalists and radio stations raised fears that a climate of intimidation was preventing voters from being adequately informed about the issues.

Aside from monitoring attacks on journalists, JED has been playing a key role in helping improve the quality of journalism in the country. In March 2006, JED held a workshop (sponsored by the Netherlands Institute of Southern Africa) to provide safety and ethics training to journalists. Noting that at least 60% of attacks against journalists stem from inaccurate and unprofessional reporting, JED believes that promoting higher professional standards will help build the credibility of the news profession and hopefully lead to fewer violations against the press.

JED also actively campaigns for legal

reform to better protect freedom of expression. JED has been lobbying for access to information legislation that would guarantee journalists and the public the right to obtain government records. For the past year, JED has also been campaigning to change the country’s media law, under which journalists can be jailed for press offences. JED has won a commitment from President Kabila to review the law and eliminate criminal offences. The organisation has offered to help draft a new bill to replace the current “Loi sur la presse”.

Promoting and defending press freedom in a country as politically unstable as the DRC does not come without great risks. JED has often been the target of death threats and harassment because of its work. On more than one occasion, JED’s president, Donat M’Baya Tshimanga, has been forced to flee the country.

Despite the climate of uncertainty and instability, however, JED remains a tenacious advocate for journalists. Its continuing presence in the country and its connections to international networks are ensuring that press freedom is an issue no elected official can afford to ignore. ■

L'assaut de l'ignorance électorale

par Kizito Mushizi

C'est de Bukavu que s'est ébranlée la suite de cinq 4x4 transportant à leur bord 16 personnes (journalistes, techniciens et autres acteurs de la société civile congolaise), du matériel radio et quelque 30 kilos de documentation pour Baraka au sud, à plus de 200km : première destination de la caravane.

«Donnez-nous des livres»

90km séparent la cité d'Uvira du centre de Baraka. Là, dans les rues, la population est en général masculine. Beaucoup d'adultes et beaucoup d'enfants également. La jeune fille en âge scolaire est rare. «Elles ont dû fuir les viols et les exactions de milices; elles sont parties soit à Uvira et Bukavu chez des parents, soit en exil en Tanzanie», nous confie un habitant. Bukavu, capitale de la province du Sud-Kivu est une ville sans journal, Uvira aussi. Et l'on se dispute les dizaines de documents que les caravaniers ont pris avec eux pour disséminer pendant la tournée. Impossible de satisfaire la demande: des copies de la loi électorale, de la nouvelle constitution et même de la liste officielle des partis politiques agréés...rien du tout. Cette population n'avait jamais vu ni entendu parler de ça. Partout, les mêmes cris, les mêmes demandes: «mutupatie bitabu, mutupatie bitabu...(donnez-nous des livres)...». Et on donnait...

A Baraka-centre, la caravane a sorti le grand arsenal. A la Grand-place, en plein air, le public a participé à un débat ouvert sur les élections. Les techniciens ont rapidement installé la radio de la caravane (studio et émetteur), les journalistes ont informé, au micro, sur l'état du processus électoral au pays et dans la province. Puis le débat a été ouvert au public retransmis en direct par la radio. Du jamais vu.

C'est fantastique : «on discute élections en plein air, sur une radio qui porte loin et dans notre propre langue... Vous ne repartirez pas avec cette radio», nous ont prévenus, souriant, plusieurs paysans, «elle restera ici, car nous n'en avons pas une et nous en avons besoin». Leur vœu n'a pas été exaucé car le lendemain il fallait partir, travailler à Uvira et poursuivre la route beaucoup plus loin à Beni, à plus de 600 km.

L'insécurité couplée à l'ignorance

Mais les Kivu c'est aussi l'insécurité. La sécurité est loin d'être rétablie au Nord et au Sud-Kivu. La question revient sans cesse dans les débats, comme une hantise. Il y a des éléments de réponse, mais il n'y a pas de solution.

Kanyabayonga brille la nuit de ses centaines d'ampoules alimentées par de petits groupes électrogènes privés ou collectifs. Dans cette cité vivent plus de 1500 déplacés de récents troubles armés orchestrés par un général dissident. La radio Rurale de Kanyabayonga est une radio complètement équipée par le RATECO. Pendant le travail d'installation des équipements par l'équipe technique, les journalistes font des interviews avec la population et les chefs locaux. La population est convaincue que cet outil sera un puissant allié pour dénoncer l'insécurité et combattre l'ignorance.

Le pari est la

Le Congo organise là ses premières véritables élections générales depuis plus de 40 ans. Elections géantes: un budget éphémère (400 millions de dollars US), un pays sans infrastructures de transport viable, plus de 25 millions d'électeurs, plus de 9.000 candidats aux 500 sièges de députés, une classe politique atypique et sans réelles assises idéologiques et populaires, la carte d'électeur la plus grande du monde et une population à plus de 60% analphabète et des questions de sécurité des citoyens non résolues. Face à cela, les congolais n'alignent que leur détermination et leur bonne foi. ■

Le RATECO est un réseau inter-provincial regroupant 23 radios communautaires à l'est de la RDC dans les provinces de Maniema, Nord et Sud-Kivu et Province Orientale dont Bunia et Kisangani. Il existe depuis 2003 et a son siège à Bukavu au Sud-Kivu.



The community radio caravan

From Bukavu, a convoy of five 4x4s, with 16 people (journalists, technicians and civil society activists), radio equipment and more than 30kg of documents travelled more than 200km to inform people in the eastern parts of the DRC about the elections. Kizito Mushizi reports.

Ninety kilometres separates the city of Uvira from the centre of Baraka. There, in the streets, the population is mostly male. Adults and children alike. School-age girls are rare: "They have fled the rape and extortion of the militias, they are hiding with their parents, they are in exile in Tanzania," we are told. Uvira, like Bukavu, is a city without a newspaper. The documents the caravan have brought along, the copies of the electoral act, of the new constitution, lists of parties and candidates, have never been seen, never been heard of by the people of this town. Everywhere we hear the same cries, the same demands: "Mutupatie bitabu, mutupatie bitabu (give us books, give us books)". And we do.

In the centre of Baraka we unload the gear. In the square, in the open air, there is an open debate on the elections. The journalists listen to the debate, and then retransmit it to the public. It's fantastic:

"People are discussing the elections freely, in public, in their own language, we're not going to let you leave with your radio." We are prevented, smilingly, from leaving: "The radio station is staying, we don't have one, and we need it." They don't get their way, the next day we have to leave, with all our entourage, on the 600km journey to Beni.

But Kivu is also unstable. Security is far from being returned to Kivu. The question is constantly discussed, debated, returned to obsessively. There are responses, but there is no solution. Kanyabayonga lights up the night with hundreds of light bulbs fed by generators owned by collectives or individuals. In this city there are more than 1 500 people displaced by the recent violence. Kanyabayonga Rural Radio is completely equipped by RATECO. During the installation of the radio station, journalists spoke to the local population and their leaders: they are now convinced that the

radio station can be a powerful ally in the fight against ignorance and instability.

In July the Democratic Republic of the Congo held its first democratic election in more than 40 years. It was a massive task: a budget of more than \$400 million dollars, a country without transport or communications infrastructure, more than 25 million voters, more than 9 000 candidates in 500 electoral districts, a political class out of touch with the voters and without an ideological basis, the largest ballot paper in the world, an electorate of whom more than 60% are illiterate, and with the stability of the country in doubt. In the face of this, the Congolese have only their determination and their good faith on their side.

RATECO is an inter-provincial network of 23 community radio stations in the eastern DRC. It has been active since 2003 from its base in Bukavu.



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Le rôle des médias dans l’exploitation des ressources naturelles

par Jean Claude Katende

La République Démocratique du Congo renferme 50% des réserves mondiales de cobalt, 10% de cuivre; 30% de diamants, un potentiel en or, uranium, germanium, coltan, manganèse etc. Malgré l’existence de toutes ces ressources minières, ce pays a une population classée parmi les plus pauvres du monde.

Cet état de pauvreté résulte notamment de la mauvaise gestion de ses ressources naturelles par les dirigeants politiques, du pillage, de la fraude et des conflits armés liés directement ou indirectement à leur exploitation ainsi que de la législation en la matière qui ne prend pas en compte les intérêts des communautés locales. Il y a lieu de signaler que cette situation a été aggravée par le fait que, durant plusieurs années, la Société Civile et les medias ne s’étaient pas intéressés à l’exploitation desdites ressources naturelles.

Mais après la publication deux rapports du panel des experts des Nations Unies sur le pillage des ressources naturelles de la République Démocratique du Congo, dans la période de 2001 à 2004, la société civile et les medias ont manifesté subitement un intérêt pour participer à la lutte contre ce pillage.

C’est ainsi qu’au niveau de la Société Civile un atelier regroupant les organisations non gouvernementales de Kinshasa a été organisé, en juillet 2002, pour analyser les deux rapports précités. A l’issue de cet atelier, il a été décidé de l’organisation d’un atelier national portant sur la même question de pillage des ressources naturelles. Cet atelier national a été organisé du 09 au 10 mars 2003 et l’une de ses conclusions était la constitution du Réseau Ressources Naturelles, RRN en sigle, chargé de coordonner les actions de lobbying pour l’arrêt du pillage des ressources naturelles.

A ce niveau certains medias ont joué un rôle important en informant et en vulgarisant les deux rapports des Nations Unies

et les actions du RRN auprès de la population. Ils ont dénoncé l’opacité, le manque de transparence, la fraude et le pillage qui caractérisent ce secteur. Ils ont commencé à sensibiliser les citoyens et les autorités aux questions liées à la bonne gouvernance. Ils ont organisé des émissions spéciales avec les acteurs de la société civile pour vulgariser les nouveaux codes minier et forestier.

Aux mois d’avril et de juillet 2006, ces medias ont encore joué un rôle important dans la vulgarisation auprès de la population des rapports publiés par deux organisations internationales sur l’exploitation minières dans la province du Katanga. Il s’agit du rapport intitulé «l’Etat contre le peuple» des Fatal Transactions et une «Corruption profonde» de Global witness.

A l’issue d’un atelier organisé du 18 au 19 avril 2006 à Lubumbashi, avec l’appui de NiZA, sur «le rôle de la Société civile et des medias dans la gestion des ressources naturelles de la RDCongo», les professionnels des medias et les autres acteurs de la Société civile avaient pris l’engagement de travailler en collaboration pour une large éducation des populations sur le danger lié à la présence des enfants dans les mines, la dégradation de l’environnement et la responsabilité sociale des entreprises.

Ils jouent ainsi depuis un certain temps le rôle de chien de garde dans ce secteur.

Cependant et malgré les efforts qu’ils fournissent pour informer, sensibiliser et conscientiser les citoyens en rapport avec les questions des ressources naturelles, ces medias rencontrent beaucoup de difficultés, liées notamment à l’accès à l’information et au déficit en capacités professionnelles, techniques et économiques de beaucoup de journalistes. Un renforcement des capacités dans ces domaines leur permettrait de contribuer de manière significative à une exploitation responsable des ressources naturelles en RDC. ■

Stopping the plunder in the DRC

by Jean Claude Katende

The Democratic Republic of Congo holds 50% of the world’s cobalt world reserves, 10% of the copper; 30% of the diamonds. It is potentially rich in gold, uranium, germanium, coltan, manganese etc...

In spite of these huge mineral resources, the country has a population classified among the poorest in the world.

This poverty is a result of the mismanagement of natural resources and poor political leadership of the country, of plundering, of fraud, and of the armed conflicts linked directly or indirectly to these resources. It is also a result of the mining regulation that doesn’t take local communities’ interests into consideration.

It is necessary to underline that this situation was also worsened by that fact that for many years, the civil society and the media have not been interested in the natural resources plundering phenomenon.

However, after the two UN reports on natural resources pillaging in the DRC between 2001 and 2004, civil society and the media started suddenly being interested in the efforts to fight against this evil.

Civil society organised a workshop in Kinshasa where many NGOs were invited to participate in 2002. The goal of the workshop was to analyse the two UN reports. At the end of the workshop it was decided to organise another national one to further debate the same issue. The national workshop took place from 9 to 10 March 2003, and one of its decisions was to create a Natural Resources Network, RRN, in short, that would co-ordinate lobbying actions to stop natural resources pillaging.

At this level some media organisations played an important role in informing the people about the two UN resolutions and to let people know about the actions of the RRN (Reseau des Ressources Naturelles). Journalists used the opportunity to denounce lack of transparency, fraud and pillaging in this field. They started making the people and the authorities aware of the issues in relation to good governance. Radio and TV programmes were organised by the civil society organisations to inform people about the new mining and the forest regulations.

In April and July 2006, journalists once again played another important role in explaining and informing the population about the contents of the reports published by two international organisations concerning plundering by mines in Katanga province. The two organisations are Global Witness and NiZA (Nederlulike Instituut voor Zuidelijke Afrika). NiZA produced the report “The state vs the people: fatal transactions” and Global Witness’ report was called “Deep Corruption”.

At the workshop on “The role of civil society and the media in managing the DRC’s natural resources” in April this year in Lubumbashi, and sponsored by NiZA, media workers and civil society activists agreed to collaborate widely in educating people about the danger and risks involved in using children in the mines, destroying the environment, and in informing people about social responsibility of the mining firms.

Since then they have been actively playing the role of watchdogs in this field.

But in spite of the efforts they have been making to inform and educate people about natural resources issues, the media workers encounter many difficulties, related especially to access to information, to lack of professional capacity and technology. Their economic situation hinders them from doing good work.

Empowering them with the capacity they need would enable them to contribute significantly on the matter of the exploitation of the Congo’s natural resources.