Broadcasting a Peaceful Future:

The Role of Community Radio Stations during Côte d'Ivoire's Electoral Crisis and the Recovery

Contents

Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) *is a not-for-profit non-governmental organization which provides support to strengthen democratic institutions, processes and culture around the world. Since 1992, ERIS has worked in over 70 countries and has provided experts for international agencies, governments, election management bodies, non-governmental organizations, and other key democracy institutions. With a database of over 800 experts, ERIS covers the full spectrum of democracy assistance and advice, from political finance monitoring in Zimbabwe, to civic education for political parties in Tanzania to electoral violence tracking in Sudan, along with a wide range of other democracy support projects. As of June 2011, ERIS is currently implementing electoral support projects in Tunisia, Thailand, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya.*

Executive Summary

In Côte d'Ivoire, community radio stations represent both a potential threat and a considerable opportunity to the consolidation of the country's stability, particularly as they are the primary source of information for a large number of Ivorians. Historically, the media has been polarized, prone to radical rhetoric and frequently used as a tool for partisan propaganda. Meanwhile, the regulatory bodies have demonstrated a strong bias towards the ruling party and have not effectively stopped or punished misconduct.

In this context, during the controversial 2010 elections and the ensuing post-election crisis, ERIS undertook a capacity building and monitoring program focused on community radio stations. First, ERIS partnered with Convention de la Société Civile Ivoirienne (CSCI) to give expert assistance and training in support of its community radio station monitoring efforts. Despite their importance in the Ivorian media landscape, community radio stations had never been monitored prior to ERIS and CSCI's partnership, first established in 2010 on a previous project. Second, ERIS provided expert advice, training and remote support to community radio stations with the goal of supporting the production of balanced, credible and calm broadcasting. This program faced numerous challenges over its implementation, primarily due to the rapidly declining security situation after the election. Despite these challenges, the program was successfully carried out with all its objectives met and was brought to a close in April 2011. Following Côte d'Ivoire's return to stability, ERIS is looking to build on this and other past projects to support the consolidation and strengthening of Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery. Community radio stations have a key role to play in Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery and with support and monitoring could contribute significantly to the consolidation and stability of the country's newfound peace.

There is a pressing need to improve the performance of the Ivorian media, a need that is compounded by the central role that the media will play in Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery. Over the course of the post-election crisis from November 2010 to March 2011, the media landscape was rife with partisan polemic and misinformation from both sides and incitements to violence, while members of the media themselves were frequent targets of violence and intimidation. Now, as Côte d'Ivoire moves beyond the post-election crisis, the dissemination of accurate, credible and balanced information is vital as the country undergoes a number of political and social processes that can play an important role in strengthening national cohesion and democratisation but also have the potential to threaten the country's newfound stability, such as the return of IDPs, peace and reconciliation processes and parliamentary elections. Also, there is a strong need to establish a common dialogue in a state that is bitterly divided after years of identity politics, ethnic hatred and violence. Community radio stations have proven to be effective tools in achieving both these goals and are uniquely positioned to reach Côte d'Ivoire's most marginalized populations.

Introduction

The Media in Côte d'Ivoire: A Need for Reform

There is a pressing need to improve the performance of the Ivorian media, a need that is compounded by the central role that the media will play in Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery. Over the course of the post-election crisis from November 2010 to March 2011, the media landscape was rife with partisan polemic and misinformation from both sides and incitements to violence while members of the media themselves were frequent targets of violence and intimidation. Prior and during the post-election crisis, few media outlets have demonstrated a commitment to acting as professional, neutral and accurate sources of public information. As Côte d'Ivoire must mitigate a wide range of deep-seated regional and ethnic rifts while managing the country's return to stability, the media must contribute to this goal. The media must keep the public engaged and informed while remaining free of incendiary polemic. The success of the media in this role could prove decisive to the entire recovery process.

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In Côte d'Ivoire, community radio stations represent both a potential threat and a considerable opportunity to the consolidation of the country's stability, particularly as they are a primary source of information for a large number of Ivorians. Community radio stations are regional broadcasters that often report in regional dialects and have little or no reach beyond a small geographic area. In other African countries such radio stations have been guilty of inciting hatred and violence but CSCI monitoring reports have shown that community radio stations in Côte d'Ivoire generally reported responsibly throughout the crisis. In a media context where the national and state-run media bodies have been widely discredited, community radio stations can play a key role in filling this vacuum, through credible and professional reporting. The importance of this role cannot be understated, particularly when you consider the audience of community radio stations. These stations are particularly important sources of information for youth[1] (who make up 50% of the Ivorian population), the illiterate population (the illiteracy rate in Côte d'Ivoire is 51%, peaking at 63% amongst those aged 15 to 45) and Ivorians living in remote areas, who by and large rarely engage with printed or televised media. Therefore, support to community radio stations offers an opportunity to engage a large percentage of the population that is both essential to Côte d'Ivoire's stability and that is often outside the reach of most conventional media outlets.

ERIS and Community Radio Stations

ERIS has been active in Côte d'Ivoire since 2008, first conducting a European Union (EU) funded programme related to the training, capacity building of community radio stations. To complement this programme, ERIS launched a project funded by the EU with the specific goals of strengthening CSCI's ability to monitor and report on community radio stations.

The rescheduling of Presidential elections to October 2010 required a follow-up project, as the need for credible, balanced electoral information and calm, non-partisan broadcasts is considerably higher around election time. To this end, ERIS partnered again with CSCI and conducted a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)-funded project called "Supporting Media and Youth for Peaceful Elections" designed to ensure that community radios play a positive role in the electoral process through delivering responsible, conflict sensitive content and contributing to minimise post-electoral violence between local communities throughout Ivory Coast. This project gave expert support to CSCI media monitoring efforts and expert training, distance counselling and support to the

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[1] Ages 16-30

production of conflict-sensitive content on social cohesion and conflict resolution during the post-election crisis.

About the Partners

Since 1992, Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) has provided support and expert guidance to strengthen democratic institutions, processes and culture around the world. ERIS has a database of over 800 electoral experts and has worked in over 70 countries, covering the full spectrum of democracy assistance and advice. ERIS has been active in Côte d'Ivoire since 2008 and has extensive experience across Africa, notably in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Somaliland, among others. Our primary donor for this project was the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whose stated goals for the programme were free, fair and peaceful elections in Côte d'Ivoire, avoiding further conflict and strengthening civil society's voice, particularly in regards to conflict reduction.

Convention de la Société Civile Ivoirienne (CSCI), a federation of 134 Ivorian civil society organizations, was chosen as a partner because it has a history of independence from political parties, promotion of human rights and as a result of an EU-funded ERIS project related to election monitoring, has a number of trained observers in all areas of the country and a team based in Abidjan prepared to coordinate the observation and analyse the information collected by the monitors.

Background of the Crisis

In the years since the 2000 attempted coup d'état, Côte d'Ivoire has been in a near-constant state of political crisis, one that may have seen its final chapter with the end of the civil war in April 2011. The core of Côte d'Ivoire's political tensions is decades of contentious, zero-sum "Ivorian" identity politics between groups in North and the South of the country. After the death of Côte d'Ivoire's longstanding dictator, Felix Houphouet-Boigny in 1993, his successor Henri Konan Bedié effectively revoked all citizenship rights of the Northern population in order to retain power. Bedié created the concept of "Ivorité", which designated two types of citizenship and stigmatized the large proportion of Ivorians with foreign origins. This concept was invoked again in the 1995 election to bar Allasane Ouattara from running for president, as his father's side of the family is from Burkina Faso.[2] While "Ivorité" did not create Ivorian ethnic tensions, it certainly aggravated them and effectively prompted a persistent cycle of democratic competition primarily underpinned by the manipulation of ethnic hatreds and the use of ethnic militias.[3]

The Presidency of Laurent Gbagbo, who came to power in 2000, certainly exacerbated regional tensions in the country through a general project of "refounding" the nation along ethno-national lines, despite such lines being nearly indistinguishable. Following a failed coup attempt organized by *Les Forces Nouvelles,* a northern militia led by future Prime Minister Guillaume Soro. These tensions erupted into civil war in 2002, which effectively split the country in two and prompted a United Nations-led peace process. The term of former President Laurent Gbagbo was meant to end in 2005, but security concerns, the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement in 2007 and the low administrative capacity to register voters and prepare for the elections led to repeated delays.

The Ivorian peace process suffered a severe setback over the course of the 2010 elections and the descent into violence that followed it. The first round of the 2010 Presidential election was acclaimed by key commentators[4] as a relative success. The campaign period was relatively peaceful. Polling day passed without significant incidents and with a record turnout of 84%. However, despite the courteousness of the Presidential debate between second run contestant, Laurent Gbagbo and Allassane Ouattara, tensions sparked on the eve of the second round when Laurent Gbagbo unilaterally declared a curfew triggering protest demonstrations from Ouattara supporters. The second round took place on 28 November in a tense climate but also passed without significant incident. On 2 December 2010 the Independent Electoral Commission announced the provisional results, showing Ouattara as the winner with 54.1% of the vote, which were later certified by Mr. Choi, the representative of the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire (this certification was a requirement of an agreement between the political contenders following the civil war). However, Laurent Gbagbo, citing fraud in the North of country and arguing that the Independent Electoral Commission did not announce the results within the statutory period of 3 days, referred the matter to the Constitutional Court. The next day, the Constitutional court cancelled more than 660,000 votes and proclaimed Laurent Gbagbo the winner.

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[2] As one might expect, Ouattara is a not unique case in this regard. A 2002 report shows that of 15 million Ivorians, just under 4 million are foreign nationals, constituting 26% percent of the total population. Furthermore, over half the figure of foreign nationals are from Burkina Faso, making them by far the largest minority in the country. See Mahmadou Zongo, "La Diaspora en Cote d'Ivoire," Revue Africaine de Sociologie 7(2), 2003.

[3] For a discussion of Ethnic Tensions and Ivorian Democratic Reform, see Chirot "Does Democracy Work in Deeply Divided Societies?" in Zoltan Barany and Robert Moser, eds., Exporting Democracy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). pp. 85-109.

[4] See report from EUEOM Côte d'Ivoire, International Crisis Group Africa briefing n77 25 November 2010.

The following day Laurent Gbagbo was sworn in as Head of State and appointed Marie Ake N'Gbo as Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the international community backed Mr. Choi's certification through the adoption of the UN Security Council of Resolution 1962,[5] and recognised Ouattara as winner of the elections. Ouattara, who was sheltered with his team in the Hotel du Golf in Abidjan, signed a written oath as President of the Republic. With both Gbagbo and Ouattara claiming victory, the country slid back into political crisis.

The post-election crisis caused increased political violence, the displacements of more than 1 million people, the effective termination of many government services in parts of the country and further economic decline. Diplomatic efforts (including both sanctions and offers of asylum for Gbagbo) against the Gbagbo administration and threat of military intervention were both unsuccessful in prompting Gbagbo to step down. Tensions quickly drove the country into its second civil war setting the forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo against militias supporting Ouattara. The clashes culminated in heavy fighting in Abidjan between March 30 and April 11, 2011, when Laurent Gbagbo fell.

Ouattara was sworn in as President on May 6 and pledged to bring back security and financial prosperity to the country. There are many daunting challenges to be addressed if Côte d'Ivoire is to turn the page to a long chapter of political crisis and instability. Chief amongst these challenges are the disarmament of numerous militias, return of IDPs, the organisation of Parliamentary elections and the reconciliation of a country polarized by irresponsible politicians and media outlets.

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[5] Resolution 1962, 20 December 2010

The Role of the Media in the post-election crisis

There is widespread consensus that certain media outlets have played an important role in exacerbating the political, social and ethnic tensions in the country. The 2003 Linas-Marcoussis agreement contained a declaration in which all the political parties and the *Forces Nouvelles* militia condemned "the incitement to hatred and xenophobia propagated by certain media".[6] This agreement also called on the government to reform the media through legislation and effective regulation, though there are few indications that these reforms were actually implemented.

Côte d'Ivoire's Media Landscape

Public Media

The Radio Television Ivoirienne (RTI)[7] is composed of two public TV channels, namely RTI1 and RTI2 and two national public radio stations, Radio Côte d'Ivoire (RCI) and Frequence 2. RTI1 and both radio stations broadcast across the entire country. The public television controlled by a pro-Gbagbo group has demonstrated biases toward the former President.

Private commercial radio stations

Private commercial radio stations are allowed to broadcast advertisement messages on behalf of companies. There are two private commercial radio stations in Côte d'Ivoire: Radio Nostalgie and Radio Jam. These stations cover Abidjan and major urban centres and focus primarily on commercial programming.

Community Radio Stations

Community Radio Stations, or *Radios de proximité*, are stations that have a limited broadcasting range and frequently report in French or in one of the many Ivorian dialects. Unsurprisingly, their coverage and the content of their programmes vary considerably. The decree 714-1995[8] governs the status of these stations. Article 6 in this decree states that *radios de proximité* are not allowed to broadcast any advertisements or political programmes.

Written press

There are about 30 daily newspapers in Côte d'Ivoire. The print media is deeply polarised. Many newspapers are openly linked to political parties such as *Notre Voie* affiliated to Gbagbo's party, the Front Patriotique Ivoirien (FPI), and *Le Patriote* linked to Ouattara's party Rassemblement des Republicains (RDR). Other newspapers are said to be neutral but their lack of financial independence often impacts on their neutrality and newspapers have limited outreach due to their high cost.

Internet

Internet penetration is about 7% and is rising.

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[6] See Chapter V of Annexes to the Linas Marcoussis Agreement
[7] The RTI has been the state television until the fall of Laurent Gbagbo. Television Cote d'Ivoire (TCI) created by Ouattara's camp during the post-election crisis as a response to RTI's bias is now broadcasting across the country. There are talks to merge RTI and TCI but so far nothing has been done.
[8] Decree 714-1995 of 13 September 1995

International Media

In addition to national media, international media bodies are also represented in Côte d'Ivoire. The main international media body is Operation des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI)-FM, a radio station broadcast by the United Nations which covers the entire country. Most other foreign radio stations that broadcast in the country are news radio stations, such as Radio France Internationale (RFI), British Broadcast Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America (VoA), Deutsche Weller, and Africa n°1.

Conduct of the Media during the post-election crisis

During the post-election crisis the print media and public television were used by both Laurent Gbagbo and Allassane Ouattara as a tool for propaganda and a means for the mobilisation of their electorate against their opponents.

The media occupied a central role in the post-election crisis and the descent into civil war. Indeed, a main characteristic of the second civil war[9] was a power-struggle between forces backing Gbagbo and Ouattara to control the Ivorian media.

In response to the pro-Gbagbo biases of the state-run *Radio Télévision Ivoirienne* (RTI), which is the most widely accessed source of news in the country, the Ouattara camp created *Television Côte d'Ivoire* (TCI) in early 2011. Both television outlets incited violence against their opponents and attacked media outlets or journalists of their opponents. In many cases, these on-air battles manifested in violence against journalists. According to local journalists, Marcel Legré, a printing press employee of the publishers of the pro-Gbagbo daily *Notre Voie*, was killed by a mob in the pro-Ouattara suburb of Koumassi in Abidjan. Furthermore, nine pro-Ouattara newspapers indefinitely suspended publications during the post-election crisis due to threat and harassment from the Gbagbo administration and security forces.[10]

When Ouattara was announced as the winner of the presidential run-off, the Gbagbo-controlled media monitoring body, Conseil National de la Communication Audiovisuelle (CNCA) banned international media saying the move was to "maintain social peace that has been badly shaken".[11] The ban, which was subsequently renewed on February 22 and again on March 2, 2010, resulted in France 24, the BBC and RFI disappearing from the airwaves. The international media was consistently accused by the Gbagbo authorities of bias, while ONUCI-FM was also attacked by RTI and pro-Gbagbo media for its bias in favour of Ouattara.

Although, new laws[12] have been adopted since the Linas Marcoussis agreement to address the threat posed by the media, the two regulating bodies that control and sanction the broadcast media and the press, (the *Conseil National de la Communication Audiovisuel* (CNCA) and the *Conseil*

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[9] The second civil war refers to the escalation on 28 March 2011 of the post-election crisis in military conflict between the *Forces Republicaines de Côte d'Ivoire* supporting the internationally recognised President-elect Allassane Ouattara and the forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo that ended on 11 April 2011 when Ouattara's forces arrested Laurent Gbagbo.

[10] Ivory Coast political camp target rival leader, Newswatch.in, 6 March 2011

[11] Ban on international media lifted by Ouattara government, Media Foundation for West Africa, Alert, 18 April 2011

[12] Loi n°2004-643 du 14 Décembre 2004 portant régime juridique de la presse and La loi n°2004-644 du 14 Décembre 2004 portant régime juridique de la communication audiovisuelle

National de la Press (CNP)) demonstrated a clear bias towards the Gbagbo camp,[13] which unsurprisingly impacted negatively on the conduct of the media during the post-election crisis.

Given the polarisation of the written press and public media, and the ban on international media, certain *radios de proximité* were the only media to promote national cohesion. It is worth mentioning however that due to their dependence on local authorities some *radio de proximité* have been hijacked by political agendas. Some were also attacked by supporters of one group or the other. However, by and large *radios de proximité* did not incite violence and performed relatively well as unbiased and accurate sources of information.

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[13] The CNP acted quite responsibly during the elections. However decision by Gbagbo's Communication Minister to replace its director Eugene Kacou by Deby Dali resulted in a clear biaised of this regulatory body toward the FPI.

ERIS' Support to Community Radio Stations during the Crisis

ERIS has been active in Côte d'Ivoire since 2008, first conducting an EU-funded project related to the training, capacity building of community radio stations. In March 2010, ERIS launched a complementary project funded by the EU with the specific goals of strengthening CSCI's ability to monitor and report on community radio stations.

" **Although in many African countries community radio stations have been used to incite violence, this project has proven that community radio stations can play a positive role in promoting peace and reconciliation following post-election violence.** "

The rescheduling of Presidential elections to October 2010 necessitated a follow-up project, as the need for credible, balanced electoral information and calm, non-partisan broadcasts is considerably higher around election time. To this end, ERIS partnered again with CSCI and conducted an FCO-funded project called "Supporting Media and Youth for Peaceful Elections" designed to ensure that community radios play a positive role in the electoral process through delivering responsible, conflict sensitive content and contributing to minimise post-electoral violence between local communities throughout Ivory Coast. This project gave expert support to CSCI media monitoring efforts and expert training, distance counselling and support to the production of conflict-sensitive content on social cohesion and conflict resolution during the post-election crisis.

The Program: Monitoring and Training of Community Radio Stations

Monitoring

The objective of the monitoring aspect of ERIS' project was to increase Ivorian civil society's involvement in monitoring the content produced by the Ivorian media. ERIS partnered with CSCI to build on the previous capacity-building partnership in which a monitoring strategy had been developed, media monitors and monitoring coordinators were trained and monitoring materials (such as questionnaires) were developed.

Training Workshops for CSCI Monitors

Building on that project ERIS conducted further training and provided expert assistance for CSCI's own media monitoring reporting. The training took place during a two-day workshop in early November and was conducted by an ERIS expert. Over the course of the workshop, 19 regional monitors and ten members of the coordinating team based in Abidjan were trained on the practical aspects of media monitoring, discussed relevant case studies and tested the use of the monitoring methodology. Evaluations submitted by the participants showed a positive response to the training. In particular, the participants were given a good understanding of the importance of radio monitoring and appreciated the pragmatic and participatory approach to the training. The training had the added benefit of improving CSCI's media monitoring strategy, as a number of practical concerns and problems were either raised by the participants or were revealed over the course of the training. The necessary changes were incorporated into the training manual and the strategy was adapted slightly in response to the context of the elections.

Expert Assistance to CSCI's Election Monitoring Report

Meanwhile, ERIS assisted with the analysis and editing of CSCI'S media monitoring report for the 2010 elections. CSCI was able to monitor community radio stations for an extended period of time, covering both the initial campaign in the run-up to the October election and the entire campaign of the November run-off between Ouatarra and Gbagbo. Following the monitoring, ERIS and CSCI's statistician supervised the collection and analysis of the reports. ERIS also provided support and guidance in developing a data processing method, necessary modifications to their quantitative analysis method and the editing of the final report. CSCI produced three reports on the first round, the second round of the election, and a report on the performance of community radio stations during the post-election crisis. Despite the challenges of operating in a highly volatile security environment and the logistical problems associated with the shutdown of the country's banking system, the project showed substantial progress. Particularly, over the course of the three CSCI monitoring reports a clear improvement in quality is apparent, and CSCI adapted and integrated the training and advice encouragingly well.

Community Radio Support

ERIS provided support to community radio stations through three primary activities: training, distance counselling and the provision of broadcast materials.

Training of 22 Community Radio Journalists

In February 2011, over a five-day workshop 22 radio journalists representing 22 radio stations from all 19 Regions in Côte d'Ivoire were trained in mitigating conflict through inclusive reporting, ethics in journalism and targeting Ivorian youth through radio journalism. At this stage in the crisis, the deteriorating security situation had made travel for international staff outside of Abidjan difficult, so the training was held in Accra, Ghana (workshops were initially planned in Abidjan, Bouake and Gagnoa). ERIS developed a training manual and the workshop programme, and an ERIS expert conducted the training. The participants were enthusiastic and very receptive to targeting youth in broadcasts promoting peace and stability.

Distance Support to Community Radio Stations

After the training, ERIS developed a wide range of distance counselling methods for the community radio stations on the production of conflict sensitive information promoting social cohesion and the participation in conflict mitigation. First, ERIS launched the support website www.rcci-radios.net, which made training materials publicly available, provided online courses and supplied a bibliography of materials. In partnership with CSCI and IDDH/CERAP (The Center for Research and

Action for Peace), ERIS also designed and launched an online programmes exchange tool (www.radios-de-proximite-citoyennete.net), which is a venue for debate and discussion between the media and civil society organisations (CSOs) on peace, citizenship and conflict mitigation. Distance counselling was also provided to community radio stations through daily contact on the phone and by e-mail between the ERIS Project Director and Project Coordinator, and the community radio stations. The mix between online and telephone communication was primarily due to the wide variation in IT literacy between journalists across different age groups. CSCI monitoring shows that the training and distance counselling made a key impact, as a greater number programmes produced on the subject of peace and social cohesion were reported in the period after the training in Accra.

Compilation, Translation and Distribution of Reports from Across the Country

Finally, ERIS partnered with the community radio stations in a capacity building program that created the collaborative radio program "Expressions Citoyennes," which targeted young Ivorians and discussed issues of political violence. The collaborative broadcast included reports from a number of radio stations across Côte d'Ivoire and included interviews with members of local CSOs. Two different broadcasts were produced and were broadcast simultaneously by 17 community radio stations across Côte d'Ivoire on March 13 and March 20. Feedback from the community radios has been very positive, as the tone of the program, the targeting of youth and the message of unity and social cohesion were very well received by the audience. The production and promotion of these broadcasts has proven to be an extremely cost-effective and effective way to promote peace and social cohesion. Furthermore, no financial incentives were required to ensure partnerships with the community radio stations; over the production of the "Expressions Citoyennes" programs, the community radio stations were proven to be committed to social cohesion and had a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of community radio stations to this end.

A Focus on Côte d'Ivoire's Youth

The training and support focused on how to target youth with the aim of reducing participation of Ivorian youth in post-election violence. These goals were found to be most efficiently addressed through the targeting of community radio stations, so the program's expert assistance was adjusted to help community radio stations reach out to youth. Despite considerable operational challenges due to the volatile political and security situation and the logistical problems associated with the shutdown of the country's banking system, the ERIS "Supporting Media and Youth for Peaceful Elections" Project came to a successful close in April 2011. Although in many African countries community radio stations have been used to incite violence, ERIS is confident that community radio stations can play a positive role in promoting peace around elections and reconciliation following post-election violence. We are very encouraged by the enthusiastic response of the community radio stations we worked with, as they demonstrated a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Ivorian community radio stations. In a media context prone to polemic and hate-speech, community radio stations are well positioned to play a key mediating role in Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery.

The Role of Community Radio Stations in Côte d'Ivoire's Recovery

Community Radio Stations have a critical role to play in Côte d'Ivoire's recovery. As more conventional forms of media do not have nationwide legitimacy and with indications that few improvements are being made to the media following Gbagbo's departure, there is a considerable vacuum of calm, unbiased and accurate reporting in the country. There is an urgent need for messages of national unity, while the processes of reconciliation, the disarmament and the return of displaced people require the engagement of the Ivorian population. As shown by the ERIS project, community radio can not only effectively fill this vacuum, but given their role as the primary source of information to a number of marginalized populations, would also prove uniquely positioned to reach populations who risk being left behind by Côte d'Ivoire's recovery process.

A Need for Shared National Media Sources

As the vast majority of Côte d'Ivoire's established media sources have historically demonstrated some form of bias, there is a pressing need for outlets that are both free from bias while retaining legitimacy for Ivorian listeners across the country. This is a considerable challenge, made more difficult by the wide range of local languages spoken across the country. Programs such as the "Expressions Citoyennes" are one possible way forward. **Through the compilation, production and dissemination of balanced reports from all regions of the country, listeners of community radio stations can be exposed to issues and reporting from all regions of the country, establishing a common dialogue that may not have been possible otherwise.** The use of community radio stations could prove to be highly beneficial, as their audiences often are the most marginalized Ivorian communities.

A Need for Accurate, Timely and Balanced Reporting during the Recovery Process

As Côte d'Ivoire manages its recovery process, there is a considerable need to keep the public engaged and informed to ensure the recovery proceeds in a relatively stable and harmonious manner. As recovery programs are rolled out nationally, they are bound to have variable effects and to be perceived differently in different regions of the country. In a country with such bitter divisions, **the dissemination of accurate, balanced information is central to mitigating these tensions as a number of contentious policies are implemented. Community radio stations are uniquely positioned to perform these roles**, as their regional focus could translate into a higher perception of legitimacy amongst marginalized population while their comparatively close position to local communities could allow them to adapt messages to reflect local concerns.

Troubling Signs? Restricted Freedoms for Opposition Reporting

ERIS is concerned that in the post-civil war context, the plurality of the media must be restored and protected. In the early months of Ouattara's term, Côte d'Ivoire's media landscape is showing encouraging, little signs of change. Following a shutdown after the fall of the Gbagbo regime, the former state media, the RTI, which was used as a vessel for pro-Gbagbo propaganda has not resumed broadcasting. Tele Côte d'Ivoire (TCI) launched by Ouattara's camp in the midst of the post-election crisis as a response to the biased of RTI is now de facto the new state media. While the behaviour of the media so far appears to be responsible, the new state media must remain committed in its role as a dependable source of balanced and calm reporting. Furthermore, there is an obvious need for the reporting of the state media to reflect and respect Côte d'Ivoire's media plurality rather than descend again into presenting one side of the story. **Furthermore, this requirement should not be limited to the state media, all media outlets, including community radio stations, must also reflect and respect the full plurality of the Ivorian media in their reporting.**

A recent report from Reporters without Borders[14] indicates that one month after the fall of Gbagbo, many media outlets and journalists close to the opposition are finding their press freedoms restricted. Since that report, a prominent pro-Gbagbo newspaper *Notre Voie,* has resumed printing and Ouattara has reaffirmed a commitment to press freedom. Nonetheless, there have been reports of Ouattara supporters taking physical revenge on several pro-Gbagbo journalists.[15] If media plurality is to be maintained then stopping these attacks should be a priority for Ouattara's government. **All media outlets, including community radios, must be able to operate in an environment free from fear of physical reprisal if Côte d'Ivoire is to ensure full rights of freedom of speech and media plurality.**

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[14] Reporter sans Frontière, 10 May 2011, Un mois après la chute de Laurent Gbagbo la presse ivoirienne dans la tourmente.
[15] Reporters without Borders, 19 April 2011, "Call to Avoid Media Vengeance by Civil War Victors."

Recommendations

- *Further Support to Community Radio Stations*

Over two successive projects community radio stations have proven themselves to be key sources of balanced, credible and calm sources of information in regards to political processes as well as important contributors to social cohesion and conflict management.

More specifically, **support to community radio stations can be a low-cost, high impact method of directing information programs to youth in the country. To this end, further support and monitoring of community radio stations should be given, both in terms of training and technical support.**

Also, given the enthusiastic reception of the pre-recorded CDs by the community radio stations and their audiences, more radio content that compiles and translates reporting from all regions of the country should be produced and distributed by civil society and international partners operating in the country. **The compilation, translation and distribution of broadcasts from all regions of the country could also function as an essential tool to combat regional tensions and should be continued.**

- *Engaging the population about the transition process*

As the country emerges from civil war, **it is essential that considerable efforts be made to keep the public informed and engaged with the many processes required to consolidate and strengthen Côte d'Ivoire's newfound stability.** As the country re-establishes order and security, disarms and demobilizes armed groups, holds parliamentary elections and engages in a peace and reconciliation program, these programs will have varying impacts in Côte d'Ivoire's different regions, particularly given the uneven levels of violence felt and the differing ethnic makeup of the regions. **As many vulnerable groups, particularly the illiterate, the youth and marginalized community have been found to be most readily involved in violence, efforts to inform and engage these populations is vital to the state's stability.**

- *Support for Media Reform*

ERIS welcomes the creation of the HACA (High Authority of Audiovisual Communication) and the establishment of an independent media monitoring body. However, **support to the HACA and to a lesser extent, the CNP (National Board of the Press), would be highly beneficial to ensure that media monitoring, analysis and regulation is performed in a neutral and professional manner.**

There is also a need to reform the state broadcasting system to ensure that it is a credible, neutral and effective source of public information. The record of the state-owned media is not good as these outlets are historically prone to partisan and hateful rhetoric. Efforts must be made to ensure that such behaviour by the state-owned media becomes a thing of the past.
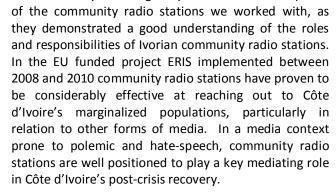
- *Capacity-building Support to Civil Society Organizations in Media Monitoring*

Media monitoring should not be left to state bodies, initiative by CSOs to monitor the press should be supported. **Independent initiatives, such as the monitoring of community radio stations by CSCI, should be offered continued support**.

Conclusion

Community radios have a key role to play in Côte d'Ivoire's recovery. Although in many African countries community radio stations have been used to incite violence, ERIS is confident that community radio stations can play a positive role in promoting peace around elections and reconciliation following post-election violence. We are very encouraged by the enthusiastic response of the community radio stations we worked with, as they demonstrated a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Ivorian community radio stations. In the EU funded project ERIS implemented between 2008 and 2010 community radio stations have proven to be considerably effective at reaching out to Côte d'Ivoire's marginalized populations, particularly in relation to other forms of media. In a media context prone to polemic and hate-speech, community radio stations are well positioned to play a key mediating role in Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery.

" **Support and monitoring of community radio stations has proven to be a highly effective method of mitigating the negative effects of a media environment prone to divisive rhetoric and incitements to violence.** "

Côte d'Ivoire is in dire need of media reform, yet there are worrying signs from the early days of Ouattara's presidency that the required reforms, such as those regarding media plurality and neutrality of the state media must be given greater priority. In Côte d'Ivoire's post-crisis recovery, there is an even greater need for the dissemination of accurate, unbiased information. If the Ouattara regime is to turn the page on the country's recently troubled history, it will need to break with the rhetoric and the media performance of the time. In the months to come, the country will start a number of political and social processes that can play an important role in strengthening national cohesion and democratisation but also have the potential to threaten the country's fragile stability, such as the peace and reconciliation process, disarmament and demobilization of armed groups, the return of displaced persons and upcoming parliamentary elections. These processes have proven to be highly contentious in other post-conflict states and the tendency for the Ivorian media to engage in inflammatory rhetoric must be mitigated by the promotion of calm, credible and balanced reporting. Support and monitoring of community radio stations has proven to be a particularly effective method of accomplishing this and further support would be highly beneficial as Côte d'Ivoire emerges from crisis.

20 May 2011.