



## Rwanda Mission Report

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The IMS mission to Gisenyi, Rwanda was undertaken by Marcus Rubin and Monique Alexis between 6 and 11 January 2005.

The objective of the mission was to convene a meeting between local radio stations in Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern Congo, in order to explore possibilities for closer cooperation through creation of a network of interested local radio stations.

## 1. Introduction

### Mission context

The liberalization of the audiovisual sector in Rwanda is now a reality. The new radio stations face many constraints such as lack of experience and professional training and lack of proper equipment. On the other side of the border, in North and South Kivu and in Burundi several radio stations have gathered valuable experience and - in spite of the prevailing insecurity - play a positive role in their broadcasting area.

Given the fragile political situation in the region, there is an acute need to increase information and cooperation across borders. Myths and misunderstandings concerning neighbors and their populations are prevalent in the three countries, thus increasing tensions and the danger of future violent conflicts. Closer cross-border cooperation among media outlets will help alleviate this situation, especially in the broader population in the border regions.

IMS's previous activities in eastern DRC in 2002 and in Rwanda in 2003/2004 have provided contacts with several media and media stake-holders in the region.

A preparatory mission took place in November to meet various radio stations in Rwanda, Burundi, North and South Kivu, and listen to their concerns. On the basis of these findings, the November mission recommended gathering all new radio stations in Rwanda together with more experienced counterparts from Burundi, North and South Kivu during a two-day pilot seminar. The seminar should explore ways to cooperate and identify which activities can be initiated to concretize cooperation and follow up this exchange of experience. Goma was first proposed for the venue but for security reasons it was decided to organize the seminar in Gisenyi, on Rwanda's side of the border.

A local resource person was in charge for logistics.

### Mission objective and methodological considerations

The overall objective of the January mission was to facilitate radio stations from Rwanda, Burundi and North and South Kivu gathered at a pilot-seminar held in Gisenyi-Rwanda to explore ways to concretize cooperation between them and draft a strategy for such cooperation.

More specifically, the mission should:

- Facilitate the exchange of experiences between participants,
- Facilitate the identification of topics participating radios could work and report on together,
- Facilitate debate on which concrete elements might contribute to cementing a network between participants,
- Help identify which structure participants could build up with IMS facilitation after the pilot seminar, including an assessment of need for external support
- Draft a strategy with the participants to concretize a network.

## 2. Context

### General political/security situation

The security situation is still precarious in the region. Rwanda is the safest place to be at the moment. The border area Gisenyi/Goma is heavily populated, many refugees coming from DRC stay in the Gisenyi area. They keep arriving to the UNHCR camps. Fighting was still going on 150 kms north of Goma at the time of the mission. The insecurity prevailing at night in the city prevented the seminar from being held there.

### Media situation in the region

Nowhere has the reputation of radio media been as damaged as on Rwanda's green hills, where Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines incited to hate and murder during the 1994 genocide. Forty nine media professionals were then murdered and twenty five are currently in jail, accused of incitation and/or participation in the genocide. Rwandan media, and the radio in particular have been striving to come out of the trauma ever since.

A new media-law was adopted in 2002 whose articles 10 and 11 assert that the press is free and censorship forbidden. Reality is somewhat different because no media want to be accused of inciting to division, the worst charge in post-genocide Rwanda. Journalists express themselves very cautiously and avoid sensitive topics such as the way Hutus and Tutsis live together.

The liberalization of the audiovisual sector took a big step forward in February 2004 when the High Council of the Press (HCP) recommended the Ministry of information to issue broadcasting-licenses to five private radio stations. At the moment, five radio stations are on air: Three commercial stations (Radio 10 and Flash FM which broadcast from Kigali and the newly established Contact FM), one religious radio station (Radio Maria which broadcasts from Gitarama in the centre of Rwanda) and one community radio station (Radio Izuba which broadcasts from Kibungo in Eastern Rwanda). The school of journalism's radio station is expected to start broadcasting soon from Butaré. The HCP has recommended eight more radio stations to the government.

On the other side of Rwanda's borders, in North and South Kivu and in Burundi, several radio stations have been broadcasting for a few years. The first of these radios were created by churches, subsequently community and private commercial radio stations have sprung up. Some have suffered from the situation of insecurity prevailing in the area when parties at war would take them as hostages to broadcast their messages.

However, a few stations, supported by international donors, have developed and gathered valuable experiences which make them play a positive role in their broadcasting area. Some examples are community-based Radio Maendeleo in Bukavu in the South Kivu region of the DR Congo (near the border to Rwanda), Radio Isangarino broadcasting from Bujumbura in Burundi and Radio Okapi-Goma in Northern Kivu. These radio stations by giving a voice to local populations actively contribute to the peace-process in the region.

### Regional support to media and freedom of expression environment

Regional media are mobilized by donors to support the peace process. Most relevant for this initiative are the regional media workshops that have been organized by Panos. In December Panos gathered media professionals in Tanzania to the seminar 'Build peace in the Great Lake Region: the media's engagement'.

The objective was to provide regional media with the tools necessary to understand the peace process in the area. Another seminar was held in Bujumbura for Media regulating institutions, ministries of information and electoral commissions from Burundi, Rwanda and DRC. Experts from West Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania discussed media regulation in Africa, the role of media regulating institutions during elections and the influence of media during peace process.

In addition to the abovementioned seminars, Panos Paris and DFID have also recently supported the creation of a network between community radios and TVs from Eastern Congo (RATECO - Réseau des Radios et Télévisions Communautaires de l'est du Congo).

### **3. Conduct of mission**

The mission achieved most of the stated objectives.

A two days' pilot seminar was held in Gisenyi - Rwanda on January 9th and 10th. The seminar gathered 15 participants from 10 different radio stations from Rwanda, Burundi and North and South Kivu. Participants represented Radio 10, Radio Izuba, Flash FM, Radio Maria and The University Radio in Rwanda. There were representatives from Radio Isanganiro in Burundi, Radio Maendeleo and the community-radio network in eastern Congo RATECO, and from RTNC and Radio Okapi in Goma. Most participants were chief editors and radio directors. Besides IMS's two representatives, there was one observer from Norwegian People's Aid's office in Kigali.

The participants debated issues of their own choice which were important for them: management, fund-raising, collection of information, training, safety, conflict management, the radios' role in the peace-process.

The participants expressed a wish for concrete cooperation in three domains: exchange of programs on specific topics (domestic violence, AIDS and sport were named), fund-raising (deal out a list of "media"- interested donors), and training (conflict sensitive journalism, safety for journalists, radio clubs). The participants agreed that such cooperation would support the regional peace process.

All participating radios expressed need for stronger regional cooperation, and a cross border regional structure – Réseau des Radios des Grands Lacs (RGL) – was established.

The aim for RGL is to be the forum where radio stations can develop concrete cooperation through exchange of programs and information as well as training. A steering committee composed of the University Radio (Rwanda), Radio Maendeleo and Radio Isanganiro was elected and given mandate to initiate activities in the three domains identified by RGL's members during a pilot phase of six months – until July/August.

These activities will if necessary be supported by IMS and an evaluation of the implemented activities and RGL's relevance will then take place during a seminar gathering the network's members. If the network proves successful, a mid-term strategy will then be drafted. IMS was asked to facilitate this process.

## 4. Activities

### Day 1: Discussion of joint concerns

The first day of the seminar was devoted to learning about each other and debating issues of concern to all participants.

The radio stations present at the seminar were quite different: Rwanda's new radio stations were almost all there (minus Contact FM). There were a community radio (Izuba), two commercial radios (Flash FM, Radio 10), a religious radio (Radio Maria) and the University radio. Radio Maendeleo is an experienced community radio in Southern Kivu while Burundi's Radio Isanganiro, supported by Search from Common Ground (SCG), is in a transition period to become independent from SCG. Radio Okapi Goma is the MONUC's radio in northern Kivu and Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) is the regional state-radio, in northern Kivu as well.

The first debated issue was the sustainability of the growing number of private radio stations in the region. Radio Maendeleo presented its experience with fund-raising. The radio has been supported by various international donors because of its solid popular base and credibility, but it has also income from commercials. The reunification of DRC is also seen as a new opportunity with new firms moving to Eastern Congo. Maendeleo is a member of AMARC (Association Mondiale des Radios Communautaires), a forum providing information and where problems can be exposed.

Radio Isanganiro has diversified sources of income: NGO-partnerships, international donor-support and limited income from commercials. Isanganiro suffers from heavy import taxes on equipment and high rent of frequency to the state. Private media shall be aware of the need for advocacy for low import taxes on equipment when press-laws are adopted. The University radio in Rwanda told about its experience with international donors who can be very heavy and slow (UNESCO and EU). The University radio has always a calendar of meetings with various embassies. Personal contact is important when projects are presented.

Rwanda's new radios were very keen on getting a maximum of information on the issue of donor support (whom to contact, how present a project-application...). A list of media-interested donors would be appreciated.

The second debated issue was professional challenges in journalism faced by radios in the region. This issue was debated during the rest of the day. The University Radio in Rwanda (which is not yet broadcasting but has production facilities since it is located at the School of journalism) gives students an opportunity to practice. Most new radio stations in Rwanda employ former graduates from the School.

Burundi has no School of Journalism. Journalists are learning by doing, accompanied by some training sessions offered on an irregular basis by donors. This creates problems with the code of ethics which is not always respected. The safety of journalists is also a concern: the military has very little understanding of what the profession of journalism is about.

Most of Maendeleo's journalists have a university education but learnt the craft of journalism on the job. Maendeleo collects information through reports, press agency release (Agence Congolaise de Presse) and its radio clubs. The radio also runs a cyber café providing access to internet and to extra sources of information. Maendeleo's strength is its participative approach which gives the population a channel of expression. Voxpops on hot issues is part of every day's broadcast. Staff safety has been a concern off and on.

Maendeleo radio-clubs raised the other participants' interest: how did they start, how do they collect information, which equipment which training do they have, which credibility has the information they provide, which control has Maendeleo on these clubs?

Two thirds of RTNC 's staff – RTNC is state media – are also self taught journalists which makes respect of professional ethics in journalism more difficult. The treatment of information – especially sensitive information - is crucial when broadcasting in an area affected by ethnic conflicts related to land and with coming elections (DRC and Burundi), and whether they work for state radio or private radio RTNC stressed the importance that they are neutral, concentrate on facts and abstain from emotional comments. Training and experience will give journalists and presenters more confidence. Follow-up by editors and decent salaries will make the treatment of information more independent. Journalists have to look over their "tribal" community's interests. It is important to let the various ethnic groups express themselves so people learn to speak to each other.

## Day 2: Establishment of the network

The second day of the seminar was devoted to discussing which concrete cooperation could be established between participants. There was general agreement on the need to create a light structure. A forum where radios could meet each other regularly, exchange experiences and learn from each other, get inspired and strengthened. A small committee should be in charge of identifying activities answering the radios' main needs and concerns.

Some skepticism was expressed concerning the viability of networks, as about the fact that many associations exist but do not function due to lack of follow-up. Several examples were given. However, all agreed that past sins should not stand in the way of this initiative. Many participants stressed their benefits of working together at a regional level on issues of concern such as the capacity of journalists, government pressure, funding, safety, radio-clubs, media illiteracy, evaluation. It would be beneficial for each radio to have interaction with colleagues from the region. Flash FM can learn more from a radio station in Burundi than from Radio 10 next door, and in the case of non-profit radios there was a general agreement that some issues can be addressed more efficiently at a regional than a national level.

All therefore agreed to establish and participate in the new network which was named Réseau des Radios des Grands Lacs (RGL). A six month pilot phase was agreed upon.

After considerable debate a steering committee for the pilot phase was established, consisting of:

- the School of Journalism in Butaré (president)
- Radio Maendeleo (secretariat)
- Radion Isanganiro (vice-president)

The steering committee will initiate activities answering the participants' needs. IMS will support these activities. At the end of July/beginning of August, a seminar facilitated by IMS will take place to evaluate the executed activities, the engagement of the radios and the need for continuing the network. The local person identified for logistics at the seminar – Jean-Pierre Sagahutu – will continue to help with practical things until July. He received 500 USD to help the committee initiate the first activities.

Ideas for activities for the new network were training in management of press-enterprises, treatment of information during conflict, ethics in journalism, fund-raising, media-sustainability.

At the end, three domains of cooperation were agreed upon for the pilot period:  
exchange of programs on specific themes (domestic violence, justice, sport, AIDS)  
fund-raising (list of media-interested donors, project-application)  
training (treatment of information during conflict, press-management safety, radio-clubs).

## 5. Assessment

The number of participants at the seminar (all people invited came) shows that there is a real need and interest for a forum where radios in the region – Eastern Congo, Burundi – Rwanda – can meet, exchange experiences and work together.

The first day's debates illustrated Rwanda's new radio stations' keen interest in hearing experienced colleagues tell about fund-raising and radio-management. The seminar gave an opportunity to discuss topics (collect of information, treatment of information) which are underestimated because of general lack of training in journalism. The new radio stations which mostly consider each other as competitors discovered the benefits of a forum where they can exchange about their concerns and get inspiration.

The more experienced radio stations from Kivu and Burundi also responded with a keen interest. They are deeply concerned about the persisting risk of conflict. They see their interest in having close contacts with broadcasting colleagues across borders in an area where ethnic groups have been moving back and forth fleeing harassment and oppression from various regimes or militia.

The second day's discussions dealt first with the statutes and criteria of membership of the new structure instead of the contents. The debate showed a tendency to concentrate on formalities which can easily lead to obstacles and no action because of possible conflicts between persons or the various media represented. It might give difficulty to make the network alive. RGL will only survive and grow through activities gathering members regularly. The pilot phase (January – July) will there be crucial.

## 6. Recommendations

To ensure optimal support to the emerging network, the following actions are recommended until the evaluation-meeting at the end of July/beginning of August :

- To closely follow up activities initiated by the steering committee through regular communication with committee-members and the local person responsible for logistics.
- To help the committee identify external input for activities in areas such as training in treatment of information during conflict, fund-raising and press-management and safety.
- To inform and coordinate with Panos, Search for Common Ground and potential donors about the seminar which took place in Gisenyi and the new pilot network.
- To update information about new radios in Rwanda, and other radios which could join the network at a later stage, like Radio Bonesha in Burundi.

**Annex:**

## Program of the seminar

Programme du séminaire régional d'échange d'expériences et de coopération entre radios privées du Rwanda, du Burundi et du Nord et Sud Kivu

Dimanche 9 janvier

- 8h30 Introduction par IMS – Marcus Rubin et Monique Alexis  
Présentation des participants  
Présentation du programme – Adoption du programme par les participants
- 10h00 Pause café
- 10h15 Les défis rencontrés par les radios privées en matière de gestion (achat de matériel, collecte de fonds, contact avec les organisations internationales de média, publicité etc...) – Comment y faire face?  
Expériences présentées par Radio Maendeleo, Radio Isanganiro, Ecole de Journalisme de Butaré. Débats.
- 12h00 Déjeuner
- 13h00 Les défis rencontrés par les radios privées en matière journalistique (collecte d'informations, programmation, formation du personnel, sécurité pour le personnel)  
Expériences présentées par Radio Maendeleo et Radio Isanganiro, Ecole de journalisme de Butaré. Débats.
- 14h45 Pause café
- 15h00 La responsabilité des radios dans les pays en situation de post-conflit. Comment former le personnel des radios (animateurs et journalistes)?  
Contribution de l'Ecole de Journalisme de Butaré, Radio Okapi-Goma, Radio Maendeleo, Radio Isanganiro. Débats
- Exemples concrets d'émissions promouvant la paix dans la région présentés par Radio Okapi-Goma, Radio Maendeleo et Radio Isanganiro. Débats.
- 17h00 Fin de la journée
- 20h00 Dîner

Lundi 10 janvier

- 8h30 Rappel des principaux points soulevés la veille.
- 9h00 Discussion de propositions concrètes et réalistes contribuant à mettre en place une coopération entre les participants dans les 6 prochains mois.

Discussion de la structure éventuelle à établir pour assurer et mettre en oeuvre cette coopération.

13h00 Déjeuner

14h30 Départ

### List of participants

Facilitated by International Media Support

Séminaire régional d'échange d'expériences et de coopération entre radios privées du Rwanda, du Burundi et du Nord et Sud Kivu  
9 et 10 janvier 2005

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