

Executive Summary of the Evaluation of the Project

« **Informorac - Bandundu** »

Initiative de Formation Mobile des Radios Communautaires

RD. Congo, 2011 - 2014

Introduction and Methodology:

This is the final external evaluation report of Informorac Bandundu, a project implemented by Free Press Unlimited (FPU) and the Union of Community Radio Stations in Bandundu (URPB) in the Province of Bandundu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The project ran from 2011 to 2014 with a total budget of €630,000 euros. This evaluation was conducted in December 2014 by Mary Myers and Pascal Chirhalwirwa, independent consultants. According to the TORs, the goal of the project was to *contribute to the amelioration of the life conditions of the poor and vulnerable populations; to strengthen civil society; to restore a culture of peace, and to promote broad community access to communication and reliable and relevant information.*

Nine community radio stations were supported with equipment and training by a small Informorac team based in Kikwit. The radio stations supported were **Radio Lumière : Bulungu, Madimba : Gungu, Radio Nsemo : Idiofa, Kimvuka na lutondo : Kenge, RCMI : Kikwit, Radio Tomisa : Kikwit, Radio Ntemo : Popokabaka, Radio Bangu : Bandundu, et Radio Bandundu : Bandundu-town.**

The methodology of this evaluation involved 9 days in the field, consisting of 24 individual and group interviews, visits to 7 radio stations, a workshop in Kikwit for all 9 radio stations and the Informorac team as well as subsequent consultation with the management team of FPU in the Netherlands who made suggestions on the draft report.

Findings

- Relevance:

Generally we find that the project was very relevant and substantially fulfilled the real needs of the target radio stations. Furthermore, we find that the project made a real contribution to the needs of the communities which the radio stations serve because the project improved the professional standards of scores of community journalists and improved the reach of radio stations' signals. There was an excellent needs-assessment exercise at the beginning; a good level of participation and involvement of all stakeholders; and a good level of complementarity with projects undertaken by other media development organisations.

However, given the limited time and budget of the project, and also given the great needs of the radio stations and the remote and under-developed nature of Bandundu Province, the project was not able to fulfil 100 per cent of needs. Several needy radio stations in the URPB network had to be left out due to budget limits. Also, most of the 9 radio stations selected remain fragile and still have great problems of transport, lack of electricity and of

recording equipment, of maintenance, of training and problems with long-term financial sustainability.

- Efficiency:

We find that FPU / Informorac was generally a well-managed project. Activity monitoring was regular and helpful, internal communication was good and budget management was transparent. Tasks were well-delegated from FPU to the URPB/Informorac team in Kikwit. Costs and benefits were evenly matched on the whole, despite the fact that it would have been desirable for the whole project to have had a larger budget and a longer time-frame. There were, however, two problems related to finances: firstly a loss of \$3000 due to using a new cooperative bank in Kikwit that went bankrupt and secondly some serious overspends on the transport/fuel/customs charges line. This latter factor meant that a few training and monitoring activities were cut short in the final year. The impact of these problems was relatively major because vital maintenance training for technicians did not take place, thus threatening the future maintenance of the equipment given; furthermore the project ended rather abruptly, leaving little time for URPB to make plans for its own sustainability.

- Effectiveness:

The logical framework targets have almost all been attained. It is a good achievement that eight out of nine radio stations have been able to increase their revenues, although only four (or perhaps five) are able to cover their operating costs in full. It is clear that the quality of the training given by Informorac was good and sometimes excellent. There is evidence that broadcasts have improved, news is more reflective of local realities, contact with communities has intensified and on-air interactivity has increased. All radio stations show real signs of better internal management. URPB as a network was strengthened although its performance on lobbying on behalf of its members and its own efforts at self-sufficiency have been disappointing. URPB has not made good use of the Informorac studio it was given.

- Impact:

We find that the project has contributed to some extent to the higher goal of improving the living standards of the poor and vulnerable population of Bandundu province. Listeners and local authorities particularly mentioned improvements in agricultural yield, improved security on roads and in communities, better communications within communities, some health and educational benefits, promotion of a culture of peace, encouragement of children into schools and some positive impacts on women's and girls' rights and status. The project has also contributed to opening the province to the wider world and bringing news in from outside as well as providing a counterbalance to the party-political media which is strong in some parts of the region. However, the practice of self-censorship, particularly on political issues, is still widespread among community-radio journalists. Further, most radio stations could do much more to involve their local community, and to report on and encourage rural development.

- Sustainability:

Future sustainability is still uncertain. The ideal would be that the Informorac project could now act as a lever to attract other revenue (including donor, local government and community-support) for the URPB radios of Bandundu. It is too early to say whether this will happen or not. One or two promises of further support to URPB by Internews and UNICEF are good signs. But URPB still needs to work hard to consolidate its network and to provide a central resource for technical maintenance and to help generate revenue for its members. The radio stations probably did not receive sufficient training in financial management, although some are better than others. The training received in attracting commercial advertising was unrealistic for most of the stations because financial autonomy through advertising in a region as poor as Bandundu is unlikely given the lack of commercial opportunities, particularly outside the major towns. As for the future of the

individual radio stations, community and commercial support for the stronger radios stations such as Bandundu FM, Bangu, Nsemo, Tomisa, RCMI and Kenge will probably ensure that these radios expand and thrive. Others, such as Bulungu and Popokabaka will continue to suffer due to their remoteness and their lack of capacity to generate much revenue. The Informorac project has given all 9 radio stations a substantial start but they are all still fragile and donor-dependent.

- Conclusion and Summary:

Despite some weaknesses, we find, in conclusion that the project was good and met its aims. This was the first relatively large project giving direct and much-needed support to community radios in Bandundu province – a place that is often overlooked compared to other provinces in the DRC – and with huge needs and high rates of poverty. Although the project satisfied many of the radios’ very urgent and basic needs, it has also awakened others. It raises the question of how the target radio stations will survive in the future: neither URPB as an umbrella organisation nor the individual radios are able to function without an element of donor support, but that is the reality for most community and public service media in the DRC; indeed it is true the world over... FPU should be congratulated for helping to lay the foundations so that specific projects can now be started by URPB and the radios themselves, implemented by local actors themselves and / or with international partners.

The following, in summary, are the main strengths and weaknesses of the project (these are based on the findings of the final workshop but have been adapted by the evaluators to reflect our own opinions too).

Strengths of project	Weaknesses of project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased skills and capacity of radio personnel - Stabilisation of organisations (radio stations and URPB) - Big improvement of radio infrastructure - Technicians capable of basic studio operation and equipment maintenance - Equipment given was appropriate and durable - M&E well-integrated in project - Broadcasters’ self-confidence greatly strengthened - Solidarity between URPB members strengthened - Improved and appropriate programme production - Strengthened structure for URPB - The <i>in situ</i> training approach was appropriate and the principle of not paying per diems was ultimately good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main project vehicle was not appropriate for the local roads (i.e. resulting drain on the budget) - Trainings were too short - URPB members who were not included expressed frustration - Lack of proper training in financial management - Insufficient amount of recording equipment given - Insufficient training of technicians on issues of maintenance - Local communities not sufficiently encouraged to support radio stations financially or materially - Absence of per diems during trainings was seen by some participants as a weakness - Failure of URPB to obtain exoneration of import duties (i.e. resulting drain on the budget) - Lack of long-term plan to sustain the URPB staff structure