

**Authors:** Marie Fierens, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Orcid [0000-0003-3374-3815](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3374-3815), Maombi Mukomya, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Institut Facultaire des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication (IFASIC) et Université de l'Assomption au Congo (UAC), Orcid 0009-0000-4140-4114

**Acknowledgements:** This research would not have been possible without the time and trust we have received from the media and development players we have met over the years. Our sincere thanks to all of them.

**Funding:** This research has partly been carried out thanks to the support of the Fondation Croix-Rouge française and the Université libre de Bruxelles.

**Abstract:** This article analyses how the interactions between international development and Congolese media actors based in North Kivu province contribute to, or prevent, delimiting the boundaries of the profession towards external actors. It takes specific account of the massive presence of development actors and the conflictual nature that often characterizes the relationship between peacebuilders and the local population. It demonstrates that the precarious professional environment in which journalists work makes them adjust their lines of conduct to the perceived or expected actions of international NGOs that hold essential economic resources, and that these ongoing adaptations have consequences for journalists as individuals, media companies, and the profession.

**Keywords:** journalism, development, humanitarian, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), North Kivu, profession, boundaries

## **Being a journalist in North Kivu province, DRC: Professional boundaries in a developmental configuration**

### **Introduction**

In the province of North Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), decades of conflict have attracted hundreds of international development actors. In addition to the presence of numerous armed groups, the humanitarian situation is aggravated by inter-community violence, epidemics, natural disasters, and chronic poverty (Reach, 2023). More than 2.5 million people need aid and protection (OCHA, 2022). The massive presence of aid workers has given rise to a “developmental configuration” composed of development actors who, “in some ways, live off the development of others, and mobilize or manage considerable material and symbolic resources to this end” (Olivier de Sardan, 1995, p. 7)<sup>1</sup>. Congolese journalists working in the province are at the crossroads of information and development challenges. Their specific location shapes their way of thinking and of practising journalism.

---

<sup>1</sup> All the quotations and citations are translated from French by the authors.

This article analyses how the interactions between international development and Congolese media actors contribute to, or prevent, delimiting the boundaries of the profession. It takes specific account of the massive presence of development agents and the conflictual nature that often characterizes the relationship between peacebuilders and the local population (Autesserre, 2014, p. 5).

## Literature Review

This article mainly draws on the sociology of journalism and African media studies. It also considers the peace studies research that specifically addresses the situation of eastern DRC. Anyone who has taken an interest in the profession of journalism knows how blurred its contours are and how many forms it can take, depending on the context in which it is practised. We look at the interdependencies that link journalists to other actors (Chupin & Nollet, 2006) in an attempt to understand how the vagueness that characterizes journalism (Ruellan, 2007) adopts a concrete form, according to the constraints of North Kivu province. We look at the interactions between insiders, namely journalists, and outsiders, i.e. international development actors, and pay attention to how “actors themselves argue with each other” to “provisionally settle for themselves the borders of their profession” (Carlson, 2015, p.4). This allows us to understand how journalists express and define their collective identity toward other actors.

In journalism studies, research concerning Francophone Africa, mainly published in French, remains largely unseen on the international level, in comparison with the research related to Anglophone Africa (Capitant & Frère, 2011, p. IX). Yet, an important literature exists, part of which deals specifically with the Congo. Congolese authors have detailed the power relationships that structured journalists' practices throughout history (Bebe Beshelemu, 2006; Tambwe Kitenge Bin Kitoko, 2001). Specific research addresses Congolese journalists' professional ethics (Elongo Lukulunga, 2011) and its relation to the economic environment (Lapess Munkeni, 2009). Attention has also been paid to the appropriation of new technologies by Congolese newspapers (Wawa Mozanimu, 2013). More recently, Malibabo (2020) studied the environmental narratives in the print media of Kinshasa, and N'sana (2021) examined the link between media and conflict in the DRC. Non-Congolese journalism researchers have also been interested in the realities of journalism in the DRC for decades. Frère was the most prolific observer. She analysed the country's media landscape (2009; (Frère & [AUTHOR], 2013); journalists' professional identity (2015); their way of practising journalism during electoral processes (2015); the state of press freedom (Fiedler & Frère, 2018); audience perceptions (2016); and censorship (2016). [AUTHOR (2021, 2017)] also studied the history of the profession in the country and addressed how journalists have interacted with actors from the political and economic sphere, from colonization until 2010, and the “negotiated friendship” that exists between media and humanitarian actors in Goma.

Research from the peace studies field suggests the fact that international aid actors often seem to inhabit a separate world from the local population, with its own temporality, its own space, its own economic realities, and its own system of thought (Autesserre, 2014, p. 5). Many books and articles are devoted to peace operations, particularly in Africa, but few of them focus on the way the various components of the concerned societies experience them (Poulligny, 2004, p. 16), and none of them focus on African journalists. Yet the lived reality of the journalists of North Kivu has a direct influence on the way they think about their role as media actors, and therefore on their practices. A lot of research analyses the relations between the international media and humanitarian actors. It emphasizes the sometimes ambiguous role played by the media in humanitarian action (Brauman & Backmann, 1996) as well as the “dangerous liaisons” that unite journalists and humanitarians (Alliot, 2000). Analyses focus on the media strategies

deployed by humanitarian actors to ensure coverage of their actions by the international media (Vestergaard, 2008) and to arouse the emotions of Western audiences (Franks, 2006; Fusaschi, 2010; Gorin, 2013; Lavoine, 2002; Mesnard, 2002). Other research shows that media coverage of an emergency encourages foreign intervention (Balabanova, 2010; Rotberg & Weiss, 1996), in line with the well-known and much-debated "CNN effect"<sup>2</sup>. However, despite the crucial preventive role that local media assume or could assume, and even though some works emphasize the need for humanitarian agencies to integrate them into their media strategy (Moke & R  ther, 2015), publications concerning the links that unite development actors and local media are still few and far between.

## Method

The two authors of this article have investigated journalism in North Kivu province for years from different perspectives but using similar methods. We shared our knowledge to discover how journalists interact daily with development actors. [AUTHOR] is a Congolese researcher who has always lived in Butembo, in North Kivu, and used to be a journalist. He has analysed the professional identity of journalists working in the Beni-Lubero region for many years. [AUTHOR] is a Belgian researcher, based in Brussels, who has been studying the media in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa for some 15 years, and has recently focused on the interactions between media and humanitarian actors in Goma. By sharing our data, we analyse the journalistic dynamics of the entire province, including conflict zones usually inaccessible to researchers, from 2016 to 2023.

Both of us carried out extensive fieldwork. [AUTHOR] conducted his research in Beni, Butembo, Oicha, and Lubero, between 2021 and 2023, while [AUTHOR] carried out his in Goma, the capital of the province, in 2016 and 2017. In total, we conducted 116 in-depth interviews. The interviewees' profile varied according to their place of work. In Goma, interviews were conducted both with international actors [12] and with local media actors [19], while only journalists were interviewed in secondary towns. The provincial capital is indeed the headquarters of most of the development organizations, while the physical presence of development workers is limited in the neighbourhood areas. In Goma, journalists working for radio, television, or the written press were interviewed, as the city is home to a diverse range of media, while in the other towns, interviews [85] were only conducted with radio journalists. Radio is indeed the only means of information available to many of the region's communities (Renard, 2008, pp. 135–136). The interview guide used in Goma was the same for both journalists and development agents. It was aimed at understanding their respective professional context and goals, and the means to achieve these goals, and how they evaluate the consequence of their collaboration. The interview guide used in the Beni-Lubero region was primarily designed to understand how these individuals become information professionals and build their careers in Beni-Lubero. In the frame of this article, the interviews we both conducted were analysed as a unique corpus that eventually represented important material allowing us to identify how journalists working in the main cities of the province – including some usually inaccessible to researchers due to the security situation – define the boundaries of their profession. All these interviews were transcribed and analysed from an inductive perspective. The data were categorized according to the main themes that emerged. We did not aim to retrace exactly how journalists from North Kivu province interact with development actors and vice versa but “to take seriously how the individuals [...] we met had understood and explained, subjectively and empirically, their interactions” (Pouligny, 2004, p. 18).

---

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the influence of the media on the foreign policy of states.

## Context

There are hundreds of international humanitarian NGOs and about 15 UN agencies in Goma<sup>3</sup>. The city also hosts numerous media organizations: *Radio télévision nationale congolaise* (RTNC), *Radio Okapi* (radio of the UN Mission for Stabilization in DRC, Monusco), 30 commercial, community-run, or faith-based radio stations, and a dozen written press outlets (AUTHOR, 2021)<sup>4</sup>. A hundred radio stations broadcast in Beni-Lubero<sup>5</sup>. Radio is the most popular media in the province, as in the whole country, especially community radio stations, which are the most numerous and the most popular. These small radio stations cover a limited geographic area but are deeply rooted in the local social fabric. The *Collectif des Radios et Télévisions Communautaires du Nord-Kivu* (North Kivu Community Radio and Television Collective, Coracon) brings together more than 60 community media in the province<sup>6</sup>.

In the DRC, 99.7% of economic units operate in the informal sector (Abaté, 2018; Mutapayi & Mutombo Kazadi, 2022). This reality affects the information sector. Congolese journalists usually work without any contract, as their media are unable to guarantee employment and offer a salary. One of them, living in Butembo, stated: "There are media that try [to pay their journalists] and others that can't even try" (JRAK, 02/04/2022, Butembo). Another journalist working in Oicha explained: "Journalists don't get paid" (JMMP, 21/01/2022, Oicha), while another, from Goma, remarked: "The country's economy doesn't allow us to earn money through officially known, legally known, established channels like advertising" (JK, 25/11/2017, Goma). The consequences are tangible. Journalists survive by doing other jobs such as working as taxi drivers or merchants. Another popular way of earning money is benefiting from *coupage*, "a practice which consists of granting a fee to journalists who have come to cover an event, the amount of which is fixed by the organizers, to motivate them to write an article, often a positive one" (Elongo, 2004, p. 56, quoted by Frère, 2005, p. 124). In this context, any financial or material support, including that supplied by humanitarian organizations, is welcome. "All we need is the slightest invitation from an NGO to ask to be paid" (JK, 25/11/2017, Goma).

Journalists consider the lack of resources to be a major obstacle to the practice of journalism (AA, 21/11/2017, Goma). Poverty reduces them to "poor wretches", prevents them from working independently, and discredits them in the eyes of their audiences. "When you present yourself as a journalist, it's really a reflection of misery" (JRAK, 02/04/2022, Butembo). "Journalists are the poor" [...] and "Journalists are people who are offered beers" (JWMK, 9/02/2022, Butembo), stated regretfully two media actors from Butembo.

The financial insecurity of Congolese journalists is part of a structural crisis. The state apparatus is unable to meet the most basic needs of Congolese citizens. Goods and services produced by the economy and public administration are scarce and of poor quality where they exist (Ayimpam, 2014; De Villiers et al., 2002). Many of the country's sensitive public services are taken over by the humanitarians who are very present in the east of the country. In this context, journalists and the public see international NGOs as a replacement for the failing state. This situation generates confusion. According to one development actor, journalists, and the

---

<sup>3</sup> According to a list of humanitarian contacts in North Kivu produced by UN OCHA Goma on 27 March 2015.

<sup>4</sup> This summary of the media landscape was drawn up by Albert Tulinabo in November 2017.

<sup>5</sup> There are about 40 radio stations in Butembo, 20 in Beni-ville, around 30 in Beni territory, and around 30 in Lubero territory. The region also has one television channel that operates regularly, based in Butembo (census based on the interviews carried out by [AUTHOR]).

<sup>6</sup> <https://coracondrc.com/>

population in general, have expectations that are above the humanitarian response (PY, 06/11/2017, Skype). The massive presence of NGOs has led to a “development economy” (Büscher & Vlassenroot, 2010), which partly compensates for the state’s lack of authority and sovereignty. The development sector artificially boosts the economy, fuelling fears that a vacuum will be created when it withdraws in the future. "Humanitarianism helps, but destabilizes at the same time", concluded an inhabitant of Goma (Trefon & Kabuyaya, 2016, p. 30).

## Results

The interactions between Congolese journalists and development workers in the specific context of the province made six original ways of considering journalism emerge, which lead to a specific way of practising it. According to journalists working in North Kivu, the profession could be a source of opportunities; an object of business; an accountability tool in the service of international NGOs (INGOs); and a way of circulating information and communication.

### Opportunity journalism

Journalists view the development sector as a source of opportunities. These can take the form of financial rewards, access to information, networking, training, and job offers ([AUTHOR], 2021). Media actors believe that part of their job as journalists consists in "creating space to create opportunities" (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo). The opportunities offered by development agents are integrated into the overall economy of media structures. For example, the training offered by humanitarian actors is considered an incentive to encourage journalists to stay in their newsrooms. Media managers "who manage to get by" are "managers who have understood that you can't look for the radio's money where the radio is", summed up one journalist from Butembo.

The means can be found in partnerships. Today, some platforms have the money to support the media. There's *Hirondelle Communication*<sup>7</sup>, there's *Internews*<sup>8</sup>, there are associations like Coracon<sup>9</sup> that can prospect for opportunities [...]. (JWKM, 9/02/2022, Butembo)

The development sector often calls on community radio stations, most of which are part of Coracon, to broadcast messages relating to their social purpose, i.e. intending to raise awareness. A contract is then signed between the "partner" radio station or media platform and the non-governmental organization. The latter pays the radio stations in exchange for broadcasting its messages or producing awareness-raising programmes. INGOs could also work with individuals. Most of the journalists in charge of these media productions are simultaneously involved in several production projects. They thus develop multiple activities that lead them to constantly negotiate the professional time they devote to requests from the development sector, on the one hand, and that devoted to their radio station, on the other. One journalist working in Butembo has worked as a freelancer with the three above-mentioned

---

<sup>7</sup> Hirondelle Communication manages a broadcasting network in the DRC of more than a hundred radio stations (2017). Hirondelle Communication is a department of the Fondation Hirondelle, a Swiss non-profit organization that provides information to populations facing crises. <https://www.studiohirondellerdc.org/qui-sommes-nous.html> (accessed 13 July 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Internews is an international media support non-profit organization. <https://internews.org/> (accessed 13 July 2023).

<sup>9</sup> The Collectif des Radios et Télévisions Communautaires du Nord-Kivu [North Kivu Community Radio and Television Collective].

organizations: with *Internews* for the programme "Koma Ebola"<sup>10</sup> – a radio bulletin on the Ebola response in the DRC, broadcast on 46 community radio stations in North Kivu and Ituri in French, Kiswahili, and Kinande; with the *Fondation Hironnelle* as part of the "*Femmes et élections*" [Women and elections] programme<sup>11</sup>, which includes radio magazines and radio soap operas broadcast in 98 partner radio stations; and with Coracon for radio programmes aimed at raising awareness of the fight against Ebola and Covid-19. She explained the concrete impact of these activities on her professional practice.

When you get involved in these kinds of things, you have to manage your time well so as not to penalize a [media] structure or one of these organizations [...] It's not easy at all, we can't satisfy all these organizations. (JKSB, 6/11/2021, Butembo)

While the multiplicity of partnerships with international organizations poses problems, it remains a source of opportunities – financial for the journalist in charge, but also informational for the media to which he or she belongs.

There are times when you get a piece of information from another medium, but you find that it's of interest to radio, and we consume it at [name of radio station] even if it's been commissioned by another medium. Every opportunity helps me to fulfil my duties at [name of radio station]. (JKSB, 6/11/2021, Butembo)

Radio journalists enter into close contact with the development actors and set about creating opportunities to secure a job with the organization. The ultimate goal consists in being hired for a long-term period. Many media players see journalism as "a door" (JPMM, 21/01/2022, Oicha) that, once crossed, leads to a better-paid job. The media for which journalists work are consequently reduced to the status of "rear bases", i.e. places where they can retreat between two paid, fixed-term assignments in the development sector. When the journalist's collaboration with the development organization comes to an end, he or she returns to his or her "rear base" – his or her radio station. This way of doing things has become so usual that it has entered the everyday language. "That's the slogan they say, the concept. 'I've returned to my rear base.' They come back, they finish their contract [...], they come back again for their back base", attested one journalist from Butembo (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo). Flexibility has become a skill to be acquired.

We know how to jump, evolve, and when it's over, we can still come back so we don't cross our arms because it doesn't pay well, but it also offers opportunities in that sense [...] When we have another opportunity we leave and so on. (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo)

The challenge consists in never definitively closing the doors of the rear base. "The important thing is to know how to leave well" (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo). In other words, maintaining good relations with the radio's hierarchy and consolidating the radio's "rear base" status are crucial (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo). Aware that the collaborations that bring them closer to NGOs are temporary, the journalists continue to practise journalism, as a way to stay in this professional social reality and not be forgotten by their hierarchy.

I can have a one-year contract or a two-year contract [in the development sector], but if it's cut abruptly, and I've already cut such and such a collaboration with such and such a media outlet, starting again is more difficult than reheating what already exists. That's

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://koma-ebola.info/> (accessed 13 July 2023).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hironnelle.org/fr/notre-actualite/228-lancement-du-projet-femmes-et-elections-par-la-fondation-hironnelle-en-rdc> (accessed 13 July 2023).

how we do gymnastics, above all to preserve and guarantee the future [...]. (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo)

The strategy is winning for the journalists as individuals but not for their media. One media manager from Oicha deplores the exit of the great skills in which he has invested. "They look for better, they jump on opportunities, and they leave" (JPMM, 21/01/2022, Oicha).

### Business journalism

The scarcity of operating resources has led radio station managers to resort to the practice of *rétrocommission*, known in Congolese society in general and in journalistic circles in particular as "*opération retour*". This practice consists of a Congolese social player from the professional world of journalism, business, or development demanding payment for having put a radio station manager in touch with a potential advertiser – in this case, a development organization wishing to make its action known. Usually following a one-to-one approach, the actor being paid makes the radio manager believe that he or she has used his or her position within the organization or proximity to it to have the radio station chosen as a "partner" and demands a share of the broadcast costs. Managers don't have enough personal leeway in the face of this practice and the profession is too busy trying to survive to take collective action. One of them stated: "We must discourage it, but alone I can't, otherwise I'll starve to death" (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo). The risk is losing the contract and being accused of being incompetent. Radio stations "are left out because of the *opérations retours*". People who don't get the money from this manoeuvre go to the international organization saying: "[T]hat director isn't any good and there's no impact on the ground" (JAL, 21/01/2022, Butembo).

Media professionals consider this practice to be detrimental to the development of their sector. In addition, they argue, *opérations retours* affect the actions of the development sector because the paid actor chooses any media without worrying about its reputation and its capacity to broadcast messages to the target audience. "The DRC has known all the donors in the world who have given money in many sectors. But why doesn't it change?" (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo), asked one radio director. He insisted:

If they [the development actors] want there to be a change in the DRC, they should also think about accompanying themselves with information, with people, with information actors. (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo)

Overly critical of this "sort of mafia between NGOs and the media", the manager admits to having lost several contracts for not agreeing with people who demand a *rétrocommission* of over 50% of the remuneration granted to his radio station. For him, if media players don't take up a collective fight against "this system", they will continue to live in "a situation where radio stations don't develop" and will be replaced by a platform specializing in managing partnerships between Congolese media and international organizations, such as the Remed, the "*Réseau des Médias pour le Développement*" (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo). According to him, it is indeed the media platforms that benefit from the financial windfall from kickbacks and stifle the development of radio stations. The system would eventually be harmful to both the media economy and the efficiency of the development sector.

### Community journalism

Community radio stations are the privileged partners of development organizations (PS, 21/11/2017, Skype). As an example, the *Fondation Hirondelle* worked with 88 community

radio stations and only 10 commercial radio stations throughout the country to carry out the *Femmes et élections* programme<sup>12</sup>. One ICRC member explained the situation:

Outside Goma [...] we work with community media, community radios. [...]. We have radios that cover hills or villages, for example [...], they are our direct intermediaries because it's these radios there that get the messages across, that do in-depth work at the community level in engagement with community leaders. (PY, 06/11/2017, Skype)

A communications officer from the same institution elaborated: "The choice is made first on the editorial line [...]. Those who have an editorial line focused on humanitarian action, on the community aspect, that fits in with our interest." Journalists, for their part, know that this type of radio is seen as "a grassroots community relay that gives the message so that the neighbour changes his behaviour" (BB, 24/11/2017, Goma). Community radio status is therefore important for media wishing to collaborate with development actors. In practice, however, identifying them is not an easy task. Radio stations with political or commercial aims often claim to be "community", so important is the label. One journalist confessed his puzzlement:

I've come to a radio station, and I can't say whether it's a community or political one. I can't define it. [...]. I had to combine communications with journalism. [...] A promoter of this radio needed me, needed the radio for his political success [...]. (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo)

Some political actors brandish the community radio status to better get their communication across, which increases the mistrust of international actors likely to forge partnerships with "real" community radio stations. One journalist from Lubero experienced this mistrust when he entered into contact with an international development organization. He remarked:

Getting people to believe that this was a community radio station was the first challenge. Even up to that point, I'd missed out on bigger deals because people said my radio station was political. (JAL, 21/01/2022, Butembo)

Yet, he asserted, his radio station was indeed created by a civil society association; its editorial line promotes "good governance and social cohesion" (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo) and the programme schedule, which he designed himself, is also, according to him, that of a community radio station. But as with all radio stations in North Kivu, he asserted, one or more politicians "give a helping hand" (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo) – financially – given the precarious conditions in which the population lives. "It's difficult in rural areas like Lubero to have a community that's going to bang out a \$5,000 or \$10,000 transmitter." This situation puzzles him. "That's why it's a challenge, I don't know where I stand if I'm the director of a community radio station or a politician's radio station" (JAL, 21/05/2022, Butembo).

### Development journalism

Many Congolese who have collaborated with development actors become communicators for their organizations. One journalist commented: "I can name Mercy Corps, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, *Alerte Internationale*, Caritas. I know friends who work there, who were journalists, we used to work with them as journalists [...]" (JCMS, 12/05/2022, Butembo). At least two reasons explain these shifts from one professional world to another: first, the seizing of opportunities mentioned above, and second, the common concerns shared by both the journalists and the development workers. An ICRC communications officer said: "We're close to journalists. We've always sought them out and they've always sought us out." He then added:

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.hirondelle.org/fr/notre-actualite/228-lancement-du-projet-femmes-et-elections-par-la-fondation-hirondelle-en-rdc> (accessed 13 July 2023).



"They do work that is very close to the work of humanitarians" (PY, 06/11/2017, Skype). A journalist from Goma agreed: "Being a journalist, I'm also a humanitarian" (AA, 21/11/2017, Goma). The ICRC communications officer stated their common objectives: "Reducing suffering at times of conflict or violence, responding to a humanitarian issue by drawing attention to it, etc." (PY, 06/11/2017, Skype)

One journalist based in Lubero explained how he moved from one professional world to the other. He was spotted by a development organization and recruited as part of a project on "positive masculinity" – a perspective that integrates the action of men and boys to support gender equality, adopted by many international organizations, as he was working for Pole FM, one of the most listened-to community radio stations in North Kivu, located in Goma.

I went to Bukavu [capital of the neighbouring province of South Kivu, about 200 km from Goma] for a 30-day training course with Rescue [International Rescue Committee]. I came back [to Goma]. [...] And that's when I started as supervisor of the Kayna health zone [about 115 km from Goma]<sup>13</sup>. It was all about positive masculinity and behaviour change. Well, these were things I'd already learned before. And now I was a humanitarian (laughs). (JAL, 05/21/2022, Butembo)

According to journalists, the respective roles of journalists and development actors sometimes merge. That's what Remed<sup>14</sup>, the "*Réseau des Médias pour le Développement*" [Media Network for Development], is all about. Its coordinator stated:

We are journalists and humanitarians at the same time [...] A journalist is an agent of change in the community. The journalist uses a sensitive tool [radio] that is accepted by the grassroots. (BB, 24/11/2017, Goma)

Remed is an intermediary platform between development actors and the media created in 2008 on the initiative of media leaders. It aims at "promoting the use of the media as a tool for development, democracy, peace, health, justice and solidarity"<sup>15</sup>. Today, the platform has established itself as a privileged partner for various humanitarian and development actors based in North Kivu. Remed brings together dozens of media outlets in the province and is financed by several international organizations, the main one being Unicef. For the international agency, Remed is "a grouping that enables Unicef not to disperse its efforts" (PD, 26/11/2017, Goma). Working with the media separately proves far more costly and time-consuming for international organizations than working with media groupings. "We can't go and work with every little radio station on a street corner somewhere. It's impossible, it requires a lot of resources" (PD, 26/11/2017, Goma). Journalists would therefore be, in their way, humanitarian actors. But the reverse is more difficult to verify.

Most development actors do not see themselves as information actors. A public information officer from Ocha, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, based in Goma, pointed out that the "primary mandate" of development actors "is not to share information". He continued: "Ultimately, communication is an attached service, if you want to talk in a business way. [...]. It's a service of a service. The primary service is helping people" (TR, 22/11/2017, Goma). At Coracon, the *Collectif des Radios et Télévisions Communautaires du Nord-Kivu*

---

<sup>13</sup> A health zone is a geographical entity defined by the Congolese Ministry of Public Health.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.remeddrc.org/> (accessed 13 July 2023).

<sup>15</sup> Promotional document, Remed.

[North Kivu Community Radio and Television Collective], journalists know the argument but counter it with another reasoning.

At this point, they [humanitarian actors] accept all the rumours that the population creates, because we [journalists] don't communicate about what they do [...]. Here in North Kivu, I've realized that people still think that in the wars that are going on, in the conflicts that are going on in North Kivu, the humanitarians have something to do with it. (JK, 25/11/2017)

The residents of the province have indeed lived with international development organizations since the middle of the 1990s (Büscher & Vlassenroot, 2010, p. 259) without having seen any real improvement. They therefore question the presence of development agents. If both journalists and development agents agree that journalists could also be development actors, only journalists think that the opposite can also be true.

Views differ depending on whether you're a journalist or an employee for a development agency, but also depending on whether you're a Congolese or an expatriate. One Congolese journalist deplors the naivety, even the pretension, of development workers. "They think that someone leaving France or Belgium arrives in Goma and [can] say 'you're going to build capacity'. They don't know what we need" (AA, 21/11/2017, Goma). Development actors are, for the most part, aware of how Congolese consider them and the accuracy of this observation. One of them admitted that dealing with the local press takes time, which is incompatible with the limited duration of contracts offered by humanitarian agencies (TR, 22/11/2017, Goma). He added that the difference in status and salaries between the "expats" and the Congolese reinforces misunderstandings. "International staff don't realize that paying \$10 for something here is unbelievable" (TR, 22/11/2017, Goma). Staff turnover and the lack of understanding of local realities seem to be obstacles to effective collaboration.

### Monitoring journalism

Development actors are driven by the imperative of impact logics (Heaslip & Tatham, 2022). The relationship with the media is partly based on it and has consequences for journalistic practice in the eastern DRC. An ICRC employee explained that humanitarian actors are under increasing pressure. They must be "efficient" and "profitable" and prove "impact". A World Food Programme communications manager thus justified the virtual absence of partnerships with newspaper managers. "I explained to them [newspaper managers] that we have to show results and those results are not with the print media" (PJ, 26/11/2017, Goma). Radio stations are favoured, as are international journalists and media, with extensive coverage, to the detriment of local journalists and media. "It's obligations because we're pushed to have a bit more impact", explained one ICRC communicator. Having impact means "making the organization's action known to donors" (PY, 06/11/2017, Skype).

Congolese journalists are aware of this.

The international media have an audience. Secondly, they have a certain notoriety, they are known throughout the world. Is anyone here from RFI [Radio France internationale]? The organizer [of the development organization] himself trembles: 'Ah! RFI here! Let him come in. And who are you?' 'I'm from the newspaper *Flambeau de l'Est* [a local newspaper circulating in Goma].' 'From Goma? No, you.' 'You're unfortunately dismissed.' (CM, 26/11/2017, Goma)

Although they are not their privileged partners, some local journalists play a non-negligible role in the international structures present in the province, ensuring the "monitoring-evaluation" of the actions they implement. This is particularly true of the Remed members. The network has "*Clubs d'écoute communautaires*" (CECs) [Community Listening Clubs], which enable it to reach the audiences targeted by its partners. These CECs are trained to involve the community and make the media participatory. In concrete terms, the six members of the CEC committee record the programmes produced with Remed partners and broadcast them on their local media.

Everyone in his village, neighbourhood, or group will target and interest at least 10 people. The minimum is 60 people [...]. They listen again, and after listening again, they lead debates at the community level. (BB, 24/11/2017, Goma)

An attendance list is then completed to make up for the absence of audience studies and meet, as far as possible, the expectations of the donor to whom international organizations are accountable. [introduire et transition avec identité]

The big problem we currently have is measuring the community's level of listening. Because when we sign a memorandum of understanding, we have a contract with the person in charge, i.e. the humanitarians. We say in this project, I'm going to reach 123,400 households. (BB, 24/11/2017, Goma)

The attendance list then becomes an "indicator". Remed has its network of "journalist focal points" in each territory of the province, i.e. people responsible for ensuring compliance with the broadcast plan and the quality of messages broadcast to communities by partner radios (BB, 24/11/2017, Goma). Finally, it has a team in charge of monitoring and evaluation. It ensures that communities have received the message desired by the partners.

### Communications journalism

Development actors and journalists do not view their relationship in the same way. Their views diverge partly because of their respective conception of "information" and "communication". For some development actors, journalists are relays for their actions and therefore act as communicators when they work with them (BBS, 18/11/2017). For others, it's up to journalists to process the proposed communication and turn it into information. For their part, journalists acknowledge that they are communicating but also wish to obtain information from development actors. The difference between information and communication is not obvious to either of them, and its conception is not always shared by both groups of actors. A UNFPA communicator explained how he sees things.

In some cases, it's true, it's communication; in other cases, it's information. If we're distributing stuff in Nyanzale [a refugee camp in Rutshuru, about 70 km from Goma] in April 2017, the WFP [World Food Programme] was the first to go and assist the recently displaced populations. That I find informative. (GR, 20/11/2017, Goma)

Journalists believe that one important difference between information and communication is that the former is relayed without financial compensation, whereas communication should always, in their view, be remunerated. They deplore the ambiguity maintained by international NGOs in this respect. One humanitarian said that "journalists themselves need to be clear in formulating their expectations" (PY, 06/11/2017, Skype). Another added: "I don't think you should pay for anything normally under any circumstances. Free to them [journalists] if they think it's communication, they don't take and that's it" (JD, 23/11/2017, Goma). One journalist

understands that journalists and development actors collaborate against a backdrop of misunderstanding.

It's not really obvious. There [is] confusion around it. I remember that we called all the communications managers of the organizations here in Goma. We got together with them to tell them that they have the communication, and we have the information. But we have to complement each other. [...]. We told them that sometimes, for us journalists, for our media, communication pays because it's your communication that you want to be broadcast. Then you pay. But when it is information taken from your communication, there you pay nothing because it's us who disseminate this information for the interest of our listeners. (PPR, 25/11/2017, Goma)

Working in poverty, and in search of financial returns, the practices of journalists also contribute to blurring the distinction between information and communication. Many of them believe that by covering the actions of aid workers favourably – voluntarily – they will be able to land a communications contract with international organizations. "So, it's all about communication and that's a real problem" (PPR, 25/11/2017, Goma), concluded one journalist in Goma. Development organization communicators are aware of these pitfalls. One of them explained that he wants to "make journalists aware that working with [them] doesn't mean [they] don't have the right to criticize the work of the UNHCR, for example". The same communicator deplors journalists' inability to seek out information, as well as their passive attitude.

Personally, sometimes I want journalists to ask challenging questions, to put us in front of certain challenges, but sometimes you just don't feel it. [...] You can have a press conference lasting almost an hour, and the questions are like: what's the budget we've given you? What did you do with that money? This and that, but the main thing doesn't come out. (GR, 20/11/2017, Goma)

To establish partnerships, some journalists create associations to work in close partnership with international organizations ([AUTHOR], 2021). As stated by one journalist, the distinction between information and communication becomes even more blurred.

In Goma, we have clubs [of journalists] that are pro such-and-such an [development] organization. These clubs that are pro this or that other organization at no time verify the information, i.e. these journalists are at the service of this organization. (CM, 26/11/2017, Goma)

These criticisms target, in particular, Remed, Coracon, and journalists' clubs such as the *Club des journalistes amis de la Croix-Rouge de Goma* [Goma Red Cross Journalists' Club].

They call themselves journalists' clubs, but they're in the communication business because if the Red Cross has a communication to make, they can never call for information. Recently, ICRC aid workers were kidnapped, but they didn't call these friendly journalists to say 'Our two aid workers have been kidnapped'. [...] They only call for communications and not for information. (CK, 22/11/2017, Goma)

Journalists themselves often struggle to make the distinction. "Few journalists know the difference between communication and information" (AA, 21/11/2017, Goma). A lack of training and precariousness, among other factors, explain this confusion. "It must be stressed

that it [concerns] the young people who sometimes haven't been through a journalism school to know what information is and what is communication" (JK, 25/11/2017, Goma). According to a long-time observer, however:

Most of them know. But they do it for lack of means. [...] They do it knowingly. They know it's communication. If you say to him on the side, 'Why did you put out such information, you even put it on the front page, why?', they say, 'My dear, what do you want? How are we going to live?' Do you see? It's that they only know they're after the money. (CM, 26/11/2017, Goma)

According to some journalists, the confusion is also the result of routines integrated for a long time by communicators who have a poor understanding of their role. Often former journalists "create a kind of belt", selecting journalists with whom they will work who are "close and who will always be positive". The consequence is that these journalists will be paid to provide a form of communication, also known as *coupage*. "What we prefer is to see communication officers who don't come from this routine of seeking *coupage*" (TW, 25/11/2023, Goma), explained one journalist from Goma.

## Discussion

In a precarious professional environment, media players are constantly seeking to adjust their lines of conduct to the perceived or expected actions of international NGOs that hold essential economic resources. This symbolic ongoing negotiation has tangible consequences (Carlson, 2015, p. 2) for journalists and media companies and questions the profession's boundaries.

Adaptability and openness to every opportunity offered by the development sector are at the core of journalists' personal strategies. They believe that part of their job consists in creating and seizing opportunities offered by the development sector. They dedicate their skills and time to both the development and journalism sectors, as they are considered equally necessary for their career advancement. The development sector provides short-term paid contracts while their media, though financially less attractive, are necessary rear bases where they can retreat between two paid services or a long-term contract in the development sector. By wearing multiple hats, from content producers to communication officers and campaign managers for the aid sector, they question issues of journalistic independence and conflict of interest (Singer, 2015, p. 30) and demonstrate that "the lack of cohesion plaguing the practice of journalism" (Carlson, 2015, p. 9) prevailing in Western contexts is exacerbated in the developmental configuration of North Kivu.

Media companies suffer from this partial professional commitment that leads to an important turnover and deprives them of their best journalists. In addition, most of the media managers know that they are economically dependent on the development sector. They consequently manage their media according to the partnerships they want to establish. While, in other contexts such as those of many Western media, "journalists and the organizations that employ them need to be perceived by the public (aka their audience) as crucial to the provision of factual, reliable, timely, and meaningful information (Singer, 2015, p. 23)", the first concern of media companies in North Kivu is to be seen as partners by the main source of financing (aka the development actors).

Congolese journalists and their media invest their journalistic professional skills in the development sector. If need be, journalists also manage to acquire other skills enabling them to

integrate into this professional world. These specific interactions shape a certain conception of journalism where communications activities prevail over editorial work.

The absence of consensus among journalists and development actors concerning the difference between information and communication – a central issue for the journalism profession – is illustrative and attests to the porosity between the two professional worlds. Communication and information are meeting points for both professional categories. But the way each professional category looks at these meeting points is totally different. For most journalists, the blurriness between information and communication is useful, as it maintains the blurriness between the journalistic and development professional spheres. Establishing clear differences between information and communication would deprive them of potential opportunities. For development actors, the distinction between information and communication doesn't constitute an important professional issue as they see communication as a "service" and local journalists as secondary partners for their visibility campaign, in contrast to international media. Development actors do not have the same concerns as they do not share the same survival imperative.

The tenuous nature of the distinction between journalism and the development sector raises important questions such as "What is journalism?" and "Who is a journalist?" in the North Kivu province. We argue, following Amado and Waisbord (2015, p. 52), that it is worth asking how boundary-making works "in contexts where boundaries between journalism and external actors [...] remain weak" and where "journalists are not interested in setting themselves apart from external actors". Considering boundaries as meeting points instead of seeing them as divisive seems helpful (Carlson, 2015, p. 6.). The economic ascendancy that development players have over local journalists is at the core of the boundary work of the journalistic profession in the developmental configuration of North Kivu. On the one hand, development actors shape the journalistic profession in North Kivu without intending to do so. On the other hand, journalists actively leave the boundaries of their profession open to the development actors. The presence of aid workers appears to be both an opportunity, as it may provide relative financial autonomy, career advancement, and consecration in the media professional world and beyond, and a risk, as it makes journalistic activities assimilated to those of INGOs.

In a survival reflex, journalists from North Kivu think of their professional boundaries in relation to the development actors and struggle to maintain interactions with them, while these interactions weaken the boundaries of the profession and therefore strengthen its dependence on the development sector.

## **Bibliography**

- Abaté, André Modeste. 2018. « Les motivations et logiques de l'informalisation des entreprises formelles ». *Revue Congolaise de Gestion* Numéro 25 (1) : 11-66.
- Alliot, Patricia. 2000. « Médias et humanitaires : les liaisons dangereuses ». Mémoire de fin d'études, Tour : Institut Universitaire de Technologies.
- Amado, Adriana, and Silvio Waisbord. 2015. Divided we stand: Blurred boundaries in Argentine journalism. In *Boundaries of Journalism. Professionalism, Practices and Participation*, edited by Carlson, Matt, and Seth C. Lewis, 51-66. Routledge, New York.
- Autesserre, Séverine. 2014. *Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Ayim Pam, Sylvie. 2014. *Économie de la débrouille à Kinshasa. Informalité, commerce et réseaux sociaux*. Paris: Karthala.
- Balabanova, Ekaterina. 2010. « Media Power during Humanitarian Interventions: Is Eastern Europe Any Different from the West? » *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (1) : 71-82.
- Bebe Beshelemu, Emmanuel. 2006. *Presse écrite et expériences démocratiques au Congo-Zaïre*. Recherches en Bibliologie. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Brauman, Rony, and René Backmann. 1996. *Les médias et l'humanitaire. Ethique de l'information ou charité-spectacle*. Paris: CFPJ.
- Büscher, Karen, and Koen Vlassenroot. 2010. « Humanitarian Presence and Urban Development: New Opportunities and Contrasts in Goma, DRC ». *Disasters* 34 (Suppl. 2): S256-73.
- Carlson, Matt. 2015. Introduction. The many boundaries of journalism. In *Boundaries of Journalism. Professionalism, Practices and Participation*, edited by Carlson, Matt, and Seth C. Lewis, 1-18. Routledge, New York.
- Capitant, Sylvie, and Marie-Soleil Frère. 2011. « Africa's Media Landscapes. A Thematic Introduction. » *Afrique contemporaine* 240 (4) : 25-41.
- Chupin, Ivan, et Jérémie Nollet. 2006. *Journalisme et dépendances*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- de Villiers, Gauthier, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, et Laurent Monnier. 2002. *Manières de vivre. Économie de la "débrouille" dans les grandes villes du Congo/Zaïre*. Tervuren et Paris : Institut africain-CEDAF & L'Harmattan.
- Elongo Lukulunga, Vicky. 2011. *Pratiques journalistiques en situation de crise : Vers une éthique atypique dans la presse congolaise*. Saarbrücken: Editions universitaires européennes.
- Franks, Suzanne. 2006. « The CARMA Report: Western Media Coverage of Humanitarian Disasters ». *The Political Quarterly* 77 (2) : 281-84.
- Frère, Marie-Soleil. 2005. *Afrique centrale. Médias et conflits. Vecteurs de guerre ou acteurs de paix*. Bruxelles : Éditions GRIP.
- . 2009. « Le paysage médiatique congolais : Etat des lieux, enjeux et défis ». Kinshasa: FCI.
- . 2016. « Les médias 'chiens de garde' des élections au Burundi et en RDC ? Une critique de l'assistance internationale aux médias ». *Afrique contemporaine* 256 (4) : 119-38.
- and Marie Fierens. 2013. « Médias pour la démocratie et la transparence en République démocratique du Congo : Lot 1 ».
- . 2015. Être journaliste dans la région des Grands Lacs : une identité en (re)construction. In *Médias d'Afrique. Vingt-cinq ans de pluralisme de l'information (1990-2015)*, edited by Frère, Marie-Soleil, 208-223. Paris: Karthala.
- . 2015. Media as watchdogs and election monitors in fragile states. In *Communication and Peace: Mapping an emerging field*, edited by Hoffmann, Julia, and Virgil Hawkins, 247-261. New York: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781315773124.
- . 2017. Audience Perceptions of Radio Stations and Journalists in the Great Lakes. In *Everyday Media Culture in Africa. Audiences and Users*, edited by Willems, Wendy, and Winston Mano, 140-160. London/New York: Routledge.
- . 2016. Censure de l'information en Afrique subsaharienne francophone : la censure dans les régimes semi-autoritaires. In *Les censures dans le monde. XIXe-XXIe siècles*, edited by Martin, Laurent, 34-356. Rennes: PUR.
- Fiedler, Anke, and Marie-Soleil Frère. 2018. Press Freedom in the African Great Lakes Region : A Comparative Study of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In *Newsmaking Cultures in Africa*, edited by Mabweazara, Hayes, 119-143. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Fusaschi, Michela. 2010. « Victimes à tout jamais. Les enfants et les femmes d'Afrique. Rhétoriques de la pitié et humanitarisme spectacle ». *Cahiers d'études africaines* 2 (198-199-200) : 1033-53.

- Gorin, Valérie. 2013. « La couverture médiatique de la guerre civile du Biafra au regard des enjeux humanitaires dans les médias français, suisses et américains (1967-1970) ». *Le Temps des médias* 2 (21): 176-95.
- Heaslip, Graham, and Peter Tatham. 2022. *Humanitarian Logistics: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing for and Responding to Disasters and Complex Emergencies*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Lapess Munkeni, Rigobert. 2009. *Le coupage : Une pratique d'allocation des ressources dans le contexte journalistique congolais*. Comptes rendus. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Lavoinnie, Yves. 2002. *L'humanitaire et les médias*. Lyon : Presses universitaires de Lyon.
- Mesnard, Philippe. 2002. *La victime écran : la représentation humanitaire en question*. Paris: Textuel.
- Moke, Markus., and Maria Rüther. 2015. « Media and humanitarian action ». In *The Humanitarian Challenge*, edited by Gibbons, Pat, and Hans-Joachim Heintze, 253-63. Springer: New York.
- Nsana Mutapayi, Elie, and Célestin Kazadi Mutombo. 2022. « Micro-entreprise et secteur informel en RD Congo : Etat des lieux ».
- N'Sana Bitentu, Pierre. 2021. *Médias et conflits armés en RDC : des journalistes en danger, le journalisme en chantier*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- OCHA. 2022. RD-Congo : Aperçu de la situation humanitaire – juin 2022. [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/democratic-republic-congo/infographic/rd-congo-nord-kivu-aper%C3%A7u-de-la-situation-1?\\_gl=1\\*1mwldga\\*\\_ga\\*NDEyNzE5MzQ1LjE2ODg5ODY5MjY.\\*\\_ga\\_E60ZNX2F68\\*MTY4ODk4NjkyNS4xLjAuMTY4ODk4NjkyNS42MC4wLjA](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/democratic-republic-congo/infographic/rd-congo-nord-kivu-aper%C3%A7u-de-la-situation-1?_gl=1*1mwldga*_ga*NDEyNzE5MzQ1LjE2ODg5ODY5MjY.*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY4ODk4NjkyNS4xLjAuMTY4ODk4NjkyNS42MC4wLjA).
- Malibabo Lavu, Pudens. 2020, « Récit environnemental et construction des modèles culturels dans la presse écrite de Kinshasa (RDC) », Ph.D. thesis, Université catholique de Louvain.
- Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre. 1995. *Anthropologie et développement : essai en socio-anthropologie du changement social*. Marseille : APAD.
- Pouligny, Béatrice. 2004. *Ils nous avaient promis la paix. Opérations de l'ONU et populations locales*. Paris : Presses de Sciences Po.
- Reach. 2023. Suivi de la situation humanitaire. Zones de santé de Kongolo et Mbulula, Territoire de Kongolo, Province du Tanganika, RDC. [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/reach/f4c910ea/REACH\\_RDC\\_Factsheet\\_HSM\\_TGNK\\_Kongolo\\_Avril2023.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1689238324501855&usg=AOvVaw3P-f0vC53sNx780KmvH2-Y](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/reach/f4c910ea/REACH_RDC_Factsheet_HSM_TGNK_Kongolo_Avril2023.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1689238324501855&usg=AOvVaw3P-f0vC53sNx780KmvH2-Y).
- Renard, Yves. 2008. « Des médias entre prolifération anarchique, impunité et pauvreté : le défi de la reconstruction du champ médiatique en RDC. *Afrique contemporaine* 3 (227):135-152.
- Rotberg, Robert I., and Thomas G. Weiss, T. 1996. *From massacres to genocide: The media, public policy and humanitarian crises*. Washington : Brookings Institution.
- Ruellan, Denis. 2007. *Le journalisme ou le professionnalisme du flou*. Grenoble: Presses de l'Université de Grenoble.
- Singer, Jane B. 2015. Out of bounds. Professional norms as boundary markers. In *Boundaries of Journalism. Professionalism, Practices and Participation*, edited by Carlson, Matt, and Seth C. Lewis, 21-36. Routledge, New York.
- Tambwe Kitenge Bin Kitoko, Eddie. 2001. *Écrit et pouvoir au Congo-Zaïre, 1885-1990 : Un siècle d'analyse bibliologique*. Études africaines. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Trefon, Théodore, and Noël Kabuyaya. 2016. *Précarité et bien-être à Goma (RDC): récits de vie dans une ville de tous les dangers*. L'Harmattan.
- Vestergaard, Anne. 2008. « Humanitarian branding and the media: The case of Amnesty International ». *Journal of Language and Politics* 7 (3): 471-93.



Wawa Mozanimu Sayal, Georges-Jérémie. 2013. *La presse congolaise (RDC) et l'appropriation des nouvelles technologies*. Comptes rendus. Paris: L'Harmattan.