

Search for Common Ground - Guinea

Key Findings

From June 2008 Media Mapping Survey

- 20 focus groups representative of civil society were compiled in Conakry, Kindia, N'Zérékoré, Kankan and Mamou.
- An analysis of press articles in major national and local newspapers was carried out.
- Surveys with local authorities in Conakry, Kindia, Mamou, Kankan

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international NGO with programmes in 17 countries with a mission to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches towards cooperative solutions.

Since 2001 SFCG's activities in Guinea have focused on the following objectives:

- Promote the participation of citizens in the development of a transparent and representative democracy;
- Focus on communication about key social and political issues in a non-violent manner ; and
- Increase the capacities of Guinean citizens and civil society so that they take part in national and local debates on political issues.

In order to achieve the above mentioned goals SFCG's team in Guinea has developed a strategic partnership with the ministries of information and communication, rural radio stations in Guinea (Radio Rurale de Guinée – RRG) and civil society organizations.

EVALUATION SCOPE

“For communities living in urban and rural areas, radio is, by far, the most accessible medium.”

The three year project «Radio: a platform for the promotion of peace » (RPP) aims to reinforce the capacities of civil society organizations and media so that they become involved in the reform process, establish contact with leaders, and ensure an adequate framework to increase interactions between the state and the populations. The mapping of the media sector in Guinea revealed answers to crucial questions about the understanding between the state and Guineans. The main questions were:

1. What information is circulated and available on major policies necessary to maintain a peaceful society and help to create an equitable society?
2. What do people read, watch and listen to?
3. What types of information are available?
4. Who has access to the different levels of information?
5. How do people access information and of what use is it?

PLAN AND METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted through interviews with key informants of the communication sector in the national government, local authorities, media leaders in major cities as well as local radios and media associations.

The objective of the interviews with the focus groups and key informers was to better understand how people, as individuals and as a community, receive public information and what they know of the two principal government policies of national reconstruction and poverty reduction.

"The majority of the population, particularly in rural areas are subject to limited access to information."

CONTEXT

Tight governmental control over the media in Guinea has hindered the opening of private radio ways. Due to illiteracy and poor revenue, the radio remains the main means of disseminating information to Guineans.

The scarcity of funds in Guinean media sector makes it vulnerable to corruption while simultaneously suffering from widespread opportunism on behalf of religious, commercial or political interests. Hence the information which reaches the public is partial.

Despite the open attitude put forth by the new government concrete actions yet have to be seen. Nonetheless since private radios have started broadcast, the national public radio (RTG) has no longer been leaders and authorities to communicate. Freedom of expression is steadily gaining grounds and coverage of controversial issues affecting peoples lives is increasing compelling in turn governmental reaction.

*"The government does not always feel that it should be accountable to the people. Any information dealing with the population's reluctance towards a public decision is almost always perceived as manipulation from the opposition parties."
—RTG employee.*

What information is in circulation and available on major policies necessary to maintain a peaceful society and help in the creation of an equitable society?

Overall the media access to information has improved since the development of the consensus government. However, public media outlets have a privileged access to public information in comparison to private ones.

Other than the Ministry of Communication and New Technologies, the government lacks an independent body to transmit official information to the population. Thus each ministry disposes of their own press officer acting as an intermediate with the press.

Although the media is able to operate more freely, the majority of the population living in rural areas has limited access to information. In addition there remains no consultation mechanism between the population and the government on government policies.

What are people reading, watching and listening to?

In times of crises, like that of January-February 2007, the national media is subject to government censorship and officials and the population alike rely international radio stations to obtain information about the situation in the country.

In the capital, the private radio stations, Familia FM in particular, are very popular and the public seems to believe what they say, compared to what they hear on RTG radio. In Kindia, where only the rural radio and RTG are available, Radio Rurale is the people's first choice. In other cases word of mouth remains a popular means of transmitting information.

What types of information is available?

The National Council of Communication governs access to sources of public information and the coverage of national or official events.

While numerous accounts of information censorship have been reported regarding the coverage of contentious issues Guineans are generally well informed about government programs. Such information is most often broadcast through press conferences, communications, and reports in French and in the local languages and is accessible to the population.

The main concerns voiced by the population were centered on inflation, food shortages, deficient or inexistent infrastructures, corruption in judicial and health systems, and unemployment.

Who has access to different levels of information?

Whether they belong to private or public sectors, journalists and leaders in the media assess differently the access to public information. The former judge that access is bad and "information withholding" is frequent. While in the public sector, the opinions are less critical due to recent efforts made to ensure better dissemination of information.

"Cases of the restriction of information were, in places, reported. These include incendiary topics, issues of social tranquility, or that involve the police. As one interlocutor noted, journalists have serious difficulties covering "thorny" subjects."

"The minister once refused to start a press conference before our arrival", declared the Program Director of Radio Familia, adding that in the past it was only the RTG (television) that they waited for.

While in rural areas RTG has limited coverage (less than 50%), local radio stations relay the leading information editions broadcasted on the national radio. In Kindia for example, listeners keep up on national news thanks to rebroadcasts of news bulletins by RR. In the capital, Radio Familia's interactive broadcasts has granted the station with greater levels of trust than RTG.

How do people access information and of what use is it?

For the majority of respondents, radio is by far the preferred means of information, for information is easily accessible at a lesser cost than television which is beyond the reach of most budgets.

Many believe that, through local radio stations, particularly rural radio stations, they have the opportunity to follow the information in local languages. In general, people express their concerns using the private media channels.

The population also uses other informal means to access information including drivers, field staff, discussions in taxis and other transport, imams at the mosque.



CONCLUSION

In Guinea, communication between the government and the people is crucial to reinforce dialogue on issues related to development and the well being of communities. Improving access to and the quality of information on policy reforms to be implemented in view of an equitable society is therefore of particular importance.

This document is a summary of a July 2008 Media Mapping Survey in Guinea. A copy of full report can be acquired by contacting Quentin Kanyatsi at qkanyasi@sfcg.org.

SFCG is grateful to the following partners for their support:

