Creating a Safer Space for Online Engagement in the Central African Republic

Overview

Since the start of the civil war, the Central African Republic (CAR) has been poised on a precipice, as armed groups control increasingly large swathes of the country and state services and security structures are largely absent. Constant insecurity and regular outbreaks of violence in urban areas have displaced a quarter of the population and left communities even more vulnerable to violence. Within this context, communities remain deeply divided as mistrust, rumors, and lack of faith in the judicial system lead to reprisals, mob justice and “tit-for-tat” retaliatory violence. Misinformation is one major driver of the current conflict, often originating and spreading via social media.

Our Goal

The overall goal of this project was to raise awareness around the negative consequences of online hate speech and mis/disinformation and sensitize communities to tools to counter these.

Our Partners

- Facebook
- Local journalists
- The online editorial committee
- Central African Bloggers Association
- Association of Journalists
- Fighting Disinformation in CAR
- Community leaders, including religious leaders, leaders of women’s organizations and educators
- National Council of Central African Youth
- Listening clubs
- High Council for Communication

With the project Creating a safer space for online engagement in CAR, funded by Facebook, Search for Common Ground (Search) used its unique know-how, gained through over 30 years of experience in 35 countries, to counteract misinformation and support sustainable peace in CAR.
Our Target Audience

The project's main target was young people, who tend to be heavy users of social networks and are often vulnerable to misinformation. We also worked with local journalists to counteract misinformation by training reporters and editors on strategies to identify misinformation and produce programs about the dangers of misinformation. We held follow-up discussions directly with the listeners to collect feedback and reinforce the programs’ targeted messaging.

Activities

➔ Building capacity with journalists and editors
The online editorial committee which monitors and reacts to the spread of false information on social networks, and journalists from various local radio stations received training to defuse misinformation.

➔ Producing and distributing content
Two roundtable programs and four spots (in French and Sango) were broadcasted on local radio stations and several videos in Sango were shared with target audiences through Facebook.

➔ Reinforcing community impact
Four listening clubs were established in schools and public places to collect feedback relevant to the messaging and shared key feedback with communities.

“Although I am a journalist, I was one of the people who shared false information, images and videos on social networks without verifying that the sources were reliable [...] Thanks to this project, I have changed how I communicate in the media and on social networks, as well as how I prepare roundtable shows.” - Augustin, a journalist for Radio Notre Dame.