

A huge recovery challenge lies ahead for Haiti after its devastating earthquake.

The Haitian press between survival and suffering
By Claude Gilles, journalist, Panos Caribbean Panos
Caribbean, Port-au-Prince, March 1, 2010-

After a difficult first month, some media houses in Port-au-Prince and provincial towns, which were severely affected by the earthquake of January 12, are trying to rise from the rubble. With makeshift studios housed in tents, sometimes in the street or in parked vehicles, these media houses aim to stay alive at any cost, so that they can communicate to their countrymen, who are mostly homeless and traumatized. This report is about a sector dedicated to informing the public.

Micheline Hilaire (45), the oldest Haitian correspondent who is still active, thinks she was well-inspired by baptizing her radio station in Petit-Goâve "Men Kontre ("Hands Together"). Since the earthquakes of magnitude 7.3 on the Richter scale devastated her city, she can hardly operate the small radio, whose premises were damaged. Upset by the withdrawal of advertising, a direct result of the earthquake, the future seems dark for this media woman, who has a twenty-year career in her field.

At least the equipment of the 17 radio stations in this coastal city is not buried under the rubble. The equipment of "Men Kontre," which has been on air for a decade, is set up in an abandoned 1980s jeep. Under the trees that shade the hood of this old car, the journalists from the 17 radio stations in the city, meet regularly in order to collectively prepare and disseminate news and issues of public interest.

"We all contribute to purchase fuel and journalists volunteer for the gathering of information, the writing and presentation of two broadcasts," sighs Guyteau Mathieu, Secretary General of the Media Network of Petit-Goâve.

Mathieu is also CEO of Préférence FM. He spends as much effort on these post-disaster programmes as on the functioning of his station. "In unity, we will save Petit-Goave, " he says.

The press has a strong influence on the 9 million Haitians, who are mostly illiterate. More than ever it has a new role to play in reconstructing this Caribbean country, which often bears the brunt of nature's fury. At the approach of the next rainy and hurricane seasons, forecasts communicated through the media, for example, can make the difference between life and death.

But the Haitian media are already being threatened by certain storms: the cessation of advertising contracts from large companies in Port-au-Prince . These companies themselves were affected by the earthquake which killed 300 000 people including thirty in the Press.

Le Nouvelliste, a daily newspaper more than a century old, fell back on the Internet for a month. It now released a special edition, a weekly, printed by "Printer II".

"Where are our customers? How do we distribute the paper? We'll have to return to street sales" says a puzzled Max Chauvet, co-owner and director of the family business founded in 1898. Pending the re-locating of its subscribers, less those who died or were exiled, the paper returns to one-by-one sales.

Some two months of work are needed to strengthen the downtown building of Le Nouvelliste. According to Venezuelan technicians, as many months are needed for getting the old print press back on track, which before the earthquake printed 15,000 copies, five days per week. Moreover, advertising revenue which accounted for 75% of the newspaper's income, is dried up for several months, laments Mr. Chauvet. He was forced to lay off half his twenty-four editors.

Le Matin, the other Haitian daily, as well as several other media in Port-au-Prince , run the same formula, to the dismay of the Haitian Journalists Association.

Fight for survival

The head of "Radio Caraibes," Patrick Moussignac, also sees the impending shutdown of certain advertising contracts. But he does not want to part with

any of his employees. "Except for those who want to leave for elsewhere," said the CEO of the oldest Haitian radio.

Under a blue tent, located on the tiny Chavannes street, the location of the station for its sixty years, Moussignac, who is regarded as the Haitian Berlusconi does not stop running the commercials of his traditional customers. He hopes that contracts will not be broken, although the buildings of many customers have crumbled.

“Energie FM,” the radio station of his brother Maxime Moussignac in Magloire Ambroise street , collapsed also. Eyes focused on the rubble left by the earthquake in the auditorium of his station, Mr. Moussignac is already exploring strategies for repairing his impressive building, affectionately called “The House of Radio” by his journalists.

Luckily, the network of 30 community radio stations affiliated to the Society of Animation and Communication (SAKS) has not been as affected as the commercial and evangelical media of Port-au-Prince .

“The radio "Zetwal Peyizan” in Fondwa - a village close to Leogane – as well as the offices of SAKS were destroyed. Also the radio transmitter for SAKS in Grand Goave was broken under the pressure of the earthquake," said Sony Estéus, head of SAKS. The other consequence of the monstrous disaster, is the suspension of production of daily news and weekly magazines by SAKS, which were distributed to affiliated stations. And for good reason: the production studio in Canape-Vert of the organization was destroyed.

"Through these programmes, rural communities remained aware of national and international news," explained Estéus. “Fortunately, our traditional partners want to help in the reconstruction of SAKS.”

In this period of profound lethargy, community radio stations are not the only ones that still take time to resume production. Television stations in Haiti are forced to relay news channels from French and American sources or distribute movies and football and basketball matches if they want to stay on the air. A good dose of therapy for the homeless people, but not enough to help in the huge task of rebuilding, which will take time and will require a lot of money, energy and leadership.

"And to effectively play its role, the press which is also stricken by the earthquake of January 12, needs to rebuild itself," says a director of information of a radio, on condition of anonymity.

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Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers

Following our update on Friday, January 29th 2010, we are pleased to announce that Radio Netherlands, through the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), has sent the "Radio in the Box" mobile radio station to the Dutch Embassy in Santo Domingo, where it will be received by a CECOSIDA representative and shipped to Haiti.

CECOSIDA President, Roosevelt Jean-Francois, expressed his thanks to the CBA and Radio Netherlands:

"This support from the CBA and Radio Netherlands is greatly appreciated and very useful for Haiti. This is a practical way to extend the emergency information response and close the communication gap which has been widened with the violent earthquake which collapsed the Haitian capital. This mobile radio station will help CECOSIDA and its network of media partners and journalists to contribute more useful information at this critical moment. I thank CBMP and its Executive Director, Dr Allyson Leacock for all their support and commitment as well. We're part of a large family and this experience proves it".

The CBMP is very grateful and appreciative to the CBA for their assistance and support to Haiti during this time. Although Haiti is not a member of the Commonwealth and therefore not eligible for assistance from their Disaster Relief Fund, the CBA not only sourced the mobile radio station through Radio Netherlands but also contributed £2000 to this cause.

Posted Friday, Feb. 5, 2010, at 10:18 AM ET

Slate

<http://www.slate.com/id/2241930/entry/2243777/>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Haiti's radio journalists, many of whom have long experience of operating under dictatorships and elected governments with little tolerance for critical press coverage, know a thing or two about adversity. But nearly a month ago, when Haiti's capital was devastated by an earthquake that leveled large sections of the city and killed at least 150,000 people, local reporters were suddenly faced with a whole new set of challenges.

"We try and orient people to where aid is being distributed, and every day we announce messages about people who are still missing," says Wendell

Theodore, the silken-voiced news director of Radio Metropole in the capital's Delmas region. His own home destroyed, Theodore now broadcasts the names of the missing from under a tree in the radio station's yard, next to the tent he has slept in since his house collapsed.

"I saw our building shake," says Rotchild Francois, director of the capital's RFM radio in the Pétionville district, who was at his desk in the studio when the earthquake struck and dashed into the street with a dozen other employees. The station lost a reporter in the quake and was knocked off the air for five days. Reporters from Radio Galaxie, Radio Magic 9, and Radio Télé Ginen were also killed.

Francois now spends his days combing the capital, trying to paint an audio picture of what is happening and to get information on the air about where aid is being distributed, the location of feeding and medical centers, and other important information. Many of the station's employees, fearful of aftershocks, refuse to enter the building.

"People come here to send messages to their relatives that they are OK or to have people call to say that they are OK," says Francois. "We do that every day."

Why journalists might be fearful was illustrated vividly when I was in the studio of Radio Kiskeya interviewing its director general, Marvel Dandin. As Dandin explained how the station, which had been knocked off the air for a week, had resumed broadcasting on an abbreviated schedule, a brief aftershock set the damaged, cracked building trembling and sent people running from the studio into the street.

Radio has historically played an important and politically significant role in Haiti's civic life, where newspapers are few and far between and difficult to decipher for a population often unable to avail themselves of proper schooling.

Radio Soleil, a Catholic station, played a key role in spreading information during the ouster of the Duvalier family dictatorship, which ruled Haiti from 1957 until 1986, during which time freedom of the press was practically nonexistent.

Independent journalism was a dangerous business during the revolving military juntas that controlled the country after the Duvalier regime collapsed. Under the government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in office from 2001 until 2004, reporters were physically attacked by government partisans while covering demonstrations; they were also imprisoned and

forced to flee the country as a result of threats against their lives.

Several journalists have been killed in Haiti in recent years, among them Radio Haiti-Inter Director Jean Dominique in April 2000, Radio Echo 2000 reporter Brignol Lindor in December 2001, and Jacques Roche, a TV host, poet, and an editor at the daily newspaper Le Matin, who was kidnapped and murdered in 2005.

But despite powerful forces arrayed against independent reporting, Haiti's journalists have persisted in the face of such adversity—good preparation, some might say, for today's challenges.

"I ran to my house and found that my wife had died," says Marcus Garcia, director of Radio Mélodie FM, a station that has continued broadcasting with the aid of generator despite the lack of electricity or telephone service. "But life has to continue, and if my wife was alive, she would want me to continue as I am doing, working for the people."

Michael Deibert is the author of Notes from the Last Testament: The Struggle for Haiti.

From Trinidad Guardian Media asked to play its role
BOBIE-LEE DIXON Published: 15 Jan 2010

Following the devastating earthquake on Tuesday in Haiti, a Caricom member state, the Association of the Caribbean States' (ACS) secretary general, Luis Fernando Andrade Falla, has called on the media to play a major role in the networking of such an emergency. Falla was speaking at a news conference at Ernst & Young Building, Sweet Briar Road, St Clair, yesterday.

Falla said though Caricom had an office in Haiti which had been instrumental in the collection of information, there was only so much it could do with the magnitude of the disaster. "We have sent out news to the entire region with regards to the need of assistance. Some institutions have been responding, but this is a matter for all to get involved," he said.

Falla added that the media must play a key role with regards to information being collected and conveyed as presently, it is difficult to even connect with the Haitian authorities to establish the state's immediate needs.

“It has been difficult for us to have a continuous connection, due to the extent of the damage in Haiti, but we do have an ambassador to Haiti on the ground who is able to connect with us from time-to-time,” he added.

Falla said as more detailed information on the extent of the damage and losses becomes available, the Secretariat would be available, as well as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), to assist Haiti. “The ACS awaits further news from the Haitian authorities on the country’s situation and needs as determined by its national experts,” he said.

The One Caribbean Media Network is partnering with Digicel in a region wide relief effort in response to the earthquake in Haiti. From this Saturday January 14th at 8 am up until 12 noon, listeners to the StarCom Network of station in Barbados (HOTT95.3 FM, VOB 92,9 FM, LOVE 104. 1 FM and Gospel 97.5 FM), HotT 93 Gem Radio in Trinidad, The Wave in St. Lucia, The Grenada Broadcasting Network in Grenada and GEM Radio in St Kitts, Antigua and Montserrat, will be hosting the Help Haiti Now Radiothon.

All listeners to those countries will be able to make pledges to assist Haiti.

Regards,

Ryan Gilkes

2010/1/14 <meade.ben@gmail.com>

Radio Montserrat has also teamed up with the local business community and other organisations to hold a Radio-thon this evening from 8 o'clock.

This is also being supported by LIME, which has set up a text facility to make donations against customers' accounts. I will keep the group posted on how this turns out. Radio Montserrat's website, in case anyone is interested is www.zjb.gov.ms Ben

Sent from my BlackBerry® wireless device from LIME.

From: matt peltier <matlove12@hotmail.com>

Date: Thu, 14 Jan 2010 21:03:44 +0000

To: <acmedia@yahoogroups.com>

Subject: RE: [acmedia] Haiti

Hy guys Just thought I should inform you that that the radio stations in Dominica teamed up with Digicel and Lime and raised over 175 thousand E-C dollars for the people of Haiti holding a few radio-thons on today--Hoping the effort can be duplicated in the Caribbean countries. In unity there is strenght...Lets do it for our brothers are sisters in Haiti Matt Peltier-Dominica