

### **3 Radio Maendeleo expands its reach in eastern Congo**

#### **Partner Profile**

**By Déo Namujimbo**

**Of the 10 radios or so broadcasting in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Radio Maendeleo is one of the few that has the full confidence of its listeners. This is no mean feat and is due to the professionalism of its journalists and other staff, its coverage of a broad variety of subjects, the 80 radio clubs that tune in regularly and technical wizardry that keeps the station on air 24/7.**

Here's what a listener in Bukavu says, "Maendeleo is the only radio station that informs us objectively about what is going on in our province and our country. Their presenters and journalists really dig for information, sometimes even risking their lives."

Those living outside of the city of Bukavu also tune in and as a result, villagers are well-informed about health matters, their own agricultural work, but also human rights and politics. André Kasilunda, who lives 15 km from Bukavu, gives Meandeleo a big thumbs-up. "We love this station," he says. "Even people who cannot read and write can protect themselves against all kinds of diseases and malnutrition. They work more effectively and they have also learned how to manage a family budget. "

This is 'People's Radio'. Maendeleo broadcasts in all local languages plus French and Swahili, so everyone gets the message. And all this is done with a staff of 22: eight journalists, four technicians and ten support staff. Currently, there are also three interns and 20 volunteers.

#### *Shut down*

Director Kizito Mushizi reflects on more than a decade of Radio Maendeleo: "We started broadcasting in 1993, and thanks to the work of some local organisations and support from our German and Belgian partners we have actually managed to take off. We are proud of what we have achieved. But we do face major problems that threaten our independence."

Maendeleo has in fact been shut down twice by the rebel group RCD (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie), first for two years and more recently for six months. The station's director and head of programmes, Jean Omba Kamengele, have been frequently threatened and arrested. Despite these attacks, Maendeleo's journalists and staff have soldiered on, maintaining the radio clubs and continuing to gather material for its sound archives.

"Actually the broadcast were shut down, but not our offices", adds the director. "So journalists went on working and gathered stories and sound to fill our database with reports on current events. They were working as volunteers since, due to the situation their job contracts had been suspended, so they could not get salaries."

*5000 Watts*

Following the 2002 peace accords, there is a new political landscape emerging in the DRC and communication is a key player in the field. However, this requires a clear structure, as Sosthène Bulambo wa Tombo, president of the board of governors at Maendeleo, explains. “We can only continue this work when we are part of a well-organised wider body”.

This is why we are setting up and maintaining a media network in eastern Congo (Rateco) and we are part of a national association of local radio stations (Arco). We have participated in a national media congress which led to the birth of the National Congolese Press Union and a self-regulatory body for our media. So that’s our contribution to a diverse media landscape in our country.”

Emmanuel Basema Muluke, the station’s head technician, must be the happiest man on earth, judging by his smile. And he is. “We are planning to mount a new transmitter, 5000 Watts strong. And a new FM transmitter too. This means that our reach will be five time larger than today. Now, we only reach people who live within 150 kilometres of Bukavu.” If the security situation permits, Radio Maendeleo is going to use its new-found broadcasting power to become an important voice in the run up to the forthcoming elections. Let’s hope so.

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*Radio Maendeleo is a partner organisation of NiZA since 2002*