

GIVING A VOICE TO THE VOICELESS IN DADAAB



Dadaab, an arid hinterland of Eastern Kenya, is home to more than 403,000 displaced Somali refugees.

For twenty years the camp has hosted those fleeing civil war, famine and the extremist regime of Al-Shabaab.

The world's largest refugee camp is now home to 8000 of 'its own' grandchildren; camp-born children who themselves have had camp-born children.

In addition to this internal growth, the population is constantly augmented by new arrivals from across the border.

In 2011, Dadaab became Kenya's third biggest city, swelled daily by 1200 newcomers.

Until November 2012, the vulnerable citizens of this vast city-camp lived in an information void.

Mobile phones and radios are ubiquitous in Dadaab, and internet cafes are accessible too, but relevant, credible, camp-information was not circulated on these platforms.

Home to more than 403,000 Somali refugees, Dadaab is the world's largest refugee camp. In 2012, Internews introduced the first camp-wide information service, ending a 20 year information void for camp residents

Obtaining essential information on children's schooling, lost family members or even camp security threats, relied on asking neighbours or long-term camp residents.

The main news source for twenty years, in a city the size of Bristol in the UK, or Atlanta in the US, was word of mouth.

ENDING THE INFORMATION VOID

Internews has tackled this deficit on two levels: working with Dadaab agencies to create long-term institutions that ensure constructive information flows, and partnering with local journalists themselves to create meaningful programming for camp citizens.

Emblematic of the institutional innovation is work undertaken by Internews in April 2013.

The organisation convened the first meeting between local



Photos credits: Meredith Kohut.

journalists and aid agencies for a discussion led by UNHCR on basic human rights and camp security. Much of the content, though of profound import and relevance to local audiences, was news to local journalists, demonstrating the paucity of information exchange occurring in Dadaab, even at the highest levels.

The session was also the first time that local journalists themselves had been brought together formally. Journalists found the session so useful, that they requested Internews' help as they form a local press association. Working to create organisations like this is an essential part of the Internews intervention: seeding the organisational growth of a press association will ensure the sustainability of information flows, long after Internews has departed.

FOR REFUGEES, BY REFUGEES

A mobilised and well-informed press corps can in turn better tailor their work to the local needs of camp citizens. This ethos is reflected in the camp radio programming established by Internews in November 2012.

The Humanitarian Information Service undertaken in partnership with local Somali radio station Star FM, is an operational radio station and journalism training centre for Dadaab: its first credible and consistent local information source. The Somali language programme 'Gargaar' (meaning 'Assistance'), now runs on a daily basis, produced by local and refugee

journalists trained by Internews. Listeners enjoy a range of issue-led programmes: from water access in the camp, to new camp health care services.

The programme is hugely popular: As refugee journalist Mohamed Abdi Osman puts it, "People are putting their ears next to the radio and saying it is time for 'Gargaar.' Everywhere in Ifo (one of the Dadaab camps) people are listening."

Citizens can also participate in the station through call-in shows and live broadcasts from around the camp. For the first time in twenty years Dadaab inhabitants experience regular radio broadcasts made specifically for, about and by, themselves. Another journalist Shine Jamac asserts that "People feel that this programme is theirs. They feel that it is talking to them, and taking their voice to the right organisation to deliver their message. They feel this programme belongs to them."

Increased access to, and participation with, information is Internews' mission: to see both needs met in the highly challenging context of Dadaab after such a long period of deprivation, stands as one of the organisation's most satisfying achievements.

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Internews EUROPE

Internews Europe is an international development organisation that specialises in supporting independent media and free information flows in fragile states, emerging democracies and some of the world's poorest countries.

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