



**INTERNEWS**

**ASSESSMENT:  
LOCAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE  
AND INFORMATION NEEDS  
OF IVOIRIAN REFUGEES  
IN EASTERN LIBERIA**

**Internews Assessment Mission**

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All materials produced during this assessment mission can be found at:  
[www.internews.org/InfoSavesLives/liberia.shtm](http://www.internews.org/InfoSavesLives/liberia.shtm)

## **RATIONALE FOR INTERVENTION**

### **Why Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Matters**

In humanitarian disasters, people affected by the unfolding tragedy need more than physical necessities. They also have an urgent need for information. In the wake of crises, from earthquakes to armed conflicts, survival can depend on knowing the answers to questions such as: What is the extent of the damage? Should I stay with my family or go for help? Where can I get clean water? Is it safe to go back home? What are the symptoms of cholera? Where is the nearest health facility?

Independent, local media can improve humanitarian relief and enable people in the midst of crisis to access the information they need to make informed decisions and take an active role in their own survival and recovery.

Aid agencies are increasingly recognizing that the effectiveness and efficiency of any emergency response and development program can be greatly enhanced by sustained dialogue between those affected by disasters and those who seek to assist them. Without participation in the response, affected communities cannot ask questions, make informed decisions, or access information, and they cannot inform, guide or direct those services supposedly intended to relieve and support them. Ultimately, they are left further disempowered at a time when it is most critical that they be heard.

Collaboration between relief agencies and local media partners is critical to the success of any humanitarian response. Since the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, Internews has been building partnerships and working closely with organizations and government agencies at all stages during emergency responses in places like Chad, Gaza, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence shows that exchanging information with disaster-affected populations through local media and other non-mass media communication channels can:

1. Save lives.
2. Increase aid effectiveness and enhance transparency and accountability.
3. Empower communities and help establish a two-way communication flow.
4. Provide vital psychosocial support.
5. Help manage community expectations.

### **Liberia Assessment**

On April 6, 2011, an Internews team conducted a 10-day assessment in eastern Liberia, where the vast majority of Ivoirian refugees fleeing the violence at home were arriving. The team mapped local media in the eastern part of Liberia and the telecommunications landscape in the country, conducted an initial assessment on the information needs of refugee communities to propose potential ways to reach those populations, and connected with the humanitarian community and local government officials to map existing initiatives to communicate with refugee communities. They worked to identify gaps and find potential ways to enhance community outreach, working in partnership with local media and through various communications avenues, such as SMS messages.

Through interviews with refugees, host communities, local media outlets, mobile service providers, humanitarian aid agencies and government officials, Internews aimed at evaluating refugees' abilities to

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more about Internews' humanitarian media work: [www.internews.org/global/er/default.shtm](http://www.internews.org/global/er/default.shtm).

access accurate, timely information about their refugee status, where they can receive aid services and news from home, and how this situation could potentially be improved through strategic partnerships among humanitarian organizations, government officials, local media and other communication channels such as SMS and community mobilizers.

The scope of this report is limited due to the duration of the assessment, the stakeholders interviewed, and the areas visited. It is aimed at documenting some of the work observed and providing a series of recommendations. Internews wishes to thank all the individuals and organizations that in one way or another contributed to this assessment, for their support and dedication to meeting the needs of Ivoirian refugees.

This assessment was conducted by Cindy Collins and Bonnie Allen in Liberia from April 6-17, 2011.

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**Internews** is an international non-profit media development organization working to improve access to information for people around the world by fostering independent media and promoting open communications policies. Internews' programs are built on the conviction that providing people with access to vibrant, diverse news and information empowers them to make their voices heard and to participate effectively in their communities. To learn more about Internews: [www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org).

Internews is a founding member of Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network. The CDAC Network brings together humanitarian and development agencies and media development organizations to integrate two-way communication, which includes information provision, into humanitarian preparedness and response in the areas of both policy and practice. Current members of the CDAC Network Steering Committee are: Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), BBC World Service Trust, British Red Cross/Irish Red Cross, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), International Media Support (IMS), infoasaid, Internews, Merlin, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Save the Children, Thomson Reuters Foundation and UNICEF.

## A. BACKGROUND SITUATION

Côte d'Ivoire was plunged into turmoil following the refusal of former President Laurent Gbagbo to concede defeat after losing the 28 November 2010 second round of elections to former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara. The presidential election was meant to advance the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire, which was split by civil war in 2002 into a Government-controlled south and an opposition-held north, but turned into a new internal conflict with regional humanitarian ramifications.

On April 11, after months of fighting that reached the commercial capital, Abidjan, the former President, Laurent Gbagbo, was finally captured by President Alassane Ouattara's Republican Forces. The situation in Abidjan remains volatile and humanitarian needs across the country are extensive. The humanitarian response is ongoing in Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring countries, particularly in Liberia, which hosts the majority of Ivorian refugees.

It is estimated that 800,000 people have been internally displaced inside Côte d'Ivoire, and over 160,000 others have fled to neighboring countries.<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the conflict, sporadic movements of Ivorian refugees in Liberia are taking place due to the increased perception of improved conditions in the west of Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>3</sup>

Since November 2010, approximately 150,000 Ivoirians have crossed the border into Liberia due to political crisis and violence in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>4</sup> The refugee influx has occurred in three waves with the first hitting Nimba County, the second striking Grand Gedeh County, and the most recent wave arriving in Maryland County at a rate of 4,000 refugees within one 24-hour-period in early April.<sup>5</sup>

In Nimba County, the number of new arrivals has diminished considerably, enough for the humanitarian community to end its rapid-response emergency registration and, instead, gather full individual registration. A surge of new refugee arrivals continues in Grand Gedeh and Maryland Counties in response to reported rebel violence against them following the capture of former President Laurent Gbagbo. The high volume and pace of new arrivals, their overwhelming insistence on staying in host communities along the border rather than in formal camps, and the impending rainy season have created a number of operational challenges in providing food and non-food items to refugees in three different types of environments: (1) host communities, (2) transit centers, and (3) formal camps.

Of the 150,000 Ivorian refugees in Liberia, less than 3,000 have chosen to settle in Bahn Camp, the only formal camp fully operational at the time of this report. Ethnic ties and shared language appears as the primary reason why Ivorian refugees are choosing to stay in host communities rather than respond to the UN's repeated efforts to resettle in formal camps where food, water, shelter, health care, and protection services are guaranteed.

Other explanations include proximity to the border where information about family still in Côte d'Ivoire can be gathered from traders crossing back and forth, ability to return quickly and at low cost to Côte d'Ivoire once the crisis stabilizes, and ability to go into the bush to gather what they need and to farm the land.

Moreover, the UN's messages to resettle in camps are countered by the host communities' explicit desire that the refugees stay with them. Some speculate that this desire is based on the local agricultural yields that communities can produce with the assistance of the refugees. The majority, however, point to the past and the estimated 100,000 Liberians that took refuge in Côte d'Ivoire during

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<sup>2</sup> OCHA Situation Report No.21, Côte d'Ivoire • Humanitarian Crisis, 15 April 2011 (<http://reliefweb.int/node/396797>)

<sup>3</sup> OCHA Situation Report No.3, Côte d'Ivoire • Situation Report, 29 April 2011 (<http://reliefweb.int/node/399343>)

<sup>4</sup> Estimating the number of Ivorian refugees in Liberia at any point in time is difficult. As of 22 April 2011, the reported UNHCR estimate was 157,000. When Internews began its assessment on 6 April 2011, the estimate was 120,000. When the Internews assessment team left Liberia on 17 April 2011, the estimate was 135,000.

<sup>5</sup> See UNHCR Map at Appendix A. As of 19 April 2011, UNHCR estimates 94,000 refugees in Nimba County, 56,000 in Grand Gedeh County, and 7,200 in Maryland County. River Gee County is host to approximately 143 Ivorian refugees. For updated maps, refugee statistics and situation reports see UNHCR's Liberia Emergency Portal at <http://info.unhcr.org/lr.locsis>.

Liberia's 14-year civil war.<sup>6</sup> As one refugee commented, "The Liberians are helping us because they are grateful to us for what we did when they were refugees." Hosting refugees in host communities, especially along the border is considered both an act of gratitude and an insurance policy for the future should Liberians and Ivoirians need to seek refuge again.



Ivoirian refugee Bade Aphonso (right) is busy constructing a house for himself and 21 other refugees. James Mowon (left), chief of this host community of Janzon, gave Aphonso the land, which is located directly behind his own house. During Liberia's civil war, Chief Mowon was a refugee in Côte d'Ivoire, where Aphonso had given Mowon, a stranger to him, the land he needed to build his house there. (Bonnie Allen/Internews)

The majority of humanitarians interviewed by Internews believe that at least half the Ivoirian refugees will remain in Liberia for the next two years, particularly those in Grand Gedeh and Maryland Counties, who came across the border fast and in great numbers following the capture of former president Laurent Gbagbo, the abandonment of pro-Gbagbo security forces from their communities, and the purported violence against them by rebel forces. These refugees join other Ivoirian refugees who entered Liberia following the 2002/2003 political crises in Côte d'Ivoire and never left.

## B. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Internews Assessment Team entered Liberia on April 6, 2010. During its 10-day stay, former President Laurent Gbagbo was captured, the refugee population grew by 15,000, and UNHCR softened its refugee assistance policy to one that placed vulnerability over refugee location.

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<sup>6</sup> Liberia's civil war ended in 2003. It was preceded by Ivoirians fleeing into Liberia in 2002 and early 2003 as a result of Côte d'Ivoire's politically stirred violence.

The Internews assessment has found that there are important information and communications gaps, and that communication resources are vastly under-utilized, preventing refugees, host communities, and humanitarian organizations from receiving the information they need to make good and timely decisions. Specifically, the assessment finds that:

1. The **information flow between humanitarian actors and local hosts and refugees must be two-way, thereby enabling real participation of refugee and host communities in the relief efforts.** Currently it is mostly one-way, from humanitarian organizations to refugees and host communities.
2. The majority of refugees, especially women, have received **little to no news about the situation in Côte d'Ivoire.** Access to trusted sources is a problem and rumors spread fast. Proactive and sustained communication strategies with refugee and host communities need be in place to provide relevant, actionable, timely and accurate information that can tackle potential rumors, help manage community expectations, and increase the sense of self-agency among refugees.
3. The **best sources** for such information to flow are **radio or mobile phones**, but both are in short supply among refugees and host communities, and reception, in certain areas, is poor.
4. **Very few refugees have access to mobile phones.** Among those who do, lack of phone credits and the ability to charge their phones create additional barriers, although a number of refugees still have their Ivory Coast SIM card in their possession.<sup>7</sup>
5. **Refugees' access to radios and information is over-estimated.** Wind-up radio sets should be distributed to refugee and host communities. At a minimum, radios should be provided to clinics and schools.
6. Acknowledging some sporadic interventions, **local media remains vastly under-utilized and its potential to support the humanitarian response remains largely untapped.** Humanitarian organizations need to proactively make a more comprehensive and coordinated effort to reach and partner with the local media in target areas.
7. **Megaphones and bicycles are needed** immediately by all people responsible for delivering humanitarian information to refugee communities and within refugee communities, including host communities, transit centers, and permanent sites.
8. **Listening stations/posts or loud speaker systems** within refugee camps, transit centers, or food distribution points should be established to play recorded programs specifically developed for refugee population and host communities.
9. There is a need for **humanitarian messages to be gender and generationally specific, and linked to the "right messenger" and the "right means" of communication.**
10. A **lack of communication between humanitarian actors and private sector telecommunications** companies prevents them from understanding and identifying existing communication tools that could solve many of their operational challenges, including lack of phone coverage in some areas.

More broadly, the findings call for humanitarian organizations to systematically adopt strategies that support comprehensive two-way communications, including:

- Assessment of the information needs of refugees and host communities.
- Assessment of the local information ecosystem, to understand how information flows.
- Analysis of refugees' ability to access various forms of information.
- Analysis of which means of message delivery are most trusted.

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<sup>7</sup> Particularly in the case of women, more shared phones should be placed in densely populated refugee locations to reduce high local vendor costs, the lowest denomination of scratch cards should be distributed to those areas, and roaming rates need to be harmonized between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, at least until the crisis passes.

- Concerted, coordinated, and sustained effort to engage with the local media and telecom providers.
- Production and dissemination of targeted information useful and relevant to refugee and host communities about their status, the services available and how to access them.
- Provision of systematic feedback mechanisms for refugee and host communities, including complaint systems, to enable active participation of communities in the relief and development process. Feedback mechanisms will also help measure the impact and perception of humanitarian interventions.
- Last but not least, allocate adequate resources, financial and human, to roll out these strategies including follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of humanitarian communication efforts.

## C. KEY OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

### 1. Media Landscape

Community radio is considered a lifeline for people living in Liberia's rural counties, where almost half of the population is illiterate, cellular network service is patchy, and communities are often isolated and even inaccessible during rainy season.

With the introduction of tens of thousands of Ivoirian refugees scattered in villages along a border that runs 445 miles (716km) rather than centralized in camps, it is necessary to determine how these radio stations are currently serving their ever-growing communities, and meeting the unique informational needs of refugees who speak French or different dialects.

While Liberia's capital city, Monrovia, has a flourishing media landscape with lively radio stations, engaged listeners, and competitive newspapers, there are no national broadcasters or newspapers serving the needs of refugees or host families in border regions, or reaching the remote areas of rural counties such as Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland. Even the state broadcaster, Liberia Broadcasting System, does not have the transmission power to reach most of the border regions.<sup>8</sup>

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Radio reaches 95% of the country, although the FM frequency is vulnerable to hills and valleys, so there are gaps in coverage depending on topography. UNMIL airs programs in simple Liberian English and various vernacular languages. UNMIL Radio has not so far introduced French programming or vernacular programs with information targeted at Ivoirian refugees, partly because they don't want to alienate their Liberian audiences living in regions away from refugee areas, as an UNMIL official told in an interview.

International radio broadcasters such as the BBC, Radio France International, and Voice of America transmit on shortwave and generally reach the remote parts of Liberia. This was confirmed in Internews' assessment by the limited number of Liberians and refugees who actually own a radio.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: 7 April 2011 April 7th visits to media outlets and interviews with Zenu Miller, News Director, Truth FM radio; Edwin Fayia, Senior Reporter, *Daily Observer* newspaper; Rodney Sieh, Editor, *FrontPage Africa* newspaper; Ivy Fairley, Director of News, Liberia Broadcasting System headquarters in Monrovia.

In Nimba County, there are 12 community radio stations, but only three key stations possess the transmitting power to reach refugees who have settled in remote villages near the border.<sup>9</sup>

In Grand Gedeh, there are two community radio stations but only one, Smile FM in Zwedru, is currently on air. It's operating with a small transmitter because of electricity problems. The other, Peace FM near the Toe Town Transit Center for refugees, has been off the air for most of the past eight months.

Maryland County is outside the scope of our assessment, but it is home to two community radio stations, Radio Harper and JAM FM, in the town Pleebo, both of which can reach the latest influx of refugees.

### **a. Barriers and shortcomings that prevent community radio stations from effectively providing information to refugees:**

Ivoirians who have fled into Liberia for their safety have little idea what is happening back at home, causing anxiety and fear as they have very limited access to news or information from their home country. Local media can potentially improve humanitarian relief and enable people in the midst of crisis to access the information they need to make informed decisions and take an active role in their own survival and recovery. However, the local media has been unable to fully fulfill this role so far, among other reasons, because:

- Most of the programming on Liberia's community radio stations is in English, which Ivoirian refugees cannot understand.
- The dialect programs, such as Gio and Krahn, are generally a platform for community greetings and announcements, and don't feature in-depth information or interviews.
- The news is largely for a Liberian audience, and the community radio stations have not yet embraced a proactive role in sharing information with refugees, addressing issues with host communities, or considering peace-building and security issues in border villages.
- The community radio stations do not have the financial means to transport reporters to villages hosting refugees, so they don't carry many field reports from refugees.
- Community radio stations are mostly "reactive" in their programming, meaning they will air information given to them, but will not generally seek out or originate programming on the refugee issue.
- Many refugees who fled Côte d'Ivoire quickly do not have cellphones, or have settled in areas without cellular service, so they don't phone into radio stations.
- Many refugees who fled Côte d'Ivoire quickly do not have radios of their own and have settled in villages that only have a couple radios.
- The programming and messages for refugees have been sporadic, so it's difficult to build up a consistent listenership.

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<sup>9</sup> Nimba County radio stations: Radio Kergheamahn (Ganta), Y-Echo (Ganta), Radio Ylamba (Saclepea), Radio Saclepea (Saclepea), Voice of Flumpa (Flumpa), Radio Karn (Karnplay), Radio Nimba (Sanniquellie), Radio Sehwei (Sanniquelli), Voice of Hope (Yekepa), Radio Shalom (LAMCO - Yekepa), Voice of Peace (Tappita), Radio Bahn (Bahn).

**Map of Liberia with key radio stations marked with X**



**Map: Nimba County:** Radio Nimba is in Saniquellie (Sanniquellie), Radio Karnplay is in Kahnple (Karnplay), and Voice of Tappita is in Tapeta (Tappita). Radio Saclepea is in Saglepie (Saclepea). Close to Radio Saclepea is Radio Bahn, in Bahn. **Grand Gedeh County:** Smile FM is in Tchien (Zwedru) and Peace FM is in Towabli (Toe Town). **Maryland County:** Radio Harper is in Harper (Harper) and Jam FM is in Plibo (Pleebo).

**b. Community Radio Stations**

The radio stations that are most relevant to the refugee populations and their current programming must be framed according to geography and dialect:

1. There are four “axes” for describing where refugees have settled in Nimba County - Loguatu Axis, Gborplay Axis, Butuu Axis, and Tappita Axis. Each ‘axis’ is a road or district that includes many of the host villages. For example, Buutuo Axis includes roughly 50,000 refugees dispersed among 31 villages. In Grand Gedeh, there are also four axes: Toe Town Axis, Tempo Axis, Janzon Town Axis, and Zwedru Axis. To understand which areas each of the radio stations cover, references will be made to the ‘axis.’

2. The radio stations generally air several programs in local dialects, including Mano, Gio (also called Dahn), Mandingo, Krahn, and Gbey. Four of these are spoken both in border counties of Liberia and the Côte d'Ivoire, but bear different names.

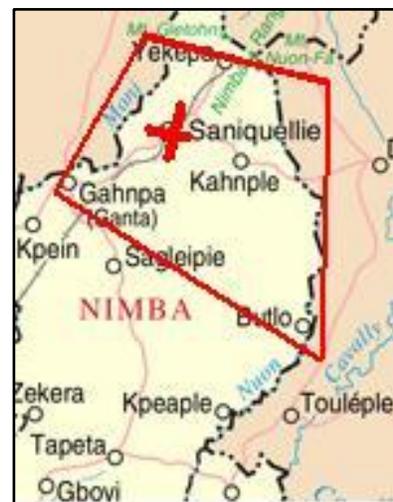
- a) Gio or Dahn in Liberia = Yakobah in Côte d'Ivoire
- b) Mandingo in Liberia = Julah in Côte d'Ivoire
- c) Krahn in Liberia = Guerey in Côte d'Ivoire

3. The maps provided show the location of the radio station (X) and the estimated broadcast areas of each community radio station (red boxes), as determined by interviews with radio station managers, radio listeners in their surrounding areas, and those 'outside' their broadcast regions. The transmission is, however, not always consistent and is vulnerable to weather, topography, the strength of current at the radio station, and the location/radio style/and battery power of the listener.

### **Radio Nimba**

Located in Sanniquellie, Nimba County  
Transmitter: 500 Watt  
Antenna located high on Cellcom Tower.

Radio Nimba should be considered a key radio station in communicating with refugees who have settled along the border. Its transmission area envelops the Loguatu axis, Gborplay axis, and half of Buutuo. ("X" marks Radio Nimba. It transmits east over the border into Côte d'Ivoire.)



It currently does not have specific programming to discuss refugee issues, but it has introduced five minutes of news in French twice a day, airing after the English news at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. In that, the announcer generally reads a script about the Côte d'Ivoire situation with information pulled from the BBC. On Friday, it airs 30 minutes of a French program that existed prior to the conflict. The producer and presenter, Dorquis Dogba, says the program gives Liberian news and issues, and simply gives "small news" about the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Dogba says he receives mobile phone calls from Ivoirian refugees sending messages to family members across the border into neighboring Ivoirian towns and refugee communities across Nimba County.

The radio staff indicate that some of their listeners cannot call into the programs because they do not have cellular networks, such as those in Gborplay, Blemieplay, or Butuuu.

Besides English, the radio broadcasts programs in Mano, Gio, Mandingo, Krahn, Gbey, and French, but these are pre-existing programs that are targeted to Liberian audiences and generally share "greetings" between community members.

Besides introducing two short French news broadcasts, Radio Nimba has initiated very little informative programming; however, it is willing to air programs or announcements that are delivered to them. For example, UNHCR and LRRRC visited the radio station, and Radio Nimba allowed them to go on air and be interviewed about why refugees should relocate to camps or designated host villages. As well, UNHCR paid \$100 USD to air an announcement in four languages - Mano, Gio, French, English - several times a day for seven days. The Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) did not

have to pay to go on the air for its talk program. As for most community radio stations, Nimba charges a higher air-time rate to INGOs or international organizations. As a Liberian government agency, LRRRC pays little to nothing to share information on air.

### **Radio Karnplay Voice of Peace**

Located in Karnplay, Nimba County.

Transmitter: It has a 500 Watt transmitter and transmits to most of the border villages and into Côte d'Ivoire. It suffered a problem in early April and was down the week of the assessment, so used its back up transmitter of 50 Watts. A technician is working on the problem and the station manager believes it will be fixed quickly. Its antenna is located high on a Cellcom tower.

Radio Karnplay is located in the village of Karnplay, which is a designated 'relocation village' to which UNHCR would like refugees to relocate. It's also only a few miles from Zorgowee Transit Centre, which currently houses 500 residents.



Even with a 50 Watt transmitter, Radio Karnplay reaches transit camps and host communities on the border, such as Loguatu Old Town. With a 500 Watt transmitter, it reaches Butuo.

Radio Karnplay received its equipment from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and gets electricity from the Cellcom generator. It won't charge Cellcom or IRC for airtime.

Radio Karnplay airs a 30-minute French program on Thursdays at 6 p.m., hosted by a local French teacher. It airs mostly greetings, but receives phone calls from some refugees. In addition to this, a refugee from Côte d'Ivoire airs a program in Gio (also known as Dahn, and understood as Yakobah by Ivoirians) and French from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. and reads announcements, plays some French music, and shares news. Until Radio Karnplay's transmitter broke down, the radio station extended over the border so this program existed prior to the conflict and the Ivoirian correspondent would travel to Karnplay each week to host the program.

The radio manager Emmanuel Karleaye says their programs existed before the refugee crisis and they don't commit any substantial time to refugee matters. But he says the radio programs receive mobile phone calls from towns along the Ivoirian side of the border and refugee settlement communities in Liberia.

The situation here is a little different from Radio Nimba. Karleaye says the producer of their French program comes from the Côte d'Ivoire and he started producing and presenting the program before the refugee crisis. Karleaye reveals that the French program was actually launched at the request of Ivoirian border communities that are far from radio stations in the Côte d'Ivoire.

Like Radio Nimba, Radio Karnplay was also used by UNHCR and LCCR to air a few announcements in multiple languages. It generally charges NGOs \$10 USD a day to read announcements three times a day, or \$50 USD for a 30-minute magazine program.

Announcer Amelia Kpessèh says that if Ivoirian refugees bring announcements to the radio station, the radio station airs them at no charge as a public service to refugees.



*Sam Matalda reads an announcement from Liberia's refugee commission on Radio Karn. (Bonnie Allen/Internews)*

Radio announcer Sam Matalda, who reads announcements in Gio, says there are some concerns over giving refugees “too much airtime.” “The radio station is here to help everyone, but some [Liberian] people have complained that the Ivoirians didn’t allow Liberians on radio in Côte d’Ivoire [during the Liberian crisis] so some people say we shouldn’t give them space.”

Radio Manager Emmanuel Karleaye confirms this is an issue. “We are grappling with our own community accepting more time on our radio for Ivoirian listenership as opposed to our own Liberian issues.”

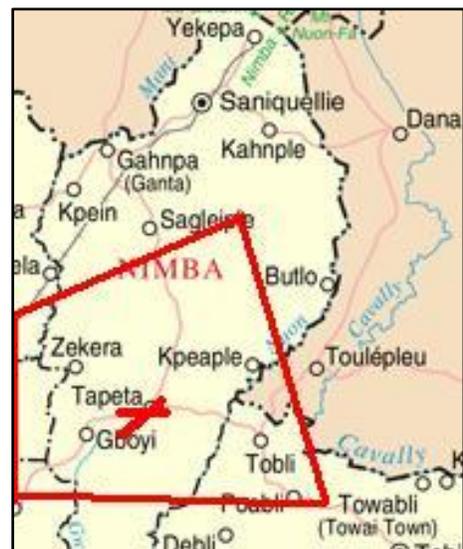
The radio staff say they could do a better job if they had correspondents in villages that have cellular service or the means to travel to the villages. They expressed a willingness to air more content, but admitted they have no plans to generate more content on their own.

### **Voice of Tappita**

Located in Tappita, Nimba County  
Transmitter: 500 watts

Voice of Tappita is strategic for cross county refugee information. It covers half of the Buutuo axis and most of the Tappita District, and crosses over to villages between Tappita and Toe Town, but doesn’t reach to Toe Town.

LRRRC has indicated that Voice of Tappita is a good option for the most recent influx of refugees in the southeast corner of Nimba County.



Voice of Tappita has a one-hour program in English called “Community Concern” that airs Monday at 8:15 p.m. It does not have any French programs.

It airs a 30 minute Gio program three times a week (M, W, F); a 30 minute Mano program (W, F, S); a 30 minute Krahn program (M, T, S) - but generally records just one program a week and re-airs it twice more. During these programs, the vernacular announcer will read news, announcements, and receive phone calls.

The news staff uses Internet, which is available at the radio station, to get information on the Côte d’Ivoire situation. They pull news from Voice of America, Radio France International, and BBC. Since December 2010, the station has sent reporters to host communities four times to conduct interviews.

### **Smile FM**

Located in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh.

Transmitter: Smile FM has two transmitters.

Smile FM currently using its 50 Watt transmitter because it’s not receiving enough current to run its 350 Watt transmitter. The small circle on the map shows the current broadcasting reach; the box illustrates the potential reach. Smile FM receives 24-hours per day electricity from Cellcom Telecommunications. Recently, Cellcom reduced the strength of current to the radio station, which is located at the base of the Cellcom tower. Now, if Smile FM tries to operate its 350 Watt transmitter, its computers shut off. With the 350 Watt transmitter, Smile FM can reach most of Grand Gedeh and across the border into Côte d’Ivoire. The Station Manager was told to discuss the issue with Cellcom staff in Monrovia, but he hasn’t traveled to the capital city yet. If the current strength was restored, or Smile FM was given access to another generator, then its broadcasting reach would be significantly increased.



Smile Manager, Alexandar Karhn says his radio station airs French news every morning, after the local news. It also airs a Krahn program every night Monday to Friday.

In the second week of April, some ‘representatives from a refugee community’ approached the radio station about hosting a program on Smile FM. Karhn has agreed to give them airtime for free, but insists that they will need to find support for the program eventually.

Karhn says Smile FM is a popular program among Liberians in Grand Gedeh because it gives local news, but then relays BBC network news, then UNMIL news, and then BBC Focus on Africa in the afternoon. He admits most of the programs are in English, but he believes refugees can get information from the brief French news and Krahn program. One of his reporters accesses the Internet from UNMIL to pull information off the web and write scripts for news.

### **Other radio stations to consider:**

#### **Radio Bahn**

Bahn Town, Nimba County

Transmitter: 35 Watts. (The transmitter is about 5 years old and breaks down frequently, forcing Radio Bahn off-air. It was down the week of Internews' assessment.)

Radio Bahn is ideally located within the community hosting the NRC-operated refugee camp settlement in Nimba (currently home to about 3,000 refugees but hoping to attract 10 - 15,000) The refugees interviewed in the camp spoke very little about listening to the radio. Those that had radios cited Radio France International, BBC Afrique and the two other local radio stations, Radio Nimba and Radio Karn Voice Peace. Their reason is that they get better information from the other radio stations and Radio Bahn's frequency is weak.

Station Manager Anthony Winpea says his reporters frequently visit the camp, and he's willing to air any programs that are delivered to his station that might provide information to refugees.

### **Radio Saclepea**

Located in Saclepea, Nimba County.

Transmitter: 50 Watts

Radio Saclepea reaches the refugees in Bahn refugee camp, but the frequency is not strong.

### **Peace FM**

Located in Toe Town, Grand Gedeh

Transmitter: 300 Watts

The transmitter is damaged and the radio station has been mostly "off-air" for eight months. It was back on briefly in December/January. During that time, it aired some news in French and allowed a refugee announcer to go on air. Station Manager Johnson Sharty explains that when it has 300 Watts, its transmission extends into Côte d'Ivoire so it has a lot of listeners that it caters to in border communities. However, Peace FM has been off air completely for two months.

Peace FM used to receive support from International Alert, but the project ended. A station manager said they have been identified by IREX for support.

Toe Town and all surrounding villages including up to the border, are in an informational vacuum according to Johnson Sharty, because Voice of Peace (Tappita), Smile FM (Zwedru), and UNMIL don't reach. If Smile FM was operating with its 350 Watt transmitter, it would possibly cover Toe Town.

### **c. UNHCR and LRRRC's Current Use of Community Radio Stations:**

In Nimba County, UNHCR and LRRRC have executed three "mass information" campaigns with a fourth starting the third week of April. In January, it did not use community radio stations. It simply met face-to-face with refugees to explain food distribution and relocation, distributed documents in French, Gio, and English, and asked refugees to share the news. It also relied on the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) 135 protection monitors. In February, it did a similar campaign in villages and border points, although those interviewed admit it was not done in a systematic manner. In the third campaign, it used community radio stations, and it also used refugees to share the messages. For example, UNHCR/LRRRC took refugees from the Bahn camp to the radio station to talk on-air about the conditions in the camp and encourage refugees in the remote villages to relocate to the camp.

LRRRC's field officer in Nimba County, Augustus Taylor, believes community radio is an effective way to reach tens of thousands of refugees dispersed among 93 host communities in Nimba. He has had the most contact with Radio Nimba and Radio Karnplay, but approached Voice of Tappita in response to the latest influx to Nimba. He has found them all very cooperative whenever he has approached them, although he says he has had sporadic contact with them, and only during an 'official' information campaign. They do not do regular updates. The radio stations do not charge LRRRC and continue to repeat the recorded programs. Taylor talks in simple English, and brings refugees with him to talk on the radio in their vernacular.

Taylor recommends: (1) French programs on radio, including educative programs; (2) dramas and "cartoons" on radio; and (3) vernacular programs that include Ivoirians who speak the language, as he believes refugees will respond better to information from their exact dialect. Gio and Yakuba, spoken by Liberians, is similar, but not exactly the same.

#### **d. Recommendations:**

##### **Production of Humanitarian Content for Community Radio Stations**

A common practice used by a handful of INGOs and media development organizations to produce quality information programming for community radio stations is to contract a production house to generate programs for community radio stations. One such model is suggested by John Kollie, Executive Director of Liberia Media Initiatives (LMI), a Liberian-run, non-governmental media house that has been actively operating since 2007.

The key radio stations of Radio Nimba, Radio Karn, Voice of Tappita, and Smile FM (in Nimba and Grand Gedeh) have expressed willingness to air programs provided to them with information targeted to refugees.

##### **Create a Humanitarian Contact List for local media and a Media Contact List for humanitarian agencies:**

Humanitarian agencies need to make sure that their communications/media officers are in regular contact with local media organizations. For this, a comprehensive media contact list with the contact details of the media organizations needs to be put in place and widely shared. Simultaneously, a contact list with all the humanitarian contacts (preferably media/communications officers) needs to be shared with the local media organizations so they can contact agencies whenever they need.

Since radio stations and reporters have limited budgets, they do not spend money on scratch cards to phone these agencies themselves. If agencies such as UNHCR, LRRRC, WFP, NRC, Save the Children and others, were given a specific contact person from each radio station and encouraged to make the phone call themselves, then the radio reporters may either try to produce a news story, announcement, or even play a recorded interview on air. This is necessary because the radio stations are generally "reactive" in that they don't seek out information, or pay for phone calls, although they are in fact always eager to receive information. Overall, humanitarian agencies need to be more proactive to engage with local radio stations and local reporters, provide with useful information about their programming and services, pitch their story and reportage ideas, invite them to the field with them and above all, regard them as a partner.

### **Educate radio station staff about importance of refugee information:**

Humanitarian officials need to regularly meet with radio stations to educate their reporters and producers about the importance of carrying information for refugee and host communities. Currently, there's some weariness about "giving too much airtime" to refugees, without a proper understanding of the significance of hosting a refugee population, the possible destabilizing affect it could have on Liberia, the tensions that can arise between host communities and refugees, and cross border security concerns.

### **Support community radio sending reporters to refugee locations:**

The community radio stations rarely send reporters into the field to gather interviews or news from refugees themselves. One recommendation is to identify a particular reporter from each station who speaks the dialect and is responsible for traveling to refugee communities and recording their voices. This requires: making sure the reporter has his own functioning recorder and transportation (either funding motorcycle transport or partnering the reporter with an agency that travels into the field), as well as a minimum stipend<sup>10</sup> because community radio station reporters are often unpaid or underpaid and choose to report stories in which they may receive financial support to cover.

### **Building listenership:**

Building listenership and increasing information sharing through the radio must be done in a three-prong approach:

- Refugees need greater access to and control over radios.
- Radio stations need to provide more consistent programming and information at designated time.
- Refugees must be informed about the radio stations' programs and directed to which station and what times they should tune in.

### **Recommendations for specific radio stations:**

**Smile FM Zwedru.** The radio station has the potential to reach a much larger audience if it can get more current to the radio station and resume use of its 350 Watt transmitter. Recommend facilitating that with Cellcom, or identifying an alternate source of energy. In addition, work with the radio station to provide more targeted information in French or Krahn (Guerey). Also, given the fact refugees have already approached the radio station about hosting their own program, perhaps assist that program or provide some support to the radio station to guarantee regular programming time.

**Radio Nimba, Radio Karn Voice of Peace, Radio Tappita.** These are the most important radio stations for reaching refugee areas in Nimba County, border villages, and even across the border into Côte d'Ivoire. Work with the radio stations to broaden refugee related radio programs in French, Gio (Yakobah) Krahn (Guerey) and Jula (Mandingo). This could include:

- 1) Extending their vernacular programs from 30 minutes to 1 hour.
- 2) Training the vernacular announcers about the importance of including refugee news (most dialect announcers do not receive any formal training on journalism or peace building).

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that this stipend is aimed at supporting the reporter to not incur in any financial loss when covering a story and alto to pay for his/her meal(s) and tea/coffee, as relevant.

- 3) Since most of the radio stations do not have access to the Internet to acquire in-depth news from the Côte d'Ivoire, some consideration should be given to helping the radio stations get scripts and stories on the Côte d'Ivoire situation that could then be translated into local dialects.

**Peace FM Toe Town.** Though off the air for now, any assistance to this radio to return to the air waves (i.e. a used or new transmitter) will go a great way in providing refugee information to a heavily populated community.

## **2. Telecommunications Landscape**

### **a. Interaction between ICT Service Providers and Humanitarian Actors**

Internews conducted interviews with the CEO of each of the two telecommunications service providers that have the most cell towers or base stations in the refugee areas: Lonestar Cell, which is 60% owned by MTN Group, and Cellcom.

Based on the interviews, Internews noted that:

- (1) A UNHCR staff called both companies and requested that they install new cell towers near the refugee areas so that humanitarian actors would not lose communication with each other. Given that a single cell tower costs approximately \$200,000 and must be financially justified by a sizeable, stable population, both service providers stated that they would not be placing new cell towers in the areas of these temporary populations. The UNHCR caller did not ask about other available options for extending or shifting the range of an existing tower's antennae to include the refugee population. It is assumed that the caller was not aware of this possibility.
- (2) Neither of the service providers had been approached by any humanitarian actor to supply "short codes" for any mobile phone-based information delivery strategy. By using a short code, for example, refugees who live a great distance from one of the 12 food distribution points could call a designated number of 4 or 5 digits and be able to listen to a recording (in the relevant language or dialect) that would inform the refugee as to whether the scheduled distribution was going to take place and on what day. This is particularly important during the rainy season.
- (3) Lonestar Cell (MTN) had not been approached by any humanitarian actor with the request to negotiate with MTN Côte d'Ivoire for in-country roaming rates that reduce the roaming costs for refugees to the amount of an in-country call, nor to enable refugees who are carrying their Côte d'Ivoire MTN SIM cards with them to purchase and use Lonestar Cell MTN scratch cards to add credit to their Côte d'Ivoire MTN number.
- (4) Neither of the service providers had any idea how to obtain refugee statistics and GPS coordinates on refugee populations to determine for themselves if they could adjust their cell tower antenna to capture certain refugee populations in their network coverage.

### **b. Recommendations and Actions Taken:**

In addition to the information vacuum and cultural disconnect between humanitarian actors and private sector companies operating in Liberia, the Internews Assessment Team also noted that there is a lack of shared phones in refugee areas that could be used by those who still have possession of their Côte d'Ivoire SIM cards but not phones. Both Lonestar Cell and Cellcom maintain supplies of shared phones that could easily be distributed.

The shortage of mobile phone options in the refugee areas also is contributing to exceptionally high rates being charged by local phone vendors. For example, in Duaplay, the sole phone vendor in the host community charges 25 LD or 50 cents U.S. for a one-minute, in-country phone call and far more for Liberia-to-Côte d'Ivoire connections. The true cost for an in-country call is 14 cents U.S.

Given the availability of existing ICT solutions for solving certain humanitarian information and refugee communication challenges coupled with the lack of communication between humanitarian actors and the telecommunication providers, Internews invited UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP to a meeting with the new CEO of Lonestar Cell. Lead officers for UNHCR and UNICEF, in particular, demonstrated exceptional desire to tap into any existing or innovative GSM tools that could help diminish some of the challenges of humanitarian-to-humanitarian communication, humanitarian-to-refugee communication and registration, and communication between Ivorian refugee and their families in the Côte d'Ivoire. The new CEO of Lonestar Cell was equally eager to meet with the humanitarian actors, along with his technical team, so that they could understand the types of communication problems the humanitarians were experiencing.

The 2-hour meeting was attended by ten Lonestar Cell staff (including the CEO), five UN staff (including UNHCR Officer-in-Charge and UNICEF Country Representative), and Internews and involved the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and challenges to be solved, and the creation of an 8-point Action Plan between the UN and Lonestar, as well as the setting of target dates and the assignment of two-person teams composed of one UN and one Lonestar staff member.

**The Action Points** agreed upon include the following:

1. **Network coverage.** Each side selected a technical person to examine GPS coordinates of refugee locations that are not served by a cell network to see what can be done. In addition to new cell tower sites, Internews stressed that it's important to look at those locations that are not getting network coverage but are food distribution points that are close to an area that **does** receive coverage to determine if simple "tweaking" of antenna position can provide service to the distribution point.
2. **Shared phones.** Get shared phones (the ones that cellphone vendors use to place calls for refugees/host community members) into most populated refugee areas with network coverage to bring down cost of calls for refugees. The UN will identify refugee areas for Lonestar cell towers. It was also stressed how important it is to ensure that the lowest denomination of mobile phone scratch cards are delivered to refugee sites. Refugee women, in particular, cannot afford large denomination scratch cards. In terms of Lonestar's scratch card distribution system, it is possible that the best scratch card distribution points are humanitarian food distribution points. Food and communication distribution might go together.
3. **Côte d'Ivoire/Liberia Roaming Rate Harmonization.** Lonestar agreed to confirm that the same rate for in-country calling will apply to roaming rates.
4. **Roaming Capability.** Lonestar will verify with MTN Côte d'Ivoire that roaming capability for all customers is automatically activated (that is, there is no need for a refugee to enroll in roaming program; he or she automatically enrolled when crossing the border).

5. **Solar-powered recharge stations for cell phone.** Lonestar will see what is available. In addition, Lonestar has in stock approximately 1,000 solar powered phones ready for sale to UN agencies and its partners.

6. **Protection services wrapped up in an International Short Code.** Lonestar reminded the UN that in terms of UN's protection services, the international short code of 112 for emergencies should work in Liberia. Lonestar will verify if it does. UN will need to decide where to route those calls (normally, they are handled by the government. In this situation, UN will need to take on that role).

7. **Enrolling refugees (and host community members) in Bulk SMS distribution.** It was recommended that refugee areas and host communities will get the opportunity to call a short code, which will automatically enroll them to receive SMS text messages in French. The UN will then be able to track the group as well.

Internews anticipates that UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP will hold a similar meeting with Cellcom, which also customized a 2-way GSM gateway over two years ago that provides customers with the ability to collect data in the field using a simple, common mobile phone. The data collected is then routed through the GSM gateway, is formatted into Excel using fields pre-determined by the customer, and then appears on the computer of any and all of the customer users identified as a person with a "need to know."

### **3. Assessment of Information Needs of Refugee Population**

#### **a. Gender and Generational Sensitivity in Humanitarian Information Content and Delivery to Refugees and Host Community Members**

In discussions and interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including humanitarian actors, refugees, host community members, and community radio station operators, the refugee and host community populations receive information from the humanitarian actors through three primary communication pathways:

- 1) Information about humanitarian activities is conveyed from humanitarian actor to LRRRC coordinator, field coordinators or monitors, to primary refugee leader (transit centers or permanent camp) or host community leader, who then distributes information through a transit center or camp structure (or host community structure) composed of community leader, youth leader, and woman leader, who then distribute information to their respective constituencies, or through town criers who carry the message to clusters of refugee areas near a host community.
- 2) Information about humanitarian activities is conveyed from humanitarian actors who develop information content (or work with local media content developers and language translators) and deliver content to local community radio stations within range of targeted refugee areas.
- 3) Information about humanitarian activities is conveyed face-to-face by humanitarians or their Liberian and/or Ivoirian agents to refugee populations.

## **b. Findings and Recommendations regarding Humanitarian Information:**

- 1. The communication structure of community leader, youth leader and woman leader frequently fosters an information bias toward males as information receivers and information providers.** In West African communities, community leader or community leader groups often refer to male elders; youth leader or youth groups often refer to (or are dominated by) young males; and woman leader or women's groups often refer to (or are dominated by) older females. If young women are grouped in either the youth group category or women's group category their voices are often drowned out by young men and older women. In sum, two information groups target males and one information group targets females, as if younger and older women in refugee situations share the same incentives and disincentives for their choices and behavior. Although the Internews Assessment Team was limited to male and female focus groups due to time constraints, special attention was given to variation in generational answers to the assessment questions.
- 2. The majority of male and female refugees the Internews Assessment Team met, regardless of type of location where they are currently staying, do not have radios or access to radios.** Males are far more likely than females to have access to a radio. In Janzon Host Community, Grand Gedeh, for example, none of the women had access to a radio nor knew of anyone else who had access to a radio, while all the men questioned by Internews had access to a radio. Community radio stations within range of refugee locations have been approached by humanitarian and government actors with pre-produced content for refugees in French to be broadcast. As these actors continue to place content on the radio for refugee populations in light of the fact that few, if any, refugees have access to a radio. At the time of writing no humanitarian actor has provided radios to any refugee or host community assessed during the Internews assessment period or before or has designed and/or implemented an impact evaluation strategy or comprehensive communications strategy.
- 3. Host Community Monitors and Field Coordinators have specific information and communication needs.**

According to an interview with the NRC trained Community Monitor (a Liberian) situated in Loguatu Old Town, Nimba County, which is located on the border beyond a UN peacekeeping outpost, he has been in the community for several months. He received training two weeks' prior to our visit, including a UNHCR/NRC information sheet, dated 25 March 2011, that described in English and French the rights of refugees and the reasons for relocating to a formal camp.

The Host Community Monitor stated that he is to send information to the NRC that identifies how many refugees want to be relocated to a formal camp, as well as how many new refugees have arrived. He was given six phone numbers to call, starting with his team leader. If the team leader is not available, he is to continue down the phone list until he is able to make contact with someone to pass on the refugee information. The Host Community Monitor stated that he does not receive, nor was he told that he would receive, any information from the NRC via the phone.

**Recommendation for Communication with NRC:** It is recommended that a two-bulk SMS system is created for the NRC-trained community monitors and their team leaders, supervisors, and others on their call list for the following reasons: Those in the field should be "touched" via a Bulk SMS from NRC at least once every other week (1) to maintain their motivation/vigilance in their duties, (2) to inform them of delays in receiving non-food and food items, if they are expecting them, (3) to inform

them of changes to the printed information they received during their training that may no longer be accurate, and (4) to determine if the Community Monitor still has a phone on his person. For example, in point (3), the printed information states that refugees will be in a transit center for 3-to-4 weeks before relocation to a permanent camp. Due to recent increases in total refugee numbers, certain transit centers are being converted to permanent camps and others are remaining as transit centers but with an estimated 6-to-8 week stay before relocation to a permanent camp.

Misinformation (caused by changes that have not been communicated to refugees) can raise expectations and lead to agitation in certain situations. Regarding Point (4), a Community Monitor in one of the towns the Assessment Team visited lost his phone while on a motorbike ride over a week ago and has not been able to get a new one yet. He relies on the phone of others to communicate his information to NRC. If NRC needed to contact him directly for some reason, such as change in information he should be telling the refugees about relocation, they would not be able to do so. Using a 2-way bulk SMS system, NRC can send an SMS to all monitors and ask that they SMS back (at no cost) to confirm their receipt of the message.

#### **Monitors' communication to and from refugees in host community**

The Community Monitor resides in the designated host community but is required to travel about to other nearby communities along the border to communicate to refugees the need to relocate to a transit camp, particularly before the rainy season sets in. Rather than travel himself, sometimes he will send a message to each location and ask that a representative or town crier come to his location to gather information and then deliver it to those refugees and "citizens" living in their area. Information from the refugees to the Community Monitor also are gathered and delivered by one of these two means. The Community Monitor states that he needs a megaphone and bicycle to be able to accomplish the communication tasks assigned to him as the refugee areas are far apart and, within the refugee host communities, the refugees are scattered about doing farm and family chores.

The Loguatu Old Town Community Monitor also tries to deliver information to communities by waiting until market day, when there are people from each of the outlying communities who come to sell and can return with information.

**Recommendations:** Megaphones and bicycles are needed *immediately* by all people responsible for delivering humanitarian information *to* refugee communities and *within* refugee communities, including host communities, transit centers, and permanent sites. If humanitarian actors have already ordered megaphones and/or bicycles, but they are not yet available, they should communicate this information directly to those in the communities responsible for communicating to refugee and host populations. In all areas visited by the Internews Assessment Team, with the exception of the Bahn Camp, these local "communicators," as well as LRRRC field monitors, requested assistance in obtaining megaphones, in particular.

#### **d. Refugees' Information about Family in Côte d'Ivoire**

**ICRC Free Phone Calling and Message Services.** The International Confederation for the Red Cross (ICRC) delivers messages from the refugees to their loved ones back home and helps those living in host families and camps make free phone calls to the Côte d'Ivoire. The ICRC has facilitated hundreds of calls by satellite or mobile phone with the assistance of Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRC) volunteers. According to the ICRC, 1,854 successful direct calls have been made to reconnect refugees with their family members. All refugees are allowed to use the free phone service; however, calls can

only be made to family members and are monitored to ensure that only family-related messages are passed. When a phone call is not possible, and the refugee wants to send a Red Cross Message (RCM), ICRC forwards the RCM to Côte d'Ivoire, where an Ivoirian Red Cross volunteer delivers it. The intense fighting in Abidjan in April has prevented Red Cross teams in Côte d'Ivoire from getting out to deliver messages. Prior to the establishment of the direct phone call service, refugees were able to send a one-way "I am safe and well" message to their family members, which was either delivered by an ICRC or LNRCs staff by phone or hand-delivered, if a volunteer was working in the area of destination.

Operational challenges for the direct phone call services include access to refugees located in remote areas, population mobility, the high cost of satellite phone service, and population density. In some districts, there are over 15,000 refugees, most with the desire to connect with family. According to the ICRC, it holds awareness sessions within communities about the phone service, at which time it also provides refugees with the dates in which the service will be coming to that particular site. Sometimes, the ICRC plans the phone calling visit to coincide with other humanitarian activities, such as food distribution, so that refugees are present.

Due to the high cost of satellite phone service, the ICRC operates only in those refugee locations that do not have mobile phone service. The Internews team observed the phone service process in Janzon, Grand Gedeh County. As the WFP distributed food and the UNHCR registered refugees at one corner of the community, LNRCs volunteers helped refugees connect to family via a satellite phone at the other end of the community. According to one volunteer, approximately 20 refugees per hour are able to connect via the satellite phone.



*ICRC helps connecting Ivoirian refugees in Liberia with their loved ones at home through free direct calls via satellite phone. (Bonnie Allen/Internews)*

## **e. Recommendations regarding Refugee Communication with their Families**

As mentioned above:

- \* The high cost of satellite phone service limits free phone calling to those refugee locations that do not have cellular network coverage.
- \* Refugees' phone conversations are limited to family members regarding family welfare.

The Internews assessment determined that very few refugees have access to cellphones, as well as phone credit and the ability to charge their phones, although a number of refugees still have their Ivory Coast SIM card in their possession. The recommendations set forth in the Telecommunications Landscape section of this report apply to this section as well. Particularly in the case of women, more shared phones should be placed in densely populated refugee locations to reduce high local vendor costs, the lowest denomination of scratch cards should be distributed to those areas, and roaming rates need to be harmonized between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, at least until the crisis passes.

The Internews assessment determined that the majority of refugees, especially women, have received little to no news about the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, although their access to such information about the ongoing situation might help them to determine when it is safe for them to return to their particular community in Côte d'Ivoire. The best sources for such information must come from radio or mobile phones, both of which are in short supply among refugees and host communities.

## **f. Refugees' Access to Information about the Côte d'Ivoire Situation**

### **Assessment Findings**

Internews gathered information from 224 Ivoirian refugees, 203 of whom are situated in host communities or transit centers. Twenty-one are in Bahn camp. In terms of gender, 165 refugees are women and 59 are men. The disparity in number of females versus males was not caused by design. In each of the five sites assessed by Internews, the team instructed the Community Monitor (if a host community) or LRRRC Field Coordinator (if Transit Center) to select ten men and ten women for focus group discussions.

While in some cases the men were even fewer than ten, the women vastly exceeded ten due to their desire to "vent" or express their concerns. Gender differences also appeared in the "tone" of the discussions, whereby men spoke softly, while women frequently would stand and speak loudly to make their point.

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted to assess the ability of refugees (i) to gather the information they need to make choices for themselves and (ii) to provide humanitarian actors with information that refugees deem important.

The assessment revealed that, of those who participated in the focus group discussions:

Question	Men	Women
Percentage of refugees with access to a functioning radio:	30%	8%
Percentage of refugees with access to a functioning cellphone:	37%	4%
Percentage of refugees who know how to read an SMS on a mobile phone:	64%	39%
Percentage of refugees who say they view the radio as their most trusted source of information (in French or native dialect):	49%	48%
Percentage of refugees who say they view the mobile phone as their most trusted source of information (in French or native dialect):	40%	3%
Percentage of refugees who say they trust no source of information other than seeing for themselves:	0%	49%
Percentage of refugees who say they want to hear more information about the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and contact with family:	66%	85%
Percentage who say radio (in French and native dialect) is the best way to reach them with information:	39%	92%
Percentage who say mobile phones is the best way to reach them with information:	46%	2%

#### OBSERVATIONS:

1. All the women who said that they do not trust any source of information were situated in the Zorgowee Transit Center and Bahn Camp. This finding suggests that women who choose to live in camps may not feel safe in host communities.
2. Women have little access to functioning radios but identify it as the best way to reach them with information.
3. Men trust radio more but prefer to receive messages via the phone.
4. SMS texting to refugees, via bulk SMS, is a viable communications option for men and women if more handsets were available.
5. Although women have little access to mobile phone handsets, many of them are carrying their Ivory Coast SIM card. It is possible that the handsets of refugees have been sold for cash, rice or other goods. Observations of an increase in handsets in market areas located near refugee sites would support this hypothesis.

## **g. Recommendations regarding Refugee Information Access**

- 1. Radios need to be distributed by the humanitarian community to refugees and host communities,** preferably radios with flashlights, USB port that enable charging mobile phones and manual crank (i.e. wind-up). If sufficient radios are not available, then radios with speakers should be placed in strategic (and gender sensitive) locations at each refugee location. An alternative is to create radio listening groups that are made aware of the day and time of particular programs; that then listen to programs and report current information to others.
- 2. At a minimum, radios should be provided to clinics and schools,** where women will most likely have an opportunity to gather some news, or given to refugee leaders, and a refugee representing the population of younger women, older women, younger men, and older men. These representatives would be responsible for operating the radio, encouraging 'listening circles' at designated times (hinging upon the community radio stations consistently airing programs at certain times each week), and sharing the information they learn. A possible partnership with the NRC protection monitors in Nimba County or LRRRC would ensure the refugee representatives fulfill their duty to operate the radio and encourage listening circles. Consideration must be given to power sources for radio operation.
- 3. Establish listening stations with stereos that can play CDs and speakers at food distribution points, transit camps, and refugee camps to air recorded CDs that may have been produced specifically for refugee and host communities.** Given the refugees' interest in international newscasts, it would also be good to play a recorded version of Radio France International and BBC Africa news.<sup>11</sup> As well, Ivoirian music could be played throughout the day. This would require identifying a person or agency to set up the listening station each day, next to the food distribution point where refugees line up for hours, and identifying how the CD would be transported to the food designation points. Since the humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR and WFP are already traveling to the food designation points each day, a partnership could likely be worked out. In addition, this strategy could be effective in reaching refugees from remote villages since each village has a designated day to receive food and refugees from that area travel to the food designation point.
4. All recommendations provided in the Action Points of the Telecommunications Landscape section of this report also apply.

### **4. Humanitarian Community**

Through evidence collected during this assessment, it seems clear that **the “right message,” from a “trusted messenger” using a “trusted means” of communication from the refugees’ perspective is always key.**

One of the greatest challenges for the humanitarian community in the Ivoirian refugee crisis is convincing the refugees to leave the host communities where they appear to have settled and move to UN-established transit centers and permanent camps, where services are available and are easier, faster and less expensive to deliver. Of the 150,000 Ivoirian refugees that have entered Liberia since November 2010, less than 3,000 have entered the permanent camp at Bahn. An overwhelming majority of refugees are situated in UN-designated host communities (meaning they are designated to temporarily receive

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<sup>11</sup> The BBC is the most popular and trusted radio source within the refugee population assessed.

food and non-food items for refugees prior to their resettlement in transit camps, first, and then onto a permanent camp location). The UN is particularly concerned about resettling those refugees who are residing close to the border (and beyond UN peacekeeper outposts, such as Loguatu Old Town, Nimba County). At the time of this report, UNHCR had begun plans to convert some of the transit centers into permanent sites and shift its policy towards providing services based on vulnerability, not location.

The Internews assessment suggests that males are less willing to be resettled into a camp than females. Men, regardless of generation, cite close family ties or familiarity with the host community as reasons for staying where they are. Women, however, speak more to food insecurity (their need to be in a place that will provide for them and their children), physical security (as noted in the data collected, the majority of women who trust no source of information were found in transit centers and the permanent camp), and educational opportunities for their children to continue schooling in French. The “trusted messenger” varies depending upon which refugee population one speaks with and the gender and age of that population. Again, the assessment data bears this out.

As the majority of this report reveals, there are information gaps in terms of targeted content and under-utilized communication resources that prevent refugees, as well as humanitarians, from receiving the information they need to make the best choices for themselves.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

Humanitarian actors operate under immense pressure and time constraints to provide basic necessities to refugees arriving rapidly and in high number to areas that are not easily accessible, particularly during a rainy season. Traditionally, the primary focus is on delivering tangible items such as food, water, shelter or health care. Information needs of disaster-affected communities are too often overlooked, undermining the effectiveness of relief operations and transparency & accountability towards beneficiaries.

From the humanitarian’s perspective, communication activities focus on “What do I want refugees to know?” and “How do I transmit my information to the refugees?” A comprehensive communications strategy, on the other hand, needs to ask refugees: What information are you receiving? What would you like to receive more information about? What source of information do you trust? What tools of communication do you have access to? What methods of communication do you prefer when receiving information? In what language do you prefer to hear communication?

By not asking these types of questions in a systematic manner, and not incorporating answers from information needs assessments into relief strategies, humanitarians may erroneously believe that they are communicating to refugees, when they are merely providing them with information they feel the refugees want or may need. The challenge lies in moving from messaging to two-way communication.

The Internews assessment found that, for example, on certain occasions humanitarians are using radio broadcasts to provide information to refugees, the majority of whom do not have access to radios, particularly women. The findings suggest that humanitarians need to: develop comprehensive communication strategies that understand the local information ecosystem; include the information needs of refugee and host communities; invest in production and dissemination of targeted information content through trusted and relevant means of message delivery; establish systematic feedback

mechanisms for refugee and host communities, including complaint systems; and set up adequate follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of humanitarian communication efforts.

Equally challenging for humanitarians is an observed cultural barrier that prevents humanitarians from “partnering” with private sector telecommunications companies to solve certain operational challenges. Although there are communication problems mentioned during most operational or coordination meetings, there are few humanitarian agencies that have the staff available, or knowledge of existing technological tools, to assure that information flows efficiently and effectively *both ways* between humanitarians and their refugee beneficiaries. The chasm in communication between humanitarian actors with a diverse array of communication issues and private telecommunications companies with a diverse array of existing communication and data collection tools required a third-party intervention. In this case, Internews brought them together. As one high-level UN representative commented, “I pass by this (telecommunications) building every day, but I’ve never stopped.”

Not all communication tools for reaching targeted groups of refugees are expensive, high-tech or complicated. Reaching out to local reporters or supplying wind-up radios to refugee and host communities or megaphones and bikes to field monitors would ensure that affected and at risk communities, particularly women, can access some of the information they need to make choices for themselves and their children. Fixing the transmitter of an existing local radio station close to a large refugee population could be expensive and also technically more complicated but also could be one of the most cost-efficient and effective means for delivering information to refugees and host community members in a particular area.

The Internews assessment team found gaps in the communication activities of humanitarians. These gaps influence refugees’ decision-making and behavior, which in turn influence all other humanitarian activities. It also found humanitarian actors highly motivated to explore innovative communication ideas and to examine how they can improve their communication strategies to ensure that affected communities can access the information they need to make informed decision that affect their lives.

## **E. APPENDICES** (available upon request)

- **APPENDIX A:** List of individuals and organizations met by the Internews Assessment Team (i.e. humanitarian organization (local and international), UN agencies, government officials, local radio stations, telecommunications operators)
- **APPENDIX B:** List of Ivoirian refugees met by the Internews Assessment Team who had cellphones and requested that they would appreciate receiving information via SMS