Seven Months on the Ground

In late 2014 Internews established the “Information Saves Lives” program in Liberia. Its aims were to investigate and respond to public rumors about Ebola; to train and empower journalists to report accurately about health issues; and to stimulate the exchange of information in response to the urgent Ebola health crisis. As we publish our last newsletter, we reflect on how our project has worked to strengthen the flow of information between the public, humanitarian agencies, and the media in Liberia. In particular, through the publication of the newsletters you have been receiving, we have sought to strengthen the quality of communications about humanitarian activities to local media while building their capacity to gather, analyse, assess and report accurate and timely Ebola-related information. In this way Internews has ensured two-way communication and provided Ebola-related information to affected populations, with the support of USAID funding through the HC3 mechanism. PSI Liberia was instrumental in the establishment of Internews’ operation in the country. We are grateful to USAID, HC3 and PSI Liberia for this support.

Through local media, and through messaging campaigns initiated by governments and international organisations, information on the containment, spread and treatment of Ebola is being provided, but Internews understands that in emergency environments like this one, it is not enough to simply deliver information – one must also listen and respond to the needs and concerns of the affected populations. We call this “two-way communication” and it gives community members a voice while also allowing local media, governments and humanitarians to have a better understanding of the information needs of the community. To be able to do this quickly Internews developed an integrated solution through the “DeySay” SMS system which uses text messages to monitor, track and report on rumors relating to Ebola across different counties. Internews, with technological support from UNICEF, set up DeySay to provide a service to both the media and the social mobilization groups. We partnered with the the Liberian Red Cross Society, Project Concern International, UNICEF, Women Campaign International, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNMIL/Human Rights and Protection Section (OHCHR-UNMIL/HRPS) and the Liberia Peacebuilding Office - Early Warning and Response Working Group to try to detect rumors in time and to address them as they arose. The rumors have been investigated and reported in these newsletters over the past 6 months, and Internews has maintained an active role within the Social Mobilization mechanism to make sure that an active response mechanism was set up. Many thanks to Reverend Sumo for his support of Internews and our work.
Another element of the “Information Saves Lives” project has been providing support to the most committed journalists through a series of small grants, training and mentoring opportunities. Selected individual journalists and local media houses located throughout the country were thereby given support to produce content aimed at responsible health reporting in the context of the current crisis. The training and mentoring that Internews implemented over the past 6 months was aimed specifically at encouraging the production of more quality news, current affairs and documentary material in print, radio, and video related to the Ebola crisis. While some of the training and mentoring sessions were held at the participating media houses, others were hosted at the Internews offices in Monrovia. Humanitarian Journalism Trainers and guest presenters worked intensively with the selected journalists. In addition to improving basic journalism skills, these sessions focused on equipping the journalists with accurate and up-to-date information regarding the Ebola outbreak and related psychosocial health issues and helped them to connect with experts and other reliable sources to aid their reporting in future.

As part of these training workshops, Internews collaborated regularly with members of the humanitarian and NGO communities who have been willing to address our participating journalists on issues related to the Ebola crisis. We take this opportunity to thank you all. Some of the issues that we have covered include: the re-opening of schools, the ongoing vaccine trials, the psychological impacts of Ebola, Ebola waste management, safe burials, reproductive health, issues of accountability relating to the Ebola response, as well as the recent reappearance of the virus and the admirable efforts to contain it.

Internews has also developed and maintained excellent partnerships with various Liberian media civil society organizations. This includes a strong consultative relationship with the Press Union of Liberia, contributing to the judging of the Annual Press Union Awards and collaborating on a number of trainings and roundtable discussions. During our time in Liberia, Internews has also co-chaired the Ministry of Information and Cultural Affairs and Tourism working group. Many thanks to Atty. Isaac W. Jackson, Jr., Deputy Minister for Public Affairs Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs & Tourism for his support and for this incredible opportunity.

The Local Voices Liberia network, who introduce themselves in this newsletter (see article: Lifting Local Voices: Liberian journalist networking to report from across Liberia) is one of the most prominent achievements of these efforts. Despite the odds, these journalists have formed an inspiring, optimistic and enterprising network of media professionals that represent all the counties in Liberia, and who have bonded over their motivation to publish good Liberian journalism around the country into the future. While their efforts are entirely initiated within the group, Internews is pleased to endorse their aspirations and encourage you to visit localvoicesliberia.org regularly, to see their publications. Further, if you would like to tap into the local radio and journalism network in particular counties where you work, Local Voices Liberia would be a good place to start. They welcome your approaches with opportunities to collaborate and develop content.

During the past 6 months Liberia witnessed the proud national moment in May, when the country was declared “Ebola-free” and while more recently we had a sad reminder of the prevalent nature of the virus, there is an undeniable opportunity to acknowledge the considerable capacity that has been gained to battle and beat the Ebola virus, with the public, government, civil society and journalists committing to the vital flow of lifesaving information.

*The Internews Team Liberia*
Letter from Local Voices Liberia network:
Lifting Local Voices: Liberian Journalists Networking to Report from Across Liberia

Reporting from and about rural communities in Liberia has always been challenging for big media institutions in Liberia. The President of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Abdullah Kamara, has often stressed the challenge in getting news from rural communities. Many journalists from the rural areas in Liberia struggle to report local voices on a bigger platform. As a result, community issues from outside Monrovia are underreported in the national media and do not get the attention they deserve. To respond to this need, we - 16 journalists from across Liberia’s 15 counties – have set up the Local Voices Liberia network.

Who are we? We are reporters, producers and broadcasting journalists from county-based media houses (producing media on social media networks, print, television and chalkboard) who combine their skills in Local Voices Liberia. The individual qualities of its members have diversified the possibilities of the network to share information on multiple modes of mass communication media. Our Local Voices Liberia network is dedicated to reporting the ‘untold stories’, bridging the information gap between rural communities and the world.

Ebola, post-Ebola recovery and health reporting
With a website already setup and running, we have been reporting on the Ebola crisis, post-Ebola recovery and June 2015’s resurgence of the virus in the country. The website has also featured and reported on a wide range of community health issues including reporting distribution, and other news from rural communities all over Liberia. The Local Voices Liberia website will be on the Ebola crisis and recovery phase, integrated measles vaccine, the nationwide mosquito net a resource and medium for big news outlets inside and outside of the country.

Members of Local Voices Liberia have been trained and mentored by Internews, an international media development NGO. They have also received equipment to continue reporting ethically and professionally. The 16 members of Local Voices Liberia spent four weeks between February and July 2015 learning the basic skills of humanitarian reporting, to help support their coverage of the Ebola virus outbreak, as well as other health issues facing West Africa.

With massive prospect, Local Voices Liberia is planning its future. The network has already obtained its article of incorporation and non-profit business registration documents with two eyes on communicating accurate and balanced information to its audience. Local Voices Liberia is also planning to recruit more female reporters from the counties. The network believes that they need to increase female participation when it comes to reporting on women’s issues from the counties. In the next couple of months the network will be reporting on sexual reproductive health and maternal mortality during the Ebola crisis, the abuse and trafficking of drugs across the country, and post-Ebola recovery.

Signed: The Local Voices Liberia Network.
Local Voices Network

MOSES K. GARZEAWU
Liberia Broadcasting System (Montserrado)
mokgeta@yahoo.com / yf4youth@gmail.com
088.609.081
“This network has the future of better story telling from a more human point of view. Local Voices Liberia seeks to add a more community base approach to reflect the views of locals.”

ALPHA DAFFAE SENKPNENI
LACSA Radio (Grand Bassa)
Front Page Africa – County Correspondent
daffae82@gmail.com0886.432.042
“The network is a dawn of a new prospect for the Liberian media and a chance for communities to be heard on a bigger platform that may attract intervention.”

IBRAHIM M. SESAY
Radio Cape Mount (Sinje)
rahimssesay29@gmail.com
0886.445.585 / 0775.203.891
“Local Voices Liberia will let the people speak for significant changes to come.”

FRANKLIN M. FLOMO
Youth Talk-Liberia, Inc (Zorzor, Lofa County)
flomo2015@gmail.com
0777.594.766
“Get the views from the locals to help save lives through professional humanitarian reporting.”

ERIC OPA DOUE
Echo Radio (Jarpah Town, River Cess)
opa.voicefm@gmail.com/0770038122
0776483357 / 0770461344
“Local Voices Liberia is not just a network but another resource center in Liberia media landscape.”

MICHAEL D.K. WROH
Voice of Pleebo (Maryland County)
michaelwroh@gmail.com / 0880.795.504
“Local Voices Liberia will connect rural communities with the rest of the world.”

MAC SAMAH
Voice of Flumpa (Nimba County)
wmsamah64@gmail.com
voiceofflumpa@gmail.com / 0777.286.315
“The network is an idea to bring out local development in all sectors of the society for national growth.”

JUSTICE C. GADDEH
Gee Radio (Fishtown, River Gee County)
gaddejustice@gmail.com
0776.633.239 / 0886.633.239
“Local Voices is the newest concept to give voice to the voiceless for local and national participation to achieve national development.”

MOSES G. GEPHY
Smile FM (Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County)
toegephy@yahoo.com / 0880.748.253
“This is a media network dedicated to telling the stories of people in the 15 political sub division of the country.”
“This network will report on social vices impeding community dwellers progress and will also commit to development and humanitarian reporting.”

“With the level of dedication have seen from its members, this network will be one of the best sources of information from the counties.”

“As professional reporters, Local Voices Liberia will inform the world about what's happening to Liberia rural villages and what they are doing to change their lives.”

“This media platform will be a gateway to disseminate information to Liberia and the world at large.”

“This network can be one of the best new media outlet because it will cover every part of the country due to presence of its reporters cross the counties.”

“This network will provide the platform for local voices to be lifted and heard for participatory decision making process for an ever changing society.”
Welcome to the Internews Newsletter for humanitarian responders in Liberia. This newsletter is created with the intent to support the work of Ebola responders in connecting with the local population and understanding their information needs. Internews welcomes feedback, comments and suggestions from all organizations receiving this newsletter and invites you to forward, share and re-post this newsletter as widely as possible.

Internews “Information Saves Lives” is a 6-month project implemented under the Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (Hc3) funded by USAID. The project aims at building the capacity of Liberian journalists to report accurately about the Ebola disease and to connect local media with the national and international Ebola response. For more information contact Rachel Maher - Internews Liberia Project Director - rmaher@internews.org - 0770756426 or Ingrid Gercama - Health Communication Liaison Officer - igercama@internews.org - 0770461348

SCHOOL CLOSURE

Some locals from Bong County indicate that teachers and students have not been going to school since Minister George Werner announced the new Education policy.

Bong

Some locals from Montserratado County state that children stopped going to school after the new Education policy of Minister Werner was declared.

Montserratado

Some citizens from Sinoe County would like to know if the government will refund their school fees or WAEC fees when schools close.

Sinoe

Some locals rumour that there are too many points to illegally cross the borders in the country.

River Gee

POLIO VACCINATIONS

Residents from Lofa County state that the Lofa County Health Team has officially stated that they have vaccinated 90% of the children whose parents were initially hesitant. Parents initially believed that the vaccinations were intended to infect their children with the Ebola virus.

Lofa

Some citizens from Grand Gedeh County would like to know when Liberia will be declared Polio free.

Grand Gedeh

EBOLA TREATMENT UNITS

Some locals from Lofa County state that the only Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) in the county has been demolished, and that cars and motorbikes previously used by the ETU staff were donated to the County Health Team.

Lofa

Locals from River Gee County would like to see the Ebola Treatment Center that was built by ARC turned into a nursing center.

River Gee

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Lofa

Locals from River Gee County would like to see the Ebola Treatment Center that was built by ARC turned into a nursing center.

River Gee
**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

Some residents from Montserrado County would like to know if motorcyclists in the capital are really wearing Personal Protective Equipment to protect them from the rain. They would also like to know if it is dangerous for the motorcyclists and their customers to be in contact with the PPEs.

**BORDER SECURITY**

Locals in Grand Cape Mount County question the government’s decision to open to borders and would like to know if the borders can be closed again. They would also like to know what the government is doing to prevent illegal entry.

**NEW CASES**

Citizens from Montserrat County would like to know why Liberia was declared Ebola-free. They’d also like to know if Ebola re-entered Liberia because the 17-yr-old Ebola victim ate a dead dog.

**RESOLUTION OF HEALTH SERVICES**

Locals from Maryland County report that INGO Partners in Health has donated a health facility to the Ministry of Health. The facility has 100 beds available to treat patients. Locals are worried about the distance of the facility from the city. They feel as if the facility is far away from the city, which makes it difficult for families to transport sick people to the clinic.

**BUSHER MEAT**

Locals from River Cess County indicate that citizens in River Cess County have started selling bush meat again.

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Project Director - rmaher@internews.org - 0770758426 or Ingrid Gercama - Health Communication Liaison Officer - igercama@internews.org - 0770461348
Residents from Bomi County say that Radio Bomi has started airing a drama program. The drama helps listeners to understand how they should follow Ebola protocols and afterwards ask listeners to call in and share the lessons they learned from the drama.

Citizens from Bomi County also indicate that the Ebola Task Force meetings have restarted on Thursdays, and that several NGOs have started the distribution of infection prevention control materials to locals in the counties.

Locals from River Cess County say that awareness raising activities have started again since the Ministry of Health has announced the new cases in Margibi County.

Some citizens from Sinoe County would like to know if Ebola will hit the county on the 26th of July, when the country celebrates Independence Day. There will be many social gatherings around the country and people will travel far to meet their family. These citizens believe that this will increase the spread of the Ebola virus to other counties, beyond Margibi and Montserrado.

Farmers from Grand Bassa County are asking if the Government or partners have any funding available for farmers. They report to have been massively hit by the previous Ebola outbreak and ask for support.
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Rumors

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

Citizens in Montserrado County rumour that locals have broken into an Ebola Treatment Unit and stolen Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). The fact that non-medical professionals wear PPEs to protect them from the rain, according to these citizens, is not correct and poses a danger to the population of Montserrado County.

**QUEEN SHEEBA**

Some residents from Montserrado County rumour that Queen Sheba's arrival in July last year caused many people to die from Ebola. They believe that she has come back again to reintroduce the virus to Liberia.

**DOG MEAT**

Some residents of Montserrado County rumour that Ebola has resurfaced in Liberia because the 17-yr-old Ebola victim from Nedowein ate dog meat before getting sick. They now believe that dogs can function as the carrier of the Ebola virus. They conclude that dogs need to be killed to protect Liberia against the Ebola virus.

**EBOLA MONEY**

Some locals from Montserrado County rumour that the government will close the schools because they have signed for more 'Ebola money' from the international community.

Locals from Grand Kru County say that Ebola is not really back in Liberia: the Government is only strategizing to get more funds from donors.
**NEW CASES**

Some locals from Montserrado County rumour that the county has 16 confirmed Ebola cases.  

Some residents from Grand Cape Mount County rumour that Montserrado County has a new confirmed Ebola case.

**EBOLA TESTS**

Some citizens rumour that nurses and doctors in hospitals and clinics in Bomi County are secretly testing patients for the Ebola virus. Patients that come in for treatment have not given their consent for the tests.

Locals from Bomi County rumour that the government hospital in Tubmanburg has one suspected Ebola case in treatment, and that doctors are now awaiting the results of an Ebola test.
ONLINE CONTENT REPORT Week July 11th to July 17th, 2015
This report analyzes data from Users identified as Liberian citizens on Twitter.

Twitter

Most tweeted Ebola topics
Most influential Liberian Twitter accounts streaming on Ebola

Authority is measured looking at how many followers the accounts have, how many followers their followers have and how many times their content has been re-tweeted or clicked on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account Name</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@MoreThanMeORG</td>
<td>3,708</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@UNMILNews</td>
<td>7,105</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@LiberianTimes</td>
<td>2,770</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@HottFM</td>
<td>7,841</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@StreetChild</td>
<td>3,807</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@VickieRemoe</td>
<td>4,003</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@BuildingLiberia</td>
<td>1,371</td>
<td>6/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Below is a list of influential content published by Liberian online news outlets. The content’s reach is measured by the number of readers.

**Ebola Study Gains Momentum, Say Investigators**


Survived the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) told journalists last Wednesday that the study... consequences of Ebola on survivors and also determine if survivors develop immunity that...and track any health issues, monitor organ and ocular function and record Ebola...*

**EU Gives Liberia €121M for post-Ebola Recovery**


The European Union (EU) has committed €450 million to the three Ebola... for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management and EU Ebola Coordinator, Christos Stylianides, indicates that... €8 million will be provided to all Ebola affected countries for multi-country...*

**Extortion Rife at Lofa’s Security Checkpoints**

*Thu, 07/16/2015 - 23:51 admin by Edwin M. Fayia III, from Voinjama Travelers along the Bong/Lofa Highway have become the helpless victims of security harassment at Lofa County’s multiple... that under the pretense of carrying out security duties and the Ebola safety...*

**French Ambassador Pledges Support to LNP**


French Ambassador to Liberia, Joel Godfroy, has assured the Liberian Government of France’s commitment to support the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the Police Support Unit (PSU) when the Unit... the Ebola virus in Liberia and the two other affected countries in the...*

**Dr. Kateh stresses honesty in Ebola fight**


Francis Kateh, says the fight to contain the Ebola virus in the country... timely end to the Ebola crisis and allow Liberia to move forward with... Disease Control or CDC refuted that the 17-year-old lad, died of Ebola...

**IMF boss postpones visit to Liberia**


31 A planned visit of the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund or IMF, Christine Lagarde, to Liberia, initially scheduled for July 16-17, has been postponed... IMF provided exceptional support to Liberia during the Ebola crisis. In another development...

**Ebola hits Montserrado**


has disclosed that the latest Ebola case has hit Paynesville, Montserrado County. The disclosure followed the recent Ebola outbreak in Newodein community, Lower Margibi County, which... has increased to six with four already confirmed cases Ebola and the victims are...

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**Key words:**

- Montserrado
- government
- monrovia
- virus
- country
- outbreak
- disease
- stakeout
- united
- projects
- result
- confirmed
- july
- million
- editing
- providing
- recovery
- chief
- according
- community
- health
- government
- development
- international
- deputy
- officer
- health
- relief
- people
Six (6) months Summary of Online Content Report – February 20th to July 20th, 2015

This report analyzes data from Users identified as Liberian citizens on Twitter.

Twitter

7,977
Mentions

53
Tweets / day

2.20
Tweets / hour

Most tweeted Ebola topics
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or Ingrid Gercama - Health Communication Liaison Officer - igercama@internews.org - 0770461348
A letter from the humanitarian community

In our ‘A letter from the humanitarian community’ column, Internews invites members of the humanitarian community to write about their experiences working in the Ebola response. We are particularly interested in pieces about communicating with communities and ‘information as aid’: lessons learned, success stories, challenges and experiences are all very much welcomed.

This week Internews presents Jessi Hanson, Co-founder and Program Technical Director for Playing to Live. Playing to Live was launched in September 2014 in a children’s quarantine center as a supplementary program to help children’s emotional and psychological stress through providing play, art and expressive activities. Later, through partnerships with Renewed Energy Serving Humanity (RESH), the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and funding from UNICEF, Playing to Live has expanded to work in over 45 communities in Liberia, most seriously affected by the Ebola virus. The program aims to reach nearly 1000 children affected by Ebola.

For more information about Playing to Live http://www.playingtolive.org. Or, contact Jessi Hanson at jessi.hanson@ymail.com.

Communicating Past the Grief

“Ebola took 27 members of my family, including my husband and two children,” says Victoria, an Ebola survivor. She and her young son survived. “I wasn’t welcomed back [to my community] and came to Monrovia. I go to a new church, but no one knows I am a survivor.”

For months after her recovery, Victoria had no one else other than two fellow survivors to talk to about her trauma. She woke up most nights sweating in terror, unable to breath. Her child started wetting the bed, sometimes hiding in corners, and was unwilling to be held by anyone except her mother. “We were alone.” she says.

Nearly one in two people who survived Ebola subsequently lost their jobs or means of income. Around 40% report being stigmatized, even physically harmed and emotionally abused by members of their own communities, and are blamed for being the reason Ebola came to their community. Some were illegally evicted and became homeless. They felt reviled, ostracized and abandoned. The horrors that they experienced in the Ebola Treatment Unit, the blood and death, suddenly became compounded by the uncertainty of their shattered existence.

According to a representative of the Survivors’ Network, a civil society network for and driven by Ebola survivors, and lasting support from the Liberian government and donors for survivors is lacking. The majority of the Ebola response and recovery humanitarian efforts in Liberia focuses on tracking and stopping the spread of the virus, improving the health system, and providing basic emergency assistance to survivors and affected households. Much less attention has been given to supporting the emotional and psychological trauma that many people experienced as a result of the outbreak. In-country, only three of the clinics offering care to survivors have trained mental health staff.

To respond to the lack of psychological support for Ebola survivors, we launched Playing to Live in September 2014. We started in a children’s quarantine center as a supplementary program to help children’s emotional and psychological stress through providing play, art and music activities. These activities are designed to develop a child’s coping mechanism and help them express their fears and grief on their own terms. The program provides supportive talks to the living parents and guardians, left highly traumatized and on their own to raise these children, often in dire poverty. Most of the program team are female Ebola survivors who also receive grief counselling from professional clinicians.

Receiving psychological treatment is healing but also very difficult: because of exposing invisible wounds and pain in support groups, some survivors even start reporting feelings of severe depression and thoughts of suicide. Playing to Live supports survivors in the healing process by giving professional counselling and helps their families to make sense of their experiences. All activities are pre-designed by professional clinicians from the United States and are tested and finalized by professionals in Liberia.

Victoria and her child are now part of Playing to Live, participating three times a week in play, art activities and adult supportive talks. Her son, Cyrus, plays with other children his age. His favorite activity is Pretty Petals, in which he draws a flower, and on each petal writes one thing he likes to do when he feels sad, such as reading or being with friends. Victoria says she is learning to let down her walls, and talk about what she witnessed in the ETU, her experiences since being discharged and what it is like adjusting to her new life. She also practices different coping mechanisms, like breathing meditation, prayer, and long walks, with her assigned Playing to Live social worker for moments of anxiety or grief. Victoria is not alone anymore - she now has a support network.
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or Ingrid Gercama - Health Communication Liaison Officer - igercama@internews.org - 0770461348

Playing to Live uses ‘Pretty Pedals’ as a way to get Ebola survivors and their children to talk about their loss and feelings.