

Internews  
Humanitarian Information Services  
Learning Collection

# Listening Groups Module

South Sudan

Part I. Context

Part II. Case Studies



Cover photo:

Capturing feedback from a wide spectrum of the community is one of the main tasks of Internews' Humanitarian Information Services. Listening Groups are one of the main ways that HIS teams systematically collect and analyze feedback.

**The Internews Humanitarian Information Services Learning Collection** communicates key lessons, best practices, and programmatic methodologies used by Internews' humanitarian teams around the world.

Each module within the Learning Collection includes three parts: Context, Case Studies, and a How To Guide. The How To Guide is usually packaged separately for ease of use.

**The South Sudan HIS Learning Collection includes:**

- Boda Boda Talk Talk
- Listening Groups
- Radio Distribution
- Communicating with Communities (CwC)
- Humanitarian Radio



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Communicating with communities is critical to effective program delivery, and promotes a sense of resilience in the midst of a crisis.

## The Importance of Listening

Within the international development and humanitarian sectors, there has been a growing call for better Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), Communicating with Communities (CwC), and using feedback and “real-time” Monitoring and Evaluation to improve programming and outcomes for affected populations.

But in the field, what do these concepts mean? What do they actually look like in practice, and how do they work?

Through the use of **Listening Groups** in South Sudan, Internews' Humanitarian Information Services (HIS) programs have found a platform for putting these principles into practice. Listening Groups meet regularly to listen to audio programming, review awareness campaigns, discuss issues and challenges facing their communities, and provide valuable feedback to the HIS and to humanitarian agencies. HIS teams analyze feedback from the Listening Groups to better understand evolving information needs, adapt HIS programs, and deliver feedback to relevant humanitarian agencies regarding their programs and services. The Groups have become a valuable tool for two-way conversations with communities, promoting accountability within the humanitarian sector, and continually adapting and improving programs.

These Listening Groups are more than just a series of focus groups held over time. Through participation in the groups, members build a relationship and trust between each other, the HIS, and with humanitarian organizations in the area. The groups cultivate a sense of community ownership, engagement, and participation, which is not only critical to efficient and effective program delivery but promotes a sense of resilience in the midst of a crisis.

The Listening Groups Module contains the collective knowledge of the Internews South Sudan team gained over three years' experience managing more than 700 Listening Groups across the country. Depending on your interests, each section is useful and can be read on its own. When combined together, the three parts of the Module give you a holistic understanding of Listening Group projects in South Sudan, and what the Internews Humanitarian Information Services team has learned over three years of implementation.

This document contains Parts I and II. “Part III. How To Guide” is packaged in a separate document, so that you can easily share it and take it with you.

**“Part I. Context”** describes the information and media landscape in South Sudan, and the value of Listening Groups as a tool for communicating with communities, accountability, and adaptive programming.

**“Part II. Case Study”** discusses the implementation of Listening Groups to gather feedback on HIS programs in Juba and Malakal, as well as the Listening Groups organized in Abyei to support Internews' news and information project in the area. The case studies also cover challenges and lessons learned in order to offer recommendations for future Listening Group activities.

**“Part III. How To Guide”** provides a step-by-step methodology for establishing, facilitating, and monitoring a Listening Group in any location. It also includes a description of the feedback collection process. Part III can be downloaded separately [here](#).

The Listening Groups Module was designed by the Internews South Sudan team. It is part of the Internews Humanitarian Information Services Learning Collection, which communicates key lessons, best practices, and programmatic methodologies used by Internews' humanitarian teams around the world.

# Listening Groups

## Part I. Context

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A Nile FM Listening Group meets to discuss the week's programs.

## ► Introduction to Part I

**Part I. Context** describes the use of Listening Groups in South Sudan as a means of effectively Communicating with Communities (CwC), nurturing feedback loops, encouraging community ownership in projects, and promoting accountability within the humanitarian sector.

While Part I focuses on the theory and rationale behind Listening Groups, Part II will focus on case studies of their implementation in Juba (UN House), Malakal, and Abyei. Make sure to read on for more!



A blind man listens to Mingkaman 100 FM on a wind-up solar radio distributed by Internews. The station broadcasts 11 hours per day, 7 days per week, covering an approximately 65 km radius including Mingkaman and Bor.

## ► Preface

Internews has operated in South Sudan since 2006. When the current five-year USAID-funded project titled “i-STREAM” (Strengthening a Free and Independent Media in South Sudan) was awarded in October 2013, Internews was supporting five stations, including Eye Radio in Juba, Central Equatoria State; and four community radio stations, one each in Warrap, Unity, Upper Nile, and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States.<sup>1</sup> Internews was also supporting a news and information service in Abyei, a contested region between South Sudan and Sudan, funded by the Office of the US Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan.

Just months after i-STREAM began, a serious conflict erupted in South Sudan. On December 15, 2013, tensions between factions loyal to President Salva Kiir, of the Dinka ethnic group, and those aligned with his former Vice President, Riek Machar, of the Nuer ethnic group, exploded into fighting on the streets of Juba. Thousands of people have died in the fighting that followed and nearly 4 million people have been displaced from their homes. The country is now one of the world’s most pressing emergencies with 5.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and a food crisis of epic proportions.

Internews immediately sought solutions to the ever-increasing information needs of the population with a series of new activities. A Humanitarian Information Service (HIS) named *Boda Boda Talk Talk* (BBTT) was established in five United Nations Protection of Civilian Sites (PoC). In addition, Internews established three mobile “radio-in-a-box” stations: Mingkaman FM (south of Bor in Lakes State), Nile FM (Malakal Town), and Kondial FM (in the Bentiu PoC, launching in 2017). The community stations, HIS, and the mobile radio stations have a combined total audience of close to two million actual listeners and are considered the most trusted source of information in their communities.

## ► Abstract

Internews believes that access to information is a human right, and a fundamental prerequisite to empowering affected communities to access services, take control of their survival and participate in their own recovery.<sup>2</sup> Since the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, Internews’ Humanitarian Information Services (HIS) have worked to provide people in emergencies the information they need to access aid and make informed decisions. HIS projects focus largely on providing useful, actionable information for people affected by disaster (also described as “Information as Aid” or “News-You-Can-Use”), based on the principle that information and communications are as critical as other forms of humanitarian aid.

HIS projects apply an approach known in the humanitarian sector as Communicating with Communities (CwC). CwC emphasizes going beyond one-way messaging to the population, but listening, discussing, engaging, and reacting to what affected people have to say. The HIS model is based on two-way information exchange and closed feedback loops. First, HIS projects source information from humanitarian agencies. These messages tend to be more directive or top-down and involve telling people how to access aid or lifesaving services or informing them about the outbreak of disease. This information set is more likely to prevail at the start of the crisis when the need to get information out quickly is paramount. However, every top-down one-way-message, even the most clear and simple, provokes a series of questions from the crisis-affected community. Therefore it is important to set up a second channel - from the affected population back to the humanitarian community - as soon as

<sup>1</sup> In December 2015, South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir issued a decree dissolving the nation’s 10 regional states and establishing 28 new states in their place. In January 2017, President Kiir decreed a further subdivision of the country from 28 to 32 states. For simplicity’s sake, and to maintain consistency with the status quo at the time of project launch, this document uses the names of the 10-state system.

<sup>2</sup> Internews, “Humanitarian Communications,” <http://www.internews.org/global-issues/humanitarian-information>



A Nile FM correspondent interviews the coordinator and members of the Education Cluster. HIS teams follow up on feedback by talking to humanitarian organizations to get additional information and answers to questions. The responses, and any actions taken, are then reported back to the community to close the feedback loop.

possible to minimize rumor, confusion, and misinformation. This can ensure the relationship between service providers and the affected population remains open, transparent, and accountable right from the start. This is a continuous information feedback loop: information sent, information received, questions asked and more information sent.

Much of the information circulated by the HIS model is sourced from affected people voicing their opinions and raising questions and concerns about the humanitarian response. Sourcing and collating this material is a critical part of the aid response in terms of engagement and accountability but requires dedicated time and resources, as well as a commitment from humanitarian agencies to listen and respond to this kind of feedback.

Internews teams around the world collect feedback in a variety of ways. The community may be encouraged to send questions, feedback, or request information via SMS or phone calls directly to the team, or via a radio program or Facebook page. In other locations, local partners and journalists are trained to collect feedback through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, or other community meetings. The methodology depends on factors intrinsic to the community (i.e. literacy and education levels, language, information needs) as well as how displacement and the emergency have affected connectivity and the community's access to technology and media.

In handling feedback, HIS projects pay special attention to “closing the loop” – HIS teams not only collect the feedback, but they are obligated to *act* on the feedback in a variety of ways, such as by dispelling the rumor through a story, passing on the information to a relevant organization, researching and making a program about the issue, or conducting an interview with a local official. This information flow not only serves to inform the community and improve the delivery of aid, it also reduces tension and conflict. In many IDP or refugee sites, rumors and misinformation can be rife. Very quickly the situation can become one of “them” versus “us” between aid agencies and the community. This can also happen where there is a lack of transparency in the aid operation. Having clear two-way channels where questions can be asked and answered, and concerns listened to and addressed, is critical in building trust. This is important even where there is no “solution” offered. Allowing all groups the space to complain and feel like they have been heard and included is an important end in itself.

## ► Listening Groups: A Platform for Communicating with Communities in South Sudan

Decades of conflict have left South Sudan with some of the world's lowest development indicators and lowest rates of access to media, information and communication technology. South Sudan's education statistics remain among the worst in the world. According to UNICEF, only 27% of adults are literate, and 70% of children aged 6–17 years have never set foot in a classroom. The completion rate in primary schools is less than 10%, and only 33% of girls attend school.<sup>3</sup> According to a national audience survey commissioned by Internews in 2015, roughly one in three (34%) people have never accessed any form of media in their lifetime (radio, television, newspapers, internet, or mobile phones).<sup>4</sup> Gender inequalities are a significant challenge, and it is more common for women (39%) to never have had access to any type of media than for men (26%).<sup>5</sup> Since the research was conducted in 2015, continuing conflict, political instability, and rapid displacement mean that these indicators likely underestimate current difficulties in accessing reliable, objective, and trustworthy information for the vast majority of the population.

Within this context, any effort to collect feedback and communicate directly with communities must reflect the ways that South Sudanese habitually engage with information and media. The 2015 research showed that while radio is the primary and most trusted source of information overall, person-to-person interactions are very important. Overall, respondents most commonly get their news and information as a first choice from the radio (39%) or face-to-face interactions with friends or family (16%).<sup>6</sup>

The findings also indicate that those without access to media benefit from radio broadcasts due to the social nature of information consumption. Over half (53%) of respondents who have never had access to a radio feel that radio broadcasts can help reduce conflict, indicating that non-listeners receive information communicated via the radio second-hand. Furthermore, even though only one-third (35%) of respondents say their household actually has a functioning radio, roughly half (51%) of respondents say they have ever listened to the radio (i.e. in a context outside the home).

Recognizing that the literacy rate is so low, that most people prefer their information from the radio, that information consumption in South Sudan is a social activity, and that listening to the radio often happens with friends or family, **Listening Groups** are one of the most effective and appropriate methodologies to both expand information access and collect feedback to support programming. Listening Groups usually consist of up to 10 people who either live closely to each other or represent targeted groups (e.g. youth, women, or elders). The groups meet regularly to listen to audio programming, review awareness campaigns, discuss issues and challenges facing their communities, and provide valuable feedback to the HIS and to humanitarian agencies on the aid response.

Listening Groups are often formed in conjunction with a radio distribution. In many communities around the world and particularly in South Sudan, simply lacking access to a radio or any other media device can be the biggest obstacle to accessing information. As such, Internews may distribute radios as a first step of any effort to improve information access.<sup>7</sup> Those who are given a radio are also expected

3 UNICEF, “Basic Education and Gender Equality,” <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/education.html>

4 Forcier Consulting, “We’re Still Listening: A Survey of the Media Landscape in the Accessible Areas of South Sudan in 2015,” [https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews\\_SouthSudan\\_StillListening\\_2015.pdf](https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_SouthSudan_StillListening_2015.pdf)

5 Forcier Consulting, 2015.

6 Forcier Consulting, 2015.

7 For more information on Internews South Sudan's radio distribution projects, please see the HIS Learning Collection's Radio Distribution module: <https://www.internews.org/radio-distrib>

to lead or participate in Listening Groups that meet regularly to provide feedback and opinions on programs. This feedback is collected and reported back to HIS teams to inform future programming as a method of real-time monitoring and evaluation.

INTERNEWS HIS LISTENING GROUPS		
LOCATION	No. of listening groups	Total no. of listening group members
BENTIU POC	500	5,000+
BOR POC	9	90+
MALAKAL POC	14	140+
UN HOUSE	110	1100+

Listening Groups also become an easily accessible platform for ongoing conversations between the community and humanitarian aid providers. The groups are not only a valuable source of feedback for the HIS teams, but they also become a channel through which general perceptions and opinions on the humanitarian response can be shared. Aid providers may enlist Listening Groups to test and tailor information for new campaigns, or to assess the impact of a recent campaign or initiative aimed at behavior or knowledge change. Instead of the community receiving a “message” to obey, they are involved in an inclusive “conversation.” This feedback loop ensures that the voices of affected populations are a fundamental part of the creation of information delivered to them, and promote a sense of community ownership and agency over the humanitarian services that they receive.

## ► Community Ownership & Accountability

Creating a sense of community ownership in a project, and forming strong relationships with the affected community and intended beneficiaries, is important to not only ensure support for project aims but to make certain that those aims best represent needs as determined by the community. Whether through 25-minute programs broadcast from the backs of quad bikes like *Boda Boda Talk Talk*,<sup>8</sup> or fully fledged Humanitarian Radio stations, HIS projects have always been operated and produced by members of the affected community themselves. The program model is unique because it amplifies voices on the ground to be heard by the rest of the humanitarian and affected community.

Radio distributions and Listening Groups are also intended to address inequities in information access and community engagement. Vulnerable or marginalized groups that may otherwise be left out of the conversation or community decision-making (i.e. women, minorities, the disabled, or the elderly) are deliberately included in the formation of Listening Groups and the distribution of radios. This gives them a stronger voice in the community to raise concerns and be heard not only by the humanitarian organizations

that serve them but by other community members. These groups determine the most important topics to be addressed by HIS, comment on the quality and style of programming and essentially use the HIS as a tool to pressure other humanitarian organizations to best represent community priorities. In this fashion, Listening Groups are a tool for promoting fully inclusive community ownership of a project, as well as accountability towards all segments of the population.

HIS projects in South Sudan endeavor to act as an effective third-party accountability tool that serves both the affected population and the humanitarian community (as well as the HIS project itself). Listening Groups are a powerful tool to put the principles of accountability to practice: the groups act as a platform as well as a mechanism for community members to express their views. Listening Group members participate to have a conversation, to be listened to, and to listen to others. Through participation in Listening Groups, members are encouraged to be empowered, vocal advocates for their own needs so that as a whole, the community may enjoy the long term benefits and engagement in services that best reflect their needs and wants. This engagement is in itself a way of strengthening a sense of agency and resilience.

As beneficiaries become aware of their rights and entitlements to participate—and become more confident in their ability to do so—they are better able to hold organizations accountable for their work. Conversely, Listening Groups enable humanitarians to truly listen, understand, and respond to a two-way conversation with a broad spectrum of the displaced community so that they can respond, adapt, and improve their service delivery.



HIS teams pay particular attention to forming Listening Groups of people who are traditionally left out of community decision making, such as youth, women, elderly, and the disabled.

<sup>8</sup> Please see the HIS Learning Collection's Boda Boda Talk Talk Module for more information: <https://www.internews.org/Bbttlearningcollection>

# Listening Groups

## Part II. Case Study

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In South Sudan, Listening Groups are typically formed alongside a radio distribution. A radio recipient is asked to be the focal point for a Listening Group and manage its activities.

## ► Introduction to Part II

**Part II. Case Study** describes the experience and lessons learned from managing Listening Groups in three project locations: 1) UN House, the UN Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Juba; 2) the Malakal PoC and its surrounding communities of Malakal Town and Wau Shilluk; and 3) Abyei, a region on the border between Sudan and South Sudan.

In all three of these locations, Listening Groups were a mechanism for Internews teams to hear directly from the community on whether information programs were meeting their needs, what opinions and feedback they had regarding the humanitarian response, and which issues were of interest or concern to them. In total, these three case studies illustrate the differences between implementing Listening Groups in a camp setting or compact area (like in UN House or Malakal) versus a distributed, insecure, and hard to navigate territory (like Abyei). The case studies also illustrate the different ways to engage and organize Listening Groups, including the selection of participants and locations, and the monitoring and data collection processes used by the different teams.

The main focus of Part II is adaptive programming: what were the issues and challenges faced by the project, and what did not work? More importantly, how did the team adapt the project? What were the key changes and corrections made as implementation progressed? Lastly, Part II concludes by offering advice and recommendations for future Listening Groups projects.

While Part II focuses on the “what we did” behind the project, Part III will focus on the “how” – how you can set up a Listening Group in any other location. Please download Part III [here](#).



The UN House PoC shelters approximately 40,000 displaced people.

## ► UN House

### ► Case Study Location

Juba is the capital and largest city of the Republic of South Sudan. In December 2013, the city was the epicenter of fighting that then spread around the country. From mid-2014 to mid-2016, Juba was relatively peaceful, despite the worsening economic crisis in the country and threats of renewed conflict. In July 2016, intense fighting once again erupted in the city following a firefight between the President and Vice-President's forces at the Presidential Palace, returning the country to a period of civil war and prolonged instability.

From 2013 to 2015, Juba hosted two Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites located at the two main UN bases in the city: Tong Ping (located centrally, next to the Juba International Airport) and the base commonly known as UN House (located on the outskirts of Juba town near Jebel Mountain). In September 2015, the Tong Ping site closed, and the internally displaced population now resides entirely in two Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites located at UN House. UN House PoC 1 is a smaller site located within the UN base itself, while PoC 3 is a larger, purpose-built site that was created to accommodate the displaced population that formerly lived at the Tong Ping UN PoC site before its close.

In October 2016, a biometric registration conducted by IOM registered approximately 38,874 people (14,925 households) sheltering at the UN House PoC sites, including arrivals due to the 2016 July violence and the relocated population from the Tong Ping transit site (where civilians had once again sought protection). While the majority of the registered IDPs have been sheltering at UN House since the crisis erupted in December 2013, approximately 10,000 arrived following the four-day resurgence of violence in Juba in July 2016.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IOM, "Juba UN House PoC Sites: Biometric registration update, October 2016," [http://iomsouthsudan.org/tracking/sites/default/publicfiles/documents/18.10.16\\_UN%20House%20Biometric%20Registration%20Update.pdf](http://iomsouthsudan.org/tracking/sites/default/publicfiles/documents/18.10.16_UN%20House%20Biometric%20Registration%20Update.pdf)

### ► The Problem

UN House hosts an ethnically homogenous group of individuals, composed primarily of a variety of different Nuer tribes (of South Sudanese nationality). While the PoC 1 population is fairly stable, and mostly drawn from the surrounding villages near the UN base, PoC 3 is much more complex, bringing together politicians and leaders from the center of town and a large population displaced from Unity State in the north of the country. These complex community representation and leadership issues – with people displaced from their normal clans and families – means traditional leaders are often at odds with former political leaders and there is limited inclusion of women and young people. The normal protective social structures have also broken down, many people are unemployed, and psychosocial needs continue to grow while services struggle to keep up with the demand. With former combatants also living in the sites, tension and violence can easily flare up.

The humanitarian needs of the displaced population living in the PoC are substantial, including their information needs (despite having good access to radio and mobile phones). People need highly localized information about their surrounding environment, particularly with regard to security concerns. For example, women who wish to leave the site to find firewood, or to travel to markets located in Juba town, need to know what is happening outside the gates of the PoC and whether it is safe to go.

In 2014 and again in 2015, Internews conducted an Information Needs Assessment at UN House. Close to 500 IDPs living at the site were surveyed to assess their literacy level, access to information and the issues that most concerned them. Many people living within the camp had never had any formal education at all (26%), only 24% had completed primary school, and 24% had completed secondary school. "General news in the UN House area" was the number 1 topic of interest among IDPs (68% in Wave 1 and 2). As most radio stations do not provide the hyper-local information wanted by the community, a humanitarian information service within the site was sorely needed.



The BBTT program is broadcast from speakers on the back of boda bodas. Listening stops include communal gathering spots like water points.

The research further uncovered significant gaps between the information desired by IDPs and the amount of information available to them. In PoC 3, 49% of respondents said they had “all” the information they needed to make good decisions for themselves and their family, while 36% said they had “some” but needed more.<sup>2</sup>

### ► The Project

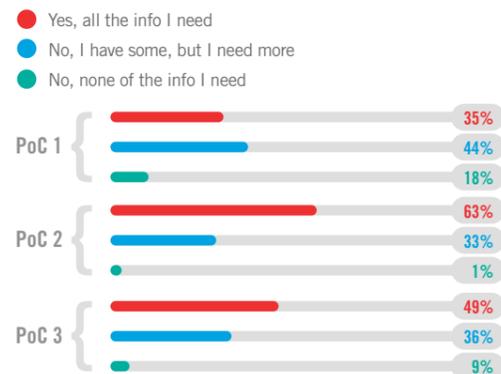
In August 2014, Internews launched a Humanitarian Information Service called *Boda Boda Talk Talk* (BBTT) to serve these complex information needs and assist the community and humanitarian organizations in better communicating with each other. The program also gives space to the community to share their personal messages, including messages of peace and encouragement, as well as opinions about issues at the site and the service available from the NGOs. In order to reflect the voices of the community, Internews recruited and trained reporters from the PoC community, who themselves had been affected and displaced from their homes. These Community Correspondents are best placed to reflect the concerns of their community and work to find appropriate solutions with humanitarian partners.

At the heart of this project is a commitment to an open two-way dialogue between the community and the various humanitarian agencies responding to the growing needs of the people. In this model, beneficiaries are encouraged to be active participants in all stages of the policy and decision-making process. The service is designed as a platform for people to discuss issues, share ideas, and ask questions of each other and humanitarian agencies operating in the PoC.

The service utilizes several three-wheeled motorbikes that move around the site playing audio programs in dedicated public spaces called “Listening Stops” through speakers attached to the bikes. These Listening Stops are complimented by a number of **Listening Groups** (LG) within the site. Currently, the UN House project maintains more than 120 LGs, each made up of approximately 10 people, who listen to the BBTT program twice a week and provide vital feedback on program content as well as issues affecting residents living in the site. Distributions of solar-powered radios completed in 2014 and 2016 further amplified access to the program and increased the number of LGs existing within the site. Through the distribution, radio recipients were given the responsibility to manage and lead Listening Groups in their area. This radio distribution also provided radios to communal areas such as Camp Management information offices, market stalls, community gathering spaces and games centers.<sup>3</sup>

#### UN House Wave 2 Assessment (January 2015)

**“Currently in this protection site, do you think you have all the information you need to make good decisions?”**  
(Base all in Wave 2, N= 299 for PoC 1; N=142 for PoC 2; N=319 for PoC 3)



“There are people who would have really struggled if BBTT had not been here. BBTT makes people laugh even if you don’t think you can anymore. It has jokes and tongue twisters, drama, comforting songs and informative stories that help us understand this situation.”

- Nyadien Kujiek, Listening Group Member, UN House PoC 3

As they travel around the camp, Information Officers and Community Correspondents become well-recognized celebrities. In UN House, each one is assigned around 10 Listening Groups to manage.



A key element of the BBTT project is that it is fueled by the feedback and suggestions of the community it works to serve. As drivers broadcast the program via Listening Stops around the camp, they are encouraged to collect feedback from audience members that is then used to influence the style and content of the program. However, through the use of Listening Groups, more in-depth, facilitated discussions take place to better understand whether the program is having the desired outcome for the community. These Listening Groups also ensure that the project reaches a broad range of stakeholders in the community who may be vulnerable or struggle to have their opinion heard in the wider community setting.

#### Listening Group Selection

Two methods were used to identify Listening Groups within the UN House PoC site. Firstly, BBTT staff worked to identify groups of people that were in the habit of socializing or gathering together. They conducted a foot survey of the camp identifying areas where the community naturally gathered (i.e. coffee stalls, schools or churches) as well as noting where large family groups of approximately 10 people regularly met in common family areas. As the staff of BBTT are all members of the community themselves, they are best placed to understand the social dynamics of the site. The majority of the Listening Groups were identified using this method. These types of groups usually have the highest success rate and longevity as they are composed of individuals that naturally spend

“Every week I look forward to sitting with my family to listen to BBTT. I hear about what is happening where I live and I get to say what I think should be done to fix problems. As a young woman, sometimes I am not heard in our community, it is always the men they ask for their opinion, but BBTT listens to me every time.”

- Nyajima Malek Ruok, Listening Group member, UN House PoC3

<sup>2</sup> Internews, “UN House PoC 3 Juba – Central Equatoria State – Wave 2 Assessment January 2015,” [http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews\\_unhouse\\_3\\_assessment\\_wave2.pdf](http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_unhouse_3_assessment_wave2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> For more information on radio distributions, please see the Radio Distribution Module at <https://www.internews.org/radio-distrib>

time together already. Finding ways to integrate the project into the communities' usual routine helps to reduce feelings of "project fatigue" or the eventual loss of enthusiasm from participants.

Secondly, to ensure that vulnerable groups who may find it difficult to participate or influence community decision-making were included, Listening Groups were formed of women, youths, the elderly and the disabled. These targeted groups not only ensure that vulnerable groups are able to influence program design and access vital information, it also allows the project to use these groups to collect tailored feedback. For example, a program addressing the issue of youth unemployment can be played to a targeted youth Listening Group as well as mixed Listening Groups that may include a higher number of adults. BBTT staff can determine whether the issue is being presented in a way that will influence behavior or policy change, and to see how these groups differ in their response to the issue.

### Monitoring & Data Collection

Listening Groups meet twice a week to listen to the BBTT program. Each Community Correspondent and Driver working on the BBTT project has been assigned approximately 10 groups to manage. They visit each Group weekly to deliver the latest BBTT program (on an SD card that can be played by the solar radio), collect any feedback or questions that have been generated from the listening sessions and to discuss issues affecting the members of the group. Each Listening Group has an assigned leader who looks after the solar radio and the program SD card, and acts as the main focal point for the group to help arrange appropriate times for the BBTT staff member to meet with the group. The feedback collected from all the groups is then recorded in a simple excel spreadsheet that is then passed to the Project Manager.

"Girl education is increasing in the camp, they want to be like Nyaluit Zachariah and Julia Diew whose voices are always heard through BBTT. My younger daughter calls herself Nyaluit Zachariah of BBTT when she is playing. That is the importance of girls being educated."

- Gordon Koang, Listening Group Member, UN House PoC 1

To compliment this, a BBTT facilitator regularly joins the session to assist in guiding the discussion after the program has finished playing.<sup>4</sup> This guided discussion is an important tool to ensure that valuable in-depth data is collected regularly to inform programming style and priorities.

During the session, the facilitator will focus on these key elements:

- Are the topics covered in the program relevant to you? (I.e. is this an issue you care about?)
- Did you understand what was being discussed? (I.e. was the issue presented in a clear manner, understandable to a broad audience?)
- Did you learn anything that will influence the way you behave in the future? (I.e. have we made an impact?)
- What did you like/not like about the program? (I.e. did you actually enjoy listening to the program or did it feel like a chore?)
- What other issues are affecting you in the community that we could address with this program?

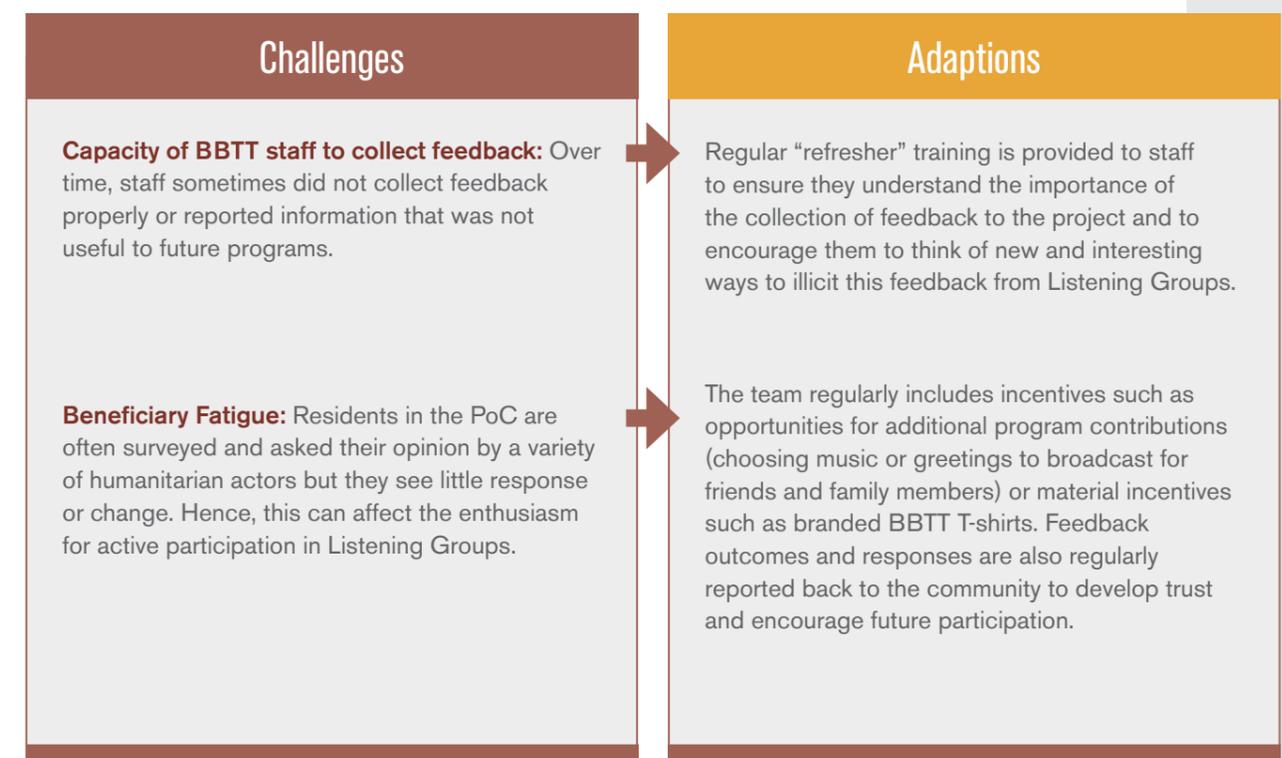
The information from these sessions is then collected and collated to form a clear picture of program relevance, quality and to inform future programming priorities. Once a week the Project Manager compiles a comprehensive list of all the questions and concerns raised, as well as their status (i.e. has the problem been solved or is it ongoing?). This information is collected from all the HIS sites in South Sudan to give a comprehensive picture of access to information, humanitarian engagement with the community as well as to discover any emerging trends within the displacement sites across the nation.

While BBTT relies heavily on the feedback provided by the Listening Groups, the project also incorporates other regular feedback providers that are not necessarily members of structured listening groups. The Community Watch Group (community police) regularly provides security-related information that can be an important warning for triggers of rising insecurity or crime trends within the camp. Similarly, the Women's Association regularly contributes information relating to the coverage of women's issues and highlights emerging trends amongst women both within the camp and Juba town.

BBTT also collects regular feedback via community contributions directly to staff at the office or at the listening stops as the driver is playing the program. BBTT staff also attend weekly community leadership and health cluster meetings to ensure they are able to keep an eye on emerging trends in the camps but also to be available to answer any questions or concerns about the project from the community or service providers.

### ► Adaptive Programming

Since the implementation of Listening Groups in late 2014, the BBTT UN House team has experienced a number of challenges that required adapting the planned program model. See below for some of the major challenges and the response implemented.



<sup>4</sup> See the Listening Groups "How To Guide" for advice on how to lead an effective listening group discussion. [https://www.internews.org/listening-groups\\_3](https://www.internews.org/listening-groups_3)

**Challenges (continued)**

**Creating a safe space:** The PoC is often a crowded, noisy place with few opportunities for privacy. Sometimes this lack of privacy affected the willingness of participants to engage in a frank and honest discussion with facilitators.

**Feedback response:** An important element of the project is to illicit a response to each piece of feedback received from the community. Sometimes humanitarian organizations are either unwilling or too busy to respond in a timely fashion which affects the trust placed in the BBTT project.

**Adaptions (continued)**

Locations of Listening Group discussions are regularly monitored to ensure they are comfortable for participants and encourage open conversation. When possible, conversations that address sensitive issues (such as GBV) are held in private community spaces or at the BBTT office site to ensure all participants feel comfortable to contribute to the discussion.

To improve feedback response times, BBTT staff work hard to build strong relationships with humanitarian actors and attend any camp coordination meetings to encourage swift responses. Staff also work closely with actors to craft responses that are clear and actionable for the community, and raise awareness of how they can find more information or assistance regarding the issue at hand.

**► Advice & Recommendations**

**Improve efficiency:** Time is one of the biggest challenges affecting the successful implementation of Listening Groups at this particular site. Currently, every group with a radio is counted as a "Listening Group." Staff need to visit more than 120 Listening Groups twice a week to deliver programming and collect feedback. While this is a valuable source of information for the project, this process also heavily cuts into the time available to research, produce, and edit new programming for the project and to implement new ideas. To improve future outcomes for the use of Listening Groups, it would be beneficial to reassess the distribution method of BBTT programming within the UN House PoC. To make the implementation of Listening Groups less time-consuming, it is recommended that teams should determine whether community leadership, camp management or other existing central community meeting points might be utilized for more efficient service delivery.

**Increase training for facilitators and group members:** To improve the quality of information being received from the Listening Groups, a training program should be implemented both for the groups as well as the radio producers who manage the groups. Better equipping producers with skills in group facilitation will allow them to create more inclusive discussions amongst participants and should encourage more active participation. As mentioned previously, training the Listening Groups themselves about why information is collected and how it is used will improve the quality and depth of information collected, which will ultimately result in the production of better and more effective programming as well as improved engagement between the community and humanitarian partners. Refresher training that explains the aims of the project could also be delivered to community leaders and opinion makers to help increase community ownership and understanding of the overall project aims.

This training and additional time created through distribution changes will improve the quality of Listening Group discussions being run in the camp. Conducting thorough and fruitful listening sessions is a time-consuming task that requires preparation and a sustained discussion following the listening of the program. The approach to this issue is a question of quality over quantity. While each staff member can visit several Listening Groups each week and simply ask questions relating to the program, participants who feel rushed to give their opinions will either not trust the process or feel that their opinion is not really being valued.

**Find additional ways to use Listening Groups:** BBTT plays an important role in the community by encouraging community debate over issues important to them. Now that Listening Groups are well established in the site, there is room for the service to expand to offer additional services to the community. For example, Listening Groups could be used as a base to organize larger community forums that grant the community increased access to the humanitarian providers.

**Identify humanitarian focal points:** Lastly, assigning a particular "feedback focal point" in each humanitarian organization may also reduce the time taken by staff to collect responses to community concerns. While the transient nature of NGO staff in field assignments may require this focal point to be replaced every 6 months or so, this attempt at continuity should still improve the speed and quality of response to community feedback.

## ► Malakal

### ► Case Study Location

The city of Malakal is located in the northeast of South Sudan in Eastern Nile State (Formerly Upper Nile State), close to the border with the Republic of Sudan and Ethiopia. Before the beginning of the conflict in 2013, it was the second largest city in the country, but in the first two years of fighting the town had exchanged hands between Government and Opposition forces 12 times. Fighting destroyed much of the town, forcing the population to relocate to the United Nations Protection of Civilians (PoC) site, neighboring Wau Shilluk, and further on to other parts of the country. As of February 2017 (when the last biometric registration occurred), there were more than 30,559 individuals (or 10,300 households) living in the Malakal PoC.

Reflecting the demographics of the city of Malakal, the PoC site is majority Shilluk with substantial numbers of Nuer. Until February 2016, the camp also included a population of close to 5,000 Dinka residents who left following an escalation of tensions with the Shilluk community and a large fire that devastated a large section of the PoC. Communal tensions also exist between Shilluk and Nuer populations driven by a range of past grievances related to land and resource struggles.

Outside the PoC, these communities have long struggled with inter-communal violence caused by cattle raiding. Thousands of homes have been destroyed and many people are unwilling to return after being displaced multiple times by repeated attacks. Conditions inside the PoC have also been challenging. Before the site was rejuvenated in 2015, several instances of heavy flooding ruined shelters, increased the risk of sanitation issues and waterborne diseases, and hindered free movement to access services and exchange information within the site. Just outside Malakal, the small village of Wau Shilluk (home to around 3,000 people before the conflict) became a temporary settlement for up to 60,000 displaced people at times. Ongoing security concerns have severely hindered humanitarian access to Wau Shilluk for long periods of time.



Listening Groups in the Malakal PoC received radios to help them listen to programs and provide feedback.

### ► The Problem

As the conflict progressed and greater numbers of people sought shelter in the Malakal PoC, a lack of effective NGO engagement and community consultation contributed to growing tensions both inside and outside the PoC. The reliance on mobile phones and “word of mouth” as the most common methods of communication exacerbated this even further. Information access was limited, with intermittent access to the Government-run state radio service. The Catholic radio station there was also closed.

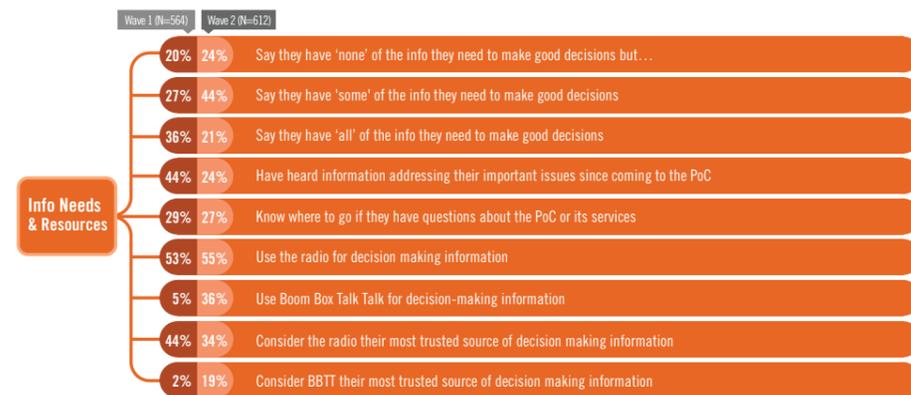
In August 2014 and again in January 2015, Internews conducted an Information Needs Assessment at the Malakal PoC site to inform its programming. More than 1,000 IDPs living at the site were surveyed to assess their literacy level, access to information and the issues that most concerned them.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, most people living within the camp reported having no formal education at all (42%), only 22% had completed primary school, and 21% had completed secondary school. Nearly one-quarter of respondents (24%) said they had “none” of the information they needed to make decisions for themselves, while 44% said they had only “some” of the information they felt they needed. The research showed that over time the demand for trustworthy and actionable information remained strong, including the desire to communicate with humanitarian responders. In 2015, 24% had heard information addressing their important issues since coming to the PoC (compared with 44% in 2014), and 27% knew where to go if they had questions about the PoC or its services (versus 29% in 2014). Barriers to accessing information seemed to be getting worse and unmet needs were growing.



The Malakal PoC is notoriously crowded and difficult to navigate. When it rains, knee-deep mud makes it hard to move around the camp.

<sup>5</sup> Internews, “UNMISS POC Site – Malakal, Baseline Assessment: August 2014,” [http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews\\_Malakal\\_Baseline\\_August2014.pdf](http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_Malakal_Baseline_August2014.pdf); “UNMISS PoC Site – Malakal, Wave 2 Assessment: January 2015,” [http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews\\_malakal\\_btt\\_assessment\\_wave2.pdf](http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_malakal_btt_assessment_wave2.pdf)

## Key Findings in Wave 1 and Wave 2 (cont...)



## ► The Project

In July 2014, Internews launched *Boom Box Talk* (BBTT) in the Malakal PoC. As with Internews' BBTT programs in other PoCs, the program delivered life-saving information to the IDP and host community living inside the PoC and in Wau Shilluk. BBTT was a professionally produced audio program made by community correspondents recruited and trained from within the PoC. The service was a platform for discussing issues, sharing ideas, and asking questions of each other and agencies. Two 20-minute programs were recorded onto USB sticks and played on static speakers and megaphones at various locations within the PoC. The project also included an initial small distribution of 20 radios to create dedicated **Listening Groups** that provided regular feedback to the project on issues of concern in the community, program quality and questions for other humanitarian organizations operating within the site.

To address the growing information needs of the surrounding communities, in February 2015, BBTT expanded into a community radio station called Nile FM that could serve an audience beyond the PoC, to include IDPs living in informal and spontaneous settlements all along the River Nile, as well as members of the host community in Malakal town and nearby villages. Nile FM provides a bridge between the information and engagement needs of the IDP community and the service delivery and accountability needs of humanitarian partners working within the Malakal PoC site and surrounding areas.

Listening Groups created by the station play an important role in serving the specific information needs of the population living in each location (particularly relating to security and access to food). In late 2015, Internews consolidated the Listening Groups that had previously contributed to BBTT's activities to create 14 new Listening Groups focused on specific issues. These groups meet on a weekly basis to listen to programs produced by the station and provide feedback on the content, relevance, and impact of the information provided.

"I trust Nile FM more than any other humanitarian organizations in the PoC. They are ours. Every day, I ask them to come to my office and tell them about what is happening in the PoC. They are our voices and without them, humanitarians would have taken a long time to respond to the growing needs of this community,"

- Mathew B. Chol, Chairman of Peace and Security Council, Malakal POC



The Nile FM team poses with Women's Listening Groups, which provide targeted feedback on women's issues.

## Listening Group Selection

Nile FM currently manages 14 separate Listening Groups of 10 members each. As the station currently has 13 regular programs, 13 of these Listening Groups are assigned to one specific program each to give detailed and ongoing feedback on the program delivery, content and style. The remaining Listening Group is used to provide overall station feedback.

As these groups develop an ongoing relationship with their assigned program, they are incentivized to continue providing commentary and feedback as they regularly see their suggestions implemented in the program. In a way, while each program has a team of skilled producers and journalists creating the product, the program itself is "owned" by the Listening Group as they are the main influencers in setting a tone and reflecting the broader community's opinion.

This style of Listening Group implementation, in which each group is dedicated to one program, is designed to increase feedback and reduce feedback fatigue. While in practice, members of each Listening Group do indeed listen to other programs produced by the station and may provide feedback on them, they are not expected to actively listen to every program, every day.

"I didn't know much about HIV/AIDS in the past and I was not using condoms at all. I heard one of the medical doctors talking about the dangers of having unprotected sex. That same day, I decided to test myself. I now regularly listen to Nile FM to save my life and that of others."

- Listening Group Member, Sector 4, Malakal PoC

The members of the Listening Groups often relate to the target audience for that program. For example, the Listening Group for the Women's program is made up of members of the PoC Women's Leadership Association; the radio program addressing issues affecting the elderly and disabled is monitored by a Listening Group made up of members of the Elderly, Vulnerable and Disabled Association; and Youth programming similarly is monitored by a Listening Group made up of youth leaders living within the camp. The remaining "control" Listening Group has a broad mix of members, including men and women aged between 18-60 years old.

### Monitoring & Data Collection

Each Listening Group has an assigned leader who acts as the main focal point for the group. Each week the program producer meets with the leader to discuss the issues raised during the airing of the program as well as any additional questions that came up during the broadcast. This information is then taken back to Nile FM to be collated into an ongoing list of feedback maintained by the Project Manager. Any comments that require a response from a humanitarian service provider are written on the station whiteboard, and the station newsroom editor then assigns these issues to journalists to follow up by exploring the topic, creating a news story, and eliciting a response or explanation from the organization responsible.

Once a week the Project Manager compiles a comprehensive list of all the questions and concerns raised, as well as their status (i.e. has the problem been solved or is it ongoing?). This information is collected from all the HIS sites in South Sudan to give a comprehensive picture of access to information and humanitarian engagement with affected communities, as well as to discover any emerging trends within the displacement sites across the nation.

Once a month, the program producer sits with each Listening Group to run a comprehensive focus group discussion. This Listening Group session is a chance to have a more in-depth look at the quality of the program, and an open discussion about issues in the camp that need to be addressed.

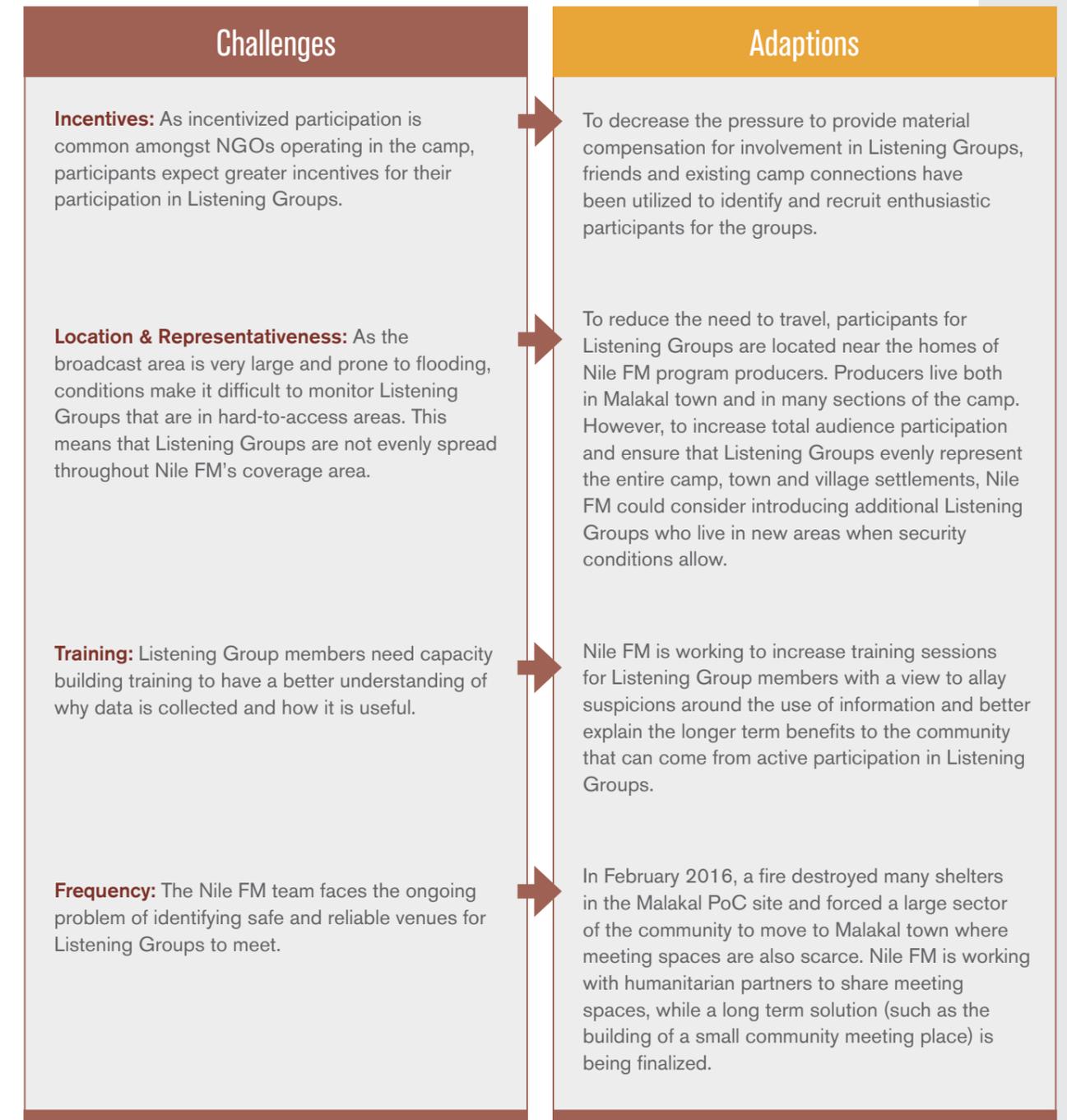
Unfortunately, due to the ongoing insecurity and restricted movement, the team has been unable to establish dedicated Listening Groups in Wau Shilluk or surrounding villages. However, trusted information providers in these communities are contacted regularly to provide ongoing feedback and talkback programming regularly encourages contact from these communities via calls, SMS, and email.

While Nile FM relies heavily on the feedback provided by the 14 Listening Groups, the station also incorporates other regular feedback providers that are not necessarily members of structured Listening Groups. The Community Watch Group (community police) regularly provides security-related information that can be an important warning for triggers of rising insecurity or crime trends within the camp. Similarly, the Women's Association regularly contributes information relating to the broadcast of women's issues on Nile FM and highlights emerging trends amongst women both within the camp and surrounding town and settlements.

Nile FM also collects regular feedback via regular audience interaction with the station. The station broadcasts two daily talkback programs that explore issues within the camp, Malakal town, and surrounding areas. In addition, the station receives regular text messages that might include feedback on program content or tips for issues that need to be addressed. The Nile FM Project Manager also regularly meets with community leadership to discuss issues affecting residents and collect feedback on Nile FM programming.

### ► Adaptive Programming

Since the implementation of the current Listening Group model in late 2015, Nile FM has experienced a number of challenges that required an adaptation to the planned program model. See below for some of the major challenges and the response implemented.



## ► Advice & Recommendations

**Provide “recognition” incentives:** To better incentivize participation in Listening Groups, a small budget could be assigned to the project to cover basic items such as tea, coffee, and milk. At this particular site, many other NGOs regularly provide these items at community meetings and focus group sessions, and because of this, a community expectation has developed that participation in humanitarian activities should be rewarded. However, “recognition” incentives, such as calling attention to groups’ contributions during a program, are generally better and more sustainable than providing material incentives. Keep in mind that any decision to implement incentives should be paired with an increased effort to train Listening Group members to improve feedback and ensure they are aware of the important role they play in influencing information channels and humanitarian programming more broadly.

**Recruit volunteer community mobilizers:** To increase the amount of feedback collected and to better represent the large geographical area, the project could consider hiring volunteer community mobilizers. These mobilizers, assigned to each block in the PoC (or grouping of houses in Malakal Town, Wau Shilluk, and the surrounding villages), could deliver detailed feedback on Nile FM programming, style, and content on a weekly basis. Additionally, these mobilizers would be an important tool to check the pulse of the community on important issues and concerns and could act as an early warning of tensions within the population. These mobilizers could be hired through a partnership with another organization that already hires local mobilizers (such as IOM or NGO partners working in protection), or as camp volunteers who receive a small incentive for their service. This increase in organizational presence across the communities could also add to the feeling of community ownership of the project and may increase the level of specific feedback relating to program quality that Listening Group members might feel uncomfortable reporting directly to the program producer.

**Increase training for groups and facilitators:** To improve the quality of information being received from the Listening Groups, a training program should be implemented both for the groups as well as the radio producers who manage the Groups. Better equipping producers with skills in group facilitation will allow them to create more inclusive discussions amongst participants and should encourage more active participation. As mentioned previously, training the Listening Groups themselves about why information is collected and how it is used will improve the quality and depth of information collected, which will ultimately result in the production of better and more effective programming as well as improved engagement between the community and humanitarian partners. Refresher training that explains the aims of the project could also be delivered to community leaders and opinion makers to help in increasing community ownership and understanding of the overall project aims.

**Identify humanitarian focal points:** Lastly, assigning a particular “feedback focal point” in each humanitarian organization that is responsible for liaising with Nile FM producers may also reduce the time taken by the Nile FM team to collect responses to community feedback voiced in the Listening Groups or via other feedback channels. While the transient nature of NGO staff in field assignments may require this “focal point” to be replaced every 6 months or so, this attempt at continuity should still improve the speed and quality of response to community concerns.

## ► Abyei

### ► Case Study Location

Whilst international attention has been largely diverted to South Sudan’s ongoing civil conflict, the political and administrative status of Abyei remains unresolved, and continues to be one of the most contentious outstanding issues between Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan. In a highly volatile region, Abyei remains a potential flashpoint for a return to hostilities between Khartoum, the Republic of South Sudan and local communities.



A small area on the border between South Sudan and Sudan directly adjacent to the vast oil deposits of the upper Nile basin, Abyei is also an important cultural and historical bridge between South Sudan and Sudan, and has long held historical and culturally meaningful associations for the Ngok Dinka (a sub-group of the wider Dinka Tribe aligning themselves with the south) and Misseriya (a nomadic Arab people with strong ties to the north). Large IDP populations and movements from South Sudan due to the current conflict, and from within Abyei itself, have the potential to further upset the delicate balance.

In September 2012 the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) presented a proposal concerning the final status of Abyei. It recommended a referendum to decide the final status of the region should take place in October 2013 and those eligible to vote should be “residents,” defining residents as “the members of the Ngok Dinka community and other Sudanese who are residing in the area, meaning those Sudanese who have permanent abode in Abyei.” Sudan and South Sudan have yet to reach agreement on the formation of local joint administrative bodies, a step that would lead to the formation of the Referendum Commission.



The Abyei team played a critical role in peacebuilding and promoting understanding between the two sides in the conflict. The program broadcast the resumption of peace talks between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya in February 2016, bringing the momentous news to communities who could not attend the talks in person.

Whilst the 2013 referendum did not officially proceed, an informal, non-binding vote was held in October 2013. This vote, which was boycotted by the Misseriya, led to a 99.9% result in favor of Abyei to join South Sudan. However the results were not recognized by Khartoum or the African Union, and ultimately the vote has done nothing to advance the peace process. In December 2013, civil war erupted in South Sudan, leading to significant ripple effects on the Abyei region and dramatically altering the prospects for engagement, dialogue, trust, peace, and reconciliation in Abyei.

### ► The Problem

In December 2012, Internews research confirmed that the populations of Abyei and nearby Agok (a town in South Sudan's Warrap region where many displaced people from Abyei had fled) faced substantial challenges in accessing information. Primary information sources included government and community rallies, church, mobile phone, and word of mouth. However, many participants identified the lack of roads and public transport as a critical impediment to information access. Women mentioned being excluded from such events and were at a particular disadvantage. Above all, respondents doubted the reliability of information they received from these direct sources, expressing concern that it was being distorted as it passed from person to person. The research found that the Internews-supported Mayardit FM broadcasting from Turalei, UN/Fondation Hirondele's Radio Miraya, and Radio Tamazuj (on shortwave) were widely listened to in the region, but members of the community expressed a view that more localized, accurate and up to date information was needed. These findings were confirmed during a subsequent field visit to Abyei in February 2013.

This lack of timely, reliable, accurate and trusted information posed many challenges, particularly within the context of the peace process and humanitarian response. Given the historical background to the conflict and mistrust in Abyei, the critical role of information and community engagement in the success of any future agreement was clear. For humanitarian actors, the need was even more tangible - without widespread access to information about humanitarian services, these services would go underutilized or could be monopolized by a more empowered minority.

In 2014 and 2015, new attempts at inter-communal discussions on Abyei's final status were continually delayed, while periods of fighting, punctuated by sporadic attacks involving military or paramilitary elements from Sudan and South Sudan, fueled concerns from all parties in Abyei of intensified conflict between the two communities. In the continued absence of inter-community dispute resolution mechanisms, the United Nations Interim Force for Abyei (UNISFA) enforced a disengagement line between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka to prevent security incidents between them. UNISFA also enforced buffer zones between Misseriya herders and the settled Ngok Dinka population during the Misseriya annual migration southwards with their cattle. These measures effectively closed the channels of communication between the two communities, fueling an atmosphere of rumor, blame, and rapid recriminations.

### ► The Project

Launched in October 2012, Internews' "Information Access in Abyei" project aimed to foster an unprecedented forum for engagement between the citizens of Abyei, local authorities, political representatives, and international humanitarian and development agencies. While the project first aimed to build an FM radio station for timely, critical dialogue around reconciliation and development in the region, the disputed status of Abyei did not allow for a legal operational and broadcast license for the station. Rather, this goal was then achieved through the establishment of a local Abyei news service, which produced content about Abyei to be broadcast on other news outlets which could be heard in the region. The project strengthened ties between communities, humanitarian agencies, and civil society groups carrying out relief and recovery activities across Abyei, especially in the two main settlements centered on Agok and Abyei Town.

From the beginning, the project's guiding principle was to give voice to Abyei's communities, such that programs would reflect listeners' expressed information needs and concerns. As such, a key component of program strategy has been community engagement. To advance the project, Listening Groups were established as part of its core community engagement strategy. The project incorporated audience feedback and participatory monitoring and evaluation into programming by organizing weekly Listening Groups across the Abyei region.

Under the guidance of a Humanitarian Liaison Officer, in January 2016 the team made a renewed push to implement Listening Groups. In the following months, the team's Information Officers (IOs) were each conducting three focus group discussions per week, eventually covering 12 different locations. These views were then brought back to the editorial meetings to inform program content, allowing programming to react more rapidly to changing events and tightly focus on the information needs of listeners. By the end of June 2016, the team had conducted 46 listening groups, focusing especially in areas of information poverty where people had the least access to information. The **Listening Groups** were instrumental in providing real-time feedback to the editorial team, and also closed the feedback loop for partner organizations. This case study focuses on the six-month Listening Group initiative from January-June 2016 (though the Abyei team had previously conducted some focus group discussions with listeners).

"I feel that the program represents the interests of women. We listen to it to hear about women's issues, whether it is how to keep your household, how to take care of your children, and good habits. When Abyei Today [the flagship program] is on, I tell my children to gather around and listen to learn about things."

- Listening Group member,  
Female / 45 years, Agok



The Abyei project provided humanitarian news, informative features, and entertaining stories for the local community, including this program on gardening.



An Information Officer in Abyei gives a wind-up solar radio to a woman leading a Listening Group.

### Listening Group Selection

Since heavy clashes between Sudanese and South Sudanese factions in 2011 left the Abyei region devastated, the area is still characterized by little to no infrastructure, fragmented communities, and on-going tensions. Though humanitarian needs in Abyei are great, and the area is host to many displaced groups, there are no formal camps like there are in South Sudan. As such, there is no conventional Camp Management, and coordination of aid and services must be done through traditional ad-hoc community structures.

At the start of 2016, there had been considerable population movements, with big groups of people resettling and reintegrating into communities, making it more difficult for aid organizations to provide an accurate registry of the affected population. Population centers were difficult to reach, and transportation to these locations was challenging at best.

In December 2015, Internews commissioned Forcier Consulting to conduct an Audience and Program Assessment in Abyei town, Agok, and other villages in the Abyei Area to understand the impact of current programming and to further assess the information needs, access to media, and program-related knowledge of the community. Using the data from the Forcier study, the team identified three communities that had the least access to information and the lowest rates of radio ownership. Accessibility was a key factor in Listening Group selection, as the project only had one vehicle (frequently used by the journalists), while the Information Officers who managed the Listening Groups had to rely on public transportation to travel around. Twelve locations were ultimately designated for Listening Groups.

The Listening Groups were not necessarily composed of the same people each time they met for discussion. Rather, the Information Officers were instructed to conduct discussions with any member of the village above 18 years, with each group consisting of more than 3 people and equal numbers of men and women represented.

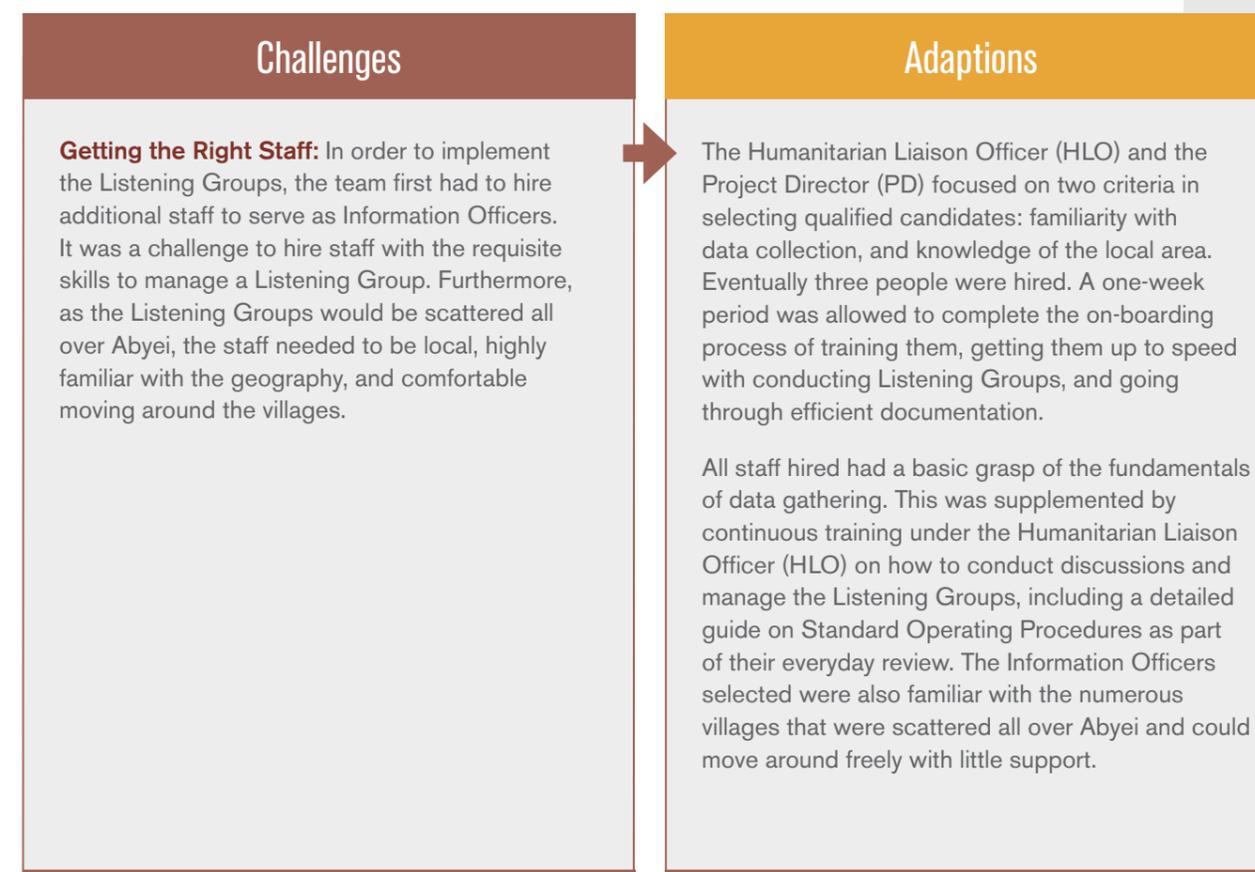
### Monitoring & Data Collection

The team was expected to meet with three Listening Groups per day, on three days of the week. The target would change in some villages where respondents lived closer together or further apart. At the beginning of each discussion, the purpose of the Listening Group was explained, and each member was asked to give their consent for participation and sign a form. During the discussion, one Information Officer would make an audio recording and take notes on a paper sheet, while the other Information Officer would facilitate the discussion and take notes as able.

On the other two days of the week, the IOs would transfer their notes and tabulate data from the Listening Groups' discussions into a master spreadsheet. They would listen back to the recorded discussions to aid in this process. Each Information Officer was assigned to write a summary of each recording (a Word document), which was then shared with the Humanitarian Liaison Officer. The HLO would then share a report with the Project Director to inform the daily editorial meetings, and regular humanitarian cluster meetings.

### ► Adaptive Programming

As a narrow patch of land that straddles the border between Sudan and South Sudan, Abyei still has numerous challenges that are unique from any other Listening Group Initiative that was done before. The complex humanitarian environment, safety and security, and lack of access presented constraints that required the team to adapt. See below for a summary of challenges and the response implemented.



## Challenges (continued)

**Selecting Participants within the Complex Humanitarian Environment:** Abyei has been called the “frozen emergency” – the crisis is not acute, but it is ongoing, and the community is far from the recovery stage. This means that unlike camp-like environments where a sizable population is stationary, the Abyei population is very fluid due to ongoing resettlement.

**Maintaining Consistency:** In the first weeks of conducting the Listening Groups, the fluidity of the population and ongoing resettlement meant that there would be occasions where no one would be in the village.

**Addressing Access:** The challenges in geography, security, and access were significant, and it was difficult to reliably visit Listening Groups and hold discussions with the limited logistical support available.

## Adaptions (continued)

There were at least some identifiable villages or collections of villages called Bomas that were known to community leaders, and this was used as an initial starting point along with big population areas like Agok, or Abyei town that had established markets. With proper coordination through the UN Regional Coordinator’s Office (RCO)/OCHA, UNISFA, and the Abyei Administrative Authority (AAA) to conduct discussions in the area, the team was able to consistently get feedback from verified towns that were safe. The lack of registry was supplemented by consulting with village leaders, and also with proper documentation – noting contact details and demographic information in cases where there was a need to verify opinions, or get more feedback from the same source.

The team also did more advance planning to ensure Listening Groups would happen according to the set schedule. A day was set in the week to contact participants and announce, gather, and agree on a time to meet for the following week. This made subsequent visits more efficient and maximized the time available to be used for discussions. In addition, radios were handed out to the Listening Groups. This enhanced participation from the communities, and encouraged those that wanted to provide feedback on the program.

At the start, the team strategically used existing resources. For example, the Information Officers would take public transportation that went on market routes to travel to Listening Group locations. Eventually this was no longer needed as the project was able to procure two motorbikes that made it easier to travel to different locations.

## ► Advice &amp; Recommendations

**Use Listening Groups to surface myths, beliefs, and other interesting insights:** The Abyei team greatly benefited from an expanded perspective on what the community needed. Although the project already enjoyed trust from the community, the echo chamber of an editorial discussion also meant that their point of view of what was “news” or what could be useful information would occasionally be limited, if not fail to capture the details of what people really wanted to know. The Listening Groups’ feedback filled in that gap by providing more targeted insights on information gaps and information needs. For one segment about blood donations (a program produced in partnership with MSF), the Listening Group was able to field questions about the myths and beliefs that they had concerning their reservations on giving blood. This feedback was used by the Editorial Team and looped through MSF to come up with a medically-sound response aired on the program. A greater focus on the use of Listening Groups for this purpose would improve program quality and relevance to the local population.

**Share Listening Group feedback consistently with the humanitarian community:** UN, INGO, NGO Partners also benefited from feedback on their programs and services. The data collected from the Listening Groups was actively shared and presented during cluster coordination meetings with different partners. The HLO, who served as the coordinator for the Listening Groups, utilized weekly feedback to voice specific concerns from the community to humanitarian organizations. This allowed partner organizations to not only increase their collaboration with the Information Access to Abyei project but also improve their own services by directly addressing key issues from the community.

**See Listening Groups as a means of extending audience outreach:** The Listening Groups also improved trust and cooperation from the community. Even though the Abyei Team was already quite popular and well-known, some communities felt that their perspectives and voices were not being heard. Information Officers gathering feedback actively, and in hard-to-reach villages, sent a strong message that the project was dedicated in its mission to reach out. Communities who were eventually visited by the radio team, or even on occasion had their voices featured on the program, felt more involved.

**Encourage quicker adoption of Listening Group feedback by the radio editorial team:** While the Listening Groups methodology was still being refined, a good two weeks of initial feedback was not looped into the “Abyei This Week” broadcasting team. It took a while for the radio side of the project to get accustomed to receiving feedback from the Information Officers. Involving the radio editorial team in the early stages, getting them acquainted with the kind of data that was being collected, and placing that data at the core of program planning is recommended at the very start.

**Continuously build capacity for local staff in conducting Listening Groups:** Although the project was able to gather voices and great feedback, the skills required to conduct an effective Listening Group discussion still require constant reinforcement. An evaluation period of every two weeks is recommended, as well as making sure that all Listening Group discussions are recorded to provide oversight for the Project Lead. One of the aspects that was difficult to overcome at first was managing the expectation of participants, as any attempt to provide space for feedback could make them expect that the facilitators would be solving the issue. It required careful expectation management and training on how to communicate limitations to address these issues and run a discussion smoothly.

## About Internews

Internews is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard.

Internews provides communities the resources to produce local news and information with integrity and independence. With global expertise and reach, Internews trains both media professionals and citizen journalists, introduces innovative media solutions, increases coverage of vital issues and helps establish policies needed for open access to information.

Internews operates internationally, with administrative centers in California, Washington DC, and London, as well as regional hubs in Bangkok and Nairobi. Formed in 1982, Internews has worked in more than 90 countries, and currently has offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and North America.

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This publication is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Internews and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.