THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT (IEA) FINDINGS FOR TRANSLATION

Background: In South Sudan information flows are hindered by immense logistical, technical, and financial constraints and these have, over the years, been worsened by conflict and violence across the country. The 2013 civil war led to further economic fragmentation, negatively impacting mass media growth and development. Prior to the outbreak of conflict in 2013, South Sudan already ranked high among countries with a harsh environment for journalists, curtailing freedom of expression and free press.

Aims/Objectives: Internews carried out an information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) in South Sudan from February to September 20222 to better understand the unique and localized information needs, gaps, sources and patterns of access and use of information. The IEA offers an analytical framework to capture all dimensions of the relationship between information consumers and suppliers. Gaining insights into these dynamics allows us to design projects that meet people where they are to deliver information through the channels, platforms, formats, or people that they prefer and trust.

Methodology and techniques: From June to July 2022 Internews, through the Rooted-in Trust (RiT 2.0) conducted an IEA in three selected counties in Upper Nile State, Central Equatoria and Eastern Equatoria among the internal displaced persons and host communities. Both the IDPs and host communities are largely disadvantaged due to their lack of connections, dependence on state assistances and their difficulty in accessing essential-basic services including reliable information on any topic. The themes studied focused on information consumption, habits, health, and preferences, as well as beliefs about the reliability of information from diverse sources. Internews employed the IEA methodology, a participatory approach which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The IEA data was collected through desk reviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), Key informant's interviews (KIIs) and a community survey in three counties of the three selected states. These data collection tools were developed by Internews global team and tailored to fit the local context, themes, and access factors with the broader aim to gain a deep understanding of how people and communities in the selected target geographic areas find, share, value, and trust information in their own local contexts and explore all the factors that govern information needs, access, sourcing, movement, uptake, and impact in an ecosystem.

Results/findings:

- South Sudan has a harsh media environment which curtails freedom of expression and press freedoms. Media is heavily controlled with limited freedom of expression for journalists. The major

news items are about politicians, military factions, tribal leaders, and the government of South Sudan.

- Religious leaders remained the most vocal and trusted opinion leaders, especially in rural areas than in urban areas in South Sudan. Religious leaders have negative views on COVID-19 vaccine, they reference it as an 'evil monster' and this increased listeners hesitancy and vaccine uptake in the country.

- Access to radios and television stations is limited in both rural and urban areas due to energy shortages and economic hardships in the country.

- The participation of people with disabilities (PwDs)in community activities is very low compared to other groups in the community because of cultural perceptions and treatment of people with disabilities in cultural setting in South Sudan vary from acceptance or tolerance to hatred or revulsion; thus, the affective attitudes held by the community include in fear, pity and sympathy among others.

- Female participation in community activities is very low due to sociocultural factors where women are discouraged by their partners, overly engaged in family chores, gender prejudice, religion, and political interference.

- Newspaper readership levels are low in rural compared to urban pockets of South Sudan due to low literacy levels among Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) and remote communities. This is a group people that were displaced from their homes by either natural disastrous such as flooding, or conflicts and such insecurity and intercommunal conflicts disrupt the follow of information in the community and among vulnerable groups—those who do not strong social connections and thus have limited access to reliable information.

- Shortage of food items due to famine and other natural disasters is one of the pressing issues in the community as the results lack of sustainable agriculture.

- Community gets Covid-19 information from the ministry of health and health partners.

Conclusion: There is a lack of participatory approaches involving community actors in the response has been identified. As such, risk communication is not tailored to internally displaced persons (IDPs), host communities nor responsive to their needs. This information ecosystem assessments (IEA) in South Sudan indicates that the use of native and/or preferred language (and format) is key to build trust and engage with communities. IDPs and people with disabilities (PwDs) are less likely to understand health information, and feel involved and recognized in the humanitarian response, and ultimately make informed decisions, if communication is not tailored to their concerns, culturally relevant, and provided through preferred and

trusted channels. Humanitarian sector and other sectors should pay great attention to how to take cultural diversity into account can affect the delivery of services both positively and negatively, and how local governments.

Recommendations:

Political Actors

- Government should allow freedom of expression. Social media (Facebook) is the leading medium followed by television and radio. The role of informal networks in sharing information within communities, such as informal networks on social media, should not be underestimated.
- Initiate peace dialogue and conflict resolution activities in the community.
- Improve infrastructures and roads in and to remote communities for easy access to information and services in urban area.

Information Providers (Media, NGOs, Government, Religious/community leaders, and civil society) and **Policy Makers**

- Humanitarian sector to increase services to vulnerable groups and people with disabilities and to have sufficient access to services and reliable information in their respective communities.
- The Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) and local communities want more *radio stations* and increased *radio coverage* or frequency that reaches remote areas in the communities.
- Religious and community leaders as well as famous celebrities are considered influential, and they should be included in the content dissemination strategy.
- Essential to develop a cultural inclusion strategy for information dissemination for target populations or community to ensure that community-based programs culturally and appropriately tailored to inclusiveness.
- Mobile network and internet access should be universal among urban, rural, and remote areas so that communities can access reliable information equally.
- Community education that aims to improve awareness, knowledge, attitudes behaviors, and access to health information and other relevant information that addresses gender and public health problems in the communities.
- Improve food security and livelihoods of vulnerable families and their communities
- Promote sustainable agriculture.