ROOTED IN TRUST 2.0 MALI

OUR LANGUAGE, OUR INFORMATION

A thematic analysis of the information ecosystem in communities of internally displaced people in Mali

FEBRUARY 2023

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LIST OF **ACRONYMS**

■ **IEA**
Information Ecosystem Analysis

■ **AMSODE**
Malian Association for Solidarity and Development

■ **DONIBLOG**
Community of bloggers in Mali

■ **FGD**
Focus Group Discussion

■ **MAG**
Group Analysis Method

■ **UNOCHA**
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

■ **NGO**
Non-Governmental Organization

■ **ORTM**
Mali Radio and Television Office

■ **IDP**
Internally Displaced Person

■ **RiT**
Rooted in Trust

■ **UNICEF**
United Nations Children Fund

EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

Thematic research on the use of local languages in health and COVID-19 communication strategies targeting internally displaced communities builds on the global Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) conducted through the Rooted in Trust (RiT) project during its first phase in 2021. This study employed a mixed methods research design that leveraged complementary qualitative and quantitative approaches. Its aims were to systematically examine the mechanisms of information production on the COVID-19 pandemic in Mali and information practices of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the regions of Ségou, Sikasso, Mopti, Timbuktu, and in the district of Bamako.

The study's results show that communication strategies rarely use local languages spoken by IDPs. The unsuitability of languages but also of content or format in the production and supply of information constitutes one of the main obstacles to effective communication between response actors and displaced communities.

> " *When I turn on my radio and everything they're saying is in Bambara when I don't understand Bambara very well, I'd rather turn my radio off and save my batteries. What's the point of listening when I don't understand what's being said?* **Internews, IEA Mali, 2021.**

In line with these findings, this thematic study (or modular update) analyzes the roles and impacts of the use of local languages by humanitarians, health actors, and the media in their communication with IDPs. The analysis focuses on local languages as communication alternatives with IDPs in the regions of Mopti, Sikasso, and the district of Bamako.

Since IDP communities often settle in linguistic areas different from their own, it seems essential that communications concerning health risks like COVID-19 are informed by these realities. Study results also indicate that humanitarian, health, and media actors do not sufficiently consider the information needs of displaced populations. Consequently, communications are inadequately understood or misconstrued.

A number of strategies have been identified to improve vulnerable communities' comprehension of – and access to – information and services crucial during humanitarian and health crises. Markedly, information should be available in local languages and presented in audiences' preferred formats. The establishment of continuous two-way communication between targeted audiences and information providers, permitting feedback channels and thus opportunities to improve communication strategies, would also be beneficial. Similar interaction and engagement could be achieved through community members' regular participation in the actual production of information concerning them. The key findings and main recommendations for humanitarian, health, and media actors are presented below:

KEY FINDINGS

1. The information offered does not sufficiently meet the needs of displaced populations and employs languages in which they are not proficient. Finding information is not a priority for IDPs; their priority is daily survival. IDPs participating in the study said that they expend little energy on communications that are not directly addressed to them or that are in languages they do not understand.

2. The discrepancy between communication content and availability and displaced communities' specific information needs and limited access fueled **denial of the existence of COVID-19 and doubts about vaccine efficacy.**

3. **Displaced populations want more information, in their native languages, about security as well as health.** IDPs expressed the need to obtain more information about safety in their local languages. The majority of the media disseminate information in French and Bambara. IDPs, however, prefer communication mainly in Fula, Dogon (for those hailing from or living in the central regions), Songhay (particularly for people from or residing in the northern regions), and Minyanka (for those originating from or living in Sikasso region), in addition to French and Bambara.

4. **Language facilitates fact-checking and reinforces trust in received information.** Many IDPs have a strong preference for communication in Bambara, which is the language spoken in most host communities. Having no proficiency in it could thus constitute a barrier to integration. However, all surveyed IDPs unanimously emphasized the importance of communication in local languages because it strengthens trust in the information and allows them to verify, adopt, control, and share it with their families.

5. **The unsuitability of the language can propagate disinformation.** Dissemination of information in a language that IDPs do not understand has been identified as a potential source of or contributing factor to the proliferation of rumors. IDPs want to share information they have received, but incomplete or incorrect understanding can distort messages which are transmitted further throughout their communities.

6. Local information sources and providers are the most used and trusted. IDPs as well as the host community cited the same sources of information: radios, telephones, Internet, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious leaders, and social media networks (Facebook and WhatsApp). Most IDPs do not have regular access to television. Women noted that

markets and in-person social networks are important sources of information. Surprisingly, community health workers were not mentioned. Griots (town criers, storytellers) or traditional communicators were most often mentioned as those who communicate with IDPs in their local languages.

7. Displaced communities are neither adequately spoken to nor listened to. A large majority of consulted IDPs and host community representatives did not feel that humanitarians sought their views or took them into consideration. They also noted that communications were not piloted or trialed before being disseminated. During the Group Analysis Method (MAG) component, participating humanitarian actors disagreed. IDPs pointed out that NGOs often use posters with text in French or local languages without taking into account that very few people can read them.

8. Inadequate NGO and media communications can create confusion and mistrust among displaced communities. During the MAG sessions, all participating IDPs felt that the explanations concerning COVID-19 prevention measures were unclear, while the NGO and media participants thought that they had explained these measures effectively.

9. Visual communication concerning COVID-19 was not adapted to IDPs or their perspectives. The use of images was sometimes unsuitable and undermined the in-tended message. During the pandemic, the widespread circulation of the illustration of the virus (the prickly ball) fueled doubt about the existence of COVID-19; people did not believe that a virus of this size and substance could enter their noses.

10. The media does not produce enough information addressing the specific concerns of displaced communities and generally does not offer enough content in their languages. Most of the media does not specifically target IDPs, but rather the general population of a region. internal displacement is widely viewed as a temporary situation; thus the media does not include IDPs in strategies to expand their audiences and broaden their reach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

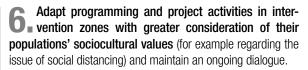## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. When designing communication strategies and products, consider the language preferences and information needs of IDPs to avoid frustration or misunderstanding. Tailor language choice in communications to specific groups to respond to their preferences and concerns. Use more Bambara, Fula, and Dogon (for communities hailing from the center – Mopti and Ségou in particular), Songhay (for certain communities originating from the north – Timbuktu and Gao) and Minyanka (for those from the south – Sikasso). Doing so could strengthen displaced people's trust in and support of disseminated communications while countering the spread of misinformation and rumors.

2. Develop inclusive communication tools and products adapted to displaced communities **in their most common and preferred local languages in accessible formats such as audio, visual, or even audiovisual.** Encourage the dissemination of such information on local IDP **WhatsApp groups,** such as Info PDI Babembabougou and Displaced Garalo in Sikasso region (Bambara), Info PDI Arhabou or PDI Kadji in Gao region (Songhay) Displaced Kadiolo, Info PDI Sénou, or Info PDI Center Mabilé (Fula), to name a few.

3. Avoid jargon and overly technical terminology and explain terms and visuals in an easily understandable, accessible manner to aid IDPs' understanding and avoid potential misunderstandings.

4. Draw on experts (such as doctors) whose native language is the same as that of IDPs' to develop communication materials and avoid relying on non-experts to translate materials into local languages. Communication actors **must trial or pre-test informational materials and content** with displaced persons before disseminating them. Such testing will make it possible to verify the relevance and clarity of the information. The results would guide communication actors in addressing potential issues with terminology and language, and ensuring that context, visuals, and formats are appropriately adapted to local sensitivities and understandings.

5. Consult and actively involve community and religious leaders and traditional communicators in the production and dissemination of information. **Avoid using generic leaflets and other materials** whose understanding requires specific abilities. In communities where literacy rates are low, prioritize audio and visual formats to make information as broadly accessible as possible.

6. Adapt programming and project activities in intervention zones with greater consideration of their populations' sociocultural values (for example regarding the issue of social distancing) and maintain an ongoing dialogue.

7. Better integrate communication in local languages when strategizing risk communication and community engagement.

8. Develop and strengthen regular co-ordination between different response actors (humanitarians, health workers, the media, civil society, etc.) to share information and produce communications that are relevant and adapted to the needs of the communities who receive them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

1. Ensure that humanitarian personnel on the ground have a good command of or native proficiency in Fula or Dogon (or any other of the most widely spoken local languages), and recruit staff from among IDPs. In addition to facilitating community understanding and involvement, doing so could contribute to strengthening and increasing the effectiveness of community engagement.

2. Involve more **influential people as sources of information in IDP sites** (leaders, caregivers, etc.) and **include them in the development of the content** of the communication to be disseminated.

3. Facilitate the establishment of temporary radio programs in collaboration with existing community radio stations and/or mobile audio programs in IDP sites. Such programs could be used to disseminate information in local languages, accounting for the different dialects. Audio information programs for – and prepared by, or with, IDP correspondents – entail interaction and collaboration between displaced people and response actors. This engagement pro-

motes humanitarian actors' understanding and awareness of displaced communities' specific information needs. The approach also ensures continuous two-way communication between local response actors and the IDPs onsite, providing a constant feedback channel whose insights can inform, guide, and improve the humanitarian response.

4. Regularly share relevant information with the media and **support them through capacity-building on health issues, on the challenges of humanitarian/health emergencies, and on risk communication and community engagement.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIA

1. **Strengthen the capacities of local radio hosts** in fact-checking and dissemination of information regarding health issues.

2. **Support correspondents' community engagement skills** and ensure that they speak the languages of the communities.

3. **Encourage the recruitment of correspondents from listeners' or users' communities,** especially from vulnerable ones. In addition to fostering a better understanding of community perceptions and concerns, such recruitment can reinforce trust and contribute to community engagement efforts. It touches on recognition, representation, collaboration, cooperation, knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and integration through income-generating activities.

4. **Adapt the content and format of the programs and radio broadcasts** to respond to the specific concerns and needs of displaced persons and leverage local languages.

5. **Facilitate the access and participation of IDPs as contributors to radio broadcasts,** especially through on-air call-ins, public debates, street interviews, or even the use of social media networks like WhatsApp groups.

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BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR ANALYSIS

In August 2022, over 422,620 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were officially recorded in Mali – the highest number documented since the start of the crisis in 2012 (DTM 08/2022). According to UNOCHA Mali projections (OCHA, 2022), 1.8 million people were at risk of and exposed to acute food insecurity between June and August 2022.

Displaced people are amongst the most vulnerable populations in the country. They face multiple difficulties, many of which are compounded by the lack of contextual information in their own languages concerning aid and other services available to them, including health. Displaced persons hail mainly from the central and northern parts of Mali. The languages generally spoken in these areas are Fula, Dogon, and Songhay. Once settled near large cities, IDPs can listen to local community radio stations. However, they are rarely the chosen target audience of these programs, except when NGOs develop specific informational broadcasts intended for them in collaboration with the radio stations. The analysis of the information ecosystem and the information practices of displaced populations in times of COVID-19 (Internews, 2021) revealed significant challenges related to the issue of language. One of the study's most striking findings was the unsuitability of languages used in radio communication, impeding listeners' ability to understand public health messaging concerning the pandemic. Additionally, two-way communication channels to discuss, understand, and respond to the needs of IDPs and identify and address information and resource gaps were insufficiently developed and uncoordinated.

The literacy rate in Mali is very low, standing at 28% for women and 47% for men (EDS 2018). These figures could be lower still for IDPs who cannot access schools or literacy centers. According to study participants, low literacy rates further frustrate accessing information, which is already a challenge. In this context, the language of communication, *"could constitute a barrier to accessing information for us (IDPs), for the simple reason that we haven't been to school, and we can't understand messages conveyed in other languages"* (Interview with female IDP).

Taking into account informational dynamics and maintaining a continuous dialogue with displaced groups in their own languages could bolster inclusivity, community representation, and mutual trust. Improved access to information that is relevant and tailored to these communities' needs and concerns can alleviate critical risk factors. At the same time, better channels and formats that prioritize and amplify the voices of IDPs can offer a valuable alternative to misinformation and rumor, making humanitarian and health responses more effective.

This research furthers current analyses of local language use in communications concerning health in general and COVID-19 in particular within IDP communities. This study examines contemporary use of local languages by radio, television, and social media, as well as displaced communities' assessments of the availability of communications in their own languages. The observations of humanitarian and media actors concerning these topics have been taken into account. The reflections and suggestions posed by study participants – IDPs, humanitarians, and media actors alike – have been documented. Concrete actions and recommendations on adapting communication strategies for displaced communities are compiled in this report. ■

n line with the Analysis of the Information Ecosystem (IEA), this thematic study follows the Human Centered Design of Internews which places the actors and target groups of the project at the heart of the analysis. To achieve this, the study employed the following research methods:

■ **LITERATURE REVIEW** focused on existing research concerning the adaptation of language in communication that targets specific groups. This review provided a systematic approach to analyze the mapping of community media and information sources (refer to the media and information sources mapping report).

■ **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS,** or individuals considered to be experts on the topics under investigation. Standardization of interview questions enables comparative analysis of the results, whilst the format permits researchers to pursue follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the response or for clarification.

■ **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS)** engaged multiple individuals and prompted exchange on topics targeted in the research. They also revealed popular perceptions and social dynamics between participants.

■ **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION** entailed researchers actively listening to different media to gather data on their use of local IDP languages in disseminating information about COVID-19.

■ **THE GROUP ANALYSIS METHOD (MAG),** a participatory research method focused on open discussions between the participants. Unlike focus group discussions and many interviewing techniques, MAG considers participants not only as producers of information or sources of data, but also as the primary analysts of that data.

Researchers and supervisors were trained on research ethics before starting on-the-ground data collection. At the beginning of each research activity, the scope of the study, its aims, and how collected data would be managed and used were explained to potential participants. Participation was free and voluntary, and all participants could skip questions they did not want to answer and withdraw from the study at any time. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and taking part in it prior to giving their informed consent or deciding not to participate. Consent was recorded through forms developed by the research team and signed by participants.

SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

KEY INFORMANTS FOR INDIVIDUAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS
Seven (7) individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in each of the three selected regions in Mali, yielding 21 interviews in total. Participants were chosen from among the host communities and represented those who have hosted IDPs in their family homes; humanitarian actors who intervene and support IDPs through the provision of specific services; and media actors (journalists, broadcasters, correspondents, etc.).

TABLE 1 : Composition of individual semi-structured interview participants

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS BY REGION				
TARGET GROUP	BAMAKO	SIKASSO	MOPTI	**TOTAL**
MALE AND FEMALE HOST COMMUNITIES	2	2	2	**6**
HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS	1	1	1	**3**
MEDIA PARTNERS	2	2	2	**6**
MEN IDPS	1	1	1	**3**
WOMEN IDPS	1	1	1	**3**
TOTAL	**7**	**7**	**7**	**21**

◄ FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS
Two (2) focus group discussions were convened in each region under study, yielding six (6) FGDs in all. Each FGD was composed of ten (10) people. These FGDs brought together civil society and religious leaders, IDP community representatives (men and women), and host community representatives. Participants in FGDs were selected by NGO partners implementing the RiT 2.0 project, in charge of primary data collection in the field.

TABLE 2 :
Composition of focus group participants

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS BY REGION	
TARGET GROUP	**#**
RELIGIOUS LEADER	1
COMMUNITY LEADER	2
MEN IDPS	2
WOMEN IDPS	2
HOST COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES (MEN AND WOMEN)	2
CAREGIVERS	1
TOTAL NUMBER PER FOCUS GROUP	**10**

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data collection spanned June and July 2022, starting with training workshops for NGO partner representatives who would be responsible for implementing the research design. This training allowed researchers to familiarize themselves with the research design and data collection tools. Part of the training included a group activity where researchers translated the interview and FGD guides into local languages. This exercise allowed the team to test the suitability of linguistic formulations and concepts once adapted to local languages, ensuring meaning was not lost in translation and would be understood in the manner intended. Study participants were randomly selected by the NGO partners, who formulated the data collection schedule. Most interviews and FGDs took place in IDP sites across the three regions under study. The MAG was undertaken in Bamako district. All research activities were carried out in local languages.

Interviews, FGDs, and MAG exercises were recorded using Dictaphones and the audio files were later transcribed for the purposes of analysis. The qualitative data was processed using content analysis. Following transcription, an analysis table featuring the research themes was developed. Data was also coded for processing and to facilitate deeper levels of analysis. The analysis considers the results in context, making it possible to "report on what the interviewees said in the most objective and reliable way possible." ■

◄ **PARTICIPANTS IN THE GROUP ANALYSIS METHOD (MAG IN FRENCH)**

Participants in MAG comprised 14 people representing caregivers, the host community, IDPs, the media, and humanitarian organizations. The participants were arranged in a circle in the room, facing one another, in order to ensure their active participation and foster direct exchanges. Each participant was identified by either their first name or their surname. For the purposes of this activity, two Internews researchers played the role of facilitators whilst two representatives of partner NGOs, AMSODE and Doniblog, acted as notetakers.

DEFINITION

It is important to note that participated only in MAG; they comprise a new category of actors in displaced communities. Caregivers are not traditional community leaders and do not benefit from any privileges. Nor are they liaisons or subcontractors recruited by NGOs to carry out their work. They are volunteers who, according to the circumstances, provide support and assistance to IDPs in their lives within relief camps. This support includes collecting census data, disseminating announcements, as well as working to provide access to water, humanitarian aid, healthcare, information, etc. Caregivers act as a bridge between external partners and displaced communities and benefit from high credibility with IDPs, especially regarding communication activities.
Source : Internews, 2021. IEA Mali, p. 4 et 5. https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/RiT_IEA_Mali_IDPs_202102_fr.pdf

II. KEY FINDINGS

2.1. INFORMATION SOURCES AND CHANNELS ACCESSIBLE TO DISPLACED POPULATIONS

In Mali, IDPs find themselves in one of two situations. The first is living on an IDP site. These are spaces specially equipped to host displaced people. They can be located within towns or further away from them. The second situation is living with a host family, one that has space in its compound and agrees to host displaced families. In both cases, where IDPs are close to towns, they are generally exposed to the same media in terms of information sources. IDPs as well as members of host communities who participated in this study listed the same sources of information. Predominantly, they named the radio, telephones, the Internet, NGOs, religious leaders, and social media networks like WhatsApp and Facebook. WhatsApp groups allow IDPs to converse amongst themselves in their local languages. Also, participants cited local radio stations several times during interviews.

The Internet was regularly cited as a source of information by interviewees representing the media, the humanitarian sector, and host communities. A female IDP explained, *"I don't have the tools or the means to access the Internet and I rarely watch television, which is not available to me."* Televisions are costly and require a steady supply of electricity, making them inaccessible to IDPs. In terms of radio specifically, some IDPs seem to distrust local radio stations. The reasons for this mistrust do not emerge clearly from the collected data. However, some interviewees explained that local radio stations broadcast information that is unsubstantiated or contradictory to that aired on international radio stations. Beyond the media, women mentioned **markets and acquaintances (parents, friends, and neighbors) amongst important sources of information.** Indeed, markets are meeting places for women traders and customers. Women leverage these spaces and opportunities to communicate freely in their local languages, discussing various topics that concern them and sharing information with one another. Women IDPs also visit markets to meet fellow women who are not displaced. *"At the market, we speak to each other as women without any barriers. We speak in our own languages, we exchange news, and we share information"* (Woman interviewee, host community). A woman IDP recounted, *"Personally, I find out information through the people that I know. I call a neighbor in Gao who often keeps me informed; we talk about the security situation. Without her, on my site, no one else tells me because I am not encouraged to keep informed about the situation."*

Curiously, when examining IDPs' and host communities' information sources, healthcare workers were not mentioned at all. This finding is somewhat intriguing as medical personnel were at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. Part of the explanation may be that IDPs do not prioritize the pandemic in their information needs. IDPs participating in the study expressed that one of their major concerns is receiving reliable information in their local languages about security developments in their areas of origin.

> " I don't have anyone suitable to provide me with the information I need. I listen to local and national radio stations, as well as Radio France Internationale. My favorite program was 'Mandékan' on RFI. I also like the ORTM (Mali Radio and Television Office) televised news. I use the Internet connection on the WhatsApp network
>
> **Interview, Male IDP.**

2.2. INFORMATION NEEDS AND GAPS

The media, mainly radio stations (community or otherwise), broadcast information that targets the general population rather than tailoring content to specific communities. According to interviewed media actors, the types of information they air and the languages they use are very varied. Most of the information is broadcast either in French (for news bulletins) or Bambara (the country's most widely spoken local language). Some media actors conveyed the challenges of covering all local languages. Most prominently, the endeavor would incur costs that radio stations cannot afford.

"Newspapers, programs about agro-sylvo-pastoral activities, education, livestock-raising activities, animal health, health for everybody, hygiene and sanitation, sport...are the most discussed topics," stated an interviewed radio presenter. The information disseminated by the media is contingent on topical developments and seasonal patterns. An IDP interviewee explained, *"For example currently, it's airborne illnesses (colds and COVID-19) and the start of winter diseases (malaria), lots of information about these illnesses."*

As far as COVID-19 is concerned, specific information is broadcast to the population and it is fairly standardized across the different media outlets. *"Prevention measures, COVID-19 statistics, actions taken by civil society organizations and the state on COVID-19,"* summarized an interviewed male IDP. *"The COVID-19-related information that the media transmits is about prevention measures (mask-wearing, hand-washing, social distancing, coughing into your elbow). They spread these awareness-raising measures to convince us that this illness is a reality,"* added a female IDP.

Media actors, host community members, and IDPs agree that security developments are an important component of broadcasted information. *"The information transmitted by the media is varied. They broadcast information about the crisis in central and northern Mali. They spread information about the country and even the world in general's political and economic situation..."* (Interview with male IDP).

> *The COVID-19-related information that the media transmits is about prevention measures (mask-wearing, hand-washing, social distancing, coughing into your elbow). They spread these awareness-raising measures to convince us that this illness is a reality,* **added a IDP woman**
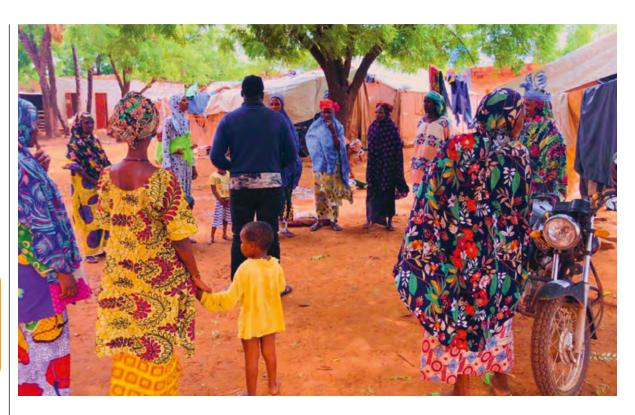
2.3. MAIN TARGETS OF MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS IN THEIR COMMUNICATION ON COVID-19

A minority of media interviewees stated that radio and television programming does not target any specific audiences, but most media actors identified their primary target audience. As media outlets strive to increase their reach and broaden their consumer bases, they develop programs that can attract listeners and appeal to as many people as possible. Some community radio stations focus on rural populations and farmers. These radio stations broadcast most of their programs in local languages to make them widely accessible to rural populations. Other media actors provided vague definitions of their target audiences. This indicates that even if some radio stations do have a preferred target audience, their programming and content is developed and broadcast with the general population in mind.

> *Yes, our specific targets are men, women and children. We have put in place community listening groups in the villages that reflect all the different sectors of the community.*
> **Interview with radio presenter**

Very few newspapers are published in local languages. They predominantly use French and are accessible to only a minority of the population. Newspapers are costly, inconsistently distributed, and printed in a language many people cannot read or understand. The target audiences of newspapers, however, are clearly defined as political decision-makers and literate French-speakers, which explains the print industry's market approach.

No media outlets mentioned IDPs among the audiences they targeted with their programming. One of the explanations put forward by some media actors relates to the status of IDPs, whose presence is temporary since they will return to their areas of origin when the security situation allows it. Media outlets do not want to invest in adapting programs and broadcasts for displaced people who are viewed as short-term residents.

As for humanitarians, their target audiences have been clearly defined since the development of their project proposals. The humanitarian actors interviewed maintain that displaced people have increasingly been the focus of NGOs in view of the security crisis in the country. In interviews, they cited recruiting personnel who speak IDPs' native languages. Some IDPs, however, still recount experiences of being unable to communicate with humanitarian actors due to the multiplicity of local languages.

2.4. LOCAL LANGUAGES AND BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Study participants unanimously asserted that language is one of the most pressing barriers to communication, especially communication concerning health and COVID-19. This barrier is increasingly consequential in the context of displaced populations who are cut off from their established sources of information. A male IDP noted, *"language is a barrier to accessing information because the contents of the message are not understood."*

This perspective was shared by other IDPs and people we interviewed from host communities: *"It makes understanding the contents of the message impossible"* (Female interviewee, host community). The languages IDPs noted as preferable were Bambara, Fula, Dogon, Songhay, Minyanka, and, to a lesser extent, French. Mali's displaced populations are predominantly from the country's central (Mopti) and northern regions (Timbuktu and Gao). These populations' language preferences vary according to their place of origin.

These communities also often speak pidgin languages that are understood by different ethnic groups. IDPs hailing from the center of the country mainly speak Dogon and Fula. Interviews conducted with these individuals demonstrate that Dogon and Fula are the languages in which they would prefer to receive information.

One of this study's key findings is that many IDPs prefer to receive information and communications in Bambara. They have settled within or around host communities that speak this language and learned it through immersion. A related consideration is whether speaking a language different from that of the host community impedes social integration. A female IDP stated, *"The language that I would prefer to receive COVID-19 messages in is Bambara, because that's the only language I speak. But I don't overlook other languages like Fula, Songhay and Dogon,"* (Interview with female IDP). Speaking or mentioning the host community's language as a preference may be a strategy that displaced people use in pursuit of acceptance and integration. *"As far as I'm concerned, I prefer receiving COVID-19 messages in Bambara, but others prefer Fula and French,"* – (Male interviewee, host community).

> "*The non-use of these languages constitutes a barrier to accessing information. We don't have any other easy ways to stay informed. I can only speak the Bambara language.*
> **Interview with female IDP**

2.5. LEVEL OF LOCAL LANGUAGE USE IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

According to interviewed humanitarian actors, they adapt to the socio-cultural context of the communities affected by their interventions. An NGO representative in Mali's central region stressed that their organization, *"mainly communicates its messages in Fula, because the majority of [its] targets understand this language. But also, the organization adapts according to an area's linguistic diversity."*

The precarious circumstances of IDPs make them a vulnerable group. Taking this reality into consideration, most humanitarian actors emphasize that their communication strategies for IDPs differ from that employed in other contexts. A humanitarian explained during an interview: *"IDPs are people who are living through a difficult situation, even if the crises also affect host communities. This explains why humanitarian actors try to reach this specific target audience (IDPs) despite the linguistic plurality than can be found within a single community. In addition, we are constantly adapting our strategy so that as many IDPs as possible understand our message."*

Interviewed radio broadcasters likewise stressed that the linguistic needs of target populations are taken into account in content development. Language choice depends on the sector and the target audience that the communication aims to

> *Taking into account targets' linguistic diversity can be decisive for the success of our interventions, hence our initiative to put in place complaints-targeting committees in order to maximize responses to humanitarian needs.* **Humanitarian actor interviewee in Mali's central**

reach. *"If they are IDPs, for example, Fula and Bambara are the languages most people understand,"* a media actor noted.

Interviewed IDPs presented a strikingly different assessment. They described various situations in which they found themselves dealing with information in languages that they did not understand. IDPs raised similar counterclaims concerning certain humanitarian sector practices. According to IDPs, NGOs spend their time putting up posters, photos, and images accompanied by text in French. Even when printed informational materials use local languages, the approach ignores the fact that very few people can read them due to low literacy rates. *"There are lots of photos and images about COVID-19. We see them without really understanding them. Someone has to explain them to us for us to understand them"* (Interview with female IDP).

> *We do this by adapting the communication strategy to the socio-cultural context of each area and by the recruitment of local staff.* **Humanitarian actor interviewee**

2.6. IMPACT OF LOCAL LANGUAGE USE ON UNDERSTANDING OF AND TRUST IN INFORMATION

All study participants agreed that when communication strategies employ the preferred languages of their target audiences, comprehension of and trust in the information they contain are greatly enhanced. **Communication in a local language attracts the attention of its speakers and arouses their curiosity. It also facilitates their understanding of the informational material and its content, important factors in the process of establishing trust.** *"When it's my language, I am automatically drawn to it as well as finding it easy to understand"* (Mixed IDP focus group).

Upon receiving an important communication, many feel the need to share it with family and acquaintances so that they can also remain informed and abreast of current developments. When those who receive the communication understand and trust its content, they are more likely to disseminate the information it contains. *"To share or spread a message, you must first understand it. This understanding requires that our preferred languages are used. It is easier for us to share the information we receive in our own languages"* (IDP focus group). Information that has not been understood is not disseminated to avoid misleading loved ones. *"If I don't trust a message, I don't share it with my family because I want to protect them. Often, on an informal basis, you might share certain messages even if you don't completely understand the contents, but you wouldn't share them with your loved ones in case the information is wrong"* (Interview with male IDP).

Internews' 2021 IEA showed that IDPs shared the contents of communications on different topics without verifying them. The results of this research specify that **one of the factors that facilitates verification is the reception of the communications in the preferred language of the recipient.**

Of all the actors who communicate with IDPs in local languages, griots (town criers, traditional communicators), are the most consistent. All communications from griots are in local languages.

For IDPs, local language is a part of their identity, and an actor using it to communicate with them is the first step in building trust. Some interviewees, however, mentioned that the language used in communication had an impact on their understanding but did not affect their trust in the information being shared. Following

> *Our language is part of our identity. Its use constitutes a first step in establishing bonds of trust.* **IDP focus group**

> *It influences our trust in messages, in so much as we generally recognize ourselves in the information given in our languages.* **Mixed focus group**

some debate, it was clear that participants had incongruent viewpoints of the relationship between the language of communication, understanding, and trust in said information. For some, the use of local language strengthens trust in the information shared, whereas for others, *"there is no link between the language used to pass on a message and trust. Trust is linked to the reputation of the people delivering the information"* (Mixed focus group).

A female IDP stressed the trustworthiness she associated with people who communicate in her language. *"When information is given in Fula, it eases understanding, and you also know that the person giving the information in Fula is worthy of trust and will not give you false information or rumors"* (Interview with female IDP).

Appropriation is the process that allows a person receiving a communication to understand it, accept it, take responsibility for its veracity, and sharing it according to need and opportunity. Language, when it is one the recipient masters, facilitates appropriation. It encourages further investigation, follow-up questions, and requests for details and clarifications. This process of verification aids in establishing the credibility and relevance of the received information.

2.7. IMPACT OF LOCAL LANGUAGE USE ON KNOWLEDGE, FACT-CHECKING AND PRACTICES

According to IDP interviewees, they need to translate communications received in languages they do not understand. This translation process, however, sometimes contributes to the proliferation of rumors and misinformation.

> *To share or spread a message, you must first understand it. This understanding requires that our preferred languages are used. It is easier for us to share the information we receive in our own languages.*
> **IDP focus group**

The period of the pandemic was rife with rumors. People found it difficult to discern between reliable information, disinformation, and unverified claims. These challenges were compounded in situations where people had a poor or nonexistent grasp of the languages in which information was communicated. *"When the message is circulated in our language, we find it easy, which can reduce rumors spreading. For IDPs, it is always necessary to use the most widely spoken language"* (Interview with local counselor).

According to one person living in an IDP site, *"the circulation of these messages in languages local to the IDPs can mitigate the proliferation of rumors and incorrect messages about COVID-19. Local language use is an effective way to facilitate understanding of the topic. Circulating information in local languages garners trust. Lots of IPDs will easily get information"* (Interview with male IDP).

Some interviewees explained that lack of understanding and misinterpretation are the roots of incorrect information and rumors. Indeed, by trying to explain or convey a message that one has not fully understood, the quality and content of the information dissipates. *"When information is circulated in local languages, everybody understands it. We don't need to go to somebody else for any interpretation that could harm the nature and quality of the information"* (Interview with woman from host community).

2.8. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT FEEDBACK FROM DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

As part of their communication strategies for IDPs, humanitarian and media actors stressed that they consider IDPs' feedback concerning their activities.

This feedback is transmitted "by word-of-mouth, and by phone" (Humanitarian actor interviewee). According to NGO interviewees, feedback is integrated into subsequent programming and approaches to future projects. Most NGO interviewees said they encourage IDPs' feedback concerning the content, relevance, and format of humanitarian communication activities. *"The quality of the provided response and the relevance of the topics covered during our activities are generally the subject of feedback from the communities"* (Humanitarian actor interviewee).

Each NGO develops its own strategy for gathering feedback, notably *"through strengthening the team's capacity when it comes to collecting feedback from communities, providing organization telephone numbers [of field agents and staff] to beneficiaries and interaction with communities during on-the-ground activities"* (Humanitarian actor interviewee).

In contrast, some IDPs participating in the study felt that they never had the opportunity to provide feedback, much less have it integrated into future programming. In fact, according to IDPs, the vast majority of humanitarian actors conclude their activities and depart without ever taking the time to gather feedback from the communities impacted by their intervention. IDPs concur that feedback is more relevant to NGOs than to the media, as the former are in regular contact with IDPs, while the latter are not.

These results indicate that although feedback mechanisms exist, they are inadequately explained to IDPs during or following humanitarian interventions. Furthermore, the extent to which language functions as an obstacle to giving and receiving feedback warrants further investigation. Do feedback channels take preferred local languages into consideration when it comes to the processes by which complaints and requests are made and addressed? If so, how? Are translators available to help people navigate these systems, or do communities have to rely on family and friends, reducing anonymity and, potentially, accuracy?

III. CONCLUSIONS

In response to the question, "What would communication in local languages change for you?" IDPs participating in the study responded that it would change "our state of mind positively because understanding would become very easy" (Interview with female IDP). Participants concluded that the behavioral changes in health and hygiene measures so sought after by various COVID-19 response actors would occur if their communication strategies for displaced communities prioritized local languages. *"Our behavior, our attitudes and our mentalities will change because when information is understood, it will be felt in our actions"* (Interview with male IDP). *"When we receive messages in a language that we understand, it encourages us to be more interested in the content, and to follow the advice or rules recommended in the message"* (Interview with female IDP).

Communicating with IDPs in their native languages also allows them to be more open and engaged, to actively participate in discussions and activities established for them.

"Receiving information in our own languages will create trust, confidence and will also strengthen our own trust" (Interview with male IDP).

Following on from this thematic analysis, the unsuitable delivery of information – in terms of content, formats, and languages – and its insufficient dissemination raises issues that could be the subject of further research:

- The images used to illustrate the COVID-19 virus fuel doubt about its very existence. IDPs value images that aid understanding when messages are conveyed in languages that they do not understand. However, the use of certain images, especially when poorly explained, can be counterproductive, undermining the COVID-19 response instead of advancing it.
- Information concerning COVID-19 is not standardized across the languages in which it is communicated and disseminated. Translations often lead to transformations of meaning and variations in interpretations and explanations, notably around prevention measures or the modes of COVID-19 transmission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE 5 :
List of participants

NUMBER	FIRST NAME	ROLE
1	AMADOU	RADIO FRÉQUENCE 3
2	ALY	DONIBLOG NGO
3	MAÏMOUNA	HOST COMMUNITY
4	LAYA	IDP
5	NOUHOUM	IDP
6	DJENEBA	HOST COMMUNITY
7	FATOUMATA	CAREGIVER
8	MAMADOU	IDP
9	SOULEYMANE	IDP
10	DJAKARIDIA	HOST COMMUNITY
11	OUSMANE	AMSODE NGO
12	ADAMA	AMSODE NGO
13	MOUSSOUDOU BAYE	AMSODE NGO
14	MAOULOUD	HOST COMMUNITY
15	OSÉE	INTERNEWS RESEARCH ASSISTANT
15	FATOUMATA	INTERNEWS RESEARCH ASSISTANT

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