INTERNEWS’ work in Eastern Chad has been funded over the years by: UNHCR; The US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM); USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI); USAID; the US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor (DRL); UKAid; and several private foundations and individuals.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Celeste Hicks is a freelance journalist specialising in the Sahel region of Africa. She spent ten years working for the BBC World Service – four years as BBC correspondent in Mali and Chad, and as a journalism trainer in Somalia. She now writes for a number of publications including the Guardian, Africa Confidential, Slate magazine, the Africa Report and Jane’s Intelligence Review, and continues to work with BBC news.

Meridith Kohut is an American photojournalist based in Caracas, Venezuela who has covered assignments for the international press and humanitarian organizations in Latin America since 2005. As a contract photographer for The New York Times, Kohut has produced in depth photo essays on the drug trade, Hugo Chávez’s socialist revolution, gang violence, labor rights, prison overcrowding and prostitution, among others. Last year she was part of an Internews team that assessed and documented information needs among Somali refugees fleeing the Horn of Africa famine in Dadaab, Kenya. Her work has been published by The New York Times, The United Nations, Newsweek International, TIME magazine, The Washington Post Magazine, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, Stern, Der Spiegel, Le Monde, and The Guardian, and has been exhibited in Europe, South America and The United States.

ABOUT INTERNEWS

INTERNEWS is an international non-profit media development 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.

Formed in 1982, Internews has worked in more than 75 countries, and currently has offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and North America.

Cover Photo: Radio Sila’s camp correspondent, Usna Omar Arabi, conducts an interview in Djabal refugee camp.

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Women pack weekly rations of flour, corn and cooking oil from a CARE International food distribution center onto the back of their donkeys at Iridimi refugee camp near Iriba, in eastern Chad.
INTERNEWS BUILT THREE humanitarian radio stations in Eastern Chad to help those fleeing the violence in Darfur to receive the critical news and information they needed to survive. Seven years after the first station went on air, Internews is leaving eastern Chad as funding to international agencies has significantly reduced. Internews has spent the past year preparing the stations for independence, including establishing rent-free premises, community governing boards and marketing strategies. JOURNALIST CELESTE HICKS and PHOTOGRAPHER MERIDITH KOHUT spent a month with the stations in July 2012 to document the past seven years – and what the future holds as these enormously popular stations strike out on their own.
“People have already realised here that without radio the region is dead.”

**Eastern Chad**

It’s a perfectly peaceful evening in eastern Chad. The sun is just beginning to tip towards the horizon, casting a golden glow over the hundreds of thatched roofs which make up the Djabal Darfur refugee camp. All around is the gentle clattering of pots and pans and the sloshing of water as women prepare their evening meal to break the long, hot Ramadan fast.

Eighteen year-old Rahma Mohamed Ibed, with a radio glued to his ears and a crowd of admiring youngsters at his feet, sees us straight away and heads over.

“What are you listening to?” I ask him. He smiles bashfully and turns down his portable radio.

“I listen to the radio all day,” he says. “In the afternoons to Radio Sila when it comes on air at 4pm, and then the rest of the time I listen to BBC on shortwave or Sudanese radio.”

We sit outside Rahma’s thatched cottage; the first hints of a crescent moon appearing in the darkening sky behind him; a shaft of honey-coloured sunset illuminates his face as he talks animatedly about his love of radio.

“Radio Sila promotes friendship between the journalists, the people in Goz Beida and the refugees. If you have a question and you don’t know the answer, you can call them or text them and they will reply,” he says enthusiastically.

“I would really love to be a journalist one day because I see what an important service they provide in the community. One day I lost my six year-old brother when we had gone out wood collecting – I called Madjihinguem and I told him to broadcast a message for people to look for him. Someone in the community found him and called up to tell us where he was.”

Madjihinguem (Madjji) Nguinabe is a 29-year old journalist who works at Radio Sila, a community radio station in Goz Beida set up by the non-profit organisation Internews.

Madjji says working at Radio Sila has fundamentally changed him: “The Madji of today knows about health, education, the environment, agriculture. The Madji of yesterday didn’t know anything about health or education, or anything to do with the community,” he says. “What I like best about being a journalist is being close to the community.”

It’s a time of fundamental change for Radio Sila, too. The station became independent in July 2012 after seven years of funding and support by Internews came to an end. Madji says the radio is essential for the refugees and local Chadian population, and that understanding what the community needs, and encouraging young people to participate in the radio, is vital if it is to survive.

“A community without a radio is worth nothing,” he says. “People have already realised here that without radio the region is dead.”
INTERNEWS’ WORK IN CHAD came to life in 2005 in response to a very real need for information from the hundreds of thousands of people who were fleeing violence in Sudan’s Darfur region. From 2003, a campaign of violence against non-Arab populations in western Sudan by government-sponsored ‘Janjaweed’ Arab militias led to the deaths of thousands of Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa people; around two million people were displaced inside Darfur and its believed tens of thousands were killed. Two hundred and sixty five thousand people fled over the border into neighboring Chad. The refugees found themselves in an extremely isolated region; many local people were semi-nomadic and the government presence was weak. The environment was harsh, dusty and arid, wells and tree-cover few and far between. Darfuri families had been split up at the border, mothers and fathers had lost children and each other in bombing raids; many people were hungry or injured but were unable to communicate their needs as they didn’t speak the same language as the host communities.
AOUSSA MOHAMMED, the current director of Radio Absoun, the first of three radio stations built by Internews in Iriba, returned to the area about a month after the refugees started arriving in 2004. “It was really horrible,” he recalls. “The image that stays with me was a woman who arrived from the border with a baby on her back. The baby was dead but the mother hadn’t even realised.”

He says that lack of information was critical. “It was really difficult to communicate with anyone at that time. It was before mobile phones, there were a few satellite phones but they didn’t work everywhere. The only way to communicate was by word of mouth or by writing letters, but it was so slow.”

It was into this context that Mark Frohardt, at the time Internews’ Vice President for Africa, made the first of many trips to eastern Chad. “It was a really bad situation,” he says. “The level of distress suffered by the refugees was shocking. They were confused and trying to survive in this sparse environment with no access to resources.”

It soon became obvious to Frohardt that a service to put the refugees in touch with the humanitarian agencies who were beginning to arrive to help them would be of enormous benefit – it seemed that either the Darfuris were mistrustful or had not been made aware of the help that was available. “The Darfur population previously had very little access to the outside world and experience of the humanitarian community,” he says. “What they desperately needed was access to local information in a language they understood – could they go home? Where were the local services and who were all these foreigners who said they were coming to help?”

Frohardt realised that the Sudanese restrictions on any kind of activities by foreigners would make it impossible to set up a radio station actually inside Darfur. But it looked possible to set something up in Chad, close to the border. Talks had already been going on with the US government’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), a funding body set up to provide rapid response to situations of conflict and political transition.

On December 5th, 2005 Daossa Mohammed was the first Zaghawa voice on Radio Absoun in Iriba as it went live on air. “I remember it really clearly, it was the first program that Radio Absoun did, and I was the first person to present that evening,” says Daoussa with a big smile on his face. “When I went back to my neighborhood that evening everyone was really congratulating me! It was great. I was really proud.”

George Papagiannis was one of the first project directors in early 2006. He says one of the biggest challenges was developing listeners’ understanding of what an independent radio should be - both the Sudanese refugees and the Chadian host population previously only had access to state-owned media which was largely designed for propaganda. “We had to persuade people to trust the radio,” he said. “We had to find ways to bring information to people in an interesting and entertaining way.”

Other pressing issues at the beginning were the conflicts that began to emerge between the Chadian communities - who had initially welcomed the refugees - and the Darfuris. One of the often quoted statistics is that before the arrival of the refugees Chadian women would walk something like 1-3 kilometers a day in search of firewood; after the refugees arrived some women reported having to walk 40 kilometers. In a region ravaged by conflict, rebel groups and badly disciplined army units, this put the women at incredible risk and cases of rape and attacks became almost everyday news.

“We started a series of programs called ‘Crossroads,’” says Papagiannis. “We were trying to be a community safety valve – to sit the two groups down together and find out how they felt about the problems. If we couldn’t get them into the studio we would send the reporters out to the camps.”
Radio is a particularly powerful medium in a country like Chad where national literacy levels are only 28%. Many thousands of people leave school after primary level, and only access their news through aural channels like radio. Newspapers have tiny circulations and are seen as the preserve of the urban intellectual elite – they’re simply not available in the east, and even in NDjamena they often sell only about 3,000 copies a week.

With the initial success of launching Radio Absoun under their belt, Internews was able to expand their network. OTI agreed to fund a second station, Voix de Ouaddai, which would be based in Abeche and cover the four refugee camps between the town and the Sudanese border – Gaga, Farchana, Breguing and Treguing, home to 80,000 Sudanese refugees.

In 2007, UNHCR agreed to assist with the establishment of a third radio station in Goz Beida – Radio Sila was to cover two refugee camps at Goz Amer near Koukou-Angarana and Djabal at Goz Beida, as well as the more than one hundred thousand displaced Chadians who had been forced from their homes by the continuing violence between rebel movements and an explosion in inter-ethnic conflict.

As well as the Zaghawa broadcasters which had begun from Radio Absoun in Iriba, Voix de Ouaddai and Radio Sila added broadcasters in Fuar, Massalit, Chadian Arabic and Dadjo. Over the years Internews has trained and employed about sixty local Chadian journalists and Darfur refugee correspondents.

Many of the Chadians Internews hired had not benefited from a decent education, but as Honda Malloum, a 30-year-old journalist who worked for Internews between 2006-9 explains, Internews bridged that gap. “In my opinion Internews was more of a school than a radio – it was a place where I learnt everything I needed to know about journalism,” says Malloum, who later went on to work in the UNFPA.

INTERNEWS BELIEVES that this ability to reach out to the community with information in their own languages was one of the unique selling points for the project. This was backed up by Internews research in 2009. “There’s a lot to Radio Sila. Radio Sila broadcasts in a language that everybody understands, and it is through this channel that we get informed about what has happened in the neighboring and beyond,” said resident Ramadane Ousmane in Djabal refugee camp.

Mark Frohardt agrees: “People had heard of broadcasts in Arabic, but even that didn’t really help most people. The idea that there could be programs in Zaghawa just blew people away.”

The three stations also have a commitment to training and best practice in common. Before Radio Absoun even turned on its transmitter, all the new recruits had been through an intensive journalism training program, including recording audio, mixing on Adobe Audition editing software, presenting programs and writing balanced and properly-sourced news copy. In later years, three expert Resident Journalism Advisors were appointed to directly support the journalists at each station.

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As part of his reporting for a story about access to health care for refugees and local Chadian women, veteran Radio Sila journalist Adam Omar handheld his first audio recorder as he began a one-year radio residency in the camps. “I was amazed,” he said. “I had never seen such a colorful show before on any of Chad’s independent radio stations, such as interactive phone-in shows and live discussion programs. In the east, where there had never been any independent radio stations, and only a small outpost of the national state broadcaster ONRTV, sophisticated equipment to take a number of calls live on air simply did not exist.

As the stations began to consolidate and expand their output, live discussions went on to become one of Internews’ most powerful tools. “We sponsored a series of discussion programs on Voix de Ouaddai about FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) in the camps,” says Nadja Kalif from the UNFPA. “There was just complete confusion amongst the population. You would hear that one marabout said this, a traditional leader said that. They didn’t understand each other and they all needed to know what the truth was.”

Anonymous calls to the radio stations proved to be a really effective device for convincing people to express how they really felt, she explains: “They didn’t want to talk about it themselves in the community because everyone disagreed, they fell out. But on the radio, there was a wide range of trusted sources that people would listen to.”
The last time I passed through Goz Beida market in 2009 I was wearing a military helmet and rolling along in an armoured personnel carrier with five Irish soldiers from the UN mission Minurcat. I recall the slightly bemused expressions of the residents and their donkeys as the soldiers in full heavy combat gear leapt from the back of the tank to patrol the market, uttering a cheery ‘Salam Aleykum’ and holding their guns down to one side to indicate they were peacekeepers.
HAD WAS THEN IN THE MIDDLE of a complex rebellion which had its roots in the Darfur conflict. Just one year earlier about 50 pick-up trucks of rebels had passed through Goz Beida before crossing the entire breadth of the country to arrive at the gates of the presidential palace in N’Djamena where they came within hours of toppling President Idriss Deby Itno.

The legacy of that devastating conflict has been easy to see in the work of Radio Sila - for example in 2008-9 they organised a series of live interactive programs about unexploded ordnance with the Mine Action group and the local mine action center. Speaking at the time, Alfadil Zene Alio, the presenter of the show, said "IDPs called us to ask for the toll-free number and the guest answered right away to explain who to call and what to do in the case of danger."

Radio Sila’s important work on promoting better relations between host community and refugees has been more of a challenge than for the other stations, due to the addition in 2006 of over 100,000 Chadian people who’d been displaced by further waves of violence sparked by the conflict in Darfur. This put intense pressure on natural resources like water and firewood, and attacks on refugee women outside the boundaries of the camps became regular occurrences. Goz Beida was the base for the Irish contingent of soldiers from the Minurcat UN peacekeeping force which was in Chad from 2006-10. Radio Sila itself has played a vital role in confronting the twin issues of violence against women and competition for resources head-on.

The issue of relations between the host community in Goz Beida and the refugees and displaced people comes up in conversation in Goz Beida’s market when we meet Mohamed Ali Ismael Zidane, a listener to Radio Sila. “There have been problems over water sources - who has priority? The refugees want water but the local people say it was us who dug that well. The Radio Sila programs taught us community orientation, they tell us that the water doesn’t belong to anyone, it’s for all of us.” He says he likes Radio Sila’s discussion programs best; “They call people such as Intermon who run the wells here and they ask them how people should share water, so then all the communities come to understand that he is thirsty, I am thirsty, we’re all thirsty. So we’ve all managed to open our minds.”

Radio Sila, he says, has “helped us to understand the culture of the refugees, who they are and where they come from, and the displaced people. They call us when we need information that we received on the radio we can now get closer to the two communities to find solutions together.”

Conflict resolution and promoting ‘peaceful cohabitation’ is a theme I take up in more detail with Abdelrezak Arabi, station profile

Serving refugees

IN 2004, JOURNALISTS IN GOZ BEIDA reported the pitiful sight of thousands of Darfuri women and children sheltering under the beautiful old trees which surround the town – Goz Beida is much greener and more fertile than Abeche or Iriba due to its southern location. Most of the people who were forced to make their new homes at Djabal refugee camp, and further south at Goz Amir close to Koukou-Angarana, are Massalit and Dadjo and come from the areas around Nyala in southern Darfur.

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Today the radio station has eight members – seven journalists including the director Abdelrezak Arabi and one technician; they also have two refugee correspondents working in Djabal camp. They serve the two refugee camps – Djabal (35,000) and Goz Amir (20,000), and the remainder of the displaced people’s population at Goukoroum and other sites, as well as the town of Goz Beida. They have one transmitter and can be picked up to a distance of 70 kilometers away in towns such as Adre on the Sudanese border.

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Conflict resolution and promoting ‘peaceful cohabitation’ is a theme I take up in more detail with Abdelrezak Arabi,
Radio Sila's manager, in their new headquarters, a pre-fab building outside Abeche. It was a good size for their needs and it was close to where Madjihinguem Nguinabe worked on the engine of his station's 4x4 after it broke down. Since becoming independent, Radio Sila is now financially responsible for maintenance and upkeep of their SUV. Journalists are fundraising to repair it.

Radio Sila journalist Madjihinguem Nguinabe, 29, interviews a doctor at a free clinic in Gouroukoun 13P camp, near Goz Beida, Chad. "I love being a journalist, it’s the best job in the world," says Nguinabe. "I will give everything I have, from the training and knowledge, to all my energy and spirit to keep this station running."
communicating with populations. Suddenly people could hear other people just like them speaking on the radio.

The value of the refugee correspondents as the ultimate source of information about camp life was proven when I asked Usna if she knew anyone who could talk about having been influenced by a social messaging campaign on Radio Sila. Without hesitation she says “Go and see Achta, she heard about hospital births on the radio.”

Achta’s compound backs onto Usna’s through a complicated warren of huts. “I remember when I heard about giving birth in a hospital on Radio Sila, it was the first time anyone suggested that to me,” she said. “My first six children had at home, and although thanks to God I didn’t have any serious problems it was just so much easier in the hospital. There they know what can go wrong and that made me so much more confident.”

UNHCR’s research also suggests that the number of hospital births has increased by 21% in recent years; something which they have partly associated with the work of the radio campaigns.

“We chose to promote hospital births on the radio because it can travel a lot further than we can. At UNHCR we only have a mandate to operate in the refugee camps but the radio can reach people who don’t even live there,” says Issa Sahye, program assistant at UNHCR Goz Beida.

This combined with in-depth news coverage, and lively on-air discussions about the issues, has helped communities access better services.

“Before these programs started not many women went for pre-natal consultations or to give birth in hospitals, but today if you go and chat to people who work in the health centers they all say that there’s been a real change in terms of how many people use the centers. When we talk to people, whether that’s refugees, local people or displaced people. Everyone talks about the value they place on the radio, because it’s the only communication tool available in this region.”

There has also been evidence that radio campaigns have encouraged mothers to bring their children to vaccination campaigns. UNICEF research shows that 86% of people who turned up to a polio vaccination campaign had heard about it on the radio, and Internews’ own research supports this:

“During the wet season many children miss out on vaccination because they are working in the fields with their mothers,” said the Chief of camp in 2008; “Now we’re using the radio mothers hear the call on the radio, while they’re working and then come to the health center.”
Radio Silva journalist Rachat Hassom Taha, 30, works as a technician during a live radio program in Goz Beida, Chad. In February, Hassom was awarded the 2011 prize of excellence in journalism in a national competition organized by the Chadian High Council of Communication (Haut Conseil de la Communication, HC) to recognize the hard work of local journalists.
Abeche is a busy, expensive town. A cross-roads for people coming from all over Chad, traders from Sudan and huge herds of animals being driven across Chad’s eastern scrublands by nomadic communities. A rash of dusty cement buildings stuck in the middle of the desert, surrounded on all sides by spiky terracotta-coloured rock formations.

It’s a place where people are less willing to be open about their experiences. As we wander round the hot market, slipping on mud and debris and reeling from the fetid stench coming from inside the covered meat market where various parts of innards of cows and camels are impaled on metal hooks hanging from the ceiling, our journalist companions Issaka and Abdelbagi from Radio Voix de Ouaddai tell us that it’s hard to do vox pops here.
in the years from 2004 onwards, Abeche became the epicenter of an enormous aid effort and later of a deteriorating security situation as bandits and former rebels began to attack the aid agencies which had come to help the displaced people. The main refugee camps – Gaga (80,000), Farchana (25,000), Treguine (15,000) and Bedjling (30,000) are located about two hours’ drive from the town and the dirt track leading to them became an ideal location for hundreds of vehicle hijackings by rebels based in eastern Chad and Darfur.

Radio Voix de Ouaddai became an essential source of information on security, and a way for NGOs and aid agencies to communicate with the refugee populations when it became difficult to reach them physically. This was especially the case during rebel attacks in 2008 when many humanitarian agencies decided to suspend their activities.

The biggest of the Internews stations, Voix de Ouaddai in many ways benefited from the most attention, training and visitors – being the easiest of the three stations to get to. At its highpoint, Voix de Ouaddai had nine hours of programming a day, and featured a number of specialised and popular programs such as “She Speaks, She Listens” which focused on women’s issues. The station has two transmitters, (one main antenna has recently been moved inside the newly-purchased compound) one in Abeche and one near the refugee camps; both have a coverage range of about 70 kilometers which makes it possible to listen in the border regions.

Today the station has nine full-time members of staff, including two people specially trained in marketing, and the station manager Abderassoul. Unlike Radio Sila and Radio Absoun, they face stiff competition from the state-owned broadcaster ONRTV, yet they have the benefit of several national and international companies being based in Abeche who may be more willing to pay for advertising airspace.

GAGGLE OF WOMEN with only a scrap of cloth to protect them from the searing sun laugh and turn away when Abdelbagi approaches them with his microphone to ask them how the huge increase in prices during Ramadan is affecting their daily life.

“What are you doing here! Go away! We don’t want to speak to journalists!” shouts a surly-looking man in the meat market, sharpening his enormous cleaver menacingly as he gestures for us to leave. A crowd of barefoot and ragged talibe (orphaned Koranic school children) are tailing us through the tight alleys of the market, some of them wearing their metal begging bowls as hats.

“Yes it’s harder to work here than in the refugee camps,” says Issaka. “What are you doing here! Go away! We don’t want to speak to journalists!” shouts a surly-looking man in the meat market, sharpening his enormous cleaver menacingly as he gestures for us to leave. A crowd of barefoot and ragged talibe (orphaned Koranic school children) are tailing us through the tight alleys of the market, some of them wearing their metal begging bowls as hats.

“They leave all the essential information until the end. “Listen to that, they let that one boring minister talk for five minutes!” shouts Abdelbagi. “Where are the real people? This is so boring!”

From their comments it’s clear that the Internews training has really got under their skin and taught them about making an interesting offer to the audience. It also backs up George Papagiannis’ point about how the Internews independent radio model has come to challenge established conceptions about what radio should be.
Youth fetch water from a community well in Abougoudam, a village of Chadian Arab nomads. To stay connected, villagers listen to Radio Voix de Ouaddai, a community radio station that has been financially supported and whose journalists have been trained by Internews for the past seven years.
Radio Voix de Ouaddai journalist Issaka Allafouza interviews Halim Hai, a disabled arrestee in downtown Abeche, Chad.

It was my childhood dream to be a journalist. When I was little, I used to love listening to the radio and I was always thinking about how to become a journalist. After my Bac in 2003 I was just a simple citizen living in Abeche. I didn't know anything about the world. I looked for other jobs but nothing else seemed very interesting. I was very lucky that the next year I saw an advertisement from an NGO called Internews which said they intended to set up a radio station in eastern Chad and that they were looking for journalists. And so I jumped at the chance and to my surprise I got the job! My dream came true and I became a journalist! We received a lot of training with Internews and I'm very grateful for that. I've learnt how to write, that they're not being as professional as we are. I have learnt how to write, how to present, how to edit and most importantly how to make a program interesting and engaging for the audience. I believe that being a journalist is a noble job. I've learnt that now I have a responsibility to inform and educate people. We have a duty to show people a better way of life. A journalist should be in between people and authority, to act as a means of communication. When we make programs about problems in the refugee camps and in the town of Abeche we're playing that role – we're acting on behalf of the people, to get answers.

In Chad and in the refugee camps there are lots of people who haven't got any education, who live in the rural areas and don't know anything. Radio is the only means of communication in this region, it's a way to change people's mentality. We have to be engaged. The best report I did was about the Am Nabol refugee camp where there were lots of problems of insecurity. I went there even though it wasn't safe. My report was about the fact that the humanitarians had pulled out because it was too dangerous. The refugees were really in a bad state. They had no water, there was no health care. I talked about how they were suffering. The refugees didn't know how to get in touch with the humanitarians, but my report acted as a bridge between them. After it went out the next day the local authorities said that they would improve the security situation. Then the humanitarians were able to go back to the camps and started helping people again. I think it was because of my report! I was also very proud of my work during the rebel attacks of 2008. That year rebels came through Abeche and went to N'Djamena. There was fighting close to the town, and then bandits went everywhere stealing things. It was a very scary time, most of the international staff working for NGOs left. I made the decision to stay, and we managed to keep Radio Voix de Ouaddai on the air for the whole time. That was a very difficult thing to do, but I think we really helped the people because we were the only source of information they had – particularly the refugees who were isolated in the Darfur campaigns.

From the end of July we will have no salary. That is tough, and I am worried because I have a family and I need to feed them. But I will do what I can to make this radio station work. I've worked here for seven years and I want to continue. With God's help we will get more funding; but for now I'm here as a volunteer and I'm willing to give it a go.
Women wave their ration cards in an effort to get a bag of flour during a food distribution in Iriba refugee camp near Iriba, in eastern Chad.

**CONTEXT**

**Darfur and the refugee crisis**

In 2003-4 CONFLICT BROKE out in Sudan's western Darfur region. At first a campaign for more autonomy from local groups representing the minority Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa communities, it turned into a full-scale crisis when the Sudanese government branded it a rebellion and sent in proxy Arab militias known as the 'Janjaweed' to crack down on the two main groups, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM).
In the following years more than two million civilians were displaced and thousands killed. More than 250,000 of those ended up crossing the border into Chad where they eventually settled in twelve refugee camps along the border. Almost no one has returned home in the eight years since the conflict erupted.

At first the Darfur crisis was largely ignored by international media, but from 2005 onwards a number of Hollywood celebrities such as George Clooney and Mia Farrow, and many campaign groups, brought the suffering of the Darfuri people onto the global agenda. Finally in 2005 the Sudanese president Omar el-Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, but the issuing of an arrest warrant against him has proved a hugely controversial decision.

The Darfur crisis also sparked a dangerous proxy war with neighboring Chad, with Sudan for several years hosting and sponsoring Chadian rebels, and with Chad’s President Idriss Deby Itno welcoming the JEM’s leadership to N’Djamena. In 2008 the Chadian rebels came within hours of toppling Deby, and in retaliation the JEM launched a lightning strike on Omdurman near Khartoum in 2009.

Although Darfur has now fallen from the headlines – the fighting in Darfur has died down because President Bashir’s attention has been diverted by a dangerous destabilising situation emerging with newly independent South Sudan – JEM appears to have moved its operations to South Kordofan (to the east of Darfur), and a recent report said new non-Arab proxy militias have been launched against local populations. Ask any of the Sudanese refugees in the 12 Chadian camps why they do not return home and they will cite this continuing insecurity as the reason.

Ask any of the Sudanese refugees in the 12 Chadian camps why they do not return home and they will cite this continuing insecurity as the reason.
Radio Absoun

IRIBA, a tiny windswept town of a few thousand, has suffered disproportionately because of the huge influx of refugees. The population of the two camps closest to the town, Touloum (22,000) and Iridimi (18,000), dwarfs that of Iriba; further east another 20,000 people live in Am Nabak, not to mention the camps of Mile and Kounoungo to the south, and Oure Cassoni further north. It’s thought that between 2003 and 2005 the population of this region doubled.

Hundreds of people came to have their goats vaccinated during an event sponsored by CARE in a refugee camp near Iriba, in eastern Chad. CARE representative Laognma Mysuf said they spread the word of the vaccination even through Radio Absoun. “We went on the radio to tell people to bring their animals today and also to explain the importance of getting vaccinations,” he said. “For us as an NGO, if the radio wasn’t here we would have to go door to door or village by village, and we wouldn’t be able to succeed with our activities.”
HERE THAT ISSUE of peaceful co-operation is crucial, even if many of the local people are the same Zaghawa ethnic group as the refugees. It’s an exceptionally arid zone. Flying in to the airport, it’s easy to see bald rings around the refugee camps where the trees and shrubs have been cleared for firewood. In the early days, one of the most common themes for news stories on Radio Absoun was attacks on women who had ventured outside the bounds of the refugee camp looking for wood.

This topic comes up in discussion in the quiet shade of an earth outhouse in the compound of Marbula Khatir Adam Moussa, the President of the Iridimi women’s association. We’ve arrived here en masse, picking up women from all over the camp. As soon as the women saw us with microphones and cameras they flagged down our car and jumped on board – some from the shade of acacia trees, others at a monthly food distribution by WFP.

“You know women are really not listened to here. Even in the morning editorial meeting with my colleagues I would find that people didn’t listen. I would make my suggestions for a story, and they think, oh it’s a woman who’s speaking. And also people think that a woman who is a journalist is too free and open – you have to travel and meet all kinds of people and you know as a woman here you can’t do that.”

I cautiously raise the subject of domestic violence and attacks on women. Every question we ask goes through three languages – English, French, Zaghawa and back. The women look at each other with lowered eyelids, a ray of hazy sunshine catching the vibrant colours of their headscarves. A fly buzzes loudly against the wall. The women aren’t saying very much.

I ask again, and Fatamata steps forward; a beautiful woman of about 30 who arrived from Darfur in 2004, having lost her brother in the violence. She gives thought and intelligence to her answers.

“Yes there are subjects we can’t discuss, even amongst ourselves at these women’s meetings. We know these things go on, but it’s hard for us to talk about it.”

Does the radio help them to confront these subjects? “We liked the programs on the radio that cover these topics (She Speaks She listens)” she says slowly. “We all have to learn. We hear a range of opinions. Many people here have no education and don’t understand anything.”

This is borne out by Internews’ own research that the scaling up of a special focus on women and gender-based violence (GBV) programs was extremely popular. The ‘She Speaks She Listens’ strand, which was launched as a regular feature in 2006, became one of the most popular programs, and was backed up with ‘listening groups’ which were formed in the camps to feedback directly about the content of the programs.

Using female voices to present the program was also a major breakthrough in establishing trust – one of the first people to work on the program was Houda Malloum.

But she adds that weakness became a real strength in the camps: “It was different, there I met lots of women who were open. They understood that the radio could be in their interests. They were much more open with me than they would ever be with a man. It became a real advantage.”

Schoolgirls attend science class at a Touloum refugee camp near Iriba in Eastern Chad. Many women interviewed said that the Internews-supported community radio station, Radio Absoun, has helped created a forum to discuss women’s rights and educate listeners about taboo issues such as domestic abuse and FGM.
The day-to-day work of Radio Absoun is a little more prosaic, dealing with the realities of living in such an isolated, arid region for eight years. We follow Mohamed Adam Hamid, Internews’ correspondent in Touloum camp, as he goes in search of vox pops about the rising costs of living in the camp marketplace. Things have been difficult for him over the last few weeks, as he’s heard that Radio Absoun is about to go independent and he’s been worrying about what the future might hold. He tells me people are starting to ask him why Radio Absoun has been broadcasting intermittently for the last few weeks. Nevertheless he beams as he explains his proudest journalistic moment.

“The water had been cut here in the camp for four days because the generator was broken, and people were having to walk 10kms to find wells. It was really hard, people had to borrow from neighboring villages and it wasn’t treated,” he explains. “So I did a really good report criticising the fact that the water had been cut, and the next day the camp authorities came and repaired the generator.”

Radio Absoun was the first Internews station to go on air in December 2005, partly thanks to the work of local Chadian NGO ADES, which had been already advocating strongly for a local radio in the area. Radio Absoun (which is the name of one of the biggest wadis in the area) was aimed at three of the more northerly Darfur refugee camps – Am Nabak (18,000) on the Sudanese border, Touloum (23,000) and Iridimi (18,000).

Radio Absoun’s coverage area was expanded with the provision of two relay transmitters by the UN Mission Minurcat in 2009 – this allowed them to reach Dure Cassoni in the north, and Mile and Kourouroungou camps in the south near Oure Cassoni.

Iriba and Bahai are the only sizeable towns in this extremely arid region where much of the local population is nomadic or semi-nomadic. Radio is a vital means of communication for these communities, and particularly for the refugees who stay in regular contact with their Zaghawa families just over the border in Sudan.

Resource conflict became one of the major issues facing the populations of the three camps and Radio Absoun became adept at producing informative discussions and debates about how to share resources, and how to manage conflicts that broke out with the host population. Even when the east of Chad was beset with rebel attacks in 2008, Radio Absoun managed to stay on air, despite many humanitarian agencies pulling out.

Today five members of staff remain at Radio Absoun, which is now being managed by ADES. Radio Absoun maintains a network of three refugee correspondents – two in Touloum camp and one in Iridimi – who report daily on the issues affecting the refugees. This has been an important service which keeps refugees up to date, even if the Chadian journalists from base are unable to travel to the camps.

Radio Absoun’s shipping container-turned-radio station in Iriba, in eastern Chad.
Women’s community council leader Fatima Abdalla Jarnadu, poses for a portrait after being interviewed by Radio Absoun’s station manager, Mahamad Daoussa, in Iridimi refugee camp outside of Iriba, Chad. She said that she values Radio Absoun because it creates a community forum where it’s comfortable to talk about previously taboo topics – for instance, domestic abuse. According to Fatima, it is something that people living in refugee camps in Chad would never talk about otherwise.

It brings people closer together and puts them in contact with each other every day. It creates an atmosphere of harmony in the camps, and everyone is informed about what’s going on. And we can hear about what’s going on in the other camps – Iridimi and Am Nabak.”

On our second visit to Iridimi, we saw a huge crowd gathering by the side of the road – hundreds of women with flowing scarves in every colour contrasted brightly against the dun-coloured Saharan sand. Beside them a writhing, stinking, flatulent crowd of bleating sheep and goats. It was an animal vaccination campaign being run by the NGO Care International. This is an essential service, especially as many families lost up to 50% of their animals when drought and hunger struck in 2009. This year’s poor rainfall and harvest have made it even more important. “Wow! Where have they all come from?” I asked Daoussa. “We did a report on it over the weekend,” he says with a twinkle in his eye. “We told people the time and place and what services would be available.” I’m slightly sceptical of his claims. But sure enough within a few minutes I’ve been introduced to three different women who battled their way through the crowds to describe eloquently the animal health program they heard that weekend on the radio. Seyda Mohammed says it convinced her to come. In fact the initiative is so popular, Care International has trained us in commerce and marketing, so we can do that, even if Iriba is not really known as a trading town. We will start charging the humanitarian agencies for air time to get their messages across, for targeted programs and spots. It will be hard, but I will not stop now. I’ve been here a very long time.
Workers build a shelter at the Radio Sila headquarters in Goz Beida, Chad. Since becoming independent, the journalists are responsible for fundraising and paying all of their salary, operating and maintenance costs.

**Sustainability**

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE for the 20 or so journalists at the three stations is certain to be money. Although most of them have firmly asserted their commitment to staying on and helping the radios to become independent, they are currently faced with the prospect of working without a proper salary until the stations can generate their own income.

Issaka Allafouza, who’s vowed to stay on at Radio Voix de Ouaddai sums it up: “I’ve accepted to work voluntarily because I’ve given the last seven years of my life to this and I want to continue to inform the community. But I have a family and they have needs. I don’t know if I can go on forever, but we hope that God will help us to find another funder.”

Each station’s business plan involves to a varying extent attracting advertising revenue, a concept which has yet to take hold in some small rural towns in the east where commerce is limited. “Internews has trained us in commerce and marketing,” says Daossa Mohammed, the manager of Radio Absoun in Iriba. “But Iriba is not really known as a trading town. Not many business people come through here and people aren’t used to the idea. But we’ll try.”

For each station, the revenue mix needs to be individually tailored. “They can try new ideas such as charging people to send their wedding and funeral dedications via text messages, hiring out office facilities such as printers and speaker sets and even setting up an internet café,” says expert sustainability consultant Michel Colin, who has provided training to the three stations over the past year. In short the journalists and managers of the three stations need to consider anything.

Abderezak Arabi, manager of Radio Sila, is factoring into his plans to generate about 600,000 CFA each month ($1200) to run the station, even though that involves the “tightening of belts;” “We’ve calculated that we can charge 10,000 CFA ($20) for a 30 second spot with a humanitarian agency, and 1000 CFA ($2) for a personal message such as a death or marriage announcement.” Association Al-Richate (which operates Radio Sila) also got off to a very good start, having won a grant of $25,000 from the Julia Taft Foundation to support its work and the network of refugee correspondents.

If reliable funding streams are not established over the next few months, staff may need to consider working in other jobs during the day and then volunteering their time at the radio, and it’s certain that they will need to draw on all their Internews training from the last seven years; “It’s really important that all our journalists can do everything, so if someone is not there they can stand in for each other. We need everyone to be able to switch from managing, to presenting, to driving to marketing,” says Abderezak Arabi.

**Chad is not an easy place to be a journalist.** It’s one of the poorest countries in the world with an almost completely undeveloped local media market. There are only 34 independent radio stations in the whole country, and journalists often face harassment and arrest despite the recent introduction of a nominally more liberal press law. Add in the logistical challenge of staying on air when there is no mains electricity and the price of diesel for generators is sky high, and it’s clear to see that only the most determined journalists and radio stations will survive.
INTERNEWS-TRAINED JOURNALISTS IN EASTERN CHAD ARE BEGINNING TO SELL ADVERTISING TO LOCAL RETAILERS, IN ADDITION TO SEEKING GRANT FUNDING.

A woman shops in a market in downtown Abeche, Chad. To be financially self-sustaining, Internews-trained journalists in eastern Chad are beginning to sell advertising to local retailers, in addition to seeking grant funding.
The Future

In 2010 the Presidents of Chad and Sudan agreed to put an end to the dangerous proxy war that had been going on between them for several years. Thousands of displaced Chadians started to return home. The fighting in Darfur seemed to die down, particularly as Bashir was presented with new challenges in South Sudan. But still the Darfur refugees are not going home - the population in the eastern Chad camps is almost exactly what it was at the beginning of the crisis eight years ago. Many people cite continuing insecurity as the main reason preventing their return. Although the story has mostly disappeared from the headlines, there are occasional reports that the Darfur conflict continues.
UT THE STABILISATION in eastern Chad means that funding for Darfur projects is drying up, as donor’s attention is diverted to new crises breaking out across the world. Many of the NGOs pulled out of the east of Chad when the UN Mission Minurcat was dramatically forced to leave in early 2010 when President Deby refused to renew the mandate.

I was struck by the difference in Abeche, compared with my last visit in 2009 when the roads were teeming with gleaming white UN vehicles and foreign soldiers, and every pizza joint in town was full to breaking. Since then tens of international NGOs have left, with the UN’s co-ordination office OCHA saying six more did so in the 12 months prior to July 2012. Internews is one of them. And though they have been able to garner funding for an extra few years beyond that of many other international agencies, their major donors – UNHCR and the US State Department Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration (BPRM) – both no

IN A COUNTRY WHERE MOST PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS GET PAID PEANUTS (THE AVERAGE SALARY IS ABOUT $150 A MONTH), AND IT TOOK UNTIL THE YEAR 2000 BEFORE THE FIRST PRIVATE RADIO STATION DIA FM WAS GRANTED A LICENCE, THE INTERNEWS PROFESSIONALISM, SKILLS SET AND RANGE OF PROGRAMMING IS SECOND TO NONE.

longer have the funding to continue supporting the project. Abeche seems to quietly be sinking back into the desert, albeit with the notable addition of paved roads and solar powered street lights.

So what has Internews achieved?

First the fact that a network of some 30 professional Chadian journalists and 12 refugee correspondents exists, all of whom have benefited from extensive journalism training and mentoring over a prolonged period of time. It is significant that these journalists all have fully functioning equipment, from quality microphones and marantzes to studio desks, cars and generators.

In a country where most professional journalists get paid peanuts (the average salary is about $150 a month), and it took until the year 2000 before the first private radio station DIA FM was granted a licence, the Internews professionalism, skills set and range of programming is second to none. Even today there are only around 40 independent radio stations in the whole country (and only one in the vast BET (Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti) area that makes up one-third of Chad’s territory in the north), and most other radio journalists at private stations have to hold down several jobs in order to indulge their broadcasting passion. Often the journalists are the technicians, presenters, managers and fund-raisers; often they simply cannot afford to go out on reporting trips. Most radios in Chad only broadcast for a few hours a day and some don’t even broadcast every day or even at regular times.

Equally important is the power of giving a voice to people who previously had no means of letting those in authority know how they felt; Abdullah from Gaga camp’s comments in 2009 sum this up perfectly: “Our lives as refugees are filled with difficulties. We don’t often have the means to voice our concerns and seek solutions with the camp authorities. Through the radio I can make my voice heard.” Former project director Ian Noble agrees: “Media elsewhere in Chad – as in many other countries – are dominated by what the minister, the aid agency official, the endless queue of workshop facilitators, etc., have to say and neglect the people most concerned.”
Internews-trained journalist Zakaria Barout (right) interviews a teacher in Touloum refugee camp near Iriba in Eastern Chad.
For Noble, it’s this local contact that can be seen as one of the greatest achievements. “In a nutshell, what Internews did best was to give a voice to ordinary people, by getting out into the streets with a microphone and recorder and giving them a chance to have their say about issues directly affecting their lives.”

Internews would point to the fact that their support of the radio stations over a seven-year period is unusual amongst humanitarian interventions in eastern Chad, where some NGOs barely last a few years. The team in Washington believes that despite concerns that the transition phase to get the radios ready to stand on their own two feet was too short, they have achieved an organised hand-over and retreat.

Income generation training was carried out by Michel Colin, an independent consultant, in 2011 and 2012. “We focused on organising staff – even if it requires reducing the number of journalists to engage sales people,” says Colin. “The most obvious sources are the revenues from advertising, public announcement, sponsorship, contests, tax breaks and co-production, but we also looked at office services such as copying, printing and internet.” The journalists were also trained on management, contract negotiations and book-keeping; before Internews left, they helped purchase land for Radio Sila and Radio Voix de Ouaddai, removing the need to pay monthly rent.

Abdezerak Arabi, station manager Radio Sila, is not sure that this will work, but he is 100 percent willing to try. “What will we say to people? Give us some money because our radio doesn’t work anymore? No we can’t say that. We need to prove to them that we can help them and change their life – that we can offer them something, that we can educate them and change their behaviour. That way they might be persuaded to help us in the future.”

Although it is inevitable that funding for every project eventually comes to an end, it has been heartbreaking to pull out of Chad,” says Deborah Ensor, Internews’ vice president for the Africa region. “The international interest is gone, the funding is drying up, but the people are still there. ‘The need for information is still there.’

Ensor is convinced the stations will survive, though acknowledges that they may look very different then they did in the heyday of big donor money. “I think we have done the best we could to help set them up for the future – training, equipment, land, buildings, emotional support. There is nothing that makes me more proud than the work that these journalists have accomplished in Chad – and the work I know they will continue to do.

Ultimately for any development project to survive losing its main source of funding, the institution needs to be owned and valued by the community – not just in terms of enjoying it, but in actively taking steps to help it survive. These are issues that affect media outlets the world over as readers and listeners become less and less willing to pay for their news.

While we found many people expressing support and appreciation for the radio, we found few concrete offers of help. What happens when the generator breaks down, who pays the medical bills of the journalists if one of their children falls sick?

One idea is to bring the community into the management and running of the station, so the population comes to understand how much work goes into keeping it on air. To that end Radio Sila journalist Madjihinguem Ngomone hit the nail on the head when he said that one of the most valuable things the radio can do is to train young people to be volunteers. The example of 18-year-old Rahima Mohamed Ibed still stands out.

On the morning we were due to leave Goz Beida, I nipped in to say bye to the staff, and found Rahima deep in discussion with station manager Abdezerak Arabi. It was only yesterday that we’d left him chatting to Madji in DjaHail camp.

Rahima’s smile is as broad as can be as he shakes hands with Abdezerak. He says hi to me and then nervously disappears through the huge metal gate and marches across the scoured land, and we decide to find out where his flip-flops are. He is incongruous against his best suit, and his smile is as broad as can be.

“I hang on, where’s he going? What happened?” I ask Madji.

“Oh he’s coming back on Sunday to start a youth discussion program,” he replies casually.

“Well? Why did you say ‘to train young people to be volunteers’? You organised all that since yesterday?” I ask Rahima.

“I told you,” says Madji. “We can do anything.”

Adam Ali, a shepherd in Abougoudam, a village of Chadian Arab Nomads, listens to the radio as he tends to his herd in surrounding fields.