

# Perceptions and Sources of Information in the Obo region, CAR

(July 2012)

## Population-based Survey in Obo for “Integrating Local Media and ICTs into Humanitarian Response in CAR”

*A project implemented by Internews and funded by the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF)*

Report #2 written by Patrick Vinck, Ph.D. and Jean-Pierre Dushime<sup>1</sup>

### Executive Summary

Between May 19<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, 2012, a team of four trained interviewers conducted interviews with 400 randomly selected adults representative of the adult population in Obo, the capital of Haut-Mbomou, one of the 14 prefectures of the Central African Republic (CAR), and its surroundings. The main objectives of this rapid assessment were to better understand the sources of information that affected populations rely on, their media consumption habits and interaction, and their perception of humanitarian organizations.

The key findings are:

- **Radio is the most important source of information**, especially the local community radio, Radio Zereda. However, women tended to also rely on friends, family and local authorities as main sources of information. None of the respondents mentioned printed media, television or Internet as a main source of information.
- **Mobile phones are relatively common**, one-fifth of the respondents (21%) indicated owning one, but just 9% indicated using text messages and less than 1% accessed Internet with their phone.
- **Text messages are seldom used** to contact the media; rather, in person meetings (i.e. walk-ins) are preferred.
- **Most adults feel informed about humanitarian actions and judge these actions positively.** However, men tended to have more negative opinions than women.
- Over 4 out of 5 respondents judged the quality of the information available to them as being good or very good, both in terms of news and security information.
- The **low level of education and literacy, especially among women.** Half the women had no education and 74% indicated being illiterate, compared to 26% of the men.
- It is important to note that according to this survey, **most respondents (80%) considered themselves victims of violence by armed groups.**

Creating a successful two-way communication platform between humanitarians and affected communities that uses the media and ICT (including SMS) will require all actors to actively address the

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challenges of low literacy levels, low use of cellphones, even lower use of text messages, and limited resources to pay for credit.

## About the project

"Integrating Local Media and Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) into Humanitarian Response in the Central African Republic (CAR)"<sup>2</sup> is a 6-month project awarded by the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF). Internews is working in partnership with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and Ushahidi.

The project has set up an innovative system that fosters a bounded network of trusted local media organizations that gathers real-time first-hand information from local populations that once verified and validated by a coordination center in Bangui, is uploaded into a crisis map ([www.cartehumanitaire-rca.org](http://www.cartehumanitaire-rca.org)) publicly accessible. Humanitarian organizations on the other hand can have access to verified information and reports from hard to reach areas and also share useful information about their activities for local media to report on and local populations to know about.

This creates a two-way communication flow between local population and humanitarian organizations putting local media and ICT at the core of it. This system will eventually improve emergency response, community participation and community resilience.

The project will initially run until September 2012.

## About Internews in CAR

In early 2011, Internews created a unique network connecting 11 community radio stations in CAR to overcome the difficulties of communication caused by power outages, lack of Internet access, bad roads, and rebel occupation in several areas.

The Association of Journalists for Human Rights (RJDH in the French acronym)<sup>3</sup>, a local organization that was founded in December 2010 at one of the journalism training sessions organized by Internews, manages the network. Using mobile phones and Internet, the Association links the 11 stations with one other to facilitate the exchange of news and information, which in turn provides humanitarian agencies with an opportunity to learn what is happening in hard-to-reach areas and to quickly exchange information with communities throughout the country

## About the Population-Based Survey

This population-based survey conducted in Obo is part of the series of assessments commissioned by Internews to inform and evaluate the design and implementation of its HIF funded project. This report is based on the results of 400 interviews conducted over 8 days of data collection, between May 19<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The sample was designed to be representative of the adult population living in Obo. It is the second assessment report, following "Documenting mistrust between humanitarians and local media", which was released in June 2012 (*Can crisis mapping in CAR also bridge the gap between humanitarians and local media?* [www.humanitarianinnovation.org/blog/internews/pvinck](http://www.humanitarianinnovation.org/blog/internews/pvinck))

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<sup>2</sup> More information, blogs and pictures from the project: [www.humanitarianinnovation.org/projects/large-grants/internews](http://www.humanitarianinnovation.org/projects/large-grants/internews)

<sup>3</sup> <http://reseaudesjournalistesrca.wordpress.com/>

## Methodology

A team of 4 trained interviewers conducted 400 interviews using a structured questionnaire of 32 open-ended questions, and 5 questions using a Likert scale type of answers (i.e. very good to very bad).

Respondents were selected using a multi-stage cluster random sampling process proportionate to population size. At the first stage, 10 quartiers or sectors were selected within a 10km radius of Obo. The radius reflected both the area that is securely accessible and the limited range of Radio Zereda, the local community-based radio. At the second stage, a geographic random sampling method was used to select dwellings.

Interviewers chose a random direction at the center of the quartier or sector and selected every other dwelling in that direction. Finally at the third stage, the interviewers randomly selected one individual aged above 18 within the selected household. The two male interviewers only selected among the eligible men, and the two female interviewers selected only among eligible women.

## Limitations

Because of insecurity, most of the population around the town of Obo had been displaced into the town itself. Displaced populations from nearby villages were living in camps called by the same name as the villages of their origins. To include villagers in the survey according to the sample design, interviewers carried out the survey in the displaced camps, rather than in villages as that is where people were living.

It is likely that not all residents of the originally selected place lived within the camps, however, resulting in possible sample bias (e.g. if only those worst off were living in camps). Survey data may further be affected by inaccurate recalls or social desirability (which hinders the accuracy of information given during discussion of sensitive topics). However, the questionnaire was designed to be very straightforward and interviewers were trained on how to engage participants so that they felt comfortable and could be candid.

Names were not collected, and respondents were not offered incentives to participate in the study. How respondents outside of the 10km security zone differ from those within the security zone is unknown. However, it is likely that those living in the less secure zones have less access to information (e.g. due to the limited radio range).

## Context

In CAR, remote areas like the Haut-Mbomou prefecture, lack most basic government services, including the provision of security for civilians. Since 2008, it has become one of the bases of operation for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a notoriously violent Ugandan rebel group known for killing, abducting, and mutilating civilians.

For two decades, the conflict between the LRA and the government of Uganda caused destruction and the displacement of over 1.7 million people who now live in squalid IDP camps, transforming northern Uganda into a humanitarian disaster.<sup>4</sup> In 2005 the LRA withdrew its forces to Southern Sudan and then crossed the Nile, assembling in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). After failed peace talks, a military operation, Operation Lightning Thunder, sought to neutralize

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<sup>4</sup> J. Miller, "Uganda's IDP policy", *Forced Migration Review*, (27), 2006, 78. Available: [www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/FMRpdfs/FMR27/53.pdf](http://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/FMRpdfs/FMR27/53.pdf)

the LRA. The rebel group, however, evaded the attack and regrouped.<sup>5</sup> By then the conflict had become regional, with the LRA operating across three countries: DRC, Sudan, and CAR.

Obo, the isolated capital of Haut-Mbomou has been at the heart of the LRA violence in CAR. Since 2008, thousands of internally displaced have sought relative security in the town. The arrival of Central African and Ugandan troops has improved security, but the population, unable to move freely outside of a limited security perimeter, cannot resume basic life sustaining activities like farming, hunting, or fishing.

It is within this context that Radio Zereda, a community-based radio emerged out of the [resourcefulness of its founder, Arthur Zoungagde](#). The weekly programs that Radio Zereda broadcast include information about the LRA and an ongoing campaign to demobilize its combatants. Radio Zereda is one of Internews’ community radio partners and a member of the Association of Journalists for Human Rights.

## Characteristics of Respondents

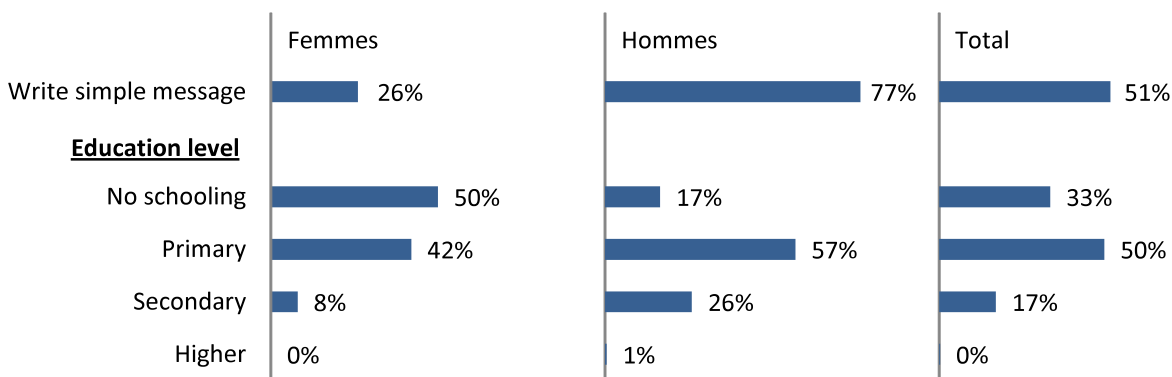
### Demographics

The sample was composed of half men and half women, with over three quarter of the respondents (77%) being in a marital relationship or partnership. The average age of respondent was 34 years old.

Half the respondents (51%) indicated being able to read and write simple messages. One third (33%) had no formal education, 50% had some or completed primary education, and just 17% had some secondary education or higher.

There were major differences between men and women. Only 26% of the women indicated being literate, compared to 76% of the men; half the women (50%) had no formal education while only 16% of the men lacked the same.

*Figure 1: Literacy and education level*



A large majority of respondents were involved in agriculture (88%) as their main livelihood activity, followed by small trade (4%), employees (3%), and a range of other occupations (4%).

Considering the security situation, most respondents are unlikely to be able to access their fields, which is their primary means of income. The average respondents’ income was reported to be 9,800 FCFA /

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch (2009). The Christmas Massacres. Available: [www.hrw.org/reports/2009/02/16/christmas-massacres-0](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/02/16/christmas-massacres-0)

month, with men reporting slightly higher average income (11,400 FCFA / month) compared to women (8,200 FCFA / month), although the difference was not statistically significant.

### Exposure to Violence

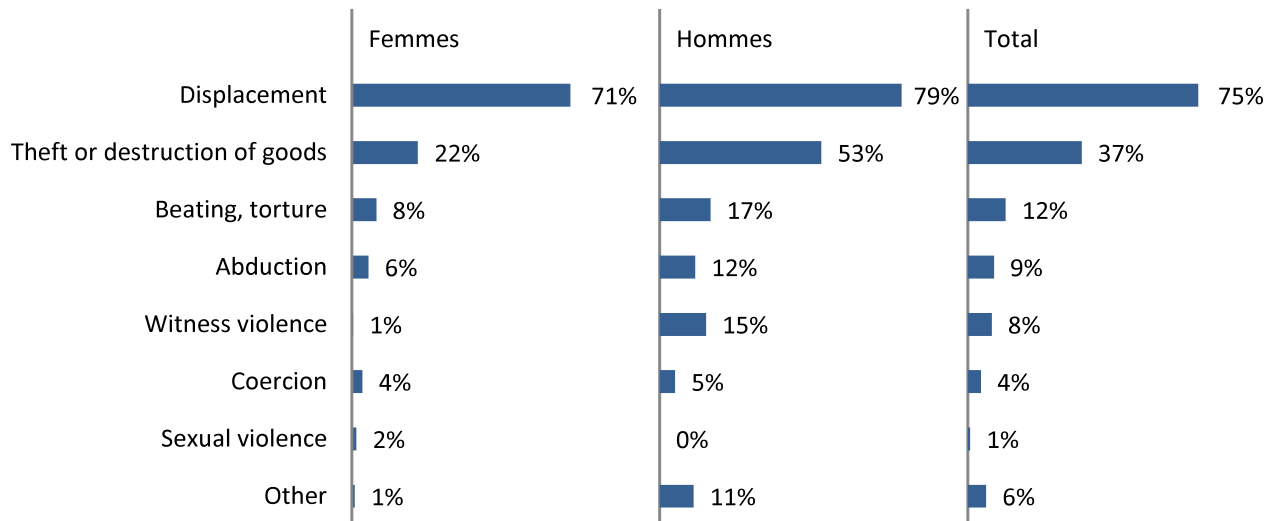
Since the LRA began targeting civilians around Obo, thousands of civilians have been displaced and untold numbers have been directly affected by violence.

According to this survey, most respondents (80%) considered themselves victims of violence by armed groups; 313 respondents (78%) indicated having been victims of violence caused by the LRA, and 30 respondents (8%) indicated having been victims of violence caused by other groups, most frequently the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) (19 reports) and the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) (5 reports).

Exposure to seven types of violence was assessed with one open option on the survey (other, specify). Displacement was reported by three out of four respondents (75%). Even residents from populated areas within 10km of Obo sought shelter in the town. Nearly half the respondents also reported the theft or destruction of their goods or belongings (37%). About one in ten respondent reported having experienced beating or torture (12%), having been abducted (9%), and witnessing violence (8%).

A smaller but nevertheless important proportion of respondents reported some form of coercion, such as carrying loads (4%) or sexual violence (1%). Men tended to report exposure to violence more frequently than women. These results highlight the toll paid by civilians to the armed groups operating in the area. Such violence may weaken social bonds and networks,<sup>6</sup> which makes the work of community initiatives like Radio Zereda all the more important.

Figure 2: Exposure to violence by armed groups



<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group (2011). The Lord’s Resistance Army: End Game? Africa Report N°182. Available: [www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/182-the-lords-resistance-army-end-game.aspx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/182-the-lords-resistance-army-end-game.aspx)

## Information and Media

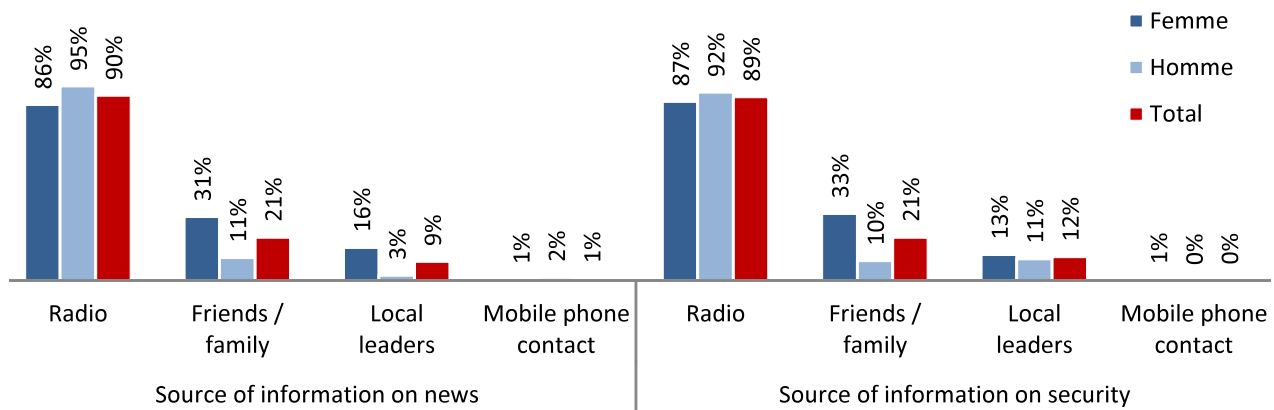
### Sources of Information

Two of the key objectives of the rapid survey were to better understand the main sources of information for the affected populations, and to identify their media consumption habits.

Radios were among the main sources of information for a majority of the population, both in terms of general news (90%) and security information (89%). Friends and family were also considered a main source of information for news and security information among 21% of the respondents. For both types of information, women tended to rely on friends and family as a source of information more frequently than men. Local leaders were also a main source of information on news for 9% of the respondents and on security for 12% of the respondents.

None of the respondents mentioned printed media, television or Internet as a main source of information.

*Figure 3: Sources of information on news and security*

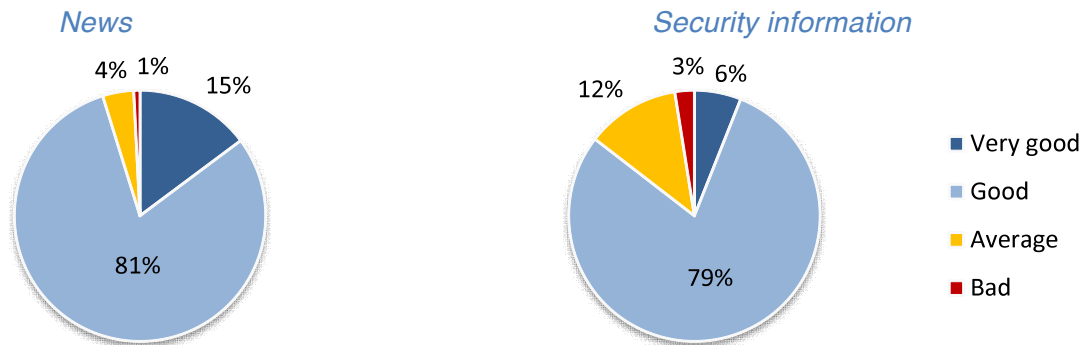


The main sources of information were also associated with respondents' education level: among respondents with no education, 84% used radio as a main source of information compared to over 92% among respondents with primary education or higher. Reliance on friends and family was more frequent (30%) among those with no education compared to those with primary education (18%) or secondary education (12%).

### Quality of information and access

Over 4 out of 5 respondents judged the quality of the information available to them as being good or very good, both in terms of news and security information. However, respondents were more frequently negative about the quality of security information (15% of average or bad), compared to news (5% of average or bad).

Figure 4: Quality of information

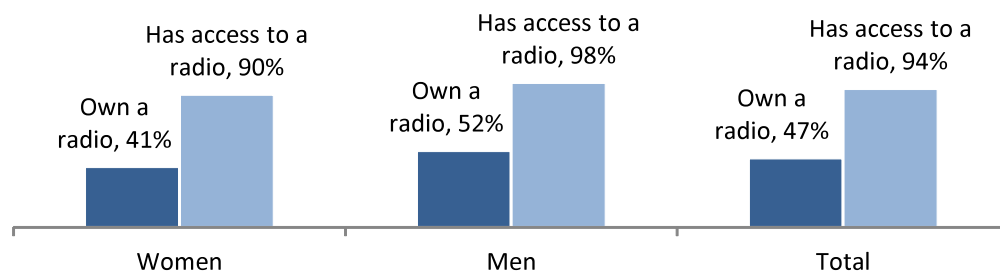


While the quality of information is not seen as a challenge, respondents outlined a series of issues they are confronted with in order to obtain information, including the lack of money (44%), the lack of radio (36%), and the lack of battery or energy sources (8%). Not surprisingly, given the widespread reliance on radio as a source of information, the problems identified focused on that media.

### Radio Consumption

Considering the importance of radios as a primary mean of information among the population, and the central role community radios play in Internews' project, the survey further explored radio consumption habits. Overall, about half the respondents indicated owning a radio, though in total 9 out of 10 (94%) indicated that they had access to one. This is mirrored in the proportion of individuals who indicated listening to the radio at least occasionally (94%). Women were less likely than men to own a radio, have access to one, and listen to one at least occasionally.

Figure 5: Radio access and ownership

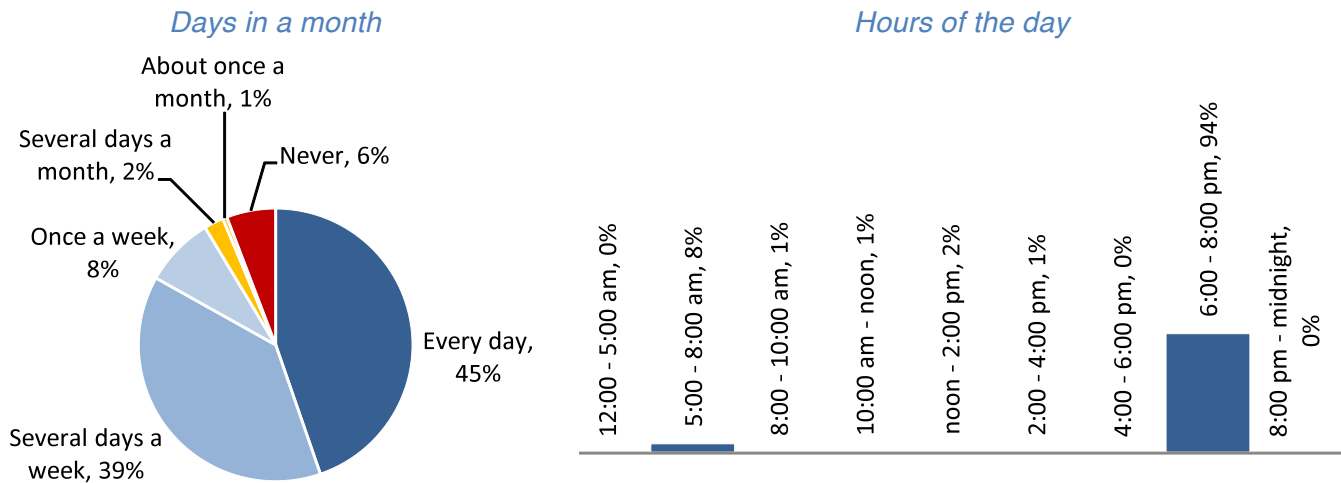


Nearly half the population listened to the radio on a daily basis (45%), and another 39% listened to it several days a week.

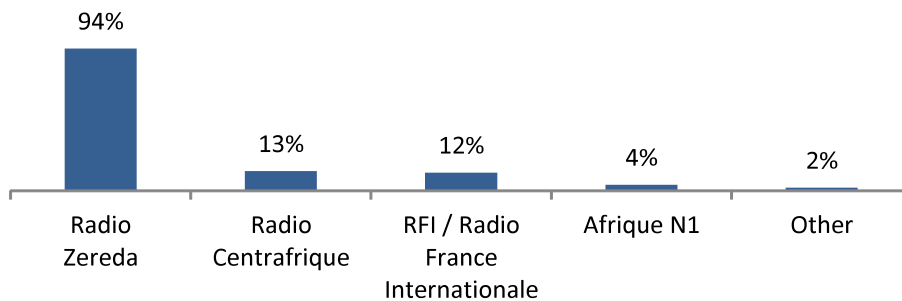
The results show that women were less likely to listen to radio even occasionally compared to men (10% vs. 1.5%). Even if they listened to radio, women were less likely than men to do so on a daily basis (37% vs. 52%).

Everyone who listened to the radio occasionally listened to it between the hours of 6:00-8:00pm (945 of the respondents). Few respondents listened at other times.

Figure 6: Media consumption



The hours during which respondents listened to the radio likely reflect the hours of operation of the only local community radio, Radio Zereda. Indeed, Radio Zereda was the most popular channel, with 94% reporting listening to it, which corresponds to everyone who listens to a radio at least occasionally. Smaller percentages listened to other stations at least occasionally, including Radio Centrafrique (14%), RFI (13%), Afrique # 1 (4%) or other stations (2%).



Every respondent who listened to the radio at least occasionally trusted this media, which contrasts with humanitarians, who expressed distrust in most Central African media sources.

### Contacts with the media

As many as one in five respondents (20%) indicated having already contacted a radio – most likely Radio Zereda. Contact was most frequently done in person (i.e. walk-ins) (15%), followed by phone calls (3%) and text messages (1%). The results suggest that the adoption of text messaging is still low.

Importantly, women were significantly less likely to contact the radio compared to men (9% vs. 31%).

### Mobile Phones

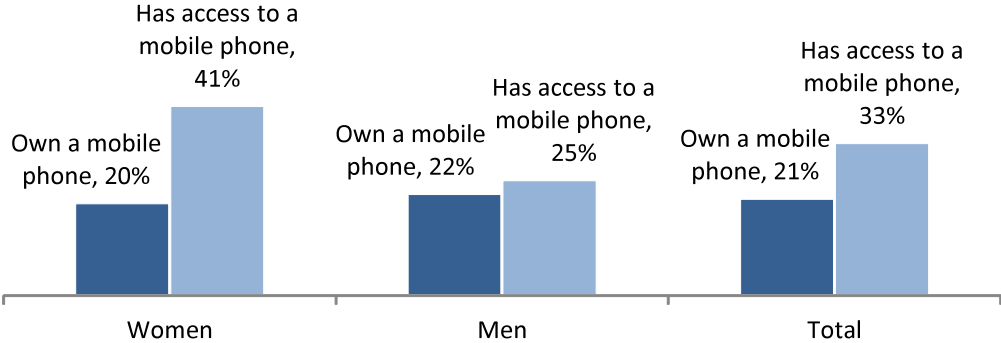
Since the Internews project is partly about the use of mobile phones as a mean to gather real-time information from the population, the survey assessed mobile phone ownership and use among the population.



Overall, about one-fifth of the respondents (21%) indicated owning a mobile phone, though one in three had access to one (33%). However, just 9% of the respondents indicated using text messages at least occasionally, and less than 1% accessed Internet with their phone.

While there was no difference in mobile phone ownership and use of text messages and Internet across gender, women tended to report to have access to a phone more frequently than men. This may reflect the fact that women have access to their partner’s phone and/or that women are more likely to be willing to let other women use their phone.

Figure 7: mobile phone ownership and access

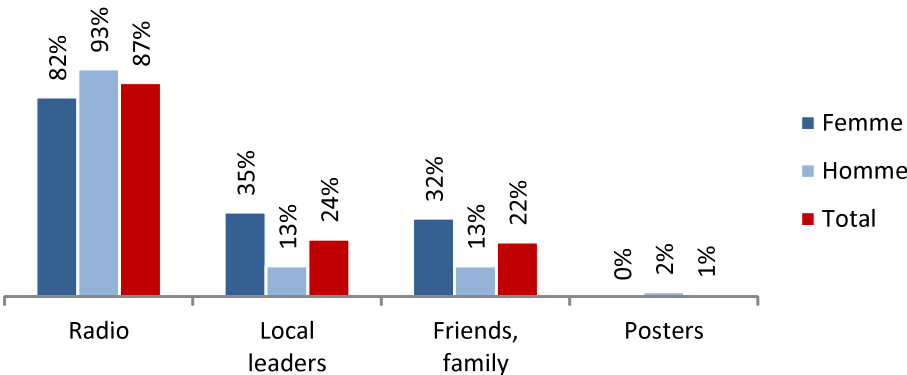


### Humanitarian Information and Perception

The Internews project is also about establishing two-way communication between affected populations and humanitarian actors, and thus the survey explored respondents’ sources of information about humanitarian actions and their perception of humanitarians.

The main sources of information on humanitarian actions were similar to sources of information on news and security. Respondents most frequently relied on radio sources (87.9%). However, local leaders were mentioned as a main source of information on humanitarian actions (24%) more frequently than they were cited as sources of information on news (9%) and security (12%). Women relied more frequently than men on local leaders and friends and family as their main sources of information.

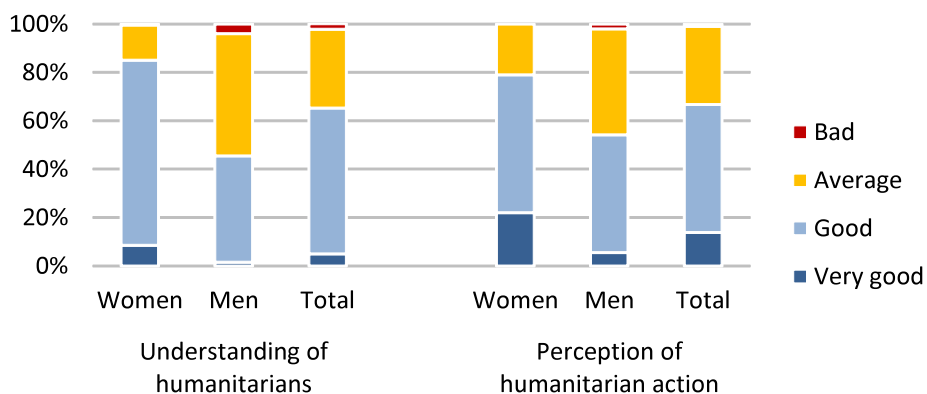
Figure 8: Sources of information on humanitarian action



The quality of the humanitarian information was perceived positively: nine out of ten respondents judged the quality of information on humanitarian actions to be very good (5%) or good (85%); 9% judged it average and 1% bad.

Two-third of the respondents reported having a very good (5%) or good (60%) understanding of humanitarian organizations, and roughly the same proportion judged the work of NGOs as being very good (14%) or good (53%). Negative perceptions were generally associated with a perceived lack of responsiveness to the needs, lack of realization based on promises, or lack of assistance. Men tended to report a worse understanding of humanitarians compared to women (55% average to bad vs. 16%) and worse perception of humanitarian action (46% average to bad vs. 21%), perhaps because a number of assistance programs specifically target women and children, meaning women may have more direct contact with humanitarian NGOs.

*Figure 9: Understanding and perception of humanitarian action*



## Conclusions and Recommendations

This rapid assessment was conducted to better understand the sources of information that affected populations rely on, their media consumption habits and interaction, and their perception of humanitarians.

By creating a two-way communication flow between local populations and humanitarian organizations through local media, the project implemented by Internews and the Association of Journalists for Human Rights fundamentally impacts these indicators.

The survey shows that radio in general, and the community radio in Obo, Radio Zereda, specifically, is a main source of information among the population in Obo. Perception of the radio and of the quality of information was very positive.

Many respondents also indicated contacting the radio occasionally. However, in most cases these contacts were done in person (i.e. walk-ins), not through phones or text messages. In fact, text messages are not widely used. One in five respondents has a cell phone, but just one in ten (9%) uses text messages at least occasionally. Less than 1% used text messages to contact the radio. These results likely reflect the low literacy level among the population and limited financial means to purchase credit for the phones.

Since text messages or SMS are essential to the program developed by Internews, these findings have several implications for the project:

1. While messages received by journalist are an important source of information, they are used by a limited number of individuals in the population, typically among the educated, male group. There needs to be alternative means for the population to communicate messages, for example by piloting the use and transcription of voice messages.
2. The use of messages to report information among mobile phone users must be increased. Several means by which to do this may be explored, including (1) direct outreach about the service with a clear outline of how the population may benefit (i.e. by helping the radio provide better information); (2) developing incentives that are carefully crafted so they do not constitute forms of coercion or generate false reporting; and (3) by increasing the network of trusted sources and informants who are trained and possibly compensated for providing accurate information through messages.

While the technology to create two-way communication channels exists and can be deployed in challenging contexts, as shown in Obo, the adoption of a system that is meant to be used by “the crowd” is not just about the availability of the technology itself. When the communications system is built on the premise that people will participate using text messages sent over mobile phones, its effectiveness can be hampered by low literacy levels, low use of cellphones, even lower use of text messages, and limited resources to pay for credit.

The success of the project therefore depends as much on “old school” social organization, outreach and awareness-raising, and diffusion of new approaches as it does on technological innovations alone.