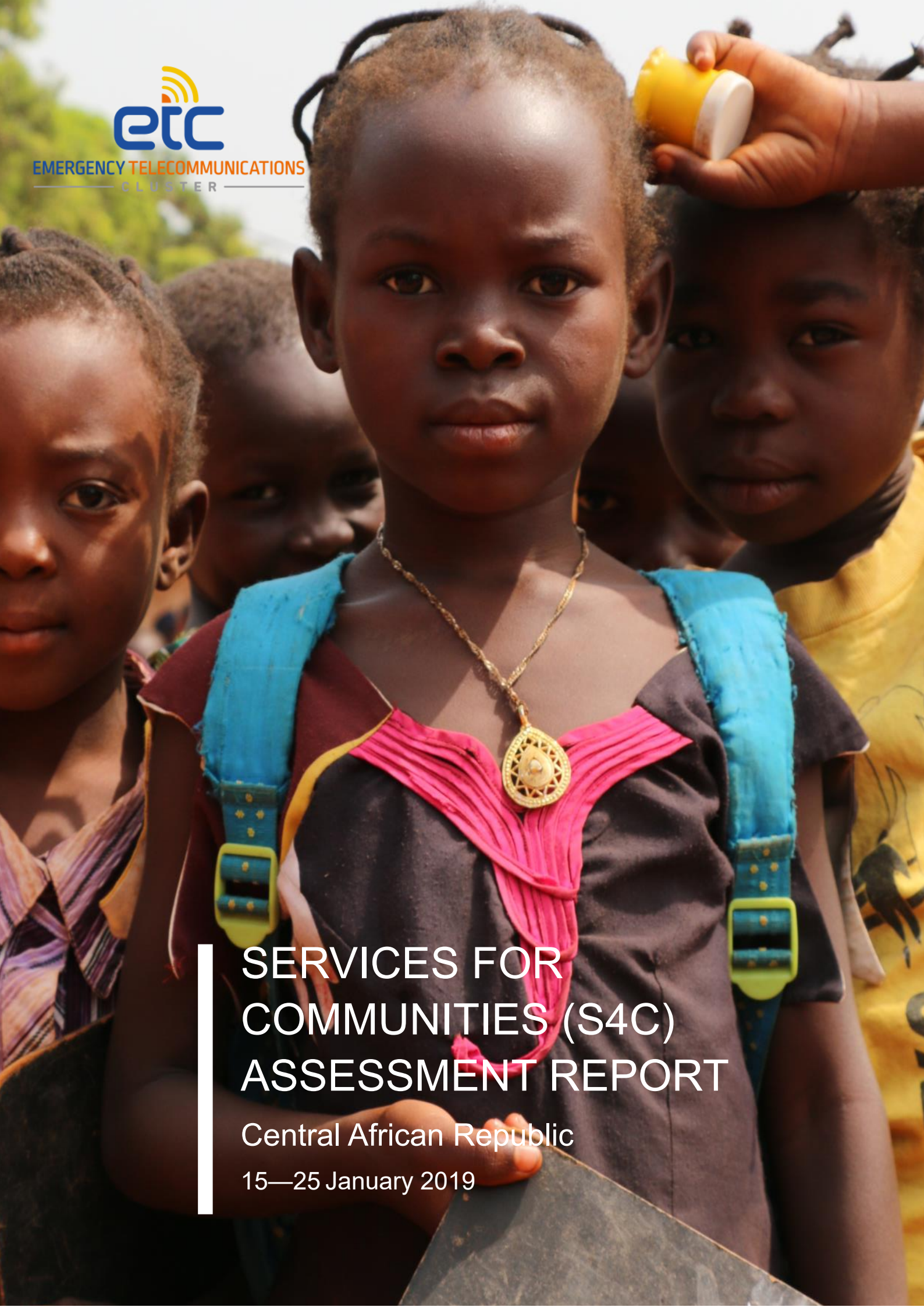


SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES (S4C) ASSESSMENT REPORT

Central African Republic

15—25 January 2019

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) Services for Communities (S4C) assessment team conducted a series of interviews and held focus group discussions with community leaders, community delegates and randomly selected adult male and female groups in Bangassou, Kaga Bandoro and Bria between 15—25 of January 2019. The team surveyed approximately 270 people living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) sites and host communities at these three locations in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The assessment aimed to identify the information that matters most to IDP communities and to understand if and how they access information, the technological means of communication and information available to communities and challenges to accessing information.

It was found that mobile phone ownership remains very low in some locations. For those who do own mobile phones, text messaging is rarely used due to low literacy rates. Further, charging of mobile devices presents challenges in the face of electricity shortages and poverty. Radio is the most commonly used source of information although it does not provide all the information that communities need. In most of the assessed areas, women were found to have much lower rates of accessibility to mobile phones than men.

The majority of affected communities do not feel they have adequate access to information regarding humanitarian assistance. Where information hotlines exist, awareness and usage of them remains low. Affected communities would like to receive more information on assistance from humanitarians and the security status of particular locations.

At the field level, there is almost no mechanized way to collect, log and follow-up on individual complaints.

Recommendations include creating information technology spaces to increase digital literacy among communities; providing affected populations with reliable voice connectivity services; and utilizing technologies to improve two-way communication with humanitarians.

Introduction

A protection crisis erupted in the Central African Republic (CAR) at the end of 2013, resulting in severe violence and widespread displacement. The collapse of state, law and order and public services further exacerbated the situation. Since then, the situation in the country has remained extremely volatile. Over five years after the beginning of the conflict, the humanitarian situation remains critical, leaving 2.9 million people—over half the population—in urgent need of assistance. Over 640,000 people are still displaced across the country and the number of refugees outside CAR is over 574,000.

Led by the World Food Programme (WFP), the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) was activated in December 2013. Today it provides Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services in 11 sites across the country; Alindao, Bambari, Bangassou, Bangui, Batangafo, Bossangoa, Bria, Bouar, Kaga-Bandoro, N'Dele and Paoua.

The recent escalation of violence in CAR has brought the country towards the brink of a new and large-scale humanitarian crisis, increasing protection risks in multiple new locations.

Protracted and complex crises present a challenging context to identify and respond to the information and communication needs of a population. Those who are displaced across borders or who have been displaced multiple times have little or no resources to contact family members still in CAR. A lack of access to information and communication is often linked with poverty and illiteracy. The absence of two-way communication between humanitarians and affected populations can create long-term perception issues on access to assistance in affected communities. Access to life-saving information is critical, both on a day-to-day basis for safety and security and in the long-term to adjust, cope, and re-establish livelihoods and rebuild lives.

S4C: Communication as Aid

Communication is the key to an effective response. People in emergencies need access to critical information, to be able to provide feedback on what assistance they need, and to contact humanitarian responders and loved ones. Having access to lifesaving information and the ability to communicate empowers local communities to make informed decisions about their own lives and to take control of the situation.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is based on the principle that affected communities and humanitarian providers are equal stakeholders in an emergency response context. Communities have the right to know what services are available to them and should be able to interact with assistance providers before, during and after the delivery of assistance. As part of the S4C strategy[1], the ETC aims to improve communities' access to ICT services, to information on humanitarian assistance, and to communication channels with humanitarian workers[2].

Access to information is a right which presumes that access to information saves, rebuilds and rehabilitates lives. This means that information technology empowers communities to make informed decisions during and after a humanitarian emergency, and seeks to increase communication and information mechanisms within communities.

Jointly, AAP and access to information create a rich and complete approach to the provision of technology as two-way communication and the differential information needs of communities. This approach improves communities' interaction with humanitarian responders while access to information provides a stronger and broader social and rights-based framework through technology.

ETC S4C in CAR

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) is a global network of organizations under the leadership of the World Food Programme (WFP) that work together to provide shared communications services in humanitarian emergencies.

The ETC is responding in the Central African Republic (CAR) as part of the Interagency Coordination Group (ICG). The ETC is enabling services for communities and adding value in the area of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) as well as access to information through coordination, advocacy, and needs-based provision of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) solutions to affected populations. This enables them to reach lifesaving assistance and to make decisions about their own lives.

1 The ETC network advocates for the restoration of critical communications services for affected populations. It commits to facilitating the required technical infrastructure for communication with and among affected communities.

2 In line with the nature of humanitarian clusters, ETC S4C can also make use of technology support to inter-agency initiatives to set up Communication with Communities (CwC) or AAP projects.

About the assessment

From 15—25 January 2019, the S4C Advisor and the ETC Coordinator for CAR conducted interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders, community delegates and randomly selected adult male and female groups, surveying approximately 270 people living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) sites and host communities.

The assessment mission was supported by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), WFP sub-offices and field staff in the three assessed sites; Bangassou, Bria and Kaga Bandoro. Additionally, the ETC consulted with various partners, assessed existing mechanisms for AAP and explored numerous past and ongoing assessments[3] to collate data from several sources. The assessment aimed to better understand populations' digital literacy and their access to and interaction with technology and information sources and stakeholders. Further, the assessment looked at existing two-way communication channels used to inform IDPs of humanitarian assistance and to collect feedback with the aim of suggesting overall improvements to AAP efforts within the humanitarian response in CAR.

3 InterNews (July 2012). Population-based Survey in Obo for "Integrating Local Media and ICTs into Humanitarian Response in CAR. https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_HIF_CAR-Obo_Survey_Report_2012-July.pdf

Methodology

All interviews and focus group discussions were carried out in the local language. The format of the discussions was based on a structured questionnaire with open-ended questions and included opportunities for IDPs to ask questions and to express concerns about access to information and feedback mechanisms. Qualitative questions enabled the assessment team to identify and understand the issues and priorities of the affected communities.

Bangassou

The assessment in Bangassou was carried out with both host and IDP communities. Interviews took place with large families from the host community who are receiving some assistance, local market traders and young adult male and females. Discussions were held with the IDP community through community leaders, community delegates and teachers. Focus group discussions took place with adult male and females living in the IDP site.

Kaga Bandoro

In Kaga Bandoro, discussions were held separately with two different IDP groups. Justification for this separation included ethnic-religious reasons and geographical locations in different parts of the city.

Bria

In Bria, the team spoke with two different ethnic-religious groups from the IDP communities. Those interviewed included community leaders, delegates and randomly selected male and female adults. Additionally, the team interviewed a local community radio broadcaster.

Key findings and analysis

Summary of findings

Mobile phones are the only available method to contact displaced families. At least 1 in 5 owns a mobile phone, while 4 in 10 use paid calling facilities. Less than 2% of the population who use mobile phones use text messages to communicate.

Radio is the most accessible source of information on safety and security. For many communities, there is only 1 broadcasting channel. At least 2 in 10 owns a radio set.

Access to electricity is scarce. Almost 80% of IDPs who own a mobile phone charge their phones by paying at charging facilities. An exception was found in Bangassou, where almost 65% of IDPs either have access to shared or to individual solar panels.

Sango is the most widely used language. However, multiple different local languages are spoken, particularly in rural areas. Around 20% of the population understand a little or some French. In a few locations, Arabic is also spoken.

Community leaders are a primary source of information on assistance for affected communities, yet the flow of communication between communities and leaders is not always reliable or consistent.

More than 74% of communities feel they do not have adequate access to information regarding assistance. This includes timing of food distribution and quality of assistance.

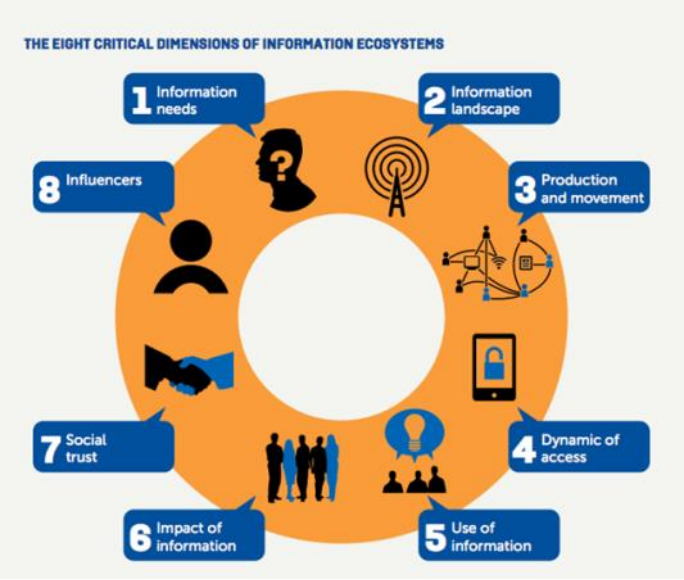
Communities have a good understanding of the relationship between the United Nations (UN) and its cooperating partners, and the role of the UN in the delivery of assistance.

Almost all communities report minimal or no direct interaction with humanitarian workers. A preferred method for communities to interact with humanitarian workers is in person or being able to call humanitarian assistance providers. Only 1 in 20 were aware of the phone number for an existing humanitarian assistance toll-free line or had made a call on the line. Communities have very little confidence or trust in humanitarian workers' intent to listen and interact with them.

Awareness among humanitarian field staff of accountability to affected population principles is relatively weak. Most feedback is collected through community delegates with almost no opportunity for individual complaints. At the field level, there is almost no mechanized way to collect, log and follow up on complaints.

Access to information

Access to information depends on various technological and social aspects. For an individual to be able to find, trust and use information, it is essential that the information is widely available and that people know where it can be found. Access to information is often attached to cost, which means that it needs to be affordable and available in a format which is relevant and understandable to users.



Source: *Internews Information Ecosystem Assessments (IEA) looks at 8 phases for effective information flow.*

To better understand different communities' access to information, the following themes were explored:

- The information that matters most to communities and identifying how they access this information;
- The current technological means of information and communication available to communities;
- Challenges to accessing information (social hierarchies, restrictions, movement, affordability, digital literacy) and how these challenges could be overcome.

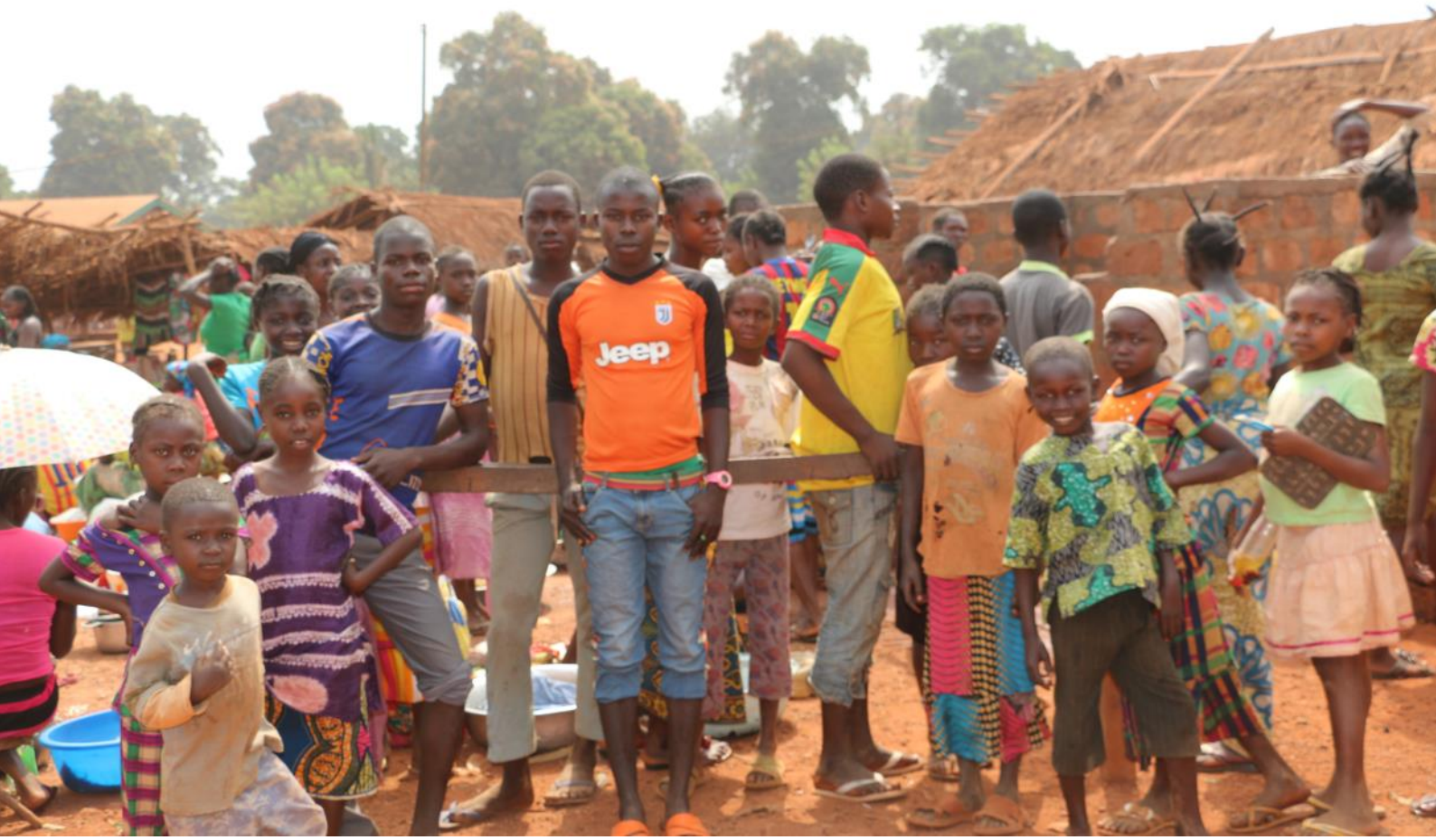
Information needs

It was found that one of the most critical pieces of information for IDPs is the movement and location of security and rebel groups. This information is vital for IDPs to accurately gauge changing security situations. For example, in Bangassou, IDP communities have taken refuge in a local church; their movements are therefore restricted to one particular neighbourhood. These communities consider themselves extremely vulnerable to the movement of various rebel groups and need critical access to information on the safety of their area. Their primary source of information is from a MINUSCA[4]-led radio channel, Radio Guira.

Other critical information needs among the population were linked with duration of stay, dependence on assistance and intention to return home. For example, in Bangassou, 80% of affected communities want to return home and were eager to know about the safety situation of their origin of displacement.

In Kaga Bandoro, the IDP groups have been living in their current shelter for approximately 5 years, with limited to no access to livelihoods. They are heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance and therefore on access to information about assistance programmes. Currently, neither of the two different ethno-religious groups (who live in close proximity to each other) have access to information from external sources, such as the internet.

4. MINUCSA is the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in CAR.



IDP groups in Bria have been situated there for two years and they intend to return home. Their priority regarding access to information is focused on livelihood opportunities and the safety and security situation of their places of origin. A lack of access to information results in incorrect or misleading information being passed on by word of mouth within communities.

Overall, the following categories of information were identified as a priority for affected communities:

- Movement of rebel groups;
- News on the political situation in CAR;
- Assistance programmes and provision schedules;
- Income generation and livelihood opportunities.

Information and communication resources

Mobile phones are a primary resource for contacting displaced and separated families. The ownership of mobile phones varies among communities in CAR. In Bangassou, nearly 65% of IDPs own mobile phones, compared with 5% in Kaga Bandoro. In Bria, 1 in 5 owns a mobile phone while 4 in 10 use paid facilities to make calls. Less than 2% of the population who own a mobile phone use text messages to communicate. Women have less access to mobile phones than men and therefore use paid facilities more frequently than men to make calls.

Radio is the most accessible source of information for news on safety and security. At least 2 in 10 owns a radio set. For most communities, there is access to only 1 radio broadcast channel. In many communities, listening to the radio is socially significant as it is often a group activity. The affected communities have no access to television, internet or any foreign broadcasting streams.

Access challenges

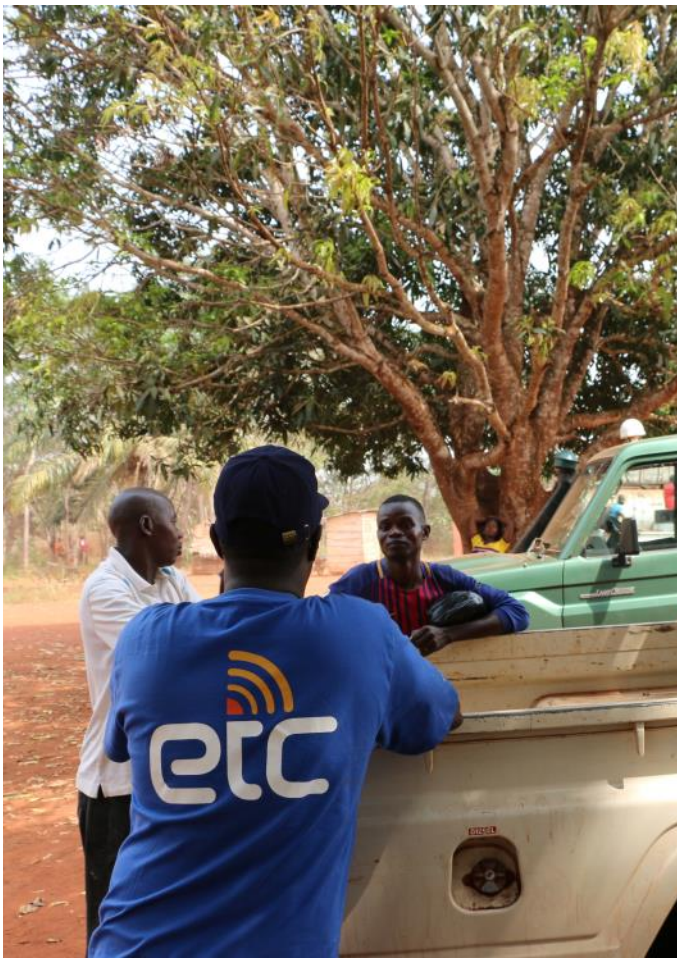
Literacy, access to electricity and affordability are the main challenges for affected communities to access information. In the absence of grid electricity, those who own a mobile phone spend on average 100-300 CFA (0.17-0.52 USD) per day to charge their mobile phone battery. In Bria and Kaga-Bandoro, local businesses are the main providers of mobile phone charging stations. On average, a local shop owner earns 2,000 CFA per day. The cost of owning a generator for electricity is approximately 1,000-13,000 CFA. It is common for individuals to make some profit by buying phone credit in bulk and selling on smaller credit packages to mobile phone users. In some communities such as in Bangassou, people have access to shared or individual solar panels.

Less than 1% of the affected communities have access to a laptop, and knowledge on how to operate a computer is very limited. Less than 2% of the affected communities send or receive SMS.

Almost all participants speak the local language Sango. Only 2% speak French, the official language used in CAR's education system. There are small pockets of communities who speak Arabic.

Radio use is common; around 90% of affected communities listen to radio broadcasts. In some instances, people report listening to the radio collectively. In some areas, mobile phone shops play the radio on speakers for the community. MINUSCA-led 'Radio Guira' receives fairly broad coverage throughout CAR. In Bria, community radio 'Barambake' is also transmitted within a 30km radius of the affected community.

Supporting previous assessments, it was found that women's access to and interest in listening to the radio was significantly lower than men's and that women are more likely to rely on receiving news from male members of the community.



Two-way communication between humanitarians and affected populations

Two-way communication is critical for humanitarians to deliver assistance and to be accountable to the affected population. Two-way communication means that affected populations receive timely information on assistance programs and that humanitarians have useful tools, systems and processes in place to collect, record, log and follow up on complaints and feedback from communities.

To fully understand current levels of two-way communication between humanitarians and the affected communities, the S4C assessment explored the following themes:

- How, when and what type of information communities receive from humanitarians;
- Availability and accessibility of feedback mechanisms known to affected communities;
- Opportunity, trust and confidence among affected communities to reach out to humanitarians.

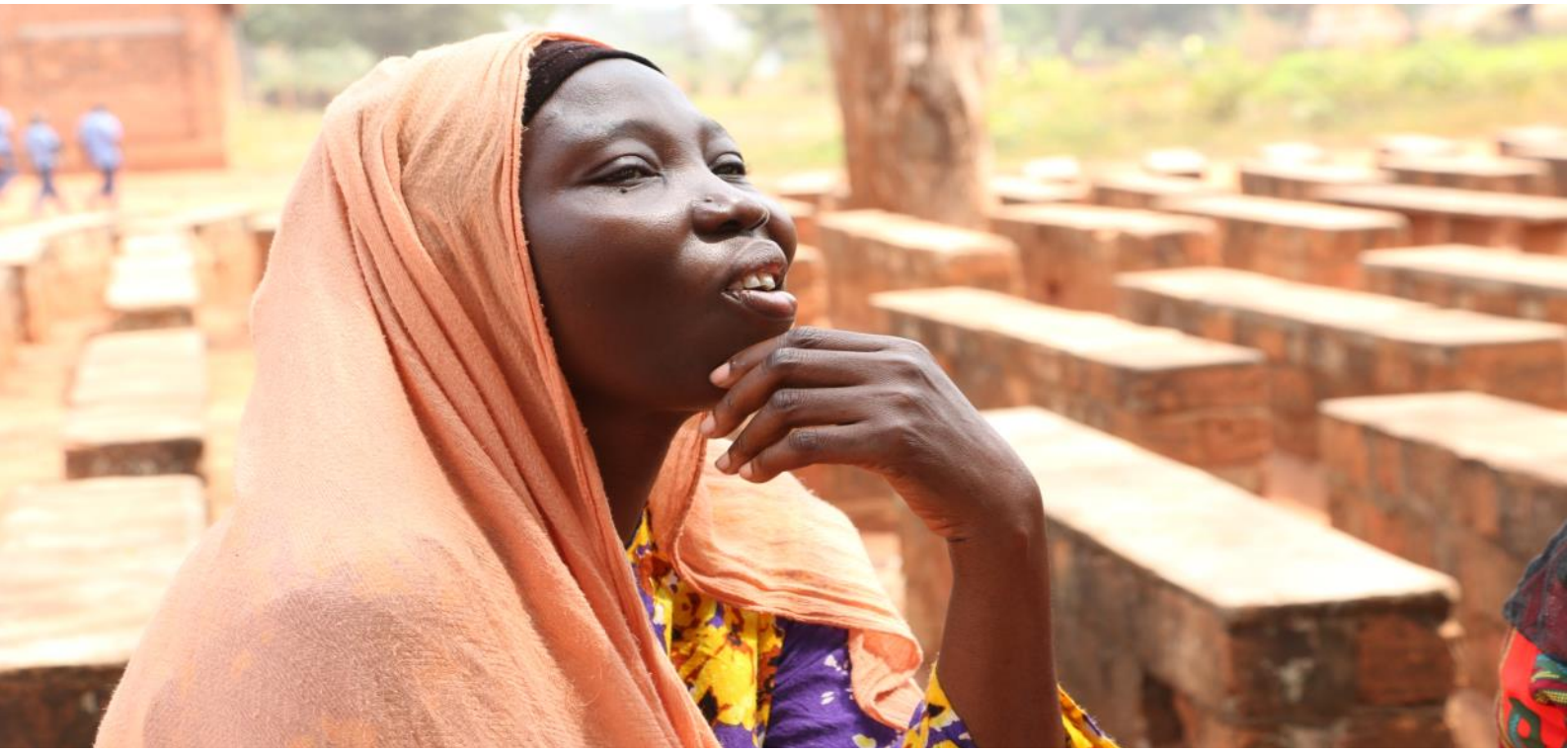
Delivery of information

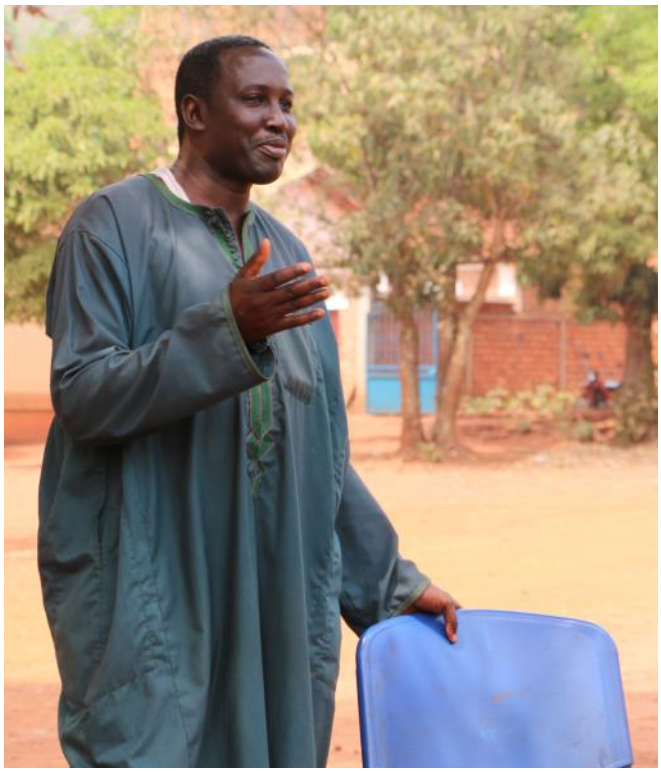
In almost all IDP communities, there is a community leader or community delegate serving as the primary point of contact for humanitarians to reach out to each community. The specific process of selecting these community delegates was not identified by this assessment. In most cases, the community delegate held elevated socioeconomic status within the community and was often responsible for groups of 250–1,250 people, depending on the area.

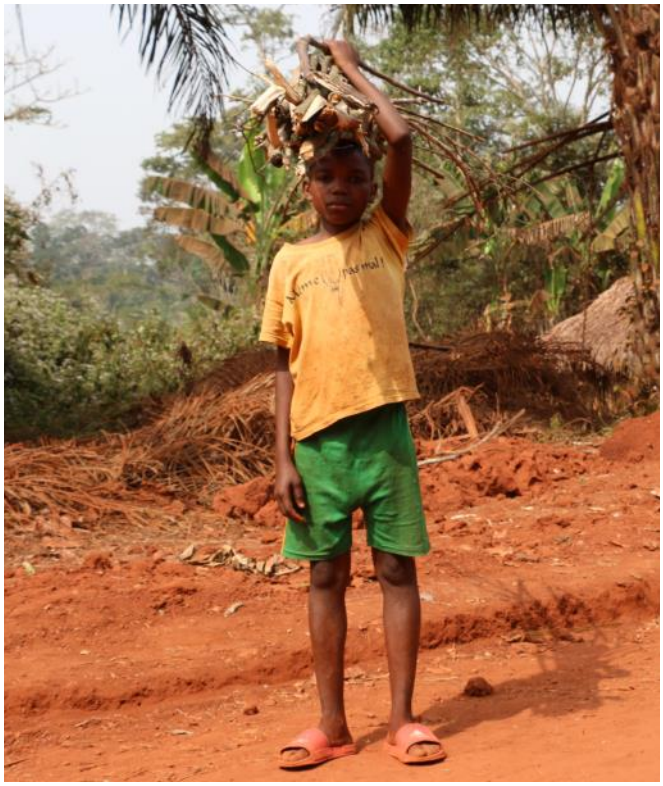
IDPs voiced various concerns regarding access to assistance and demonstrated a lack of awareness of existing and available assistance programs. More than 74% of the affected communities said they feel they do not have access to information regarding assistance. The most commonly reported information gaps on assistance focused on entitlement criteria for delivery of shelters, the schedules of food distributions and causes of distribution delays. The lack of information on security is also a pressing concern.

The affected populations identified the following as the most desired information they wish to receive from humanitarians:

- Contact points for shelters (Bria);
- Where and how information can be found on the security situation of a particular area;
- How ration sizes are calculated;
- Income generation activities provided by humanitarians;
- Rights of IDPs when employed by local NGOs.







Complaint and feedback mechanisms

IDPs were asked, “Did you make a complaint or give feedback about humanitarian assistance and if so, what happened?” This question aimed to assess availability and access to complaint mechanisms and to see how much confidence, means and trust affected populations have in complaint mechanisms. The question aimed to find out if affected communities had made a complaint about humanitarian assistance and if not then why, rather than gathering information on the specific content of complaints.

Almost 80% of the affected communities report being unaware of where to log complaints or give feedback regarding humanitarian assistance. Less than 10% of participants in a location in Bangassou reported knowledge of a hotline and only 1 in 20 have used the line to make a call. There have been no instances of an individual complaint being made or action taken on a complaint.

Most IDPs report wanting access to more information but did not know how to reach out to humanitarians. A preferred method for communities to interact with humanitarian workers is in person or being able to call humanitarian assistance providers. Almost all communities reported no experience of having direct discussions with humanitarians, nor of being consulted by community delegates on humanitarian assistance.

Existing complaint and feedback mechanisms provided by humanitarians are available. For example, WFP has a dedicated and toll-free line for affected communities to call for food-related issues. Affected communities are largely unaware of this line. The lack of access to mobile phones further hinders the use of this line.

Recommendations

Create information spaces using technology—The assessment shows that there are several communities who have higher literacy rates but have no means of accessing technology. Similarly, these communities have no access to news or updates on security situations from global information sources. Setting up information spaces can increase digital literacy among populations, especially in communities where there are higher overall literacy rates. Improved access to skills, digital literacy and safe use of the internet can empower populations to send and receive information to and from their location, ultimately giving them better educational resources and the ability to engage in long-term planning.

Provide affected populations with reliable voice connectivity services—In most of the assessed areas, women were found to have much lower rates of accessibility to mobile phones than men. Although paid calling facilities are available in some areas, poverty and a lack of confidentiality in the spaces provided means that women face additional barriers to using these paid facilities. Setting up free calling services for affected communities will enable men and women (especially unaccompanied women) to utilize the service. Free calling booths can further improve communities' access to humanitarian hotlines. This intervention would require local buy-in and reliable voice services to ensure that the facilities are trusted and used.

Utilize innovative technologies to improve two-way communication with humanitarians—In the absence of wide mobile phone ownership among affected communities, humanitarians need to deploy innovative mechanisms to collect, record, log and follow up on individual complaints and to facilitate information flow between communities and humanitarians.

Although the commitment of UN partners to community engagement and accountability is strong, UN and NGO agencies are overwhelmingly lacking in expert technical capacity in emergency humanitarian information services delivery and AAP. Resources such as the WFP toll-free humanitarian line is in place, but does not fulfil its potential in reaching affected communities.

Proposed projects

- Information, communication and learning center in Bangassou for communities to learn skills and connect with the outer world and humanitarians through the internet;
- Free calling booths in Bria, specifically for women to communicate with their families and to use humanitarian hotlines;
- Use of mobile application to collect, log and follow up on complaints (pilot);
- Use Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to run surveys and get satisfaction survey results on the quality of assistance (pilot).

ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
CAR	Central African Republic
CFA	Central African Franc
CwC	Communication with Communities
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
ICG	Interagency Coordination Group
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission to Central African Republic
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
S4C	Services for Communities
SMS	Short Message Service
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Programme

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