

Case study: *Chimen Lakay* and camp-based radio

Chimen Lakay (*Kreyol* for ‘The Way Home’) is a radio project run and developed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), originally in partnership with commercial network Radio Ginen and now with the community station Radio Boukman based in Cité de Soleil in Port au Prince. It consists of a one-hour radio programme and has been broadcasting since August 20th 2010.¹

The *Chimen Lakay* project emerged from a need to listen more closely to camp residents. The IOM team of community mobilisers found that residents were increasingly angry and tended to take this out on them when they visited the camps. The teams at this point were tasked with going in and sharing information, but as a result of the response were becoming frightened and frustrated. “They were saying we are not effective, we need to listen more,” says Head of Communications, Leonard Doyle. “So we began looking at ways we could listen and create constructive discussions.” The project consists of a team of producers and presenters based at IOM who travel out to camps every day to record the programme, with production and broadcast now handled by Radio Boukman. Unlike other radio shows, *Chimen Lakay* was initially broadcast daily live from the camps, changing location each day. From the start the show took an experimental open mike approach to allow people to share views and generate discussion on camp issues. The format caused confusion at first – neither camp residents nor NGOs understood the approach.

“The show was live, which was very difficult for us to start, not only with the camp’s population but also with some organisations that do not quite understand this approach,” said one producer. “But gradually as we proceeded with the project some organisations like Oxfam, CHF² and MDM³ have begun to join us.”

The team discovered quickly that this approach proved very effective at lessening tensions in camps. “At the start we had people shouting at us, but now they understand that it’s not effective. It’s amazing – people grumble and shout but you put a microphone in front of them and they calm down and people start talking properly. I was concerned at the beginning that we would have real security issues with the radio show, but we have never had them come back and say, we need security.” Building on the success of this initiative, the radio team began being asked to go specifically to camps with problems. “When there is an eviction threat in a camp and the community mobilisers are afraid to go, we send the radio team in first. We go under the guise of media, not providers of aid. It calms things down.”

¹ IOM originally broadcast ‘nationwide’ with Radio Ginen who claim to cover 60 percent of the country, but found them to be too costly. Production was then moved to Radio Boukman, who has expanded their range from 250,000 people in Cite de Soleil to the whole city by placing a repeater antenna on the mountain near Boutelier. The show is also distributed to a network of some [50 community radio stations](#) via CD, MP3 or by email.

² Cooperative Housing Association, US-based NGO

³ Médecins du Monde



The radio team also received requests from camp managers in other organisations to troubleshoot problems. This was the case in Terrain Accra at the start of the cholera outbreak when the community objected to the construction of a cholera treatment centre by destroying it the night after it was finished. The camp manager reached out to the IOM team, who organised a broadcast on cholera the same day, which also included a *Kreyol* speaking American Red Cross doctor. “It is very difficult to draw a direct causal link,” says camp manager Emmett Fitzgerald, “but we went from them tearing the cholera treatment centre down one week and absolutely opposing it, to the camp committee being OK with us building one that was twice as big. I would say that the radio programme was helpful, really helpful. And it was a good event – not much happens when you live in a camp.”

The programme has gone through many changes during its time on air. “One difficulty we have had is that for the kind of work we do now, we find that journalists are not always the best communicators. Their instinct to go for the big story, and to talk up conflict can be unhelpful – our guys are now much more about discussion and facilitating dialogue.”

The lack of structure did cause *Chimen Lakay* some problems. When Radio Boukman took over the project the first thing they did was make the format more structured. The freeform nature of the programme also continued to challenge organisations, who were hesitant to take part. “One thing I would add is a message to organisations, which at times are too reluctant to intervene in our programme,” commented one member of the production team. “It is high time they understand that their *Chimen Lakay* offers the opportunity to hear the voice of the people they serve and can also provide an answer as communication in action.”

The format was, however, popular with camp populations.⁴ One resident participating in a broadcast attended by infoasaid commented that “*Chimen Lakay* is extremely important...and...one of the few opportunities we have to make our voices heard.”

It was interesting to note that camp residents saw the value of the broadcast in generating discussion about their camp, rather than as a useful radio show per se – they complained, for example, that it had been five months since the radio team last came to the camp and they should come more often, apparently discounting the broadcasts made daily from other camps.

This disconnect with the general radio audience was reflected in the feedback from focus groups conducted by infoasaid. Participants expressed confusion over how to listen, the frequency and time of broadcast. “This show is made only in Radio Boukman and we can’t tune into this station. Some times we had it on Guinen but there is no publicity to know exactly the schedule,” said one participant in Port au Prince. “I think it’s a good programme as I listen to it now. I wish the persons in

⁴ There has, however, been no monitoring, evaluation or capture of the project.

charge could design a way for it to be diffused across the country.” “They could have an open partnership with community radio stations that cover department,” said another in Artibonite. Among general audiences, *Chimen Lakay* was far less popular than *Enformasyon Nou Dwe Konnen* – ENDK (*Kreyol* for ‘News You Can Use’) – the daily humanitarian news and information programme produced by Internews. This is partly because it broadcasts on a much smaller network: the focus groups indicated there was a demand for more consistent broadcasting, and for *Chimen Lakay* to be available on a wider network.

One listener in Petionville Club camp in Port au Prince, for example, had felt that an item on voodoo priests not causing cholera was so important that he called his brother in Jeremie – at the time the centre of a series of attacks on voodoo priests – and made him listen to the item via his phone. “I remember one day on *Chimen Lakay* a *hougan* voodoo priest was explaining to the population that cholera is not related to voodoo. It was a very special show for me because the cholera created many confusions in the countryside – they were lynching voodoo practitioners in Jeremie. I called my brother living in Jeremie and tell him about the show. I make him hear from my cellular because this show was not available on radio in the countryside.”