



Internews Radio Assessment After Hurricane Matthew in Haiti

Localised aid needs local media but most of them struggle to get back on air

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Matthew, Internews sent a technical team out to the most affected areas to assess the damage caused by the hurricane.

Internews has a longstanding relationship with local media on the island and believes they have a crucial role to play during and after a humanitarian crisis. In a country where over 70% of the population tunes in daily to radio, local media outlets are essential to rebuild communities, provide life-saving information and allow people to voice their concerns and facilitate the conversation between everyone involved in the recovery of Haiti.

As part of its response, Internews will work with both the Haitian government and the broader humanitarian community to improve two-way communication and ensure that the concerns, questions and comments of the affected population are being captured and shared with the humanitarian actors. But the first step to enable this is to have a clear picture of the technical damage to media outlets and radio stations in particular across the affected region.

Hurricane Matthew made landfall on Haiti on October 4th and in the 2 days that followed the storm killed at least 546 people, affected 2.1 million across the island, and left at least 750,000 people needing urgent humanitarian aid. The impact on agriculture, livelihoods and housing will also have long term consequences on recovery.



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Figure 3 - Makeshift Antenna and studio.



Figure 2 - Toppled antenna

On October 7th, Internews sent out a team with a radio & telecom engineer to do a full technical assessment of the radio & TV stations in the affected areas. In difficult circumstances, with roads being blocked and bridges been washed away, the team managed to assess directly 52 media outlets and remotely cross check information about damages to 18 others. Beyond those 70 stations, Internews assessed damage to three of the main private radio & TV broadcasters based in Port au Prince who have extensive coverage across the country. All of which have sustained damage to some of their relays, partially impacting their ability to reach the entire affected population.

From all the radio & TV stations that were assessed only 3 stations were left fully undamaged. 18 radio stations managed to do some makeshift repairs and go back on air using some safely stored spare parts. However, this means they are now operating with much lower capacity. Because many radio towers were toppled over by the storm (Fig 2), several media have used alternative antennas like on the picture (Fig 3) where you can see an antenna setup on a tree. Others have taken out an old transmitter with only 30 or 50Watt capacity instead of the usual 300Watt, severely limiting the reach of their broadcasting.

Of the 70 stations, 58 had their radio towers brought down by the wind, 15 stations saw their studio equipment damaged by water, some saw their building collapse or severely damaged (Fig 6), others has their equipment explode as it was still connected to the antenna.

Another major challenge the stations are facing is the lack of power supply. Even in normal times many of these radios and TVs operate with irregular broadcasting due to lack of consistent electricity supply from the national grid and the lack of resources to fuel their generators. Some also rely on solar panels and electricity storage equipment, most of which are old or suffer from inappropriate maintenance.

Now that the storm has hit, this energy supply issue is compounded. Generators and electric storage equipment are damaged. The national power grid has suffered extensive damage worsening the already irregular supply of electricity. On top of this, owners of media outlets are victims themselves and must use their resources to prioritize other urgent needs. In certain areas where transit routes have been compromised, fuel supply is also scarce.

However, even while facing adversity, many of the owners have sought to get their media back on air to serve their community. Just one day after the storm, they were drying their equipment in the sun (Fig 5) and constructing alternative antennas. Others, who lost the building where their radio station was hosted, built up tents with tarps to broadcast again (Fig 4).



Figure 4 - Broadcasting from a tent



Figure 6 - Severely damaged studio



Figure 5 - Drying equipment

Operational Status Radio & TV stations							
	Total surveyed	%	Grand Anse	Sud	Nippes	Ouest	Artibonite
Fully operational: Didn't suffer any damage	3	4%	0	1	2	0	0
Partially operational: have made makeshift repairs to get back online	18	26%	5	8	3	2	0
Completely non-operational	49	70%	15	26	7	0	1
Total	70	100%	20	35	12	2	1

Main operational needs of damaged radio stations							
	Total		Grand Anse	Sud	Nippes	Ouest	Artibonite
Antennas	58		19	31	4	1	1
Energy supply & equipment	9		2	4	2	1	0
RF broadcasting	15		3	10	2	0	0
Production or recording equipment	2		0	2	0	0	0

Tables 1 and 2 - Overview of operation status and needs



Figure 7 - Stations damages in Les Cayes

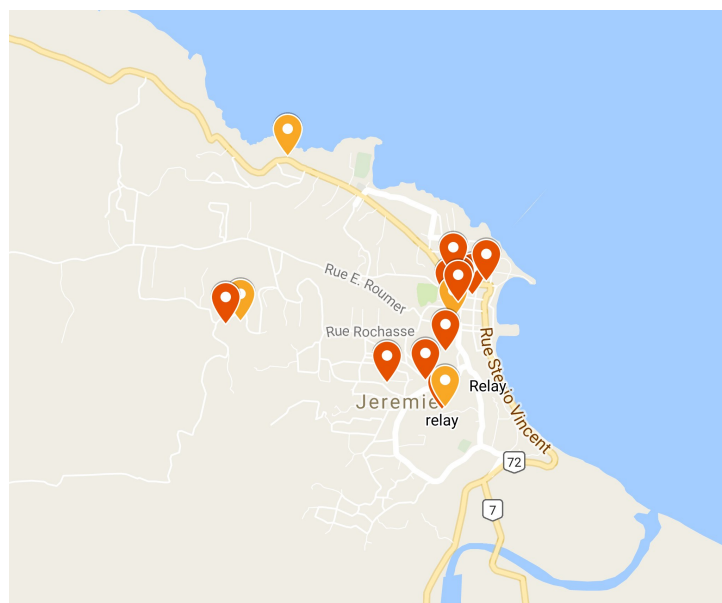


Figure 8 - Stations damages in Jeremie