![etc EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATIONS CLUSTER]

Burkina Faso
ICT for Communities Needs Sssessment
Summary Report

29 June 2022 – 12 July 2022

Contents

ETC Sahel Project background

In the Central Sahel region, where over 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line[1], there are stark inequalities in access to basic social services, including access to information and communications technology (ICT) services. According to 2019 data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), only 16 percent, 13 percent and 5 percent of the population of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, respectively, use the Internet. Lack of access to electricity exacerbates the digital divide, particularly in rural areas, where on average only 15 percent of the population has access to electricity[2]. Within a broader context of increasing climate change vulnerability, chronic food insecurity and intensifying violence, not being able to access information and connect to the rest of the world is leaving communities in the Sahel vulnerable and trapped in a perpetual cycle of poverty.

With the support of the Government of Luxembourg, the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) is working to bridge the digital divide and address the information and technology gaps faced by communities in the Sahel by providing tailored ICT services which will enable them to gain access to life-saving information, connect, and develop their digital skills. These services include:

- Charging stations
- Phone booths
- Cybercafé
- Internet hotspot

In the long term, the ETC also aims to add a digital learning component to the project, with a view to building communities' digital skills and ability to fully leverage the services offered by the ETC to improve their livelihoods and build their resilience to future shocks and stresses.

Needs assessment in Burkina Faso

Mobile phones are increasingly important in World Food Programme (WFP) operations, as evidenced by their use for cash transfers as part of monetary assistance. It is therefore helpful to look to the digitalization of humanitarian aid to better understand mobile phone access and use in current humanitarian contexts that are characterized by chronic food insecurity, intensified violence and barriers to accessing information and connectivity.
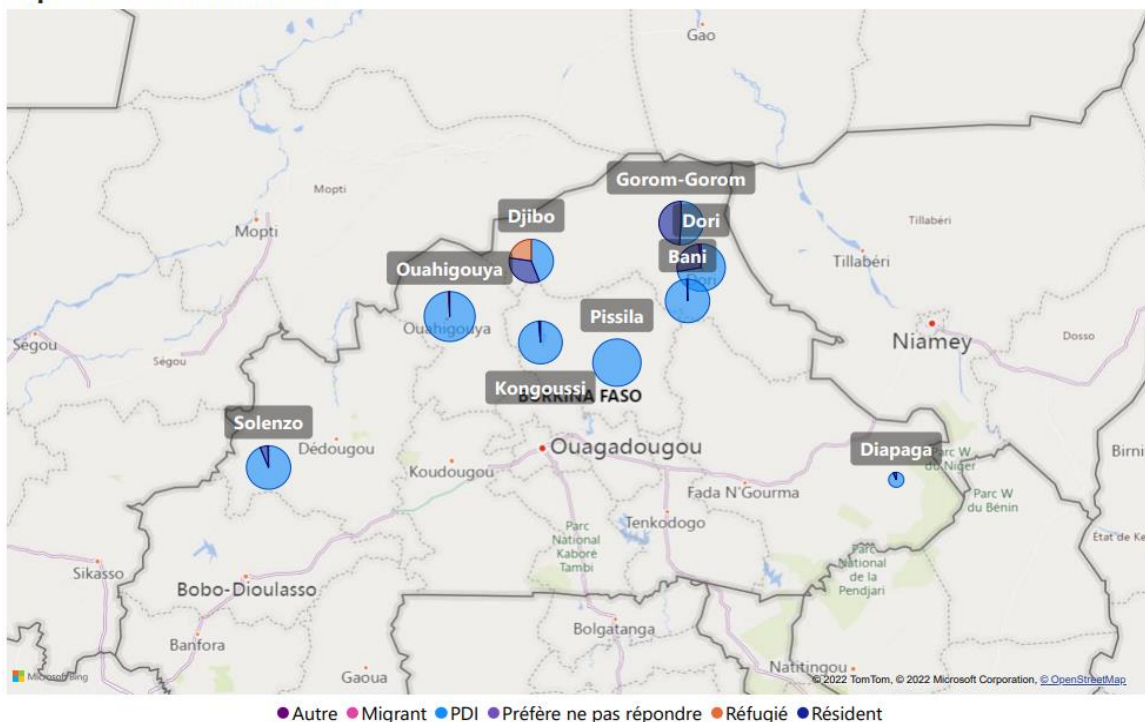
The data collected and analysed by the WFP-led Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC)—with the help of a consultant—on access to and use of mobile telephony in Burkina Faso has provided evidence-based information on the current country context in terms of potential for and barriers to the digitalization of humanitarian aid.

The needs assessment covered 2,002 people, including members of host populations, internally displaced persons and refugees in nine sites located in the regions of Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Nord, Est, Nord and Sahel. **The full report in French can be accessed on the ETC website.**

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[1] https://www.worldbank.org/en/home
[2] https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/

Population des sites évalués

Legend: ● Autre ● Migrant ● PDI ● Préfère ne pas répondre ● Réfugié ● Résident

Findings and observations

Access to telephony services

The mobile phone is still the main tool used by the various communities in Burkina Faso that receive humanitarian assistance (displaced persons, refugees, and vulnerable host communities) to access information and communication channels. Mobile phone use is deeply entrenched in community habits, regardless of the population group considered, with nearly 98.8 per cent of respondents having used a mobile phone.

Communities report using mobile phones to communicate and share information (on security, humanitarian aid and NGO assistance, weather and severe weather warnings, etc.) with family members, friends and other close contacts through phone calls, messages and video calls via social networks. They also use mobile phones to provide feedback to humanitarian agencies on the aid they receive.

Access to internet connectivity services

In a context where mobile phones with internet access are unaffordable and there are barriers to use, access to information and communications technology (ICT) could be provided through public spaces that offer internet access and training for users. There are very few internet cafes or hotspots providing these types of services: 58.1 per cent lack access to internet cafes and 77.0 per cent lack access to hotspots.

Access to power charging facilities

Access to electricity is average in the areas studied. Only slightly more than half (53.6 per cent) of all respondents with at least one mobile phone can reliably charge the battery at home. There is low overall use of community stations to charge phone batteries, as the majority of respondents find these are non-existent or unavailable.

National internet service provider coverage

The overall state of connectivity in the country shows fairly good internet coverage, but with strong disparities in the Nord and Est regions covered by this study. The study measured the network coverage of the three mobile phone operators present in Burkina Faso: Moov Africa (formerly Maroc Telecom), Orange and Télécel. In seven of the nine sites, network coverage is sufficient: users can, for example, open a video through at least one of these three mobile networks.

Based on the tests carried out by the investigators in the field, Orange covers seven of the nine sites, Moov Africa covers six, and Télécel covers only three sites (Ouahigouya, Pissila and Solenzo). During the survey period, no Orange network signals were detected in Djibo and Diapaga. In the case of Moov Africa, investigators were unable to detect network signals in Djibo, Bani or Gorom-Gorom.

Challenges

The study revealed barriers to access and gaps in community knowledge about the use of communications technologies and digital tools. The major barriers and gaps in mobile phone accessibility and internet are illustrated by the following quotes:

- "I can't afford a mobile phone, especially not one with internet access"
- "Network coverage is limited or non-existent in my area"
- "I don't know how to use the internet"
- "I can't afford to buy data"
- "I find it difficult to use a mobile phone in general"
- "There is no one to teach me or help me to use the mobile internet."

Recommendations

In view of the barriers and gaps identified in the field, and the interest of communities in using ICT to access various types of information, there is a need for training to fill these gaps, and for capacity building in infrastructure for community services providing access to connectivity and electricity. This capacity building will cover areas related to mobile phone and internet use, provision of internet cafes or hotspot services, and community charging stations.