GDNET RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS:
MOMBASA MEDIA WORKSHOP

1. WHAT IS THE MEDIA AND HOW DOES IT WORK

What is Media?

The media is best defined by the roles they play in society. They educate, inform and entertain through news, features and analysis in the press. They also produce documentaries, dramas, current affairs programmes, public service announcements, magazine programmes and other forms of programming for radio and television. The media is a conduit through which voices, perspectives and lives are brought into the public sphere. In the last decade, Africa has witnessed a massive growth of on-line media, which is being exploited by both urban and rural communities to access and deliver information for social and business purposes.

The media also plays a critical role in facilitating social change and shaping public opinion and attitudes. The media, through its reporting, can put a spotlight on critical developments that impact negatively and positively on people's lives, as well as bringing to the fore issues that are often ignored and voices that are marginalised. The media's agenda-setting function often influences debate, thinking and priorities within society.

Research and data has shown how the media reinforces stereotypes, especially on issues of gender, religion and culture. Women are often portrayed in subordinate roles to men. When journalists look for sources for their stories, they often gravitate towards the powerful people in any community, who are mostly men. Women are often portrayed in their traditional roles as wives, mothers and care-givers, while men are seen as powerful, resourceful, leaders and many such roles associated with power.

But, perhaps one of the most important roles played by the media within modern democracies is the watchdog role; through which the media monitors the performance and conduct of governments, to ensure that they adhere to the promises and expectations of those who put them into power. Consequently, this role is often the source of conflict between media, the state and its institutions.

How does it work?

The media performs its functions based on the guiding media principles of fairness, accuracy, diversity and balanced representation. However, the ability and efficacy with which it performs these functions depends largely on political and legal environments in any country. Where the legal framework is conducive, there is a proliferation of media organisations and products as well as a plurality of voices and access to information. In cases where the legal framework is stifling, there is a lack of diversity of media as well as

bias and blatant political interference. Political interferences can polarize and significantly confuse the way the media functions.

Media ownership also influences the way media functions. Generally there are private, state and public media organisations. In the majority, media organisations operate based on the imperatives of their owners. For privately owned media, they are often guided by commercial and market considerations. In Africa, state-ownership media is prevalent and the state dictates the functions and operations of media organisations while public media are often guided by the interests of viewers and listeners who pay licences to access their services.

Growth in partnerships between media and the private and civil society sectors has strengthened and opened new avenues through which development and research could be communicated. Many organisations are working with media to develop special projects that are mutually beneficial. In this instance, organisations are able to fulfill their commercial, social and development goals. Researchers should exploit this area by engaging media managers.

Types of media

Your audience will determine your choices in the types of media your organisation will engage.

Mass media– Print (newspapers, magazines), TV, radio. Despite the sharp decline in newspaper readership globally, newspapers are still an important source of news in Africa. Politicians, policy makers and others still refer to newspapers for information and to gauge public opinion. However, the penetration of newspapers is still hampered by low literacy levels and poor distribution networks. Radio remains the most important source of information for both urban and rural communities. It also has immense capacity for wider coverage and ability to integrate a diverse range of programme forms.

Community media - Community media is important because of its ability to focus and cover issues within a particular community. For example, journalists who work for community radio stations are often from the community. However, community radio stations have limitations of geographical coverage, they are poorly resourced and their journalists and editors are not trained.

New media – This is an area of startling growth in Africa, which has seen people accessing and disseminating information in ways that were inconceivable a decade ago. People are using new media (internet, email, blogs, SMS platforms, etc.) to access and disseminate social, political and economic information. New media also offers new ways to develop partnership with telecommunication companies to disseminate critical issues from research that can change people's lives.

Who is who in the media, what they do?

Knowing and understanding the different people who work in the media and the roles they play is critical in developing an effective media engagement strategy.

Journalists/ Reporter (specialist beat reporters, features) – Journalists are the 'hunters and gatherers' of news. They also make decisions about which stories to cover. It is critical to identify which journalists cover your type of issues and develop a relationship with them. Send them background information, keep them up-dated of developments in your organization and share your diary with them.

Sub-Editors - They are very important individuals because they determine 'end product'. They edit stories for structure, factual correctness, length and ensure that story is written according to style guidelines. They also write headlines and captions for photographs. Because they often work on very strict deadlines, sometimes their decisions maybe detrimental to the stories they publish about your organisation. Target this group for training and work with them to produce tools to help them do their work better.

Editors – These are often designated based on the roles they play (Editor-in-Chief, Assignment, News, Features, Special Projects, Business, Financial, Obituaries, etc.). This group of people are also known as the gate-keepers because they decide on what is published, what prominence it gets. They also guide journalist on the sources they would like to see in the story. Seek their audience and make your work known to them. They should be the target for media advocacy to ensure that they include on their agenda, coverage of your issues.

Media Managers – They formulate and implement policy and they are also responsible for administration and human resources management. Decisions on what the media organisation covers, how it will be done, by whom and with what resources are often done by media managers. For example, if your research shows that violence against women is escalating because of the lack of or stereotyped coverage, you should target this group to formulate policies that could help address this issue. Like other organisations, media organisations want to be seen as good role models on coverage of certain issues – consequently they are open to ideas.

Owners and Governance structures (Board of Directors) - They ensure that the organisation operates within the framework of its statues and mission but they are not involved in the day-to-day running of the organisation. They generally cannot influence the work of editorial staff. It is important for them to understand your issues to help them in making policy recommendations to managers.

HOW TO MAKE NEWS

USE THE SPACES BEING CREATED IN THE MEDIA

Increasingly, the media is covering research and in many ways contributing to moving research into the public domain. Researchers are a source of news that often fails to make it to the news agenda and researchers should begin to explore opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships with the media, where media plays the role of conduit of research findings to influence policy.

Over the years, some media organisations have invested in building the capacity of their journalists to report competently on research as well as policy making processes. News agencies such as the Inter Press Service (www.ipsnews.net) have been training its southern journalists for many years to understand issues such as budget expenditure, aid effectiveness, and pro-poor governance. Through such initiatives they continue to provide in-depth reports as well as expert analysis to a diverse audience that includes policy makers at the United Nations, the European Union, and regional economic blocs, government officials, parliamentarians and many other decision-makers through its Terraviva newsletters.

The overwhelming response to such online newsletters demonstrates the huge interest and a clear niche for researchers to begin to plug knowledge from their work into different policy making and knowledge networks at national, regional, and international levels. Researchers should embrace such opportunities and step up efforts to create media for different interest groups to contribute to their country's equitable development.

WHAT CAN RESEARCHERS DO TO CREATE MEDIA

1. Understand your audiences

As a first step, researchers need to identify and profile audiences that will benefit from their work. Because of the nature of research work, the mandate of researchers and the financial constraints faced by the majority of economic research institutions, researchers cannot always actively participate in policy making processes. But they can contribute significantly by feeding information through intermediaries such as:

- Economic and policy activist networks;
- Civil society organizations;
- Networks of business and financial journalists;
- Journalist networks at national and regional levels.

In undertaking this exercise, it is critical to understand as much as possible:

- The audience's information needs;
- How they access information, what are their preferences?

- Timing -- how often and when should the information get to them so that it remains relevant for their work?
- To whom the information will be targeted. While knowledge is important for many and the temptation to cast information to a wide audience is great, in order to influence policy, it is crucial that the right information reaches the right people who have the power to use it to make a difference.

2. Use ICT (Information and Communication Technologies)

Researchers should embrace opportunities offered by Information and Communication technologies.

- **Write blogs** – these are a good way of sharing information especially expert analysis and knowledge on a particular topic. Identify individuals and organizations, especially those mandated with researching and drafting policies, and encourage them to follow your blogs. The incentive in putting together blogs is that if consistently done well, publishers are beginning to publish blogs into books.
- **Social networking** (Facebook, Twitter) offers immense opportunities. Explore these networks and find out what others are doing with them. In order to have impact, invest in raising awareness about the page, and keep it fresh with relevant updates otherwise people easily lose interest. Such pages can also be used as a platform for dialogue on specific issues, provide an instant form of person-to-person news alerts that could potentially influence the news agenda.
- **Online newsletters** – Produce specialist newsletters and share with policy makers for example, parliamentarians, parliamentary committees, focal points in government ministries.

3. Produce Supplements

Supplements are carried in mainstream newspapers and are usually sponsored by organisations that have an interest in putting their issues in the public domain. Supplements are an excellent way of communicating research, and as the sponsor you have control over copy and advertising.

4. Repackage

Repackage information in ways that are accessible to policy makers and media. Where resources permit, researchers should pick out information that is crucial for policy makers and media. For example:

- Trends analysis;
- State of the economy;
- Cost benefit analysis of specific policies;
- Relate state of economy to national development agenda, for example, what this means in terms of poverty, will poverty increase? Reduce? Will the country meet its MDG targets?
- Relating information to people's everyday realities makes information more readily usable.

5. Write opinion and commentary pieces (see Writing for the Media Handout)

6. Write letters to the editor to make research information relevant to national context and debates

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RESEARCHERS MAKING NEWS

Increasingly, the media is contributing to moving research into the public domain. This handout provides researchers with ideas on how they can begin to explore opportunities offered by the media to reach wider audiences than they do now.

WHAT MAKES NEWS

Understanding how journalists make decisions on what gets covered or not is crucial. The following Seven Pillars are used to assess newsworthiness.

- Timeliness
- Proximity
- Rare
- Prominence
- Impact
- Novelty/Newness
- Human Interest

HOW AND WHEN RESEARCH MAKES NEWS

- Breakthroughs.
- Award winning research.
- Human interest – research that links to people's lived experiences.
- Research that produces negative results immense media interest and attention.
- New research and– any new research is exciting to the media, especially in a world where there is clearly fatigue around certain issues. Journalists are always looking for new angles and stories that pull in new audiences.
- Alternative voices – Nutrition vs. conventional medication.

HOW TO MAKE NEWS

Heighten Your Media Literacy

- Be an active consumer of news.
- Note issues that are receiving media coverage. What are the gaps and identify opportunities to plug your own work.

- Keep and organise news clippings.

Actively Seek Ways to Make News

- Use pegs – keep a diary of important events link issues from your research to such events. (UN international days, important national, regional and international meetings).
- Make sure your research is current; it should resonate with thinking and people's interests.
- Blog and speak about your work and draw attention to it.
- Create social networking pages (Facebook and Twitter) and invite media followers. Refresh your pages otherwise you lose readers.
- Facilitate media tours to allow journalists to witness issues your research deals with.

Repackage

- Repackage information to make it easy to read and use.
- Highlight interesting points from your research – for example, trends, state of economy, cost-benefit analysis, relate it to the economy, will poverty increase? Reduce?
- Connect the dots that are not always obvious.
- Produce news supplements that highlight your research from many angles.

Know Your Media, Build Relationships

- Hold briefing meetings with media to give accurate and informative background to issues.
- Provide journalists with tools to make their work easier. Databases of useful information and people are always handy in any newsroom.
- Know your media, create databases and ensure that they are up-to-date.
- Create and update regularly an inventory of journalists' networks in your country and region.
- Pay attention to journalists covering your issues. Compliment good journalism and offer constructive criticism where reporting is inaccurate and misleading.
- Understand media needs, how and where they access information to make sure information is strategically targeted.

Remember!

The media is always looking for news. As researchers there is always news around you. Don't be afraid to engage media.

5. WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

THE BARE BONES

- **Use A4 letter-headed paper.** Put ôNEWS RELEASEôor ôPRESS RELEASEô, the date and your contact details at the top. Double space the text. Leave 6cm blank at the top for the sub-editor to write printerôs instructions and a 4cm left margin for the editorôs amendments.

- If you do not wish the story to be published at once, or if you want the journalist to know that nobody else will publish it before they do, write ôEMBARGO : Not for publication or broadcast before XX hours, XX dateôat the top of the page.

- Begin with a headline (this should be attention grabbing, therefore not too clever or mysterious), no more than eight words long and in a bold font.

- The first paragraph should be one or two sentences **that sum up the main findings** and are backed up with facts and figures (boil your message down to its essence).

- The rest of the text should distil the research **into three or four main points**, backed up with facts and figures. (Make sure you cover who, why, what, where and when.)

- Add a conclusion and the main policy implications for the way forward.

- At the end of the press release text, type ôENDSôin a bold font.

- **Follow the main text with your contact details again** (where you will definitely be contactable for at least the next two days, both in and out of office hours).

- **End with additional information for editors**: the word count; a short description of your institution; relevant basic information and statistics; and your organisationôs website address.

THE VALUE-ADDED

- **Make the Press Release timely** e.g. by making a connection between your research and whatôs currently in the news.

- **Follow it up** but donôt be too much of a nuisance: thereôs a difference between being helpful to a journalist by phoning to make sure they received the Press Release, and making yourself unpopular because you wont take ónoôfor an answer.

- **Offer a spokesperson** who could speak on and around your research topic to the media ï often at short notice.

7. DFID'S APPROACH TO COMMUNICATING RESEARCH:TEN PRINCIPLES AND EIGHT LESSONS

10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNCIATION

1. Develop a Communication Strategy
2. Spend minimum 10% on it
3. Assess policy, communications and research environments
4. Identify, reach and engage with multiple audiences
5. Identify mechanisms to reach user groups throughout
6. Convene multi-disciplinary teams to meet objectives
7. Evaluate properly and practically
8. Generate information that is appropriate and regular
9. Develop capacity of user groups to access and use
10. Design distribution strategy that outlasts your project

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Start with a baseline and set realistic targets
2. Engage different stakeholders early on in research
3. Find the human story within your research
4. Work with different forms of media
5. Be creative with your data
6. Recognise – and help – reluctant researchers
7. Use information intermediaries to get your message across
8. Piggyback newsworthy events

3. MAKING THE MOST OF MEDIA ENCOUNTERS

It's important to remember that journalists and reporters have a job to do, and they want to do it well. If you can help them to 'get a good story', you will become an ally and this will help you in the first important step of building relationships with the media.

A journalist's job is to gather the facts; to inform the audience; to hear from experts; to meet deadlines; and to reflect the interests of their readers. Your job is to communicate the key messages coming out of your research in a way that will engage and inform both the journalist and – importantly – his or her audience. A fruitful interaction is one which allows both of you to get a little of what you want from the meeting!

So, do your homework! Find out about the reporter and the news outlet they represent. Think about what your research has to say that will be interesting to the audience. At the same time, be clear about your own agenda: follow the interviewer's lead passively but remember that you are not being examined!

Remember that you need to start telling your story with the most important information first. Journalists like to use the "inverted pyramid" form of story-telling. Imagine, literally, a pyramid turned upside-down and balancing on its sharpest tip. The widest part at the top represents the most substantial, interesting, and important information you want to convey: this should lead the article or interview. The supporting facts should follow.

Journalists – and editors – use this style of writing so that if the story has to be cut down in size, it is not the most important information that is lost. So, don't be tempted to start with the methodology used in your research – however fascinating you think this is!

Playing offence: Begin instead with the conclusions or main findings of your research and go on to the facts and evidence which support your main findings. Be brief! And don't be afraid to repeat your findings when in a broadcast interview, perhaps saying the same thing in a different way so that it can be absorbed.

Playing defence: If the journalist is being mischievous – or you suspect they are about to be – try to anticipate the difficulties ahead. Ask yourself 'What is the big issue behind the question?' Avoid unwelcome questions which are controversial, hypothetical, or ask for information you cannot disclose, or lie outside your area of expertise. Useful phrases to dodge these minefields include: "I am not an expert in that area, but …." Or "'I think what you mean is…." Or possibly "I am not familiar with that problem, but …."

Potential landmines in an interview include the following journalistic styles:

- **Machine gunner**: the journalist who asks double-barreled questions making it difficult to know which of the two questions to answer. Separate the two questions, repeating each of them out loud in your own words before answering each of them in turn.

- **Interrupter**: the interviewer who doesn't let you finish the answer to one question before asking you another. Listen to his or her interruption politely, and promise to come back to the question, but go on to finish your original answer e.g. "As I was saying…" The likelihood is that if you do this successfully a couple of times, the interruptions will stop!

- **The bomber**: the journalist who uses highly-charged negative words to question you. The chances are they are looking for an angry reaction from you: this always improves a programme's ratings. But do not fall into the trap! Try to defuse the angry language, repeating the more moderate question which you think lies behind the challenge and addressing that instead.

- **The shrink**: the professional who is puts words in your mouth for example by re-framing what you have just said incorrectly; "So what you are saying is …." This is dangerous! You must take charge of your message by politely disagreeing with their summary, and repeating your original statement.

OTHER NATURAL HAZARDS YOU SHOULD LOOK OUT FOR

- **The absent party** Do not answer questions for others, whether for your allies or your opponents. Speak for yourself on topics you feel confident about.

- **The pregnant pause** Beware of a lull in the interview: this could be a trap for you if you begin to fill in the silence with commentary that you hadn't meant to deliver. Instead, ask the interviewer, "Is that all…?" Or "What else can I help you with …?"

MOMBASA MEDIA WORKSHOP:
PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

INTERVIEWS WITH THE MEDIA

PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

Understand why you are being interviewed. Find out exactly what the topic and angle of the interview will be. How will the interview be used - for a news story, a current affairs feature or an entertainment piece?

Don't be afraid to do the interview. People often turn down the chance to be interviewed because they're nervous, or afraid they'll say the wrong thing, or because they've had a bad experience with the media in the past. Don't turn down the opportunity but BE PREPARED! Remember that the only way you'll get to be media-savvy is to practice!

Think about what you want your main message to be. What is your reason for wanting to speak to the reporter? Think about the main message you want to convey, and how to weave it into every answer you give. That way, even if your answers are cut and spliced during the editing process, your message will still come through. Make sure you know your subject inside and out. Write down answers to any questions you think may be asked, but avoid memorizing statements. A successful interview should never appear rehearsed - and reporters dislike prepared statements, because they sound stiff and unnatural.

Take along supporting material. Even the best journalist will not ask every possible question during one interview. Take with you supporting materials that describe your project and your institution – no more than 2pp on either – that you can leave behind with the journalist after your interview. This will enable them to get the basic facts right.

THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

Keep your messages clear and simple. Make sure you are clear about your main message, and what are the supporting arguments. Your main message can have several points to it, though it's best to have no more than three. Try to balance the urge to 'tell them everything' about your years of research, with the need to get the main message across. It is possible to communicate complex issues, but you need to build up the story using simple concepts which will have relevance and meaning for the audience.

Treat the interviewer with respect. Remember that when you speak to a reporter, you're potentially speaking to an audience of hundreds or thousands of people. If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest about it! Say that you don't know, but you'll try to get the information. Make sure you keep that promise, though - nothing sours a good relationship with a reporter faster than keeping him/her waiting for necessary information. Your attention to detail and reliability will be noticed and help to build your reputation with the media.

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Consortium pour la Recherche Economique en Afrique

Speak clearly and firmly. Offer the reporter just the facts; don't speculate or estimate, even if you're asked to. Don't feel you have to fill "dead air" - that's the interviewer's job. When you've answered a question, stop talking. If you're uncomfortable answering a question, just say firmly that you don't think you are the appropriate person to comment. Remember that no reporter has the right to bully you into answering a question if you don't want to.

Be helpful. Suggest other sources the reporter could interview. Mention anything that you think might be helpful and offer approaches s/he may not have thought of.

FOCUS ON TV INTERVIEWS

TV interviews are different from those done for print or radio. In TV interviews your appearance can be just as important as your words. Here are some general tips:

Ask the reporter ahead of time what s/he plans to ask you. This will give you a chance to think of what you want to say before the cameras start rolling. The location of the interview could reflect on the story, so if you have a choice, suggest a location you're comfortable with.

Always **maintain eye contact** with the person you're speaking to. This could be one reporter, several reporters, or a studio audience. But avoid looking at the camera - just pretend it's not there.

Whether you like it or not, **people will judge you on how you look**, so try to look professional and tidy. Avoid wearing anything that could distract the audience from what you say, such as extremely bright clothing, busy patterns or large jewellery. Sit still or stand still. Try not to fidget in front of the camera - small movements such as nail biting or foot tapping are magnified on screen. Sit with your hands folded in your lap and both feet planted on the ground. No swivel chairs or rocking chairs!

Speak in short, concise sentences. If you answer reporters clearly, they're less likely to edit your statements - and maybe cut out important points. Remember, the average interview clip in a news story is only 7-15 seconds!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Follow-up. Thank the journalist for the interview and for the opportunity to talk about important work that will be of interest to their readers/viewers. Offer to do a ‘fact check’ of the story before it is published – this gives you a chance to correct any errors of interpretation as well as fact. Make it clear to the journalist that you would be available for further clarification should they be needed.

Share the story with others. Post on your organisational website all stories that have published/broadcast with appropriate links to the media where the story is featured. Coverage of your research carries weight and adds credibility to both your work and your organisation. Remember that journalists often look for story ideas that are published in the media – so your one published story could lead to others.

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Kampala, 7-8 June 2011

SESSION 5 WRITING FOR THE MEDIA

HOW TO PREPARE AN OP-ED

An Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed) is essentially, an opinion piece that takes its name from its placement in a newspaper -- it is usually placed on the opposite side of an editorial. An opinion piece is often written by an expert and must be on an issue that is of interest to the newspaper's audience.

Op-Eds sometimes offer an alternative view to an issue; or it could be intended to educate the public on something that the author feels the readers need to know about, but are being denied information on. Organisations also use Op-Eds for public relations purposes, to give prominence to key experts and issues they are working on.

Tips for writing Op-Eds

1. **Monitor what Op-Eds are published**. If some authors are consistently published and get feedback from readers, find out what makes their work outstanding and interesting to the newspaper and its readers.

2. **Discuss with the relevant Op-Ed editor** the idea of your piece. They will also inform you of the appropriate time to send your piece.

3. **State the compelling argument of your piece right at the beginning**, maintain it throughout and back it up with relevant facts and data.

4. It is useful to **start by writing one sentence** and then put facts and messages that you develop around it.

5. **Op-Eds are clear and concise**.

6. **Keep your length to 1000 words or less**, if it's too long, you risk losing the readers' attention.

7. **Demonstrate knowledge and passion** about the issue you are writing about.

8. **Two authors can write an Op-Ed**, but limit it two, otherwise it gets clumsy.

9. **Send your Op-Ed** to only one publication; they are not intended for mass circulation like press releases. Newspapers will not publish it if they know it has been sent to others.

10. After submitting your piece, **follow-up with the editor the next day** to make sure they have received it, whether they have any feedback for you and most importantly, if they are going to publish it.

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