MEDIA HANDBOOK

For

Development Researchers

Panos Eastern Africa

RELAY

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Cover image: Newspapers on sale on a Kampala street by Badria N. Muwonge / Panos Pictures

Panos Eastern Africa is part of a world wide network of independent non-governmental organisations working with the media to stimulate debate on global development issues. Panos works from offices in 16 countries.

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FOREWORD

Panos Eastern Africa (PEA) believes that researchers have a stake in shaping contemporary development discourse and that the media provide ideal forums and channels for them to influence public debate on development issues. Under the *RELAY: Communicating Research Project*, PEA seeks to help researchers acquire the necessary skills to effectively communicate research through the media. The project also aims to bring researchers and journalists closer and to encourage them to engage more meaningfully with each other.

This media handbook targets researchers in the eight countries of the East and the Horn of Africa, that is: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. This is the region referred to as Eastern Africa.

The handbook clarifies the professional context of journalism that development researchers must be aware of in their media outreach efforts. It offers a series of practical tips on how to effectively present and package development research for the consumption of the media and for the benefit of their audiences. The handbook also gives some insights into the structure of the media industry and journalistic profession in Eastern Africa generally.

Researchers are reminded that development research must ultimately compete for time and space, and have the same appeal, as any other category of public information and news. In many significant ways, therefore, the suggestions in this handbook reflect the typical advice that anybody interested in communicating important public issues via the media would find applicable and handy. Similarly, although the advice in this handbook draws on specific examples and experiences from selected countries in Eastern Africa, development researchers across the region will find the guidelines equally relevant.

Anukur Luther Bois

Executive Director
PANOS EASTERN AFRICA

INTRODUCTION: WHAT THIS HANDBOOK IS ABOUT

This media handbook is primarily a *how-to* manual of tools, resources, and tips for the benefit of development researchers interested in opening an ongoing dialogue with the media and a reliable avenue for disseminating their research. As a researcher you will gain: (a) valuable insights into the professional cultures and operations typical of the media in Eastern Africa, and (b) practical knowledge on how to convey research results to the media in compelling form, substance, and style.

What follows is a package of strategies to help you as a development researcher get your messages across to and through the media. Inevitably, success will come not just from a mastery of the mechanics of working with the media but also, importantly, from a grasp of the roles, functions, opportunities, and limitations of the media in development and in public policy discourses.

HOW CAN RESEARCHERS BREAK THROUGH THE MEDIA?

While development research is critical to success in eradicating poverty and improving citizens' quality of life, the dissemination of such research in the media is often spotty and ineffective. Besides, there is a common belief that research activities and outputs as well as development issues do not, at least on the surface, readily satisfy the news judgments of journalists.

A major reason for this scepticism is that the media, because of their established conventions and practices, tend to give greater weight and priority to events, issues, and personalities that meet the traditional criteria of newsworthiness. On the other hand, *evidence* is the researcher's stock in trade. Yet journalists and researchers tend to use different standards for determining, evaluating, and reporting evidence.

As a development researcher, you can begin to make breakthroughs by understanding where the journalist is coming from. For example, one study[1] concluded that the technical reports produced by researchers are inaccessible to reporters who do not have a 'science' background. This might partly explain why "researchers do not like giving information to the media for fear of being misquoted."

Development research could be subject to a similar fate; but it does not have to. It would therefore take some measure of effort and a better understanding of journalistic values and media practices for a development researcher to turn her or his work into material that the media will find interesting, accessible, and worth relaying to their audiences.

Researchers should invest some time in understanding how the news media work. This is especially true for those researchers who are always wondering: "How come they don't cover my important work?" As will be explained further on in this handbook, the first step would be to understand what journalists call *news values,* those rather elusive factors that make events or issues newsworthy.

WHY IS MEDIA DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

The media provide an important opportunity for communicating research results with the public. Without being able to consistently and constructively communicate and share your research with the public and policymakers through the media, your scope for participating in and influencing ongoing development discourses will be limited.

Given that a lot of research is funded by public agencies (or by private bodies with public missions and mandates), the public are in some sense the ultimate sponsors of most of the research undertaken by all manner of researchers. In that regard, sharing research results with the public can be considered as reporting and accounting to one's sponsors. It can as well serve other valuable purposes such as satisfying one's "sense of duty to educate and inform the public," correcting misinformation, increasing the profile of one's work, and bringing recognition to one's sponsors.[2]

1 Panos Eastern Africa (2006). Media and research environment review in Kenya. Kampala: Panos Eastern Africa.
2 Funsten, H. (2003, p.2). You and the media: A researcher's guide for dealing successfully with the news media. Washington, DC: American Geophysical Union.

THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN EASTERN AFRICA

The media landscape in much of Eastern Africa is the product of the liberalisation policies adopted by various governments during the 1990s. Until then, the state in many of these countries had a monopoly over broadcasting, the dominant means of public communication then, as they are today.

However, liberalisation led to the ascendance of private entrepreneurship in the media, with especially far-reaching impact on the broadcasting sector. Today five general trends stand out, though their extent varies from country to country. First is the proliferation of FM radio stations; second is the consolidation of the print media into a handful of newspapers; third is cross-ownership of assets in different media sectors; fourth is the concentration of talent among a handful of media houses; and fifth is the commercialisation of the industry.

Commercialisation, in particular, should be of concern to development researchers. The ferocious competition that has emerged in the wake of commercialisation has spawned a growing focus on entertainment, light news, scandal, gossip, and such other content. This obviously means a shrinking of space and air time available to development issues including research.

THE SCOPE OF DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

What could be defined as development research covers an extensive range of subjects. With varying degrees of specificity, a review of literature and interviews with scholars and professionals have revealed a diversity of research work related to development. The list includes research on:

- Community-based organisations
- Accountability mechanisms in Africa
- Politics and governance
- Gender in Africa
- Resettlement of internally displaced people
- Contribution of organic farming to household incomes
- Monetary and fiscal policies
- Financial sector linkages
- Sharing environmental resources around wildlife areas
- Peace and conflict
- Trade policy
- Intellectual property
- Health
- Local government
- Elections and political participation
- Land issues
- Growth, productivity, profitability and competitiveness of the private sector

It is evident that development research is carried out in, and often cuts across, different disciplines. Still, the issues that confront development researchers when interacting with the media, regardless of discipline or country, are by and large identical.

Competence in their own disciplines does not necessarily prepare researchers to deal with the media, nor does it immunise them against criticism from journalists.

Here is a sampling of the complaints that editors and reporters have lodged against researchers:[3]

- "Research documents are too bulky, written in technical/scientific uninviting style and language, which is boring to read. Therefore media avoid them."
- "Research documents are not available or very difficult to obtain."
- "Most researchers are difficult to interview and do not want to be named."

Similarly, researchers have their own complaints about journalists. Here is a sampling of these complaints:[4]

- Editors have little interest in science-based stories.
- Scientific research is inaccurately reported.
- The media do not understand that scientific research takes time and are unwilling to wait for results.

Regardless of the issues researchers have against journalists, many keep trying to reach out to the media in their publicity efforts. Researchers in a number of institutions in Kenya[5] and in Uganda have reported that their preferred methods of media outreach or public dissemination of research findings are:

- Press releases
- Press conferences
- Public dissemination workshops or seminars
- Dispatching/emailing research reports to journalists
- Media interviews with principal researchers
- Newsletters
- Websites
- Special newspaper supplements
- Quarterly and annual reports
- Booklets

3 Panos Eastern Africa (2006). A report of the review of the media environment in Uganda: 2003–2006. Kampala: Panos Eastern Africa.

4 Panos Eastern Africa (2006). Media and research environment review in Kenya. Kampala: Panos Eastern Africa.

5 Panos Eastern Africa (2006). Media and research environment review in Kenya. Kampala: Panos Eastern Africa.

- Pamphlets and posters
- Stakeholder dialogues or meetings
- Radio and TV talk shows
- Monthly press briefings
- Publications e.g. journals, books, working papers
- Researcher-authored newspaper articles
- Policy briefs and position papers

RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE MEDIA

For some researchers, the problem with the media is not so much that journalists misrepresent facts as their tendency to oversimplify issues. In fact, a number of researchers have said that journalists do understand the issues presented to them and that they have encountered no habitual misrepresentation of facts.

What ticks researchers off, nonetheless, is the claim by reporters that development concepts are difficult for their audiences to comprehend; and that this compels them to only cover the surface and to do minimal analytical reporting beyond covering the bare facts.

Another thing that disturbs development researchers who have dealt with the media is that reporters often distort or emphasize aspects that are not the focus of their research. Consequently, development stories routinely come out the wrong way and policy makers often do not pay as much attention to issues in the media as they would if the same issues were discussed one-on-one.

Additionally, some researchers have noted that at times when reporters have gotten used to new concepts and have become comfortable reporting on them, they leave the media or get transferred to other beats or assignments, thus compounding the shortage of experienced journalists. Others have pointed out that few editors are inclined to allocate space or time to research and prefer to sensationalise, what has been dubbed the "bite and run" approach. Researchers are aware that the media are largely driven by the need to sell their products, which means that such issues as the environment, investment, and poverty come far behind politics and entertainment.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING THE MEDIA?

If the odds appear to be so stacked against the development research community, do researchers see any potential benefits in using the mass media to disseminate their work? They actually do. Here is a sampling of the perceived benefits to the researcher, either the individual or the organisation, of disseminating research via the media:

- Creates awareness of the researcher's activities and promotes transparency and accountability.
- Helps to generate support for the researcher from various stakeholders and funders.
- Ensures that results are shared beyond one organisation and are used for the good of society since most research issues are of public interest.
- Minimises unnecessary duplication of work.
- Enables researchers to influence public policy in their fields of expertise.
- Objectively disseminated information is an asset to the public.
- Reduces the cost on the individual researcher of public information dissemination.

WHY DO RESEARCHERS OVERLOOK THE MEDIA?

Media policies vary from one organisation to another. Media outreach is the rule in some organisations while it is the exception in others. Public information dissemination is mandatory when a given project sponsor requires it as a funding condition, hence the use of the media. Other than that, researchers have attributed the reasons for overlooking the media to the policies, gaps, or weaknesses either on their part or on the media's side.

Researchers hold themselves responsible for the present state of research in the media because:

- Some organisations do not deal with the media as a matter of policy, implying that media outreach is usually excluded from the planning and budgeting processes.
- Where an organisation's target group comprises mostly local communities with low literacy levels or with low access to the media, inter-personal communication channels, for example, are deemed more effective in disseminating research findings.
- Some researchers prefer resolving policy issues in one-on-one engagements to addressing these issues via the media.
- Poor packaging and handling of the information passed on to the media makes it uninteresting and irrelevant to journalists and their audiences.
- There is a lack of media relations skills and knowledge in some organisations on how to exploit the media for research dissemination. It could be down to lack of interest and initiative in some instances.

- There often is a lack of consistency in dealing with the media. Too many times it is a one-off process whereby the media are invited to cover a dissemination workshop, but with no follow-up thereafter. In one researcher's words: "I wouldn't say we have really targeted the media deliberately. Normally at the dissemination meetings we invite the media on the day of dissemination and expect them to cover the function and we hope what they cover finds its way into the media."
- Researchers have not focused on topical issues that are of interest to audiences and which they can relate to. Most Research tends to focus on the "academic" aspects of research whose relevance to the public is not easily visible.

Researchers hold journalists responsible for the present state of research in the media because:

- Media houses tend to sensationalise issues and to highlight superficial areas of research reports so they can sell their products. Yet ordinary development and poverty issues do not sell that much. As one researcher says: "If at all they report on research they make the issue so insignificant that there is no impact."
- Editorial policies of media houses dictate that most coverage is given to politics and "exciting" events such as protests and entertainment at the expense of issues that are perceived as less captivating. Yet these are the very issues that research organisations focus on – farming, the environment, trade issues, and the like.
- Audiences themselves are normally turned off by policy issues such as on trade and development. Since the mainstream media houses are profit-driven, they pander to the interests of their audiences.
- The scarcity of experienced journalists leaves little room for specialisation. In the event of competing priorities, politics, and politicians scoop the coverage at the expense of research and development matters.
- Media practitioners are not grounded in specific areas of development research and their relevance to the public. As a result, they report them inadequately by failing to look farther than one-off events like dissemination workshops.
- Limited contacts between researchers and the media make it hard to have a forum for bringing the two parties together to enhance continued dialogue and better reporting on research.
- Researchers are hindered by the commercial interests of the media. In going the extra mile to publicise their work, researchers incur high costs in paying for talk- show time on radio and TV, in procuring space in the print media, and in taking journalists on field trips.
- Journalists do not invest sufficient effort in reaching out to researchers. They tend to interview the same people over and over, not knowing who is an expert on what subject. So they end up recycling the same "expert" opinions from the same people.

The claim that the media recycle expert opinion ought to be considered with a sense of perspective. Researchers interviewed in Kenya were able to identify "the most frequently quoted and/or reported research institutions and experts."[6] The list,[7] which was validated through an informal analysis of media content, suggests that poverty, health, and agriculture are the most widely covered areas of development research in Kenya.

The reasons for the predominance of these three topics could either be that journalists figured out that issues related to these subjects have a particular appeal to Kenyan audiences, or that the responsible institutions have done their homework in efforts to get these issues onto the media and public agendas. Whatever the case, it is crucial for researchers and research promoters to understand that issues, events, and people seldom appear in the media out of the blue.

6 Panos Eastern Africa (2006). Media and research environment review in Kenya. Kampala: Panos Eastern Africa.

7 Kenya Medical Research Institute; Kenya Agricultural Research Institute; Kenya Institute of Policy Research and Analysis; International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology; Ministry of Health; World Health Organisation; World Bank; Central Bureau of Statistics; Central Bank of Kenya; University of Nairobi; International Livestock Research Institute; World Food Programme; Unicef; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Environment Programme; World Vision; Action Aid; National Environment Management Authority; Kenya Medical Services; Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service; and World Agroforestry Centre. Source: Panos Eastern Africa (2006). Media and research environment review in Kenya.

WHAT HAS WORKED FOR SOME RESEARCHERS?

Researchers have tried out strategies such as the ones listed below to reach out to the media:

- Holding regular press conferences.
- Distributing press kits containing press releases, policy briefs, and summaries of key research findings.
- Establishing functional communications offices to disseminate information.
- Proactively building relationships with media practitioners.
- Conducting short courses for journalists customised to the sponsoring organisation's development research field.
- Availing journalists with condensed information sheets along with the research reports.

DOES RESEARCH IN THE MEDIA CAUSE IMPACT?

The link between research and policy reform is rarely a straight forward one. Researchers in Eastern Africa may well be advised to resist the temptation to claim outright credit for various policy reforms and improvements in the areas of development they research on. What is indisputable, however, is the impact of their research on framing the debates around development issues.

As a case in point, research that the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) at Makerere University conducted about the effectiveness and efficiency of the taxation system in Uganda and the attendant advocacy campaign that the Local Government Finance Commission (LGFC) mounted evidently influenced the discourse in policy, government, and political circles at the national and local levels. The eventual scrapping of the graduated tax in particular might have had nothing to do with the EPRC researchers' work; but the fact that their findings were discussed extensively speaks volumes for media-based communication of development research.

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) too has made tremendous strides in enhancing the visibility of research. The statistics generated from the massive volumes of data they routinely gather, such as the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey series, are widely used by academics, policy makers, and the media themselves due in large part to the dissemination efforts carried out via the media.

MEDIA STRATEGY

The LGFC's experience suggests the importance of adopting a media strategy. Such a strategy not only works for big research organisations; it is equally applicable to the individual researcher who wants to share research results with the public either to influence public opinion and to persuade policy makers and opinion leaders, or simply to generate debate.

The basic framework of a media strategy involves the following:

- *Goals and objectives*: What do you want to accomplish by using the media? Is it to influence public opinion, to persuade policy makers and other key stakeholders, to generate debate, or simply to get known?
- *Central message*: What do you want the media to communicate to the public about your research?
- *Target audience*: Is your information intended for the general public or a specialised audience?
- *Resources*: What resources, both financial and human, are available to you?
- *Media outlets*: What media outlets are available in your community? Which ones will best help you reach your target audience?
- *Media contacts*: Do you or your research colleagues know people in the media?

In order to communicate effectively with the media, it is important to understand how they work and how they determine news. What do they consider important? What motivates them? Researchers should invest some time in understanding both the internal dynamics of the media and the external factors that have a bearing on media coverage.

DECIDING WHAT IS NEWS

On any given day, hundreds if not thousands, of notable events happen around us. Yet, only a small fraction of all the new developments in our environment attracts media coverage. Why is this so?

Generally, the media have limited space and time. Even the most well-intentioned and dedicated media outlets can only cover so much of all the events unfolding.

Partly because of these limitations, but also in response to the demand to remain interesting to audiences and, therefore, competitive and viable, the media select the news on the basis of what journalists call *news values*. These are factors that determine whether an event or issue is newsworthy. Generally, newsworthiness revolves around the interest and social utility of events and issues or messages related to those events/issues.

Below is an outline and brief explanations of the major news values:

Impact or consequence: Is the event or issue likely to have a major impact on a great number in the community or country? In case of research, the higher the potential impact or consequence of the findings, the higher the chances that the media will eagerly cover the work. Similarly, if the research addresses issues that affect a great number of people in important ways, it is likely to receive more attention. For instance, research that addresses the relationship between poverty and HIV/AIDS is likely to attract media-wide coverage than research focusing exclusively on clinical findings.

Relevance: This is in some ways related to consequence, but has more to do with significance. The key question that journalists will (or should) ask is "so what?" So what if you have completed a research project? Why should the media care? Why should the public care? How does the topic concern or touch them?

Proximity: Does the event (or in case of research, the issue) relate to a development that is close to the audience geographically? Additionally, or alternatively, is it about people that the audience can identify with in some way? Research issues that are closer to the community's concerns or issues that the community is grappling with are more likely to attract coverage than those that appear peripheral or distant.

Prominence: Does the event or issue revolve around well-known personalities or groups? For instance, how prominent is the researcher or organisation sponsoring or conducting the research? Prominent researchers or those who work with well known and credible organisations are more likely to attract coverage than "lesser souls."

Conflict: Does the event or issue involve controversy? Does it pit one or more sides against another or others? Is it likely to generate heated arguments for and against? By this logic, the higher the conflict element in research findings, for instance, the more likely that the work will attract media coverage.

Timeliness: Is the event or issue recent? While research inevitably involves some bit of history, there should be an element of freshness for it to attract coverage. The fact that the research results have just been released would be one element of timeliness. The other would be whether the findings contain new knowledge or ideas.

The unusual/bizarre: Does the event or issue involve something bizarre or out-of-the- ordinary? Oddities such as the now hackneyed example of a man biting a dog attract media coverage. Similarly, research findings that challenge conventional wisdom are more likely to attract attention and coverage.

Human interest: Does the event or issue have elements that will touch people's emotions?

Drama: Does the event or issue contain elements of excitement, spectacle or crisis?

While a combination of several factors might determine newsworthiness, the key point is *interest*. People generally read or tune in only to what interests them, "such as drama, sex, and violence. The topic must concern or touch the audience in some way…To be newsworthy, a story must appeal to people's needs, interests, and desires"[8] This is not an invitation to "sex up" development research. It is a reminder to think carefully about what in the results of development research could touch people's lives and to draw attention to it.

The challenge is for the newsmaker, in this case the researcher, to know whether the event or issue he or she is pushing contains some of these elements that journalists use in their evaluation of newsworthiness.

Researchers also ought to appreciate that most media have *limited space* and *time* for news. Not all research that is conducted and completed successfully will be covered in the media. It is often ground-breaking research that will be covered on merit.

Similarly, researchers should appreciate that journalists work under constant *deadlines*. Most newspapers work on their final pages by 7:00 pm in Eastern Africa, unless there is a major story worth waiting for. Moreover, stories go (or they are supposed to go) through rigorous editing processes that are often time-consuming. If the journalists do not receive the required information in good time, it is unlikely that a story will be written.

Researchers also ought to appreciate that the media are by and large *businesses* operating in a highly *competitive* environment. Even public and private media that claim to value their public service role operate under constant competitive pressures. They must appeal to broad audiences and remain relevant. Sometimes this means that entertainment or less important news with mass appeal will receive more attention than important research that is perceived to be unexciting. For research to upstage more routine issues that fill the news pages and airwaves, it must not only be ground-breaking but also touch the lives of the community in demonstrable ways.

8 Jacobson, S. (1999, p. 140). *Communication skills for conservation professionals*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

FRUITS OF A MEDIA STRATEGY

Although research, generally speaking, seldom attracts the excessive media coverage that crime, scandal, and politics attract, a good understanding of newsworthiness and devoting time to shaping research into news will ensure at least some decent coverage of research issues. In the case of Uganda's taxation study, the media coverage was substantial. The LGFC's publicity campaign yielded newspaper stories, editorials, and opinion articles bearing headlines such as these:

- "Local government to discuss reforms in rural taxation."
- "Abolition of graduated tax will hurt everybody."
- "Study says tender boards should be abolished."
- "Graduated tax still is needed."
- "Political interference hurts tax collections."
- "Small firms suffer bite of local taxes."

Stories related to the publicity and dissemination activities as well as issues arising from the research ran in the newspapers and on radio and TV over a two- to three-month period. And as the coverage and headlines suggest, the research provoked serious and extended debate among public and policy audiences. Had the coverage not been deliberately nurtured, it is far from certain that the research would have realised such an outcome.

EVALUATE YOUR RESEARCH

Not all the results, and certainly not every aspect, of your research will necessarily be of immediate or direct value to the public or attract media attention. Herbert Funsten of the Public Information Committee of the American Geophysical Union urges researchers to "consider the importance of your research by asking whether it addresses any of the 'motivations' of the public as a media consumer" before contacting a journalist or media organisation. Speaking of scientific research, for example, Funsten says:

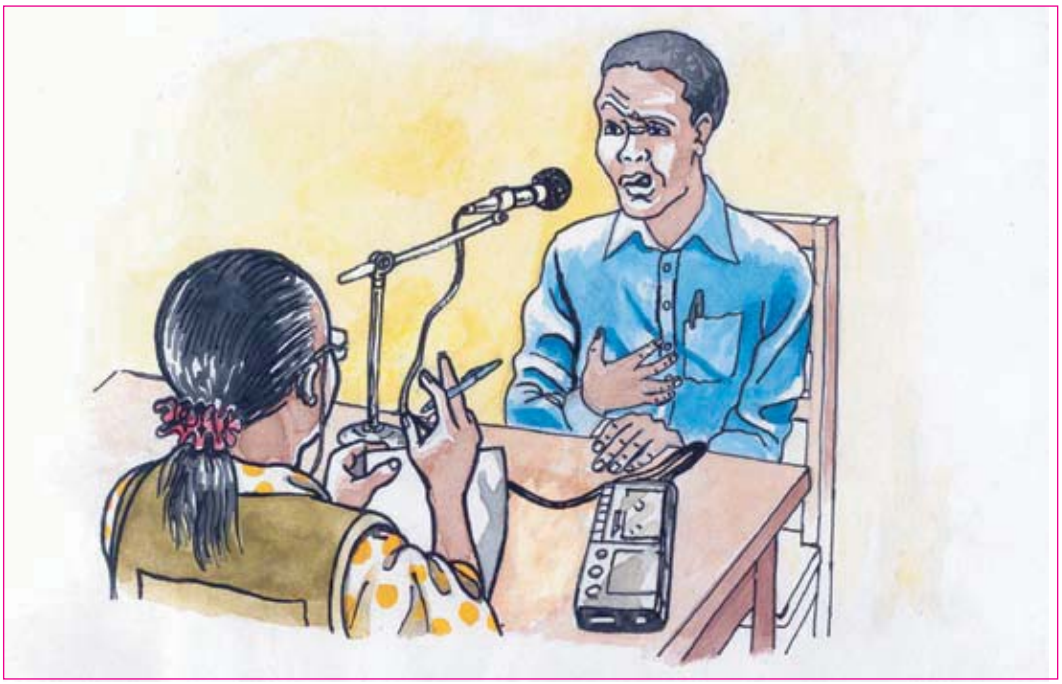
"[D]oes your research

- significantly contribute to understanding a controversial issue?
- impact the health or safety of the public or the environment?
- improve or potentially improve the public's quality of life?
- decrease the cost or enhance the capabilities of current technology?
- set a record?
- explain an aspect of a scientific field that captivates the public's interest?"[9]

It is worth talking to the media about your research only if you have a positive answer to any of these questions. If not all, at least most of these questions apply to development research too.

9 Funsten, H. (2003, p.5). *You and the media: A researcher's guide for dealing successfully with the news media.*

INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA



Facing the media can be an intimidating task especially for the uninitiated. Fortunately, however, most people overcome the anxiety, sometimes through the sheer terror of the experience. Highlighted here are some important clues.

Know the right contacts. Understand the structure of the news organisation. Do not call the newsroom to complain about advertising. Similarly, do not call the advertising department to complain about a news story. Understand who does what in the newsroom.

In Eastern Africa, most newspapers are generally organised around editorial structures that are filled by the following positions:

- Editor-in-Chief or Managing Editor
- Editor or Associate Editor
- Features Editor
- News Editor
- Chief Sub-editor
- Business/Economics Editor
- Opinions/Op-ed Editor
- Foreign News Editor
- Sports Editor
- Graphics/Design Editor
- Photo Editor
- Production Editor
- Training Editor

- Internet Editor
- Sub-editors/Copy Editors
- Reporters/Writers
- Photographers
- Correspondents

It should be noted that many people who are part of the editorial operations of news organisations do not come into direct contact with the public in the course of their duties. For instance, many sub-editors or copy editors primarily work on stories submitted by reporters or writers after they have been passed by the relevant 'desk' editors who are responsible for major sections – features, economics, development, science, etc.

Generally, for most researchers the key contacts in a newsroom would include reporters, writers, and correspondents as well as editors in charge of news, features, opinions, business (especially for those involved in research that includes perspectives on finance and the economy), and associate editors or overall editors, depending on the organisation's nomenclature. Only in exceptional cases (such as failure to secure the cooperation of all reporters and desk editors) is a researcher encouraged to jump the hierarchy and talk to the managing editor or editor-in-chief. Bear in mind that the responsibilities of the individuals who hold these high positions in media organisations tend to be more executive or managerial than editorial. You are therefore better off resolving any sticky issues with staff that deal directly with the editorial content on a routine basis.

Radio and television in Eastern Africa generally employ smaller numbers of journalists. The key contacts in the broadcast media include:

- News Manager or News Editor
- Producer (most public affairs programmes, including talk shows, have their own producers)
- Reporters or Correspondents

It is important for researchers to find out who handles the type of issues related to their research at different print and broadcast media organisations. It definitely helps to get to know these people. You can call them or seek an appointment to talk about your work and related issues that you feel deserve more or a different type of coverage.

After the initial meeting (a face-to-face meeting is recommended in the beginning), it is crucial to maintain contact with the relevant reporters and editors. You do not have to call only when you want something of yours published. Sometimes it could be to provide factual information on a story the media house covered or to point out an error you spotted. Keep the relationship professional at all times.

Personal contact is very important for increasing the chances of your message getting covered by the media. It is also good practice for you or your organisation to develop a contact list of editors and reporters (especially specialists) in the country. Update the list regularly.

Generally, many reporters and writers do not have that much control over the final appearance or shape of their stories. Editors do. For example, at newspapers, reporters rarely write headlines for their stories. A misleading or sensational headline the following day can be as annoying to the reporter as it is to the news source such as a researcher. In other words, taking it out on the individual whose byline is on the story might be unproductive.

BASIC GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Know what you want to communicate

What exactly do you want? Do you want to register a complaint, to correct a distortion, or to suggest something? Do you want the complaint or suggestion covered (say in a published letter to the editor) or is it merely for the consumption of the journalists? Do you want to publish an article or to appear in a Question & Answer interview?

Have your facts on your fingertips

Once you have agreed to talk to a journalist, be sure to be on top of your game. Have your facts.

Focus on the most important aspects

Not everything in your research can be captured by the media. Break it down to the key issues that define the work, such as the major findings, how you arrived at them, and their societal implications.

Keep it simple

Journalism thrives on simple language. It is clear, precise, lively everyday language that captivates and engages readers. Avoid discipline-specific jargon or technical terms. Where you have to use scientific jargon or technical terms, explain them in common terms.

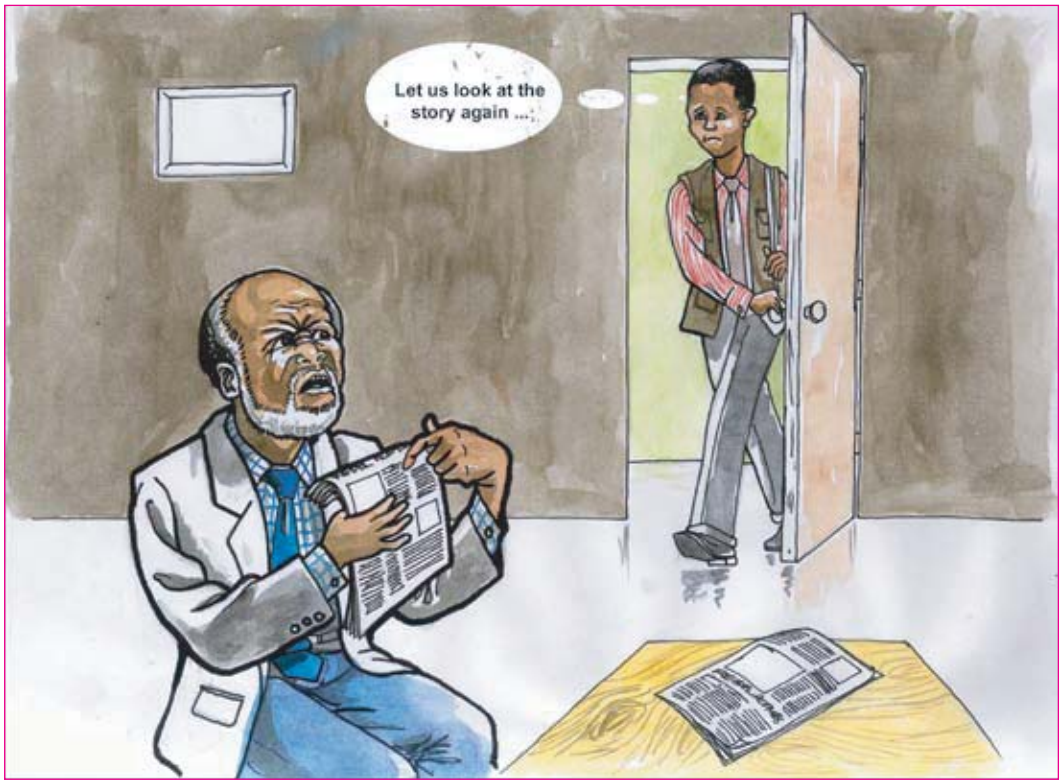
> **Example: "Polythene bags of less than** *30 microns* **have been banned.** *These are generally light polythenes that cannot hold a kilogramme load***, and they are mainly used for packing water and juice."**

Remember that journalists work under constant deadlines

Journalists work under enormous deadline pressure, especially in this era of so-called 24/7 news. If you want your article or contribution to appear by a particular date, give the journalists ample time to carry out research and to work on the story. Do not submit a story today and expect it to appear the following day.

Maintain a professional relationship

A professional relationship based on trust, mutual respect, goodwill, and cordiality will invite better coverage. As an example, most journalists, including unethical ones, will come to respect you more if you work to show them the merit of your stories or messages than if you try to use financial and other inducements to have your work published.



Respond to media inquiries, and promptly too

Providing timely responses to journalists' questions often serves to sustain positive ties with the media and to enhance media coverage of a research project. In case you cannot respond immediately to a request for information or an interview, it helps to talk to the journalist to give him or her a better time. Where appropriate you could refer the journalist to a colleague who is in position to respond. Many Journalists work under pressure to get the story first and "scoop" their competitors. As a result, some will "sacrifice accuracy for expediency."[10]

Yet, a researcher's prompt response to a media inquiry can help to keep the story accurate, especially if the alternative is for the media outlet to appear with the story without your message or contribution. Whatever the case, avoid "No comment" responses as they increase journalists' suspicion that you are hiding something. Where you cannot give a substantive response, be tactful in your answer. You could say, *"I am sorry I am unable to answer any questions at this time."*

Be careful with "off-the-record" comments

If you do not want to be quoted on a particular remark, tell the journalist directly that it is off-the-record or do not say anything whatsoever about the issue. Media ethics place some responsibility on journalists to respect off-the-record requests. However, it also pays to remember that in some cases a journalist could still go ahead and quote you on something that was meant to be off-the-record. Weigh your relationship with the journalist before offering off-the-record remarks.

10 Funsten, H. (2003, p.3). *You and the media: A researcher's guide for dealing successfully with the news media.*

Stay focused on the subject matter and facts

Venturing into opinions (especially controversial ones) about politics is a slippery road to sensational coverage. Stick to the facts of your research. The exception is if the purpose of the research was to support an advocacy objective.

Provide consistent messages

Where a research project involves more than one senior researcher, be sure that you do not contradict each other. In some cases, it may be advisable to designate a spokesperson for the research to ensure consistency. In such cases, all media inquiries should be directed to that person.

The truth will set you free!

In all circumstances when you talk to journalists, stay with the truth. Any hint of a lie not only increases a journalist's suspicions of your motives and credibility, it can also injure your reputation seriously.

Give journalists the benefit of the doubt

If a story has inaccuracies, distortions, or apparent bias, some readers, listeners, or viewers will immediately assume it was deliberate on the part of the journalists or media houses. Many times, however, journalists (be they reporters, editors, or producers) try to be fair and to do their best, but still fall short. Such failure is not in intent but in execution. Understand that this happens and politely call for corrections or clarifications. This is another way of cultivating enduring relations with media organisations.

Media has limited space and time

All media outlets can dedicate only so much time or space to any event or issue. These space and time constraints mean that not everything that a researcher exchanges with a journalist will be published or aired. While it can be disheartening to spend an hour in an interview with a journalist and then end up being quoted in only two sentences or seconds the following day, remember that the interview may be your only opportunity to draw mass attention to your work.

Educate the journalists

A majority of journalists in Eastern Africa are relatively young people with only a few years of experience. Moreover, most reporters are not specialists but generalists who cover a wide array of topics. This mix means that not everything that appears basic to a researcher is as obvious to the journalists. Take the time, where appropriate, to educate the journalists by providing them with necessary background information. Explain and clarify complex issues. This ensures that they will come out with an accurate story. Also, it helps to build your reputation as a helpful source with journalists.

MEDIA TOOLS FOR RESEARCHERS

Press Release

The press release is one of the most common tools used to communicate research results via the media. A press release is an announcement, usually a one- to two-page summary of information, about a newsworthy event, subject, issue or development. It is issued to the media in the hope of onward transmission to the public. Sometimes it is called a news or media release.

A press release can announce an event or development that has already occurred (e.g. the formal launch or release of a research report; the announcement of a new research grant) or a forthcoming event to prepare journalists and the public. Sometimes, though, press releases are not related to events but are simply meant to provide information, such as when you want to share key findings of a research project or to comment on developing events or emerging issues.

A good press release should answer the 5Ws & H (Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?) immediately. That is, who is the subject of the event or development in question? This can be a person or a group such as a leading researcher at a given institution, a scholar, a researcher with a private firm, a non-governmental organisation, a university, or a government department.

Key questions to ask when preparing a press release:

- What is the substance of the event or development? What is it about the event that you want to share with the media, and ultimately the public?
- Where is the event going to take place? In the case of research results, this could also refer to where the report was launched or released, where it was conducted and so on. If it is about an upcoming event, you should be very specific about the location, providing easy-to-read directions.
- When is the event going to take place? If the press release is about research, this could also refer to when the research results were released, when the study was conducted and/or completed. In case of forthcoming events, specify the date, day of the week, and time when it will take place.
- Why is the event or development arising? Why should anybody care? This answers the importance of the event or development you are addressing. You must have a compelling reason for issuing a press release. This is where you also address the "so what?" question.
- How is the event or development expected to proceed? Or in case of research, how was it conducted?

Generally, press releases are written in the inverted pyramid format. In other words, important information comes first while the least important information comes last in the body of the text.

A good press release will contain the following:

- The release date, usually in the top right-hand corner of the first page.
- A catchy headline that captures the subject matter and hooks the reader (editor or reporter).
- An introduction or lead paragraph that captures the essence of your story; that is, it summarises the main point and attempts to answer the 5Ws.
- As much information in as little space as possible. Brevity is the key.
- Clear and concise language that sustains reader interest. Short sentences and paragraphs are strongly recommended.
- Quotes from the key person(s) associated with the event (e.g. the lead researcher). This adds credibility, provides variety, breaks monotony, and enhances interest.
- Information that develops or backs up the main point, that is, evidence.
- Explanations of any jargon or technical terms.
- Reference to any background material like the research report and other materials like photographs and graphic presentations accompanying the release.
- Full official contact details of the person who should be contacted for further information or clarification.
- Summarised background information about the organisation or person sending the press release.

Sometimes press releases are *embargoed*. The embargo date is the period before which journalists and others with access to the press release are not allowed to publish or air it.

Why then would a researcher issue a press release when he/she does not want the information contained there to appear immediately, you may ask? The embargo allows the media to develop the story (gather background material, including interviewing you and other experts), and to write and edit it before publication. This is especially so for press releases accompanying the release of complex or comprehensive research reports.

The embargo date may coincide with a formal launch of the research report, a press conference you are addressing or a dissemination workshop you have organised.

Submitting the press release

It is important to know the media outlets that you are targetting and to have a sense of their publication deadlines. Generally, a press release that is related to a forthcoming event should be sent out at least two to three days before the event and within 24 hours of an event that has already occurred. Press releases that are not related to events, but are simply meant to provide information or comment, do not have to follow the above rules. However, it is important for the author of a press release that is meant to provide a comment or reaction to an event or development to keep in mind the news cycle. For instance, a researcher attempting to provide a

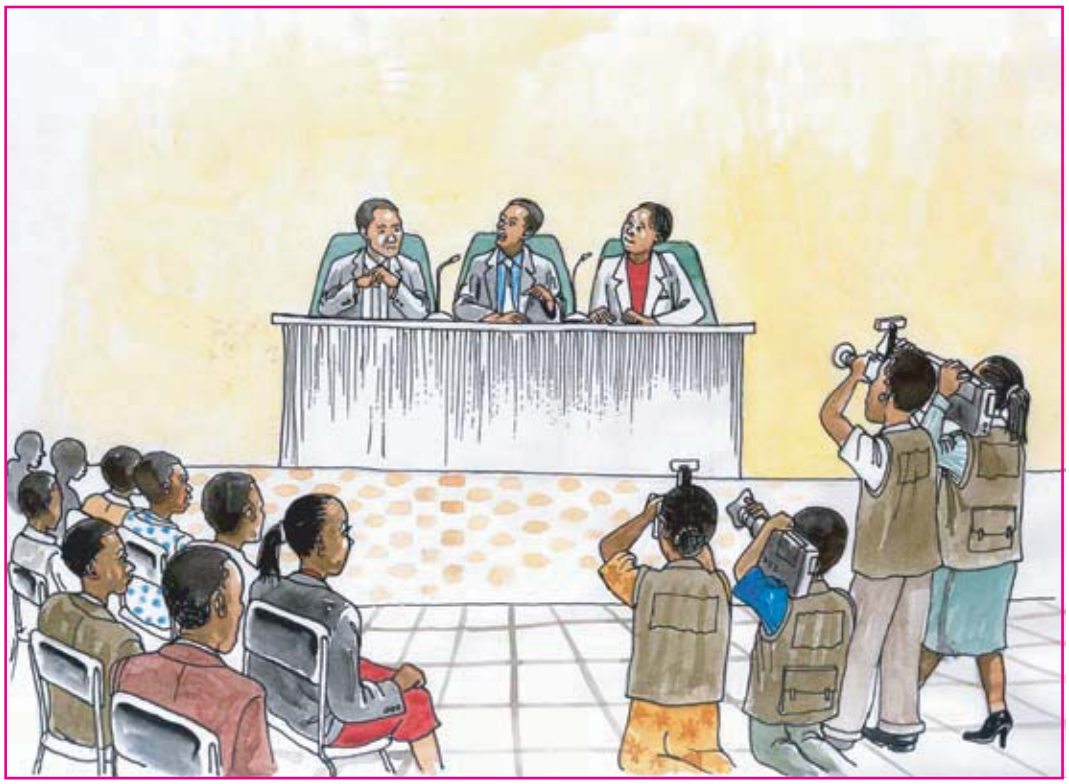
response to a government policy pronouncement is more likely to have this included in the following day's media coverage if he or she sends out a press release shortly after the pronouncement comes out.

If you do not know the responsible people at the media outlets you are targetting, find out their contacts and ask them about the most appropriate ways of sending the release. These days most media organisations are comfortable with faxes and email. Address the press release to the appropriate person, usually the news editor or news manager. Having the name of the person, on top of the correct title, provides some kind of personal appeal.

Follow-up

After sending the press release, it is advisable to follow up with a phone call to each of the media outlets to confirm that it was received. This is also an opportunity to confirm which media outlets will send representatives, if you are planning an event.

Press Conference



A press conference is a formal meeting with journalists that is designed to generate news about a specific subject(s) or to clarify a specific issue(s). A press conference is usually held when an individual or group has newsworthy information to share with the media and the public. In the absence of such information, a press conference may fail to attract media coverage.

Arranging a press conference can appear a daunting task for the uninitiated (what with all the cameras and microphones), but it can also be quite rewarding. With elaborate planning and organisation, it should not be that difficult to pull off a notable press conference.

Why hold a press conference?

Just like the press release, a press conference provides an opportunity for dealing directly with the media and putting your message across to the public. But unlike a press release, a press conference will afford you the opportunity to provide more information to journalists. Also, because of its interactive nature, a press conference gives you the opportunity to answer immediately questions that the media may have and therefore to minimise the risk of inaccurate reports.

A press conference is a good tool to clear the air or correct distortions in previous media reports or public announcements. Moreover, the presence of many journalists at a press conference adds to the importance of the event and is therefore more likely to ensure coverage of the issues you care about.

When to organise a press conference

A press conference should be a special event organised only when the circumstances demand it. For researchers, such circumstances may include the following:

- Releasing a report of a major research project
- Launching a major research project
- Reacting to an event or issue related to your research; for example, a government policy pronouncement that is connected to your work
- Setting the record straight when there has been distortion of your research findings in the media or other public forum

Determining appropriateness of a press conference

Before holding a press conference, you should determine whether it is the appropriate media tool for you. That decision should be simple, based on the criteria listed above. They key question is whether you have newsworthy information. Other considerations could be how much time you have (planning a press conference requires at least a week) and whether the press conference clearly beats other options such as using a press release.

Defining the issue for a press conference

Once you have decided to hold a press conference, you should define the issue or theme and message that you want to put out. The issue must be exciting or compelling to warrant media attention. Simply wanting to share your research results with the media is not enough. There must be something about the results that you are convinced is newsworthy; something that will create interest. That should be the focus of your presentation and answers at the press conference.

Setting a date and time for a press conference

You need to decide a date and time for the press conference, giving yourself enough time to send out invitations and to organise all the relevant material you may want to give out to reporters. In determining the time, ensure that it will not clash with media deadlines. Generally, the best time to have a press conference in Eastern Africa

is between 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. By this time most newsrooms will have held their regular review and assignment meetings and it is also early enough to make the afternoon news bulletins on radio, the evening news on television, and the following day's newspapers. If predictable, avoid having your press conference on major news days (when there are several big events that will attract media coverage). Also, steer clear of weekends and public holidays.

Selecting a location for a press conference

You should select a venue that is convenient and accessible to journalists. In particular, the venue should not be located too far away from the city centre; it should have sufficient parking space; and it should be relatively quiet (without high levels of background noise such as motor traffic or running machinery). The location should also have sufficient light so it is suitable for photography and video/TV coverage.

Developing a press kit

A press kit is an information packet that is put together to provide background details to the media about the issue or development you want to address. It does not have to be sophisticated. A simple folder is often sufficient. The key thing is for the kit to have relevant background information and material that you will not have time to talk about at the press conference.

A press kit usually contains the following:

- A press release that summarises the key issues to be addressed at the press conference.
- Background information about the issue (e.g. related research reports, statistics, historical background, and clippings of related news stories).
- A list and short biographies of the people who will address the journalists and field questions.
- Relevant action photographs (both colour and black and white).
- The organisation's brochures and fact sheets.

Inviting the media to a press conference

This is where your previous interactions with the media come in handy. If you have not already developed a comprehensive contact list for news editors or news managers as well as senior or trusted reporters at both electronic and print media outlets, now is the time to develop one. Ensure that it contains the right contact details, including correct titles and names. You may also want to include reporters who have covered similar issues more recently.

The invitation letter should follow the format of the press release and provide adequate information about the time and location of the press conference. But be careful not to include too much information especially if you are not sure about how compelling the issue you want to talk about at the press conference is. You should create enough interest in the press conference without providing details that could make editors prejudge it as inconsequential.

Send the invitation out at least a week in advance. It is advisable to send both letter (mailed or faxed) and email invitations. You should follow up the invitations by telephone to confirm that all invited media outlets received them and that they will be sending representatives. Be sure to make phone contacts again on the morning of the press conference.

Preparing the venue for the press conference

Make sure at least a day before the press conference that the room in which you will hold it has enough chairs for all the invited journalists and that electrical outlets are in order. You should also ensure that you have working microphones, a table to seat those who will address the journalists, a podium for the moderator (and those who will address the journalists, in case they do not want to do so from their chairs). You should have an attendance register, and you can also prepare some light refreshments.

The Big Day

On the day of the press conference, go through the following steps:

- Have someone telephone the media houses to confirm that their representatives will be joining you.
- Have someone to welcome the journalists as they arrive.
- Invite the journalists for a quick registration (write their name, the organisation they represent, and contact information).
- Hand out a press kit to each journalist who arrives.
- At the appointed time, the panellists (those who are supposed to address the journalists) should take their seats behind the table facing the journalists.
- Check the registration book to make sure that representatives of what you consider to be key media houses have signed in.
- Let the moderator take charge by welcoming the journalists and introducing the issue and those who will address the media.
- Try to start the proceedings no later than 10 minutes after the scheduled time. You should only delay proceedings a little longer if most invited journalists have not yet arrived but have confirmed they are on their way.
- Record the proceedings for your own records. You may also provide copies of the recordings to media outlets whose representatives came late or were unable to make it to the press conference.
- The moderator should invite the key person to make a presentation of not more than 10 minutes. If there are panellists, each should be given no more than five minutes.
- After all the presentations, the moderator should invite questions from the journalists.
- Formal proceedings should last between 45 minutes and an hour.
- You and your team should stay behind for any informal conversations with interested journalists. This is an opportunity to clarify issues one-on-one.

How to conduct yourself at the press conference

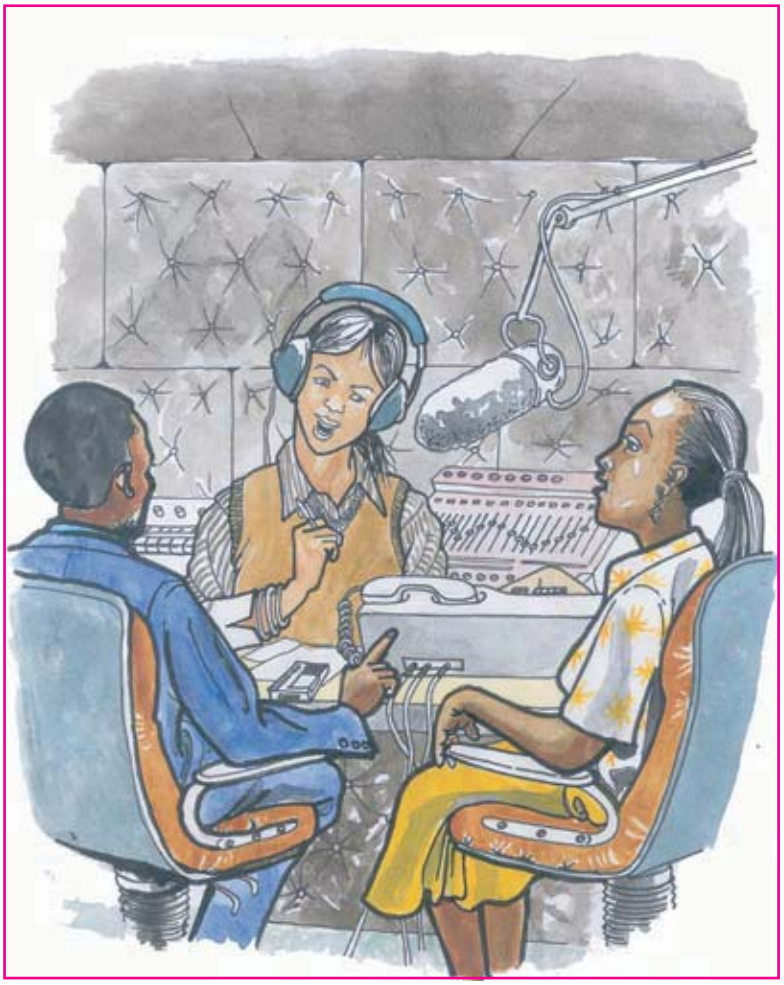
- If you or the members of the panel you are appearing with have not addressed a press conference before, a rehearsal would be a good idea. Go through your presentation to ensure that it is clear and that you can present it within the allocated time. Also try to anticipate the kind of questions you will be asked and think about appropriate answers.
- Dress appropriately; do not appear too casual.
- Use clear and concise language. Avoid jargon and technical terms. If you have to use them, do so sparingly and explain them in simple terms.
- Raise and explain issues without sounding condescending.
- Truth always! If you do not have an answer to a tough question, do not be afraid to say so. Alternatively, you could refer the reporter to a colleague or promise to answer the question later.
- Do not allow yourself to get unnerved by hostile or tough questions. Politely refocus the exchange to the issue at hand.
- If a reporter asks the same question differently, take a hint that your answer was either not understood or was unconvincing. Answer the question more thoroughly without appearing to be shifting positions.
- Stay focused on the key issue, avoiding inflammatory language and controversial opinions that could bury your message and produce sensational coverage.
- Do not allow your body movements to distract your message.
- Stay calm and avoid the appearance of nervousness.

Media Interviews

Before granting a media interview, decide whether it is necessary and whether you are an appropriate choice of interviewee. Answering the following questions will help you reach a quick decision on whether to grant the interview:

- What do I want to communicate?
- What will I achieve?
- What is the audience for the interview?
- Who is the reporter?
- What is the medium? Is it a newspaper, radio, or television interview?
- What issues will be discussed?
- Where will the interview take place?
- How long will the interview take?
- When will the story be published or aired?
- Is the interview a stand-alone Q&A or is it part of a longer story or feature?
- Will the interview be aired live or will it be taped?

Preparing for the interview



Once you have decided to grant the interview, preparation is the key to success. Take care to:

- Agree to a time and venue that you are comfortable with. If it is a phone interview, consider asking the reporter to call you back in a few minutes. This should allow you time to think about what you want to put across.
- Understand your audience. Ask the reporter about the audience for the story. Is it a mass audience or a specialised audience? Knowing the audience will help you tailor the message to suit their interests, including the choice of language.
- Understand the interview format. Will it be a stand-alone Q&A, or part of a longer feature that includes interviews with other sources?
- Prepare three to five key talking points that will capture your message. In outlining these points, consider the issue, its significance or relevance, its real or potential impact, and its relation to current national and global trends.
- Study the style of the interviewer. For longer interviews, especially on radio and television, it would do you good to have a good sense of the style of the interviewer. Is he or she aggressive with his or her subjects? Does he or she interrupt interviewees? Is he or she usually prepared for interviews? Is he or she conversant with the subject matter?

- Anticipate tough questions and prepare responses. Take off time to think about three to five difficult questions that you could be asked. Alternatively, you can have a colleague play devil's advocate by asking you tough questions that could arise during your interview. Take this time to prepare or think about responses to those questions.
- Practice your message or rehearse. The most important point about practice is to ensure that you can get your key points across within a short time.
- Go to the interview with a summary of your key points. This could also include statistical and other evidence that you may not provide off your head.
- Offer the interviewer background material. In some cases, it may be a good idea to provide the interviewer with such material ahead of the interview. This could make for a more interesting interview that is based on informed questioning.

During the interview

- ***Be a good listener.*** Do not rush to give an answer before the interviewer has completed the question. If a question is vague, ask the interviewer to repeat it or tell him or her politely that you have not understood the question.

- ***Summarise, then explain.*** A good strategy for answering questions involves providing summaries (usually in one sentence) then explaining them, sometimes upon the prompting of the interviewer. For example, "The results of our study suggest that all Ugandans should be worried." Interviewer: "Why is that?" Interviewee: "Because the rate of our population growth far exceeds the rate of economic growth and there is no evidence that this pattern is going to change soon." When an explanation is a little long, it helps to reiterate the point at the end, as in, "So, as I was saying, Ugandans should be worried."

- ***Take time to think.*** Do not feel obliged to respond immediately before you have internalised the question or given some quick thought to your answer. Allow yourself at least five seconds to think before you respond. But do not stretch the thinking. This is not an examination.

- ***Keep it simple.*** Avoid jargon and technical terms. If they are unavoidable, minimise their usage, and where you use them, explain them using everyday terms.

- ***Adopt a conversational tone.*** This is best achieved by using short sentences and avoiding long, complex phrases. Also, use clear and concise language.

- ***Exude enthusiasm.*** Show some excitement. Enjoy the moment. Employ some humour. Be interesting and engaging. This rubs off the reporter the right way and inspires him or her into asking the right questions. On the other hand, a reporter will be put off by a bored demeanour.

- ***Avoid curt "yes" or "no" answers.*** Where you give such an answer, explain or emphasize what you have already said.

- ***Keep it short.*** While "yes" or "no" answers are discouraged, this is not a license for you to ramble on. Be brief, but go on long enough for you to put your message across clearly. Be succinct. Do not feel obliged to continue talking simply because the interviewer has no follow-up question. You may feel awkward for those few seconds, but the joke would be on him or her. If you feel you have answered a question adequately, stop and wait for the next question. Forcing yourself to break the silence could make you say something unintended.

- ***Stay focused on the key message.*** Sometimes a reporter will raise peripheral or difficult questions that threaten to divert your focus. Answer them politely and get back to your key message. Do not stray from the topic.

- ***Remain friendly or cordial.*** Do not get hostile, even when a reporter asks difficult questions or questions that are silly in your estimation. Show respect while remaining firm.

- ***Be truthful.*** Do not tell lies or deliberately feed the interviewer with inaccuracies. Where you are not sure of the answer, refer the question to a colleague (in case you are on a panel) or simply tell the reporter you do not know, or you are not in a position to answer the question immediately. Do not speculate or guess.

- ***Take charge.*** Try your best to retain some control of the proceedings. Granted, the interviewer has a lot more power to dictate the direction of the interview, but do not allow him or her to get you off your overall objective and focus. For instance, if he or she interrupts before you complete your response and asks a new question, you can allow him or her to complete the interruption and then return to the incomplete response you were giving to the previous question. Also, answer questions on your terms. Do not allow the interviewer to put words in your mouth. Correct the interviewer when this happens by repeating or clarifying what you were saying. If there is an important issue that the interviewer has not raised, bring it up towards the end of the interview.

- ***Do not answer hypothetical questions.*** Generally, hypothetical questions are to be avoided. They are one way interviewers force answers from their subjects on controversial issues. Politely turn them down.

- ***Provide evidence.*** Use examples, basic statistics (where appropriate), facts, quotes, and so on, to beef up your argument. Where you cannot memorise key information, refer to **a summary in** front of you.

Tips for broadcast interviews

Most of the general tips above will apply for both radio and television interviews. However, a few aspects of broadcast interviews are worth repeating separately for emphasis.

- ***Dress appropriately:*** Appearance is critical for television. Many viewers will judge your authority and credibility based on how you look. If you are going to be interviewed in the studio or in another formal setting, dress formally. These days "smart casual" is also acceptable. But it is important to show some respect to your audience through the choice of your dressing. At the same time, you should choose clothing that makes you feel comfortable. Do not attempt a full suit if you are used to and are more comfortable in formal African wear. Avoid flashy, bright or shouting colours as they usually become unnecessary distractions. Dressing is not that critical for radio interviews given that radio is a medium for the ear. But remember that your appearance could influence the interviewer's attitude towards you.

- ***Avoid excessive makeup:*** While makeup is appropriate for television (some studios will even offer to do some make-up work on you before the interview), try not to overdo it. Try to look natural.

- ***Avoid shiny and dangling jewellery:*** This could cause reflections from the studio lights and interfere with microphones.

- ***Relax:*** Do not think about the cameras and microphone. Think about the opportunity to share your knowledge with the public, and remember also that you are probably more familiar with the issue(s) you will be discussing than most of the people who will be listening or watching.

- ***Use gestures sparingly:*** Gestures can relieve you of stress, but you should not overuse them. In particular, avoid gestures that show stress like touching your face frequently, pulling at your hair, and tapping on a table continuously.

- ***Look at the interviewer in one-on-one TV interviews:*** This comes off more naturally than when you look into the camera. You should look into the camera only when the interview is conducted on phone but you are filmed on site. In both studio and remote TV interviews, avoid looking at the floor or the ceiling.

- ***Talk to one person:*** While you should be aware that the interview has an audience, treating it as a conversation with the person who is interviewing you will create a more relaxed, conversational tone.[11]

- ***Do not speak too fast:*** Viewers and listeners may tune out if they cannot catch up with your speaking rate. At the same time, however, be careful not to speak too slowly as this too could bore the audience.

- ***Try to remain still in your chair:*** Unnecessary movement, including swivelling or rocking, may not only make you look jittery, it could also take you out of range of the camera.

The Talk Show

11 CIHR. The Research Media Partnership. http://www.cihr.gc.ca/e/2169.html

The radio and television talk show has become quite popular in Eastern Africa. The talk show owes part of its popularity to audience participation in the programme (through call-ins, fax, email and SMS) as well as the spontaneity associated with it. It is an important media tool that researchers should take advantage of. The interview tips discussed earlier will equally apply to the talk show situation.

One major difference is that many talk shows provide for the live participation of the audience. Therefore, the researcher will be facing not only the studio interviewer but also callers. Faceless 'interviewers' sometimes do not play by the rules. Some callers will insult you brutally or ask questions that are not related to the topic of discussion. Dealing with them successfully requires you to keep calm and to stay positive. Think about their calls as an opportunity for you to share your ideas with a wider audience. Note down everything that each caller says and respond to them professionally. Thank them where necessary, and correct them politely where they have gone wrong. Stay focused on the main subject at all times.

The standard talk show is typically devoted to public affairs, however defined, and ordinarily addresses topical issues in the news. However, there are variations on the talk show format in various countries in Eastern Africa. Going by current practices, talk shows are normally initiated by broadcast organisations as part of their routine news programming. In some instances, they are conducted as publicity and as public information dissemination tools; in other instances they are used as an advertorial (advertising-editorial) tool, that is, as commercial messages packaged to appear like news. These are the types of talk shows that are sponsored and normally paid for. There is no space to go into the merits and demerits of this approach. Development researchers who ever consider using the talk show as a research dissemination tool would be well advised to focus on exploiting and spotlighting the inherent newsworthiness of their work in order to draw the attention of the media, rather than buy their way onto the air.

By and large, you should prepare for and handle the radio and TV talk show pretty much the same way you would deal with a media interview. There are nevertheless some critical elements that are unique to the talk show. In most cases, you will feature on a talk show along with two or three other participants on a panel moderated by a host who is a journalist or one who is not a journalist but a reputed interviewer. Like interviewers, talk show hosts differ widely in their moderator or interviewer styles, and in their level of knowledge about and personal interest in the subject under discussion.

The common denominator though is that the role of talk show host in Eastern Africa is highly regarded and many hosts or moderators have become celebrities in their own rights. This is because being invited to participate in a talk show that has a vast audience, especially on radio, can confer status on an individual in ways that other media formats cannot. It is also for this reason that the most successful talk shows tend to be those that are high on conflict and those that pit controversial individuals or individuals with opposing viewpoints against each other. On the face of it, these tendencies seem to put development researchers at a disadvantage. On the other hand, being aware of them is the best starting point when considering the viability of using a talk show to disseminate development research.

Opinion Article

Opinion articles are commentaries written either by newspaper staff writers, including regular columnists, or guest writers who have something compelling to say. Opinion articles are sometimes referred to as "op-ed" articles because in many newspapers they are published "opposite the editorial."

Most newspapers solicit opinion articles from people who they believe can write about particular subjects authoritatively. Many other opinion articles are unsolicited. The editors choose to publish them because they are topical (about subjects already in the news), interesting, well written, original, persuasive or strong in argument, laced with humour, contrarian, and often authoritative (or written by people who are credible in their fields).

Good opinions highlight problems, showcase progress, and/or propose solutions. In most newspapers in Eastern Africa, the limit is generally 750 words, although longer opinions (usually not more than 1,200 words) with powerful arguments and evidence are occasionally published.

Many newspapers these days require guest writers to accompany their articles with mug shot (passport-type) pictures, which are usually published below the headline. If you submit an op-ed article, provide a good picture and include a short biography with your contact information at the end of the article.

Before sending an opinion article

Before deciding to send an opinion article to a newspaper or magazine, consider the following questions among others:

- ***Do I have something compelling to say?*** Not everything goes. Your opinion must be about an aspect of your research that is topical or current; an issue that will generate reader interest and further debate; an issue that is socially significant.

- ***What am I bringing to the table?*** Are you going to add value to the debate? Do you have new arguments, evidence, examples, and solutions or are you simply repeating what others have already said?

- ***Have I done some reporting?*** Are you simply writing whatever pops into your mind? Are you spewing opinions that are not based on the facts or the evidence? Have you cared to report those facts or evidence?

- ***What am I trying to accomplish?*** Are you writing simply to steam off because you are angry? Are you writing to generate a change in policy or response from officialdom? Are you writing to explain or correct distortions? Are you writing to educate the public? Or are you writing simply because it gives you a kick? Your motivation generally determines the nature and direction of your article.

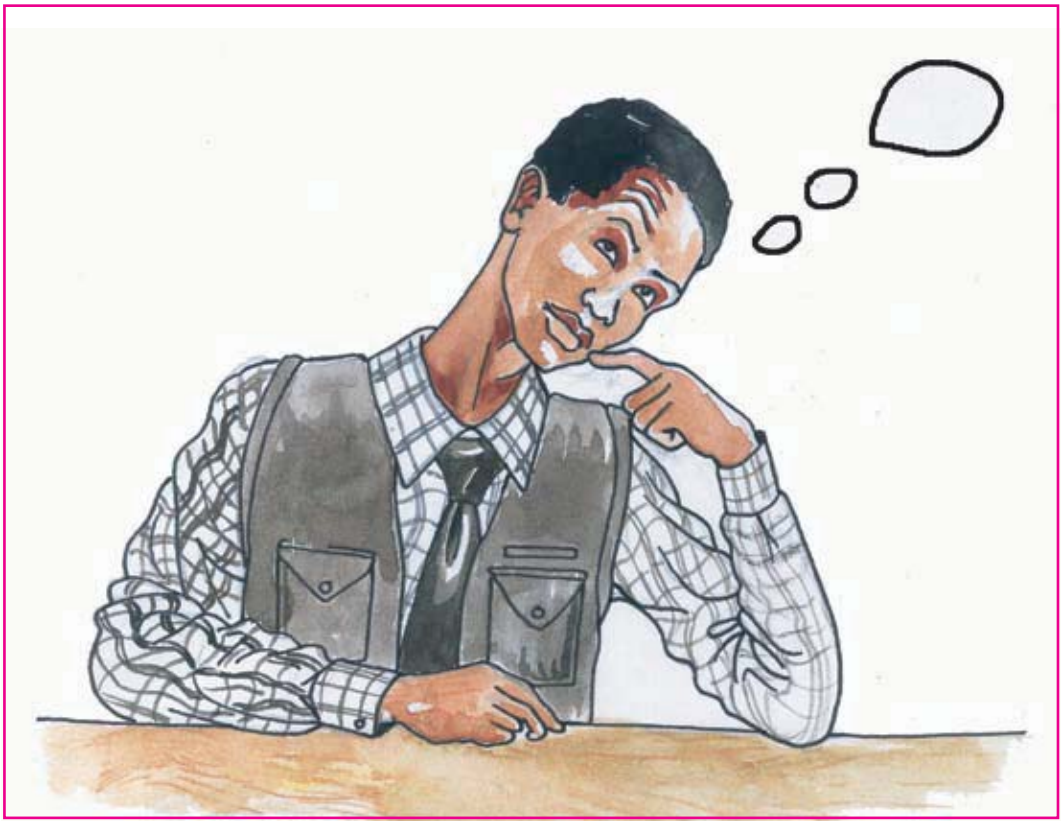
- ***Have I considered counter arguments?*** What will opponents of my position raise in criticism? Have I attacked my own standpoint? Will my position survive the ferocious scrutiny of others?

- ***What is my audience?*** Generally, most newspapers in Eastern Africa are mass oriented. That is, their audiences include people from all strata in society (the elite, the working class, and so on). A common problem with researchers, especially those from academic backgrounds, is that they tend to write for their small academic communities forgetting that the newspapers in which they want their articles to appear target average readers.

- ***Does it make sense?*** Others may not agree with your opinion, but does it make sense? Is it logical? Does it flow from the facts or evidence you have presented?

- ***Is it interesting?*** Is this an article an average reader will enjoy reading or is it mired in jargon that will only interest those in your field?

Tips on opinion writing



- ***Talk to the op-ed editor:*** Find out about the news organisation's policy on opinions. You could also ask whether they would be interested in opinions relating to your research area.

- ***State your focus:*** Provide a clear sense of what your article is about in the first three paragraphs.

- ***Provide evidence:*** Use concrete examples and anecdotes to illustrate your opinion.

- ***Do some reporting:*** Your article should not simply be a series of opinions. These should be based on facts or evidence which you should report.

- ***Keep it short:*** Aim for not more than 750 words, but do not write simply to fill the space. If you can say what you want to say in 500 words, perfect.

- ***Write simply:*** Remember this is not academic writing. Avoid formal language, academic jargon, and technical terms (e.g. "This article explores the promise and limits of the Internet in a developing country"). You may use some jargon and technical terms where you feel they add value, but explain them in simpler terms. Avoid scholarly citation (e.g. "Sachs (2004) argues convincingly…"). If you must cite him, write something along these lines: "The American economist and development activist, Jeffrey Sachs, has argued convincingly…"

- ***Be innovative:*** Don't be scared of creativity.

- ***Write short sentences and paragraphs:*** Researchers and academics generally use longer paragraphs. Newspaper writing on the other hand strives for short sentences and short paragraphs which carry one idea at a time.

- ***Don't pack too many ideas:*** Focus on a few ideas and develop them convincingly. Sometimes even one idea is enough. Remember you cannot exhaust all dimensions to an issue in just 750 words.

- ***Don't be wishy-washy:*** Take a position and support it persuasively. This does not preclude raising counter-arguments from potential opponents and then shooting them down in your article.

- ***Be original:*** Avoid clichés, those overused phrases. Here are some examples: "Burn the midnight candle," "Blessing in disguise," "Leave no stone unturned," "Light at the end of the tunnel," "Spreading like wild fire," and "Tip of the iceberg."

- ***Keep it interesting:*** If, say, you are contributing a piece on what your research has discovered about the effects of corruption on service delivery to the poor, draw analogies to help your readers visualise the magnitude of the loss in terms of numbers of health units, classrooms, etc that the stolen funds could have built.

- ***Use nouns and strong verbs:*** Adjectives and adverbs rarely add vigour to a story. "The *blare* from the disco" is more compelling than "The *very loud noise* from the disco."

- ***Use active, not passive voice:*** The active voice means you start with the subject performing the action and end with the object. *Passive*: "The research project has been hailed by leading African economists." *Active*: "Leading African economists have hailed the research project." *Passive*: "It has been shown by numerous studies that heavy users of the media are more likely to participate in public life." *Active*: "Numerous studies show that heavy users of the media are more likely to participate in public life."

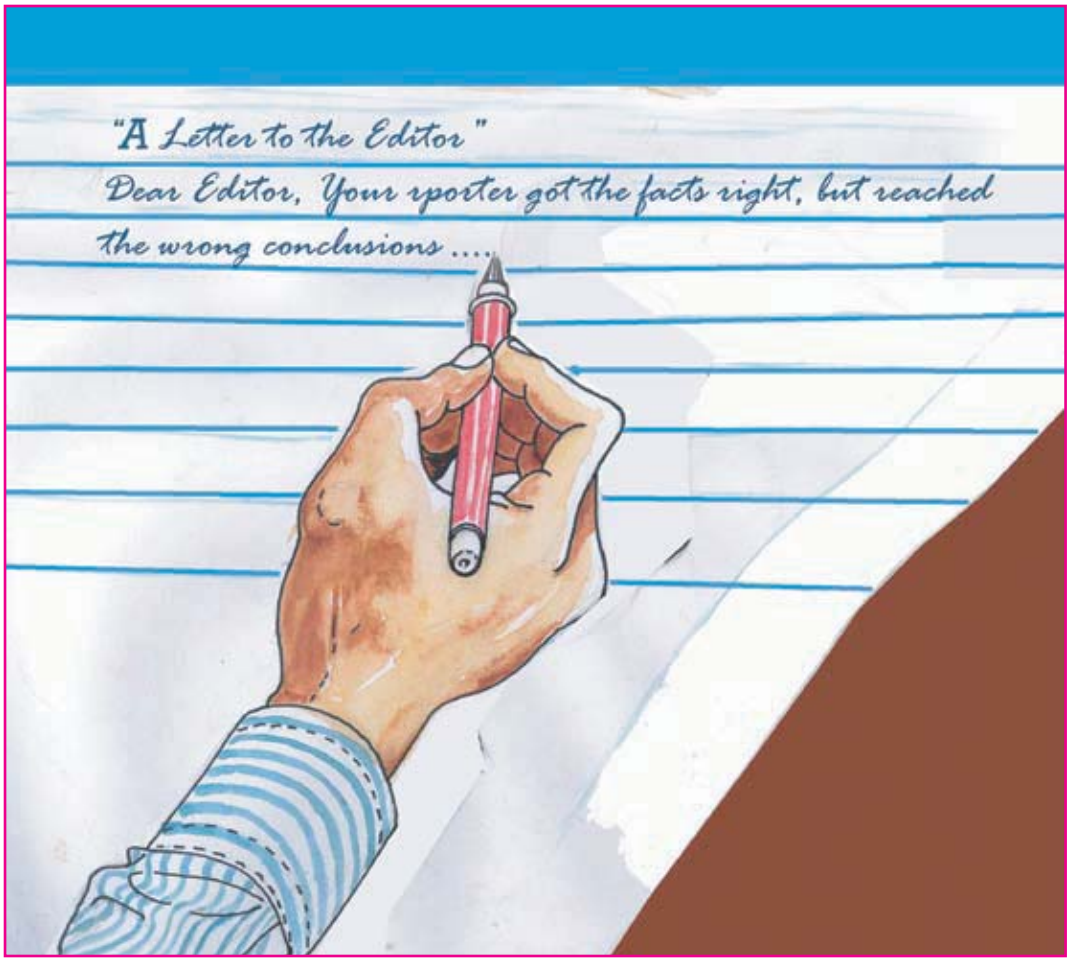
- ***Be concise:*** Avoid redundancies and wordy expressions. *Wordy*: "At this particular juncture, the University Council's proposed salary increment makes it incumbent upon us to decide whether or not to end the strike." *Concise*: "The University Council's proposed salary increment now forces us to decide whether to end the strike." The following wordy phrases could all be substituted with "because": "As a result of," "due to the fact that," "for the reason that," "on account of," and "on the grounds that."

- ***Avoid using qualifiers:*** A good example is "very." Qualifiers sap the strength and power from your sentences.

- ***End with a compelling conclusion:*** Make it memorable. It could be a forward-looking solution or simply a memorable observation that ties in neatly with your introduction or focus paragraph.

- ***Rewrite:*** And then rewrite some more.

Letter to the Editor



Letters to the editor are another common type of opinion article. Newspaper readership research has shown that readers' letters are a very popular feature with audiences. Letters to the editor provide a good opportunity for researchers to comment on issues in the news that are related to their research, including correcting distortions.

Tips on letters to the editor

- Make your case or state your opinion as early as possible.
- Provide evidence to support your opinion.
- Conclude with a memorable sentence or paragraph.
- Be brief. The longest letter in many newspapers will not exceed 250 words. Generally, you should not write more than 200 words. Some of the most powerful opinions we have read were only one paragraph long (about 25 words)!
- Be clear and concise. As in other media writing, avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Use short sentences.
- Use strong nouns and verbs instead of adjectives and adverbs.
- If you are responding to a specific article, cite the headline and the date of its publication.
- Address the letter to the editor.
- Sign the letter and provide your contact details. While many newspapers no longer pay as much importance to the signature in this email era, they will rarely publish letters without the contact details of the author.
- You can post, fax, or email the letter. Use the fastest available means of delivery.

The Supplement

A supplement refers to dedicated space featuring a collection of custom-written articles as well as advertising and promotional content usually focusing on a specific theme, business sector, or geographical area. It can be initiated by the publisher or by the sponsor. The space a supplement occupies in a newspaper or magazine can range from one to tens of pages and is paid for by the sponsor(s) of the focal theme at special advertising rates.

In most cases, several sponsors who share a common interest in a theme pool their resources to underwrite a supplement. This normally applies to commemorative supplements that are designed to mark special events or occasions like the International Labour Day. Thus, interested employers and labour organisations can buy space to advertise or promote their businesses and activities.

Often times space is bought on the condition that the publisher will run specially written articles about the sponsor or advertiser, or will allow the sponsors or advertisers to supply the content they wish to run alongside their ads. There are also instances where a supplement is sponsored by and features a single sponsor.

Development researchers considering supplements to promote their research must consider some serious issues:

- One, to be effective, the content of a supplement must be credible. Yet, because articles that appear in supplements are naturally customised to promote the sponsor's message, discerning readers (and we have to assume that most are) might find their credibility questionable.
- Two, to be persuasive, the content of a supplement should visually blend into the rest of the newspaper or magazine. However, it is journalistically unethical to pass off advertising and promotional material as legitimate editorial content. In fact, media practice dictates that advertising and promotional content be clearly labelled and graphically presented as such.
- Three, everybody knows that supplements are paid for. Although journalists are routinely assigned to write the promotional articles that appear in supplements, many resent the practice because they perceive it as undermining their professionalism.

On the foregoing grounds, supplements seem compromised at the outset. Nevertheless, they are virtually a fixture in newspapers in Eastern Africa. At the same time, experience shows that supplements are arguably the most abused promotional tool. Perhaps this is because many sponsors find it is easier and more expedient to buy space to publicise their messages than to carefully think through the newsworthiness of their material and to plan to translate it into legitimate news or public information. On the radio and television side, sponsored talk shows can be viewed as the broadcast equivalent of the supplement.

Personal experience and insider information suggest that very few people ever read a supplement. The reasons are there for all to see.

Many supplements are tedious, blandly written, haphazardly designed, and too official.

Some try too hard to impress and quite a few are, most annoyingly, printed in microscopic font sizes.

That said, there is no doubt that when prudently planned and creatively produced, the supplement can be a valuable dissemination tool for development research. But the decision to use a supplement should not, in the first place, be made casually.

LEARNING FROM A SUCCESS STORY

In 2005, a team of researchers from the Economic Policy Research Centre in Uganda, the Overseas Development Group in UK, and the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway published the results of a study on rural taxation in Uganda.[12] The study was commissioned by the Local Government Finance Commission (LGFC) of Uganda's Ministry of Local Government and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID).

12 Bahiigwa, G., Ellis, F., Fjeldstad, O., & Iversen, V. (2004). Uganda rural taxation study: Final report. Kampala: Economic Policy Research Centre, Overseas Development Group, & Chr. Michelsen Institute.

The report that detailed the study was concerned with five poverty-reduction aspects of local government taxation, namely:

> **income distribution effects of existing rural taxes; resource allocation and growth effects of rural taxes; debates and policy issues concerning the [graduated] G-tax; privatised tax collection (tenders) and how it works in practice; and proposals for reform of the local taxation system.**

In capturing the essence of their findings, the researchers reported that

> **"...the research uncovers serious flaws in the design and practice of existing local government taxation regimes in rural areas. These flaws include serious revenue leakages in the private tax collection system (tax tendering); negative impacts on income distribution due to the steep regressiveness of local tax systems; and harmful impacts on local economic growth caused by local taxes and charges which distort relative prices on goods and services and differ widely between sectors, and across councils. Moreover, the lack of effective linkages between taxes collected and services delivered by local governments legitimises tax evasion and contributes to undermining state-citizen relations."**

The findings of the study obviously had far-reaching development, policy, and political implications. The LGFC wanted to ensure that these findings and their implications were widely disseminated among, and clearly understood by, local and national leaders and citizens alike. This is because the findings were expected to influence the measures that would be designed to reform local taxation systems, thus impacting the rural economies which support the livelihoods of most Ugandans.

With DfID's support and EPRC's technical backup, LGFC launched a public information and advocacy campaign to promote the study. A strategic communication firm with expertise in media relations and public information was hired to help plan and implement the campaign on behalf of the LGFC.

The communication strategy that was drawn up for the campaign revolved around a combination of media channels – radio, TV, newspapers, print materials, and face-to-face. It employed various formats, modes, and tools of communication and news management including talk shows, interviews with reporters, a backgrounder (in form of a synopsis of the study), a fact sheet, three policy briefs, a press release, talking points, an information kit, press conferences, as well as dissemination workshops all over the country. The information kit contained all the print materials and was distributed among journalists to facilitate their reporting and among stakeholders to support discussions during the workshops.

The communication experts, the researchers, and the LGFC technocrats collaborated closely in developing the backgrounder, fact sheet, policy briefs, press release, and talking points.

> **Significantly, the campaign engaged the media at all points by inviting journalists to events and furnishing them with all the information that was availed to the policy makers and other stakeholders.**

Backgrounder

The backgrounder was a four-page (A4 size) pamphlet that summarised the study in about 1,000 words under six sub-headings and key themes: introduction; the regressive nature of rural taxes; resource allocation and growth effects of taxes; debates and policy issues regarding graduated tax; tax tendering in Uganda; proposals for reform; and references for more information. The backgrounder was especially valuable considering that the research report was a 43-page document. It was predictable that probably only economic experts, high-level policy makers, and specialists would have the motivation and find the time to read and internalise the elaborate analyses. By highlighting and graphically illustrating the main issues and conclusions of the study in digestible language and in an accessible format, the backgrounder did a good job of communicating complex ideas and detailed information to an audience of lay people including the media.

Fact sheet

The one-page fact sheet highlighted major aspects of the tax study in bullets and one-liners (single short sentences). The facts were presented under four sub-headings: overall findings; purpose of the study; areas of concern; and key findings (condensed in five points). Like the backgrounder, the fact sheet was meant as a quick guide for lay audiences to the main findings of the study.

Policy briefs

Each two-page policy brief was identified with a unique number and title that indicated the central issue it dealt with. Policy Brief No.1: "Graduated tax debate: Implications for local government revenue and service delivery." No.2: "Market dues and business licenses: Implications for rural growth and poverty reduction." No.3: "Privatized tax collection in local governments: Implications for local revenue, poverty reduction and service delivery." The policy briefs, as the name signifies, were meant for policy and decision makers at the central and local government levels. They provided them with summaries and breakdowns of the evidence they would need in considering potential policy reforms.

Talking points

Nine talking points were developed and printed on a single sheet under three themes: graduated tax debate; market dues and business licenses; and privatized tax collection in local government. The talking points were designed to guide policy makers in discussing the reforms to the systems of local revenue collection on radio and TV talk shows. The talking points would help ensure that consistent and coherent messages went out to the citizens, local leaders, and decision makers regarding the recommended reforms. In other words, all officials who would speak to the public advocating for these reforms had to be reading from the same page as it were. That is a fundamental principle of strategic communication. Although the talking points were created with radio and TV talk shows in mind, they would also be useful to officials during interviews with journalists.

Press release

A press release was prepared and distributed to the media a day before the launching of nation-wide workshops at which local government officials, private tax collectors, and civil society representatives were to deliberate on the findings and policy implications of the rural tax study. The press release used the anticipated 600 strong attendance at these meetings as its news angle. Then it cited a few gripping statistics to hook the interest of news editors.:

> **"The study found that the smallest rural businesses pay almost 50% of their gross profit in tax while the largest rural businesses pay only 5%"**

Information kit

All the aforementioned materials were collated in a folder that was labelled "Information Package on the Uganda Rural Taxation Study." This information kit served a dual purpose. It was used as a media relations tool and also handed out to all workshop participants as a set of working documents and background information.

The moral of the story

The LGFC's media and public information campaign suggests that development researchers can have a measurable impact on public policy and development discourse by creatively exploiting the media to disseminate their research. Obviously, it took the LGFC a tremendous amount of resources (time, money, expertise, institutional support, influence, etc) to realise the outcomes described above. Yet, regardless of the resources that were expended, what ultimately made the difference was that the LGFC and its collaborators applied some of the 'best' principles and practices in media and communication planning. It is possible to reproduce similar outcomes, if on a smaller scale, by borrowing from the ideas that this handbook offers.

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