



## **CHANGING LIVES: Making Research Real Roundtable**

Held At:

Mercure Hotel, Randburg South Africa

21 – 22 February 2011

## ***Executive Summary***

This report is a summary of a roundtable convened by IPS Africa on 21-22 February in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Changing Lives: Making Research Real Roundtable was convened to share experiences, learn lessons on disseminating research through the media, identify best practices and develop guidelines for researchers and journalists.

The Changing Lives project is funded by DFID and aims to encourage the use of media as a way to disseminate research that is often not covered and, in so doing, promote research uptake.

The first day of the meeting was divided into four sessions – Reporting Research: Challenges and Successes, Case Studies examining health research uptake, and New Media vs. Traditional media in disseminating and best practices. The second day was practical and allowed participants to develop a checklist for journalists on reporting research and to make some recommendations for taking the Changing Lives Project further.

The meeting brought together researchers, IPS project staff and journalists and some communications experts from various African countries.

## ***Key Issues***

### ***Reporting Research – Successes and Challenges***

- IPS reported that the 'Changing Lives: Making Research Real' project had provided the organisation with a platform to test various story forms, including online, radio, slideshows and video to engage policymakers in research and placing focus on a subject not usually regarded as newsworthy. IPS found many challenges in reporting research: It was difficult to get researchers to engage with the media; for reporters it is also very difficult to engage with the research, identify a human-interest angle and to write it in an interesting way that captures the depth of the research. As a result, there was some reluctance on the part of reporters and suspicion of media on the part of researchers.
- Finding news entry points was a huge challenge given that reporters are often required to provide a human face to the research. The use of new media provided new entry points for stories: slide shows provided a good way of disseminating figures and facts while social media provided new ways of promoting the stories generated by the project.
- Radio, while widely accessed on the continent, remains underutilised. However, the new challenge is how to disseminate the research using cell phones – either through short messaging systems or on mobi sites for Internet access - which most people have access to.
- In a survey undertaken by IPS to gather researchers' views on the media's potential to disseminate research, many researchers reported that media engagement was often guided by protocol within their organisations -- which journalists found frustrating. Researchers felt that there was a need to train journalists to help them

to cover research competently. Packaging research findings in ways that help journalists in writing their stories is crucial.

- The issue of timing is critical in news reporting. However, journalists were frustrated by researchers' reluctance to discuss their research until after the results had been peer reviewed and published. For the media, some of the stories lose their news value. The meeting stressed that for research to make news -- stories need to be timely; stories need to look at the impact the research has on people; and there needs to be a balance between the research and the impact.
- One major weakness outlined by researchers was that their institutions often lacked research communications strategies, which resulted in poor dissemination of research. Institutions such as the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa have set in motion a process that promotes better planning of research dissemination activities as well as resource allocation to support such activities.
- IPS underscored the importance of sustained coverage of research. This had the value of spotlighting research issues that are critical for Africa's development and increasing research uptake.
- In their monitoring of media coverage of research across Africa, Media Monitoring Africa discovered that research was not covered in detail, seldom went beyond statistics and in the majority, media never interrogated the validity of research methods and ethics. In their reporting many journalists failed to connect the dots, which resulted in stories that failed to link to previous or related research.
- It was noted that the HIV and AIDS pandemic has changed the way that journalists approach health research and how individuals approach their own personal health. While this was commendable, the meeting also recognised that the focus on HIV and AIDS reporting had resulted in the lack of attention to other critical health research reporting such as fistula, breast cancer, prostate cancer, diabetes and many others.
- New media, especially social networks, are providing new platforms for disseminating research. But some research institutions such as CSIR in South Africa are testing platforms such as MXIT to link researchers to students. However, most organisations are still reluctant to explore these channels because of fear that they can lose control over their research. Citizen journalism is also a growing phenomenon because of its ability to allow ordinary people to tell their own stories. However, issues of accuracy and ethics could be compromised as people try to get information out as quickly as possible.
- A challenge expressed during the meeting was related to the struggle between disseminating research and getting it right in the media. Further, the question needs to be addressed whether getting media to tell the story does indeed 'change lives' and whether the research being reported on is underpinned by some kind of ideological base towards 'changing lives'.
- The meeting also expressed concern that in some instances reporting of research is changing lives – in a negative way – because of the lack of knowledge, inability to analyse ethics and validity and the editorial policy of the news organisations reporting the issue.

## ***Key Lessons and Recommendations***

- ✓ **Changing people's lives** - There has to be ongoing research on how the media impacts lives to determine whether or not making research real genuinely changes lives. The agenda-setting role of the media is to tell people what to think about, not how to think. When research is socially relevant and benefits people, it gets the necessary uptake.
- ✓ **Making research for media** - One of the things that Changing Lives project should be looking at is the fact that research is not made for media. The project should look into ways of ensuring it is. This could be fostered by participating in networks of researchers to inform them of the media's needs and what makes a good story.
- ✓ **Reporting research** requires that news organisations put to bed the tenet of "timeliness" as long as the story is relevant to Africa. In reporting research, journalists should recognise that science changes and therefore journalists should make all the connections and build on previous knowledge when reporting on research.
- ✓ **Ethics in reporting research** - In trying to make research interesting, journalists need to be cautious that they are not violating the rights of the people who are the subjects of the research that is being done.
- ✓ **Promote networks** -There is a need to develop a network to facilitate dialogue between researchers and journalists for more informed, in-depth and good quality reporting of research in Africa. In instances where researchers' networks exist, IPS could explore how journalists could tap into these. Such networks would allow journalist to access research information and researchers online. An application, which could be downloaded to a mobile phone, could be developed to facilitate this networking.
- ✓ **Follow Twitter** - Journalists should be encouraged to identify and follow Twitter discussions on interesting issues. This could be something that journalists could use to download useful comments and to contact some of the people who have contributed as sources. Twitter is also very useful as a source of information that one would have to do a lot of research for and which journalists might not even know where to find relevant information. Following UN organisations, research institutions, politicians, etc, provides so much invaluable information.
- ✓ **Research communication curriculum** -A useful strategy for awakening an interest in research journalism would be for IPS to design a module for a seminar to be used by journalism schools. IPS should also explore developing a short programme for civil society and parliamentarians on research communication as well as toolkit to build the capacity of the sources.
- ✓ **Develop a Google map** of research in Africa that shows where, what type of research is being conducted and by whom, including government research.



# CHANGING LIVES PROJECT

## Roundtable Detailed Report

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Changing Lives is an IPS project funded by DfID to encourage the use of media as a way to disseminate research that is often not covered and, in so doing, promote research uptake. The Changing Lives: Making Research Real Roundtable was convened to share experiences, learn lessons on disseminating research through the media, identify best practices and develop guidelines for researchers and journalists.

The two-day programme included presentation and discussion sessions on the following topics: reporting research – challenges and successes; case studies on health research uptake; new vs. traditional media in disseminating research; and best practices in south-south learning on day one. On the second day, participants engaged in a practical exercise to develop a checklist to guide journalists in reporting research and they also made recommendations on the way forward for the Changing Lives Project.

Participants to the workshop included media practitioners and representatives from research institutions from Africa. During introductions, participants shared their expectations, which ranged from how to cover the range of health approaches in terms of making research real and ways of reporting research in more newsworthy and interesting ways to encouraging the reading public to take an interest in science research.



*Above: Sarwat Husain (World Bank) poses a question to panellists at the Changing Lives Roundtable in Johannesburg.*

## 2. Reporting Research – Challenges and successes

### **Reporting Research**

*PAULA FRAY, IPS AFRICA REGIONAL DIRECTOR*



A background to IPS and to the Changing Lives project was provided as being to promote the understanding and use of research, noting that it has allowed IPS to test various story forms, including online, radio, slideshows and video to engage policymakers in research and placing focus on a subject not usually regarded as newsworthy. The aim is to increase reporting on research in newsworthy and interesting ways in order to increase research uptake.

IPS found many challenges in reporting research. These included difficulty in getting researchers to engage with the media and for reporters to engage with the research, to identify a human-interest angle and to write it in an interesting way that captures the depth of the research. As a result, there was some reluctance on the part of reporters and suspicion of media on the part of researchers. Training was therefore needed to get reporters to provide issue-based content.

Amongst the findings during the project implementation was that there had to be a news entry point -- something quite difficult when you require the reporters to provide a human face to the research.

The use of new media provided new entry points for the story: slide shows provided a good way of disseminating figures and facts while social media provided new ways of promoting the stories

Radio, while widely accessed on the continent, remains underutilised. However, the new challenge is how to disseminate the research using cell phones – either through short messaging systems or on mobi sites for Internet access - which most people have access to.

In talking to selected researchers (around Africa) to gather their views on making research real, one of the challenges was feedback. Many were reluctant to talk due primarily to issues of protocol. Only one-third responded to the survey. Those who responded felt that it was best if the media was engaged right from the beginning, explaining the research process and preparing simplified versions of the research report with less technical jargon. They also suggested partnering in training and including media personnel on their staff. However, the biggest challenge remains how to dispel suspicion of the media held by researchers.

In terms of generating stories, IPS Africa found that sustained coverage is critical. An example is IPS's sustained coverage of social grants, even though IPS does not have a specific project on that area. Other popular research areas have been science and water. There is need to look at how to narrow the focus on specific issues to increase the impact – that is, generating news that is used or followed up by other media. In addition, IPS identified partnerships as a successful strategy. IPS has therefore used platforms such as Highway Africa to speak about the Changing Lives project and is comfortable with others replicating the idea, as this is one way of increasing impact.

One of the reasons researchers do not want to engage with media is because they do not want their research “dumbed down” or treated disrespectfully. This can affect how people understand the research and even future research funding. As such, some trust has to be built. The more social the research, the more willing researchers are to engage. This, however, is not the case with science research. Nonetheless, there is often a lack of understanding amongst researchers as to why reporters want to talk to the people affected by their studies as the researchers feel that their research speaks for itself.

## ***Enhancing Research Utilisation at the HSRC***

*FAYE REAGON, HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL (HSRC)*



This presentation began with a background to the HSRC, noting that the research it provides attempts to change people’s lives of the people and as such, the HSRC has a slightly different mandate – a public mandate – compare to that of university research, for example. Among the HSRC’s objectives are to address developmental challenges covering a spectrum of research areas. The institution promotes evidence-based policy making; having an Africa focus; uptake of research; and ensuring that, from the outset, the research includes researchers and other stakeholders. The HSRC also seeks to build capacity, for example of researchers to understand the nexus between research and policy-making, and to build the capacity of media, communities, and others on how to use research.

Disseminating research is one of the HSRC’s key challenges and it needs to develop a focused strategy around communication of this research. Towards this end it has formed a unit that will focus specifically on this. Some of the tools for communications around research include making datasets accessible to the public that will allow them to do their own secondary analysis on the HSRC data. It also seeks to communicate research evidence by publishing and distributing the outputs of the research, translating the research into various formats and for various audiences and ensuring there is public debate around the research. It also seeks to build the bridge between research, policy and action. Impact assessment has been a particularly difficult area and it is one that the HSRC will focus on.

In communicating its research, the HSRC works on the principle that science communication is vital in supporting more informed decision-making by those in positions to influence change and that decision-making is strengthened when underpinned by timely and relevant information and data. There is recognition that the research communication is not a linear process.

Target audiences for HSRC’s research communications includes policy and decision-makers, communities, media and civil society. A varied dissemination method is employed which includes research (knowledge) translation -- change, synthesis and analysis of research findings -- an acceleration of the knowledge cycle.

Challenges are that while some of the research could be vital to policy making, it is not newsworthy. Getting the media to understand the importance of the research is one of the

areas that need to be improved and this is related to capacity issues within the institution. Part of this could be dealt with through having research communicators in place. However, not a lot of resources are put into the communications aspect of research. The difficulties that many researchers have in communicating their research and their focus entirely on the research and not the communication aspects of them is perhaps something that needs to be addressed right from the tertiary level. Similarly, media's desire for shortcuts needs to be addressed.

There has to be some work done on how to determine the reach of the HSRC's research and some of this could be determined through monitoring and evaluation.

## ***Lessons from Monitoring Media in Africa***

*WELLINGTON RADU, MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA (MMA)*

Media Monitoring Africa (formerly the Media Monitoring Project), was established to monitor the media coverage of South Africa's 1994 elections.

MMA has since conducted over 110 media monitoring projects covering wide-ranging issues from children, race, elections and HIV and AIDS.

Through its experience, MMA has determined that:

- **Media rarely reports anything in depth and seldom goes beyond statistics.** An example is the Gilead anti-AIDS gel trials in South Africa. The results were released at the 2010 AIDS Conference in Vienna, Austria and the media praised the research but never interrogated the ethics or the methodology or, in fact, that something like 30 percent of the women who underwent the tests became infected.
- **Media rarely interrogate the methods and validity of research;** and
- **They rarely discuss research in light of research that has previously been done.** Often, research is contradictory but media cannot pick up on that if they do not 'link the dots'.

The implication of the above is that the research gets wrongly publicised. A share of the blame needs to be placed on the researchers themselves. MMA suggests that what research institutions can do to mitigate this challenge is to have a clear media strategy from the onset of the project, make their research media friendly by 'speaking their language', even if this means developing an additional page that contextualises the research for that particular audience, and recognising that journalists work under a lot of pressure. If, as a research institution, the capacity to do this is not available internally, a professional should be contracted to do it. Research institutions also need to create rapport with specialist journalists and to provide them with results ahead of time but embargo its release.

MMA's own experience has been with the AVUSA launch, which had plenty of uptake and the Independent Newspapers launch, which was less successful, mainly because it was rushed. MMA learned from this to communicate with the parties involved, to not rush, make research media friendly.





## **Key issues arising from group discussion**

### ✓ **Assessing the validity of changing lives through media reporting on research**

A challenge expressed during group discussion was related to the struggle between disseminating research and getting it right in the media. Further, the question needs to be addressed whether getting media to tell the story does indeed ‘change lives’ and whether the research being reported on is underpinned by some kind of ideological base towards ‘changing lives’? There has to be ongoing research on how the media impacts lives so that we can determine whether or not making research real genuinely changes lives. One of the ways of making sure that lives are changed could be to use evidence based knowledge, an example being research to counter xenophobia.

The agenda-setting role of the media is to tell us things to think about, not to tell us how to think. What this tells us is that when research is socially relevant and benefits people, it gets the necessary uptake. An example of this is the research that resulted in the best rice variety for African growing conditions that received a lot of uptake.

### ✓ **Building media capacity on reporting research**

There is a danger that reporting on research is changing lives – in a negative way – because of the lack of knowledge, inability to analyse ethics and validity and the editorial policy of the news agency reporting the issue.

In terms of the non-academic nature of the media, this could be dealt with through the idea of engaging with specialised media/journalists. The question is how to prepare people to become specialists in reporting science

One of the things that Changing Lives should be looking at is the fact that research is not made for media and look into ways of ensuring it is. There is also the question of whether media has an issue with research generally or scientific research in particular. One of the reasons for this is the poor knowledge and understanding of science.

## **3. Case Studies: Health Research Uptake**

### ***Soul City Experience in Disseminating Research***

*DR SUE GOLDSTEIN, SOUL CITY*

The background to Soul City stems from the high infant mortality rate in South Africa in 1992 and some of this was related to information. Not that there wasn't good information available, but the information was largely not reaching the affected people. The apartheid education system, which discouraged people from learning maths and science and poor infrastructure – lack of access to potable water, electricity, etc., -- contributed to the problem.



Information was put out on how people could alleviate diarrhoea, for example, by giving out instructions on how to use a litre coke bottle to mix the solution. A follow-up study showed

that people did not have the relevant bottle and did not know how to translate a litre into a cup, which most have in their homes. Another was the lack of knowledge on what media to use to disseminate this information.

A study was done on what kind of media people were consuming and it showed then that on TV it was sport, news, soaps (particularly those aimed at women) dramas and, more currently, reality shows. On radio, it was dramas, news and sports. The study also showed that different media can carry different amounts and types of information, for example drama can present emotions, viewers identify with characters, they can show change over time and allow consumers to engage. The study also looked at who the target users of the information on oral rehydration would be, primarily parents, health workers, etc. Pre-testing was done with the target audience and evaluated.

A key area for Soul City was how critical ethics are to what you communicate – to question always whether you are doing harm. For example, the advertising of certain drugs, vitamins and even AIDS “cures” has had a harmful effect on the population. In the past, the argument was that the target group was not sufficiently sophisticated to understand health research and why they should not be taken in by some of the bogus drugs. Yet people do understand more than they are believed to. It is therefore important not to underestimate audiences.

Advocacy around policies and community action around research is very important. An example is HIV and male circumcision – how to communicate this. There is need to know what services are available – for example teen pregnancies. What services are available to the girls, who are the boys who are making them pregnant and how are they affected. Having supporting environments is critical. In the example of oral rehydration, its one thing to provide information on oral rehydration but clean water has to be available.

## ***Questions and Problems on HIV and AIDS***

*MERCEDES SAYAGUES, KNIGHT HEALTH FELLOW*



This presentation juxtaposed the ease of reporting on health from within a well-resourced news agency such as the UN’s IRIN Plusnews, which reports on HIV and AIDS, and the challenges of attempting to do the same within Mozambican newspapers. Drawing on her experience as the Portuguese editor of IRIN PlusNews, Sayagues highlighted what a privileged position this was because resources were available to pay reporters, timelines were not as tight as in a newsroom and an eager audience was available for the news outputs in the form of people living with HIV and AIDS, those who make a living from HIV and AIDS and those agitating around HIV and AIDS. The primary challenges here were to do with weak journalistic skills, mainly from the lusophone countries, and getting rid of stereotypes.

Later, embedded as a Knight Fellow within Savanna, a prestigious Mozambican weekly that is mainly read by policy makers, the challenges were related to a lack of money, limited numbers of journalists and knowledge and application of the basics of journalism. Savanna’s main focus is on stories to do with policy issues. It has published stories on the sale of illegal or fake medicines, a massive story on the Church of the Kingdom of God, which claims to be able to heal people and calls on people to deny any kind of drugs.

Now in her second year as a Knight Fellow, Mercedes is working with @Verdade, a newspaper distributed free in the poorer neighbourhoods of Maputo that has a special interest in social issues. @Verdade has the largest print run – 20 000 – in Mozambique and each paper is read by at least 10 people. The paper is well ahead in terms of use of new media – it has a twitter and Facebook presence and solicits and publishes SMS's and emails from readers. Given the circulation, they are considering doing a supplements and the process started with a survey with Verdade readers on their health information needs.

Reporting on health is a priority because there is a serious lack of health information and the health needs are very basic. This brings into question what kind of research is relevant for which people. For example, many people do not know what fistula is and, while equipment for testing for breast cancer, for example, has recently been donated; it is woefully inadequate to serve the country's population, as is the treatment.

An aspect of the HIV and AIDS pandemic that should be applauded is that it has changed the way that journalists approach health research and how individuals approach their own personal health. At the same time, there is need to begin focusing more on neglected diseases, such as prostate cancer, fistula, breast cancer and diabetes, among others.

## **Reporting on Health Research**

*NALISHA KALIDEEN, IPS CHANGING LIVES THEMATIC EDITOR*



Time is one of the biggest challenges in terms of reporting research – in terms of the time the research is released and getting a good quality story out of it. In the absence of this, stories could get old. This is instructive on the relationship between journalists and researchers; why researchers guard their research findings to ensure that it is published in journals before it goes into the mainstream media and the tensions this create between them. For many journalists, the focus is on the news angle and not so much the impact that the research could have.

An example from Changing Lives is a story that was pitched on the basis of a clinical study conducted in Botswana. The study found that pregnant and breastfeeding mothers given ARVs could reduce the incidence of mother to child transmission by 99%.

Unfortunately the research was two months old and there had to be a way to bring a fresher angle to it. This was done by looking at the impact the research had on people; to follow up to see what was being done with the research recommendations; and to find out from mothers if they were following the recommendations. Ultimately, the story managed to combine reporting research and the impact of research on people.

One of the outcomes of the story was the discovery that although this research was done in Botswana, many women did not know about it or had not fully accepted it although the WHO was disseminating the results all over the world. Doing the story was useful in bringing the research results to the people and finding out what people actually know.

Another example is the story on the release of the results of the anti-retroviral gel study at the World AIDS Conference in Vienna in 2010. Because the trials were conducted in South Africa, it was possible to do a story on how women were affected by the trial.

Lessons learnt from the project in terms of identifying research to report on are:

**Time** – stories need to be timeous;

**Impact** – stories need to look at the impact the research has on people; and

**Balance** – there needs to be a balance between the research and the impact.

## *Key issues from group discussion*

### ✓ **Researcher/reporter relations**

A key issue for researchers in terms of guidelines for interacting with the media is the lack of respect accorded to journalists. What is needed is more quality interaction between the journalists and the researchers. Journalists need to provide more interesting information and one way of doing so is to profile the researcher and find out, for example, how they feel about the research. Journalists have to be reminded to avoid jargon, use simple language and provide alternatives for very scientific language and terms. Journalists also need to be constantly reminded that the most important question they can ask is “why”. A useful strategy for awakening an interest in research journalism would be to design a model for a seminar to be used by journalism schools.

### ✓ **Timeliness and relevance in reporting research**

With agencies like IPS and with development related stories, it may be time to put to bed the tenet of “timeliness” as long as the story is relevant to Africa. The challenge though is that it is not just about publishing the story as IPS, but to get other agencies and outlets to publish or follow-up these stories.

The question then is how to take the story that no longer has timelines and make it newsworthy. One way of doing it is to bring a new angle. Another is that the researcher him/herself could be used in other stories – to comment based on the expertise that researchers collectively bring into the discourse. Another way of dealing with the timeliness challenge is to ask they “why” question. The research findings have multiple implications and each can be an angle on its own.

Old research or research that has been neglected can also be very valuable in terms of addressing a current problem. An example is the decline in HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe and the importance of asking “why” such a huge decline. The answer you would find is that it is because the original figures were inflated with UNAIDS providing upper and lower percentages and the media, striving to sell a story, complicit in always quoting the higher figure. Therefore, that became known as the average figure and why the decline now seems so dramatic

However, it is also important to recognise that science changes and that you are building on previous knowledge and it is important to question how to communicate that change.

### ✓ **Identifying angles**

Dissenting voices on research provide another angle for a story. When other scientists start questioning the research that can make for a good story.

Another way of identifying a research story is to find out if it relates to a current issue or a policy issue (testing of HIV in schooled, for example).

✓ **Ethics in reporting research**

In trying to make research interesting, journalists need to be cautious that they are not violating the rights of the people who are the subjects of the research that is being done. Do no harm – this is an ethics issue.

## 4. Panel Discussion: New Media Vs. Traditional Media



This session was opened with remarks by **TINUS DE JAGER**, IPS Multimedia Editor and **EMILY BROWN**, HOD Media Technology – Polytechnic of Namibia, followed by discussion.

Tinus De Jager questioned whether there is space for traditional media in light of the emergence of mobile information technology, acknowledging that the internet itself is an environment that was developed by researchers/scientists and now it is a platform that both researchers and journalists depend on a great deal for information and interaction.

However, with the rapid advances, what we are calling new media now – the Internet is no longer so new. Today, this means an IPS story in the form of a pod cast online could be regarded as a newspaper story with some sound. As a prediction of where the web is going, Web 3.0 might be a search engine you have on your website where you can create your own newspaper.

Further, miniaturisation for purposes of mobility is making wireless networks the most popular method of connecting to the web. If you have access to a cell phone you can get your message across. Currently the cell phone penetration is massive at 350 million (2008).

Many researchers have a strong net-based presence and if researchers can draw in journalists at that point and engage with them throughout the process it can make a difference, especially if they can share their ideas of what they think a good news story is. Tinus De Jager suggested this is one way that researchers and journalists can work together to define the story. The role of the researcher would be to define the story and the role of the journalist to tell the story.

The Internet is changing the way we access data and it is not so clear that the media is benefitting from this. Newspapers might have to adjust how they treat the information that comes available instantly, perhaps through more analysis.

Emily Brown pointed to the political protests in North Africa and the Middle East as an example of the power of online networking, noting that age cannot be overlooked as a factor. Young people do not have the fear that older people have of technology. That the governments of Bahrain, Libya and others are trying to block protests by blacking out the internet is a further sign of the power of new media as a mass communication tool that is capable of mobilising populations. It is difficult to regulate or monitor and thus seen as a threat to governments. Brown provided the example of Namibia where some politicians are calling for a ban on the publication of SMS pages by some newspapers, where the public gets to feedback on issues using SMS'. At the same time, politicians are using the SMS pages to get their own message across.





## ***Key issues from group discussion***

### ✓ **New and Social Media Risks**

While research institutions such as CSIR use MixIt, a popular youth SMS networking platform, to enable students to ask scientists maths questions and employ social media internally, researchers are discouraged from communicating externally using the social media platforms. Similarly, HSRC uses Facebook, twitter and bloggers, especially among their “communities of practice”. However, as organisations that are risk averse, there is reluctance to use social media to interact with the outside world, especially in the absence of a social media policy. Researchers and research institutions need to begin to view new media as a communication tool and put in place the necessary policies to allow this to happen in a controlled manner.

### ✓ **New media and citizen journalism**

Where Citizen Journalism is concerned, there is even more reason to ensure accuracy and sourcing. However, it was suggested that it is mainly the big news agencies that talk about issues of accuracy because this is what they can hold on to in the face of the ability of new media to allow more voices and instant information. But, with citizen journalism, it is about getting the information quickly and then checking the accuracy later. This may still be valid because sometimes they do get it right. Ultimately it is also a trust issue between the journalist and the user/reader of that particular journalist.

### ✓ **Sourcing through new media**

In journalism there is the question of ‘who can be a source?’ and how far we can go in using new media for sourcing stories. Previously it was not permissible in journalism to use Wikipedia as a source. Now, some journalists will quote Facebook as a source. Despite the reluctance to accept new media as a source, it can be very useful for crowd sourcing and also asking technical questions.

### ✓ **Among the Knight fellows in the different African countries, it was found that Facebook was the most popular social media. The Knight foundation has a fund for ideas on innovative uses for new media with grants ranging from US\$5000 to US\$800 000. Kubatana in Zimbabwe, for example, received an award for Freedom Fone, a platform that allows the general public to listen to news via telephone using a toll-free number.**

### ✓ **Enhancing media uptake of research using new media**

One way to disseminate research information using new media is to ensure that the research report is disseminated in several small chunks. Get researchers with opposing views to discuss it and have an exchange back and forth on twitter. This will also generate traffic.

## 5. Best Practices South-South Learning

### ***Enhancing south-south learning***

*TERNA GYUSE, IPS REGIONAL EDITOR*

In this presentation, several questions were posed and some recommendations proposed for further discussion on enhancing south-south learning and engagement:



- How much exchange goes on directly between researchers in the South and what platforms can journalists go to in order to find researchers, compare and find collaborations (world federation of science journalists; research alliance; African Economic Researchers' Consortium; Global Development Network's researchers across Africa?)
- There is much research that is at a stage that journalists cannot get anything out of it and some of it has to be let go. The question then is how to find research that will be really lively. How do we find research that has a noticeable effect on the world?
- Researchers need to be able to explain why the research matters. From the journalists' perspective, it would be useful to identify the problems or challenges in the world and then find the research that seeks to address those problems. For example, what do you do with the information that researchers are breeding a certain type of sheep in Kenya that is resistant to intestinal worms? The more researchers and journalists work together the more clearly we can articulate how research affects the world.
- How do we make target audiences and the reading public pay attention to research?
- An enhanced Changing Lives project would allow for constant updating of new facts and snippets. There is need to come up with formats that are shorter, lighter and faster in order to capture people's attention and get them to come back faster. The Changing Lives website also needs to be a place where researchers can interact with policy makers.

## ***Best practices: Communicating Climate Change Vulnerability to the Grassroots***

*PROF. ALFRED E. OPUBOR, WANAD CENTRE, COTONOU*



The question arose of how to share the information on climate change with all the people who are affected by it, especially in rural areas. It reflects some of the value systems that we have – while we say we want to make a change to people’s lives but we frame it in the context of media where maybe we need to frame it a little larger.

The current information flow has been very conservative, restricted to a few and does not reach the grassroots. It moves from government to technical specialists, who talk to other specialists, scientific journals, bulletins, etc. These then speak to multipliers -- media, civil society, etc, who then feed the information on to the grassroots.

The technical specialists do research and norms and how to apply these. What the technical specialists need in order to communicate climate change to the grassroots are media relations, partnerships with CSOs, NGOs, documentation, communication and popularisation strategies.

For the media, it is to understand issues and concepts; to be more grassroots and field oriented; to use more than news formats – drama, radio and television series, etc; to have an editorial policy to ensure this is an area of focus for them; specialised teams and/or desks; and documentation. It also has to be nuanced according to the different types of media. For example, in the context of the grassroots, this would include community media.

Civil society needs to be able to broker knowledge to make it accessible to other people; broader partnerships with other NGOs, media, communities, etc; communication strategies to ensure that knowledge brokerage is spread; and to relate to the media.

NGOs and CBOs need the capacity to feed forward to the policy level. They need to be able to create the capacity to take the information from the grassroots forward to policy makers. They also have to act as bridges between the two and this requires a translation capacity to broker the information. They also need a communication strategy, media relations and documentation.

Communities require CBOs. These are cultural institutions, extension services – health information systems, cultural institutions, places where people gather (markets, etc), families, faith based organisations (FBOs), traditional leaders and institutions.

Within this context, communities need to have a voice to articulate what they want and who they are and what they are asking of other people. As such they need a translation capacity to talk to other people about their needs. This requires a communication/advocacy strategy that includes systems and skills, media relations, ICT capabilities, documentation – both modern and traditional, and the ability to give feedback and feed forward.

In terms of the multiplier effect, the media tends to be event driven and not sufficiently proactive. There is a tendency to reproduce technical jargon and have a concept deficit. They also have limited specialisation and an infrequent grassroots voice.

Civil society tends to be policy oriented, good at advocacy, issues savvy, have special interests with international contacts but weak grassroots linkages. NGOs and CBOs tend to be grassroots oriented, able to advocate but the question is, for whom? To who? They can also be lacking in terms of the issues.

The desired connection would be to have a direct linkage between the technical specialists (scientists, researchers, think tanks) and the communities without the participation of the multipliers.

## ***'Unlocking the African Moment' campaign***

*WARREN NYAMUGASIRA, AFRICAN MONITOR*

The work of African Monitor was described as evidenced based advocacy seeking to make an impact on communities. There is a team of researchers who are advised by a communications team on how to get their information out and an advocacy team that packages the communications for advocacy purposes.



One of the recent findings of African Monitor was that there are two economies in Africa – an elite that talks among themselves and talk about changing/improving the lives of the grassroots but ultimately the elite is merely changing lives for itself. Meanwhile, life goes on for the grassroots. This provided an awakening on the need to try and connect through the “Unlocking the African Moment” campaign, which seeks to hear the voices of the grassroots and/or let the voices speak for themselves on “what should the Africa agenda be?”

While acknowledging that policy makers make very good decisions, it is also a fact that implementation is poor and often, the very people who were most pessimistic about policy implementation are the very people responsible for making it work. An example is that policy makers will come up with a great education policy but send their own children abroad for education. What the events in North Africa and the Middle East have shown is that we can no longer be complacent. We have been saying that the youth is a time bomb about to explode and that is exactly what is happening. From this, perhaps, can come a new model for policy making that can create improved outcomes for people.

Specific times that Africa Monitor has targeted for engaging the “Unlocking the African Moment” campaign include Africa month (May). Champions – people with influence but also a degree of integrity – have been identified to spearhead the campaign. But because they are not technical people, the outcome of the research has to be prepared in a way that these persons can articulate the issues and respond to the broad range of possible questions that are likely to be aimed at them by the media.

In spite of the effort, even if the message is unpalatable, it should be said in a way that does not marginalise the audiences. What is needed is to find consensus on what works and the good practices. Replicable good practice can have a higher profile impact usually because it then tends to become associated with high profile persons and sometimes this can result in a negative perception of this practice.

We need to prepare ourselves in terms of our research practices, our target consumers, etc, to enable them to make more informed demands or to walk the journey of adjustment, in view of the changes that are taking place in North Africa and the Middle East.

## Lessons from Asia

Unfortunately Johanna Son, the Regional Director for IPS Asia failed to attend the meeting due to pressing priorities in Bangkok. However, she provided some insights on how this work could be taken further. Her recommendations are included below in the section on taking the Changing Lives project further.

### *Key issues arising from group discussion*

- ✓ **How and whether to use existing networks of communities of practice**  
One of the innovative ideas in the Changing Lives project has been to get researchers to write about the process of conducting research as part of the process of networking between journalists and researchers but that has had its own challenges. Where networks already exist, would these be valuable to journalists and should we be encouraging them to use them or should we be thinking of more innovative ways to get researchers and journalists to network?

- ✓ **Uptake through community media**  
In terms of uptake, it would be good to find out if community media, for example, are part of the uptake process. As the Changing Lives project is about the people, the people need to be involved. From anecdotal evidence, it is clear that there has been good uptake for advocacy purposes. An example is the Water Wire story where Katondo, a community in Namibia requested to use an IPS story focusing on their community to take it to SADC (who fund the Water Wire) to pressure the regional body on the effects of their policies on the community's access to water.

- ✓ **Journalists' views on "Changing Lives"**  
From the journalists' perspective, the project has allowed for a change in approach that is a shift away from identifying new/fresh research and reporting on it to one where a rapport is built up with the researchers, taking the story from the perspective of the affected persons (human interest) and then involving the researcher. One of the challenges is getting researchers to speak. From the example of Zimbabwe, this is particularly true if the researcher is linked to government. Often they must get clearance first.

Some variety in the length and structure of the stories would be useful for the project. Time magazine has a page called Time Lab and something like that would be useful to run as a tab on the page and provide a counterpoint to some of the longer stories. Some titbits and snippets would be very useful. Some of the stories also tend to lack a voice, which may be happening in the editing or as a result of some formula.

- ✓ **Researchers' views on "Changing Lives"**  
Researchers tend to operate in a linear fashion and want a clear picture from the outset – who you are, what you want and why. For fact-checking, it is useful to use the science communicators. It has to be made clear to the scientists that they



cannot change anything in the story but the facts. At the same time, it can take time to develop an understanding of the issue on the part of the journalist and some of this may require developing a relationship with the researcher to enable a less formal questioning style. Journalists can send some questions ahead of the interview and then, during the interview, take an ambush approach by posing more difficult questions.

Working with a network of researchers makes the work much easier and helps to create a rapport. This could be a great advantage in terms of career development for journalists working on research reporting.

Journalists need to understand that researchers also work on deadlines and are equally time-constrained.

- ✓ **Dissenting voices, personal and institutional interests in research communities**  
Where dissenting voices are concerned, it may be important to question whether you should follow these just to get controversy and or stick to the development agenda. Also suggested that there is value in using dissenting voices and then crushing them in a story with facts and evidence. This is especially so where the dissenting voices are within public discourse and cannot just be ignored. The problem of dissent is also dealt with by sticking to the principle of having varied sources for a story. Journalists also need to be aware of the personal dynamics that prevail in the research community and the personal and institutional interests before or when they make use of these voices.

Dissent can also be found in the recommendations of a social science study, for example, and this can provide for a range of opinions. Having a dissenting voice can be very useful for getting questions from someone else who is also an expert in that field that can help you better understand what you are writing about.

## **Ideas for South-South exchange: Africa-Asia**

Johanna Son regional Director for Asia- Pacific shared through a written submission some ideas for enhancing South-South exchange between Asia and Africa. She pointed out that there were numerous synergies between Africa and Asia in terms of covering research as well as approaches to specific thematic areas. Some of her recommendations are incorporated in the session below.

## **ANNEX1.**

### ***Checklist for journalists for reporting health research***

The following checklists and recommendations were developed through group work.

#### **Elements of a good research story:**

### **1. Preparation**

- ✓ Read the research beyond the abstract
  - Look at secondary sources, Wikipedia has limited value;
  - Understand the terms.
- ✓ Be aware of the audience and the focus
  - Discuss the article with the editor and define what you want to achieve with the story.
- ✓ Ask for background images – graphs, maps, research pictures, Google maps as a way of illustrating a location, etc, take a flash disk along.
- ✓ Consider how you present yourself to the researcher. Bring along samples of your previous work or send links.

### **2. Interview and writing**

- ✓ Find interest in the research (what do you find interesting in the research)
- ✓ Have a clear focus of what you want to achieve.
- ✓ Ask researchers to explain in simple terms what they found from the research, avoid jargon.
  - What, why and how
  - Find colour, images and detail to give a human angle to the story
  - Ask questions about the qualifiers, practicality of the research
  - Identify recommendations and implications –the why question
  - Through questions, try to understand the scientific process –the how question
  - Use your ethical and gender lenses

- ✓ Use archives for background, find other sources, speak to your editor – interview people affected by the research to make the science real and show how this is changing lives. Other sources can also be archives. The researcher should be the first person to ask about other sources
- ✓ Have a plan; avoid the vomit structure (where everything you have just spills over the copy). Have a structure for the narrative
- ✓ Attribute sources
- ✓ Support points by quotes and remember your target audience when you write
- ✓ Avoid acronyms
  - Don't plagiarise (don't lift verbatim from the report unless you put it in quotation marks). Attribute information to sources

### 3. Review

- ✓ Ask the researcher to check for factual inaccuracies (if needed) – did I get the science right? Send this on to the editor at the same time
- ✓ Make it clear that the editor will be the only one to change the story
- ✓ Have a clear focus of what you want to achieve
- ✓ Get someone else (other than your editor) to read it critically and listen to their comments

### Additional Comments:

It is useful that the checklist goes back to basics but it should avoid going too far as to insult the journalist. However, it should start at preparation stage, checking the validity and ethics of the story, etc. It should also include a guideline to journalists that they can also use fact boxes, sidebars and other elements to illustrate the story.

## **ANNEX 2.**

### ***TAKING CHANGING LIVES FURTHER: Recommendations on improving research reporting uptake***

**Demystifying and mainstreaming research** – where journalists are not just looking at specific research but the role of research in people’s day to day lives and so that it becomes part of the public discourse and public expectations of how research informs specific development agendas.

**Developing a network** of the networks of researchers that reporters could use to access information or for interviewing. This should be no more than a three-step process. An example is the Science Media Centre in the UK. Other networks include the Global Development Network; African Economic Researchers Network.

Such an Africa Science Media Centre has to look at **cell phones, not websites**, in terms of applications. This would allow any journalist in Africa to access research information and researchers online. An application can be put on the website that can be downloaded to the cell phone. This will need IPS Africa to rethink the format of its content. It will definitely need a shorter format and to provide a different kind of news – short features, sound, video.

**Twitter discussions** (BBC) this could be something that journalists could use to then download the comments and contact some of the people who have contributed as sources. Twitter is also very useful as a source of information that you would have to do a lot of research for and which you might not even know where to go to get it. Following UN organisations, research institutions, politicians, etc, provides so much information that you don’t have to hunt for. Most of the journalists who frame debates are on twitter.

Developing a **short programme/curriculum for journalists**, civil society and parliamentarians on research as a critical tool in informing the development agenda that could be used by tertiary institutions and others and that could bring together local researchers, journalists and civil society.

Toolkit for civil society on using research for changing lives as a way of **building the capacity of the sources** and linking civil society with the researchers provides for impact in terms of research that seeks to change people’s lives.

Develop a **Google map of research in Africa** that shows where, what type of research is being conducted and by whom, including government research.

#### **Additional Comments:**

Researchers tend to be very conservative and there may be some resistance to the use of new technologies. IPS could develop a road show on why research is important and how it informs the development agenda. This could be road tested in Cape Town at Highway Africa where there will also be a delayed Windhoek +20 celebration running concurrently at the Cape Town Convention Centre in September. This event will provide a microcosm of each country that will be represented.

## South-South Exchange

- Bringing together Asian and African journalists identified to have proven expertise/a record in covering research issues and resource persons to talk about Southern research, and some examples and challenges
- Developing cross-regional articles on specific issues to enable audiences /policymakers to gain some perspective on how things are done on the other continent and what might be useful in terms of replication (e.g. HIV and AIDS, appropriate technology, primary education, developing-country diseases, the pharmaceutical industry in the South, infant milk issues).

These could also be defined thematically because often an article whose focus is just Asia or Africa can face publication resistance on the other continent.

- ✓ Publishing an e-book version of a mix of well-written and engaging stories with visuals;
- ✓ The visuals for the above could include planned sets along themes (photos or short videos) ;
- ✓ Strengthening the stories by ensuring they are approached with a critical eye looking at how the current development paradigm on what Africa and Asia 'need' as defined externally, or by international regimes on trade or IPR, and to also question those frameworks.





## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Tendani Tsedu  
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## WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

CHANGING LIVES: MAKING RESEARCH REAL ROUNDTABLE

Mercure Hotel, Randburg, South Africa

February 21 – 22, 2011

### MONDAY, Feb 21, 2011

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 9.00 – 9.15am  | Welcome: <i>Facilitator Farai Samhungu, CommsConsult</i>   |
| 9.15am – 11am  | <b>Reporting Research – challenges and successes</b><br><i>Paula Fray, IPS Regional Director;</i><br><i>Faye Reagon, HSRC</i><br><i>Wellington Radu, Media Monitoring Africa</i>           |
| 11am – 11.30am | Tea  |
| 11.30am – 1pm  | <b>Case Study: Health Research Uptake</b><br><i>Sue Goldstein, Soul City</i><br><i>Mercedes Sayagues, Knight Health Fellow</i><br><i>Nalisha Kalideen, Changing Lives Thematic Editor;</i> |
| 1pm – 1.45pm   | Lunch  |
| 1.45pm – 3pm   | <b>New Media vs Traditional Media</b><br><i>Tinus de Jager, IPS Multimedia Editor</i><br><i>Emily Brown,</i>   |
| 3pm – 3.30pm   | Tea  |
| 3.30pm – 5pm   | <b>Best Practices (South-South Learning)</b><br><i>Terna Gyuse, IPS Regional Editor</i><br><i>Prof Alfred Opubor, WANAD</i><br><i>Warren Nyamugasira, Africa Monitor</i>                   |

## TUESDAY, Feb 22, 2011

9.00 – 9.15am	Welcome
9.15am – 11am	<b>Breakaway Group Discussions</b>  Reporting Research to increase uptake (Researchers)  Kudzai Makombe (Rapporteur)  Reporting Health (Journalists)  Nalisha Kalideen/Tinus de Jager (Rapporteur)
11am – 11.30am	Tea
11.30am – 12.30pm	<b>Breakaway Group Report-backs</b>  Action plan for finalisation of case studies
12.30pm – 1pm	Closure

### OUTPUTS:

- Best Practices Report: What works and what does not work in reporting research
- Reporting Health Research – how to deepen impact with Reporting Health Checklist
- The role of new as opposed to traditional media in reporting research
- South-south learning in reporting research